



Involving Children and Young People in Policy, Practice and Research

Edited by Hugh McLaughlin

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The National Children's Bureau is a leading charity that for 50 years has been improving the lives of children and young people, especially the most vulnerable. We work with children and for children, to influence government policy, be a strong voice for young people and practitioners, and provide creative solutions on a range of social issues.

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Foreword

Why is it important to involve young people in policy, practice and research?

The involvement of children and young people improves policies, practice and research.

Our input is very important because we have a unique perspective, which can introduce new ideas, and address issues which adults may have overlooked. In regards to youth issues, young people will improve research and policies because they have real life experience of problems which affect them, as shown in the passionate involvement of young people in Young NCB campaigns. Additionally, youth input will improve the perception of research and policies amongst other young people as information informed by peers seems more reliable, relevant and relatable.

We, children and young people, make up approximately twenty per cent of the population of the UK. Such a large amount of people have the right to be listened to, especially as we are the future generation who will live with the consequences. We are often affected by policies and research either directly, for example in regards to education, or indirectly, through our parents and communities, so young people and children deserve to be involved and have a strong motivation to help as much as possible.

Consulting young people also helps to ensure that information is accessible because we can make features, such as the language and design, child friendly. Moreover, working with young people ensures they are included, and do not feel excluded, and are appreciated as part of society and the solutions created by policies and research. The benefits are for both the adults, who gain awareness of the different lives of modern day children and for us, the younger people, who develop experience and gain increased knowledge, for example, about different research methods.

Children and young people should be involved in policies and research. Our participation can provide better informed results and improve the quality of responses, so why should we be ignored?

It is our right to have a voice.

Rebecca Nyame-Satterthwaite
Young NCB member, aged 14 from Bristol

Chapter 1

Involving children and young people in policy, practice and research

An introduction

Hugh McLaughlin

Introduction

In this first chapter we introduce the background and rationale for the collection of papers, identifying some of the key themes and considerations in the involvement of children and young people in practice, policy and research. Throughout this chapter, for the reader's ease, we will use the term 'children' to refer to children and young people under 18 years of age. This is not to suggest that children are an homogenous group, the opposite is true, and this book seeks to celebrate the diversity of children, their specialness and their creativity.

The idea for this collection was first conceived while attending a Trustee Board meeting for the National Children's Bureau (NCB), where we were discussing the 50th Anniversary of the organisation and how, as a board, this could be celebrated. I began thinking about what had attracted me to become a trustee. My earliest memories of the NCB were of travelling down to London to attend research-informed conferences. I was impressed with the quality of the research presented and how it could be applied to practice and policy; from there, it was an easy step to come up with the concept of a collection of papers focusing on all three areas: policy, practice and research. This is not to suggest that the three areas are hermetically sealed. As may be seen in many of the chapters, this is not the case but, for the ease of conceptual clarity, the three areas have been identified separately. I also thought that one of the key themes that symbolised NCB was the development of children's involvement and participation, which had become increasingly important and significant over those years. This has reached the point whereby the Trustee Board, which is responsible for the governance of the organisation, now involves children as members: these young members bring their own issues and perspectives to enrich the Board's work, challenge adult-centrism, champion NCB, regularly meet with politicians and contribute to research projects.

The NCB's vision and mission state:

Our vision is of a society in which children and young people contribute, are valued, and their rights respected.

Our mission is to improve children and young people's experiences and life chances, reducing the impact of inequalities.

(www.ncb.org.uk)

This is backed up by six aims, of which Aims 2 and 6 resonate particularly in these essays:

Aim 2: Ensure children and young people can use their voice to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.

Aim 6: Provide leadership through the use of evidence and research to improve policy and practice.

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'Children' has been defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) as everyone under the age of 18. Greig and others (2013) remind us that there is no universally accepted definition of the child or adolescent, with different cultures categorising children and young people differently. In modern western societies, children are legally constructed as having rights. Children are expected to go to school; and are required to be protected. In the UK, for example, TV provides specialist channels and programmes for children but allows them to be subjected to consumer product advertising, such as for clothes, games and music; in other countries, children may not be subjected to such advertising and are not legally constructed or constrained in a similar way. In the UK, it is possible to get married with your parent's consent at 16; whilst in other societies children may be married by arrangement at any age. Such a view may shock us in the West but reminds us that children and childhood are constructed differently in different societies. In the UK, children may get married at 16 and have a child of their own before their 18th birthday: but are not allowed to buy alcohol in a public house or vote until they are 18. They are also expected to pay full fare on a train or bus from the age of 14. Children in the UK could be excused for being confused by the mixed messages sent out by our different age criteria.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The Convention sets these rights out in 54 articles and 2 Optional Protocols: stating that children everywhere have the right to survival; to develop fully; to protection from harm, abuse or exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. Interestingly, the right to be educated includes both boys and girls but only up to completing a primary school education. All United Nation (UN) member states, except for the USA and Somali, have approved the convention and, in so doing, each member state undertakes to regularly report to the UN outlining how their nation has implemented the Convention. Of particular interest to this book is Article 12, which states that:

Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously.

[\(Article 12, UN, 1989\)](#)

These rights should not be viewed as giving children carte blanche to have their views acted upon in all situations: as Article 4 notes, the 'best interests of the child must be the top priority in all things that affect children' (UN, 1989). It is highly contestable how we decide upon children's best interests; and children, parents, carers, teachers, judges, health workers and social workers may all have justifiably different views of children's best interests. What Article 12 does do, though, is highlight how important it is that children's views or 'voice' is heard, considered, and treated with the same respect as others' views. This does not mean that their view will always carry the argument, but neither does it assume that their view will always be passed over in favour of those of adults or professionals.

Constructions of childhood

Historically, children in Western societies have been viewed as 'objects of concern' because they either needed protecting from abuse or because they threatened the very fabric of that society. In trying to understand childhood, there are a number of competing psychological and sociological theories.

Psychological approaches

Psychological theories have a longer tradition in this area and include five main approaches, namely the physiological; psychodynamic; behavioural; humanistic; and cognitive approaches.

The physiological approach focuses on the biological basis of behaviour (Greig and others 2013). Its focus on brain function, biochemistry and heredity has helped us to better understand how children's brains develop – although the approach has been criticised for being too reductionist and too deterministic.

Psychodynamic approaches are often associated with Freud and focus on dynamic unconscious drives that rule our behaviour. Behaviourist approaches challenge this view by focusing on behaviour rather than the mind. Behaviourist approaches are associated with Pavlov (1927) and Skinner (1938). They demonstrated that behaviour could be learned or modified through operant conditioning, thereby demonstrating how children learn. Behaviourists, though, have been criticised for being too mechanistic, ignoring the importance of the mind and failing to explain complex behaviours.

Challenging these approaches is humanistic psychology, which developed from a concern with the human element in psychology. The work of Maslow is important here, with his concept of self-actualisation: he created a hierarchy of needs that each of us requires to be met before we can achieve our true potential of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1954). This hierarchy of needs begins with the basic need for food, water and oxygen – the physiological – and then moves on to our need for safety, love and esteem; before finally reaching self-actualisation. This approach has been important in the development of counselling but has been criticised for its lack of scientific method or integrated theory (Greig, 2013).

Lastly, there are the cognitive approaches, which are probably best known for the works of Piaget and Vygotsky. Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, developed a four-stage model of a child's development, comprising: the sensorimotor stage (0–2 years); pre-operational stage (2–7 years); concrete organisational stage (7–11 years); and formal operational stage, from 11 years onward (1954). Vygotsky (1978) focused on the importance of language; and described how cognitive functioning has its origins in children's social interactions. These theories have provided a major contribution towards understanding children's development and how we need to match our approach to a child's development when seeking to involve children in policy, practice and research.

Sociological approaches

Prout and James (1998) have argued that we need to move beyond psychologically-based models, which view childhood as a period of development or 'becomings', towards a model that perceives children as active social agents, as 'beings' shaping structures and processes as well as being shaped by them, at least at the micro-level. Greig and others (2013: 51) suggest that sociological approaches differ from their psychological counterparts by arguing that:

all of our attitudes, perceptions and beliefs about children and adolescents are – like all our attitudes – socially constructed.

James and others (1998) offered a model for differentiating how sociologists identified children and childhood from how psychologists do. This model contained four major ideal types, the socially constructed child; tribal child; minority group child; and the social structural child.

The 'socially constructed child' category acknowledges that childhoods will be experienced differently depending on issues such as gender, ethnicity, wealth and education. The 'tribal child' category views children as occupying an autonomous world, accentuating the differences between adults and children. The 'minority group child' category ascribes children a minority group status, drawing attention to the power differentials between children and adults. This they describe as 'a sociology for children rather than of children' (James and others, 1998: 31). The fourth category suggested is the 'social structural child', one in which children are seen as forming a social group of citizens who have both needs and rights.

Morrow (2008) notes that these ideal types, or categories, are not exclusive of each other and, for the purpose of this book, we seek to acknowledge children as social actors, who have the competencies and communication skills to contribute to policy, practice and research. This is to accept that maturity and ability may impact upon how they may participate but also challenges adults. Children are conceptualised as a social group who exist in a relationship with other children and adults, and who are often constrained by adult structures, and thus display elements of all four of the categories listed by James and others (1998).

Sociologically, childhood can also be viewed as both a social group and a stage in the human life-course, a temporal stage or state that we all have to pass through. This has led Qvortrup (1991: 12) to comment that 'childhood is a permanent structure, even if its members are currently being replaced'. This has led some adults to assume that they know what is best for children – after all, they were a child once! Such a view situates children's perspectives as subservient to those of adults. The adult case is based on the view that they have been both a child and an adult thus making their views naturally better informed. This is to not to deny that all children have basic needs in terms of food, shelter and love but this understanding of the children's world from an adult's perspective becomes more problematic when we consider the impact of technological change, increasing consumerism, the debates over education and the changing nature of the family. Our adult experience of childhood is quite likely to be foreign to that of today's children. Such a perspective also belittles children's agency. Children are not merely passive but also active and these papers seek to identify examples in which children have made a difference to policy, practice and research. Within this collection of papers, there is an assumption that children:

are not only 'actors' – people who do things, who enact, who have perspectives on their lives. They are also understood as agents whose powers, to influence and organise events – to engage with the structures which shape their lives – are to be studied.

(Mayall, 2002: 3)

Agency is:

inherently linked to the 'powers' (or lack of them), of those positioned as children, to influence, organise, co-ordinate and control events taking place in their everyday worlds.

(Alanen, 2001: 21)

Children's agency is not unfettered, nor is adults' agency. Like an adult's agency, a child's is embedded in complex social systems like the family, education, religion and culture, overlaid with other structures such as gender and class.

Power

Whilst there are usually power differentials between researchers and those researched, this is particularly the case when we consider the position of children in relation to their involvement in policy, practice and research. Children are inherently vulnerable, not only because of their physical weakness, lack of knowledge and experience in comparison to adults, but also because of their dependence on adults such as parents, teachers and social workers. They are also structurally vulnerable due to their lack of economic or political power and their lack of civil rights (Lansdown, 1994).

As Robinson and Kellett (2004: 85) note, researchers – and this is also relevant for those working with children in policy and practice initiatives – cannot dispel 'the central adult characteristic of having power over children'. This unequal power relationship is sustained by a belief that adults have greater experience and superior knowledge; but Mayall (2000) challenges this and observes that it is children who are best able to tell us what it is like to be a child. Children are experts on their own experience of childhood. As Butler and others (2002) has shown, children are likely to seek out other children to discover what it is like to be a child of divorcing carers in preference to talking to adults.

Uprichard (2010) argues that merely seeing children as experts on their own experience does not go far enough. It becomes self-sealing and restricts children's ability to comment and be taken seriously to a narrow range of issues; and it negates their ability or opportunity to comment on wider issues, such as the environment or social justice, if they cannot be located firmly within children's experiences. He goes on to point out that, whilst such a position can be seen as a move forward, in reality it restricts children's agency to those issues that adults decide are children's issues. In contrast, Uprichard (2010: 7) argues that:

Children are quite capable of talking about many, many things, not just about their childhood lives.

If we are not willing to listen to and accord children legitimacy in subjects beyond their childhood lives, we are not only missing an opportunity to learn more about these things but are also acting in such a way as to further control, marginalise and disempower children. Giving children the right to express their views on issues beyond their personal experience encourages them to take an active interest in the wider world and, hopefully, will support them in becoming the informed citizens of the future.

Models of involvement

The most famous model of involvement is the 'ladder of participation' developed by Arnstein (1971) for town planning. Hart (1992) later translated Arnstein's model into a 'ladder of children's participation'. Hart's ladder consists of eight rungs, three of which are identified as non-participation, that is: manipulation; decoration; and tokenism. The other five rungs, in hierarchical order going up the ladder, include 'assigned but informed'; 'consulted and informed'; 'adult-initiated but shared decisions with children'; 'child initiated and directed'; and lastly, 'child-initiated but shared decisions with adults'.

In recent years, this model has been criticised as building in the assumption that the higher up the ladder one is the better it is, thereby neglecting the possibility that different levels of participation may be appropriate for different tasks and for different children. In more recent times there have been simpler articulations of this model, including that of the Children's Commissioner (England) (2012) that identified a wheel, not a ladder, based on five positions between 'inform', 'consult' and 'involve'. The use of a wheel is to try and avoid the hierarchical nature of Hart's model, although it

does have certain similarities. The wheel can be entered anywhere but, for the purposes of clarity, 'assigned but informed' is when children volunteer to be part of a project, they understand the nature of the project, whose idea it was and are aware that their views will be respected. Then there is 'consulted and informed', where the project was designed and run by adults but children are consulted and their views are taken seriously. Next comes 'adult initiated but shared decision-making with children' so that, although adults initially conceived of the project, children are involved in all aspects of it including the decision-making. This is then followed by 'children-initiated projects but with shared decision-making with adults'. In this scenario, the adults offer their skills and expertise to support the children in completing their project. The last aspect of this wheel is 'child initiated and directed'. This is where children have the initial idea and decide on how they wish to progress the project, and where adults may be available but do not take charge of the project.

As can be seen, the rungs of Hart have been refigured into the wheel of the Office of the Children's Commissioner. The wheel more accurately accepts that the different spokes may be appropriate for different projects, or within the same project. A criticism of the wheel is that it denies the possibility that children's participation may be tokenistic. To be able to identify and label tokenistic involvement is important to ensure that those who speak the rhetoric of children's involvement must also back up their declarations with identifiable actions. The important point here is that there are degrees of involvement and it should not be assumed that the highest level of involvement would necessarily be the best. The level of involvement required for a project will depend on the nature of the project; the abilities of the children; the training they have been offered; their maturity – and the agreement of the gatekeepers to allow them to be involved in the research in the first place. Readers of these papers may wish to try and identify the levels of involvement highlighted in the forthcoming chapters!

Layout of the papers

This collection of papers have been specifically written to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the NCB and to demonstrate children's involvement in research, policy and practice. The three areas of research, policy and practice are not mutually exclusive: it is unusual for research projects *not* to seek to influence practice and policy. Similarly, policy or practice are often the springboard for research. Thus the three different areas may be viewed as complementary.

The next paper in this collection (McLaughlin) deals with the ethical issues of involving children with research, policy or practice. It is not solely about research because the ethical challenges of working with children in policy or practice cover many of the same issues, such as confidentiality; safeguarding; training; and the role of gatekeepers. It is important that working with children should be within an ethical framework otherwise children are left open to tokenism, being given the mundane tasks or being abused. Whilst the paper accepts the need for ethical approval, it supports the view that adult supporters need to adopt an ethics-in-action approach as many ethical issues occur after ethical approval has been given. Ethical issues are also highlighted by the other writers in their own chapters, demonstrating the centrality of ethics to working with children.

This paper is then followed by Street who identifies two research projects in which NCB young people have made a difference. The first of these involves Young Research Advisors (YRA) working with the Children's Policy Research Unit for improving the health of children, young people and their families. The second example focuses on the Voice, Inclusion, Participation, Empowerment and Research (VIPER) project including a co-researcher group and promoting the participation of disabled children and young people in strategic decision-making about health, social care and education services. Both examples identify how NCB has met the challenges and practical and ethical issues of working in an honest manner with children and young people.

Owen and Williams then provide us with a case study of the implementation of the Young Children's Voices Network: A project to embed listening into everyday practice. The paper highlights issues from the project sites and provides a clear rationale of why, and examples of how, we should listen to young children and not assume that they do not have the ability to make their views and feelings known. As the authors claim:

young people tell us all the time what they think, through words, actions and behaviour. If we really do want to design services which are based on what children say, then we need to listen, pay attention and reflect on what they are telling us in their daily lives.

(Owen and Williams, p.32)

This paper provides advice on how to listen to very young children, as well as evidence of how it can be achieved and how this can make a difference.

This is further reinforced by Karlsson's paper, which develops this theme and focuses on young children being cared for by childminders. This research set out to find children's views of childminders. The research used a mosaic approach to data collection, including photo-techniques (which are also used in Wright's paper) to show how young children can make their views known.

Murray takes a different perspective in her paper on the involvement of 4–8 year old children as researchers. Instead of setting out to train children in established research modes of inquiry, Murray set out to explore how children's own naturalistic behaviours could be claimed as research. Using a multi-modal approach to co-construction of knowledge, she provides very helpful comments and advice on the development of this approach to allow others to replicate it. Following reflections on this process, she asserts that that the academy may well wish to consider young children as researchers in their own right.

Wright looks at a different age group and discusses how the use of cameras can be used to empower and give 'voice' to the life stories and experiences of socially-excluded black youths. Wright highlights the issues in seeking to engage young people of African-Caribbean descent: particularly in the need to redirect the power imbalance and to challenge black and ethnicised identities through the use of photographs in research. The paper provides a rich understanding of the young people's perspectives through the use of detailed field notes; and concludes that this method is valuable in empowering marginalised and hard-to-reach groups of young people.

Conclusions

This set of papers seek to provide practical and theoretical insight into how we can support children in research, policy and practice. The papers can be read individually or as a set which challenge adults and researchers to pay attention to even the youngest child's views (Owen and Williams; Karlsson), what we consider a researcher to be (Murray); how children and young people can make a difference (Street) and how we engage with socially excluded young people of African-Caribbean descent (Wright).

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Chapter 2

Ethical issues in the involvement of children and young people in research

Hugh McLaughlin

This chapter seeks to identify some of the major ethical challenges and issues in involving children in research, although many of the same issues will be familiar to those involved in the arenas of practice and policy. In particular, the chapter highlights both the rationale for the involvement of children and the 'special' nature of children. It goes on to consider the ethical and practical issues prior to a project starting; issues during a project; and issues once the project has been completed. For ease of reading the term children refers to children and young people up to the age of 18. This is not to suggest that children are a homogenous group or that children in the early years of school think similarly to teenagers. Children are subject to the same intersectionalities as adults: where differences may be due to gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class, religion, whether one lives in the countryside or city, and so forth. As such, childhood can be viewed as a social construct that can and should be problematised.

Background

In this chapter, we identify some of the key ethical and practical issues to be considered when involving children as co-researchers or as research respondents. As has been identified in this book already, children have historically been seen in the Western world as 'objects of concern, rather than persons with a voice'. Lewis (2010) claims that this position began to change with the UK's ratification, in 1991, of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The UK has seen a raft of policy initiatives seeking to establish the rights of children to be able to express their views, or give voice, to all matters that directly affect them; and that these views should be given due weight in relation to the age and maturity of the child, as identified in Article 12 (1) (UN 1989). This Article supports the view that children could be viewed as 'actors' in their own right, both created and creating their own social world. The involvement of children, and service users generally, has been much quicker to occur in policy and practice than it has within research (McLaughlin 2006). The government's drive to involve children in matters that affect them can be summarised by 'The Children and Young Person's Unit' position, which stated:

The Government wants children and young people to have more opportunities to get involved in the design and evaluation of policies and services that affect them or which they use.

(Children and Young People's Unit, 2001: 2)

It is appropriate to ask why we should involve children in research as co-researchers. Smith and others (2002), Kirby (2004), Kellett (2005a) and McLaughlin (2006) identify some of the key benefits of involving children as researchers:

- they offer a different perspective to that of adult researchers
- they can help with the identification and prioritisation of research questions and areas
- they speak a common language and can help with ensuring the accessibility of questionnaires and interviews
- they succeed in getting responses from their peer group in ways that would not be possible for an adult
- they can help with the recruitment of their peers
- they can be very powerful in the dissemination of results
- the experience of participation can be an empowering process, which can lead to increased self-confidence and self-esteem and, potentially, employability.

Involving children in research not only potentially benefits the research but also the children themselves. Roberts (2004) goes further, suggesting that children's involvement in research is not merely an effective research approach; it also represents a participation agenda that promotes active citizenship and democratic practices. Also, as an adult researcher who has researched with children, I would suggest it benefits adult researchers in giving them an insight and a greater awareness of children's worlds. Just because we have all been children we cannot assume that we understand the world of children today. This is not to claim that we should not have adults researching children, but to suggest that if we also have children researching other children, or children researching adults, we are more likely to get a fuller and more informed picture to our research questions.

Such an approach is not without its disadvantages, as McLaughlin (2006) has identified: research involving children will often take longer as children cannot be expected to be experts in research methods and will require training. Children may also require others to transport them to research sites and, if at school, the research may have to be conducted around the school day. There is also no guarantee that just by involving children you will automatically get a better result. It should be remembered, too, that if the experience of research is tokenistic, the child researchers are less likely to trust adults and engage in other research projects. It is also possible that a poor experience will contaminate the field for others.

So there are clear benefits and potential costs for involving children as co-researchers that make it important that the involvement of children in research, whether as subjects or co-researchers, is conducted in an ethical manner. It is also important to be clear about what we mean by involvement (for a fuller discussion of this please see Chapter 1). Within childhood studies, Lewis (2010) has claimed that those who champion children's 'voice' from a children's rights-based perspectives often perceive the articulation of the child's perspective as an end in itself – neglecting what happens to this voice. Does the children's voice get heard? Does it make a difference? How should we weigh the articulation of children's views against those of parents or professionals?

The rationale for ethical research

It could be argued that we have moved on a great deal since the days when Nazi scientists experimented on Jewish twins in the concentration camps. Such experimentation would never be tolerated again. However, we could also point to the more recent scandal in England involving the unlawful retention of the organs of babies for medical research at Alder Hey Hospital (Redfern, 2001). Both of these examples refer to bio-medical research and it could thus be suggested that this should be regulated separately. Teachers, youth workers, social workers, health visitors and

other social researchers, who are likely to make up the majority of the readers of this book, are educated, value-driven people who will act ethically and in the best interests of children. Orme and Shemmings (2010: 47–48) would challenge this assertion:

The risks associated with social work research are more subtle, in that engagement with those who are experiencing disadvantage and poor social conditions can lead to raising the hopes of those with whom the researcher is in touch. Social work research also often involves making contact with those who for a variety of reasons are isolated and excluded. This can lead to unrealistic expectations of the research relationship.

It is possible to replace 'social work' in the quote with the other professions listed above (teachers, youth workers, health visitors and other social researchers). The point here is that, just because it is not bio-medical research and the researcher views themselves as an ethical person, we cannot assume they will act ethically.

In response to these concerns over ethical research, differing disciplines and professions have developed their own code of ethics. Examples of such codes and ethical frameworks include those of the British Psychological Association (www.bps.org.uk); British Sociological Association (www.britsoc.co.uk); Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) (ESRC, 2010); and NCB (Shaw and others, 2011).

The most common place to begin a discussion of ethical principles is with the Belmont Report which, in 1978, listed three principles: autonomy, beneficence and justice. To this list, Beauchamp and Childress (2008) added 'non-maleficence'.

'Respect for autonomy' refers to the moral obligation to respect the autonomy of each individual in so far as it does not interfere with the autonomy of others. Like 'respecting persons', it implies the need to treat people as ends in themselves and not simply as means. Respect for autonomy thus begins to identify the need to secure informed consent; preserve confidentiality; and to act in a way that avoids wilful deceit. 'Beneficence' and 'non-malevolence', at their most simple, mean 'doing good' and 'avoiding doing harm'. These terms in the world of medicine can be reduced to a rational calculation as to the costs and benefits to a patient. If the costs are greater than the benefits, then the treatment or intervention should not be undertaken. The principle 'justice' refers to the need to deal fairly in the face of competing claims. As such, justice requires the researcher not to further his or her own interests at the expense of the legitimate interests of others, for example not favouring one's own community of interest and not disapproving of the moral choices of others.

Butler (2002) cites Gillon (1994: 186) on how these principles can be combined to identify other moral obligations. For example, the empowerment of others is essentially a combination of beneficence and respect for autonomy, whereby the researcher is obliged not only to respect the patient's autonomy but also to enhance it. The application of these moral principles represents the 'scope' or space in which individual researchers can act in accordance with their own moral conscience. This requires the researcher to be continuously morally engaged with their research project.

Butler (2002) also observed that any code of ethics is a form of professional claims-making and represents a measure of self-interest, with the relationship between those who wish to be included in the code being as important as the code itself. It should also be remembered that codes of ethics, like the ethical principles on which they are based, are concerned with 'should' type questions and are inherently normative, temporal, situated and impermanent. Ethical principles can thus never be finished but are always open to discussion and contest. MacIntyre (1984) argued that to avoid the danger of descending into a spiral of relativism it is possible to infer 'ought' from

'is', in that we can speak of the 'good' teacher, youth worker, nurse, Early Years worker, social worker or researcher implying more than mere competency and hinting at the virtues of the particular occupational group. As such, ethical codes can be viewed as an attempt to establish and maintain the professionalization of researchers whilst providing guidance to researchers on how to act to prevent research subjects, or co-researchers, from abuse or malpractice. Husband's (1995) account of the morally active practitioner is helpful here: where he observes that doing one's duty is not the same thing as being morally responsible. Compliance is insufficient. Compliance leads to responses that are routine and procedure-led, which were criticised by the Munro Report (2011) on child protection practice where technical expertise was valued at the expense of professional responsibility. Ethical approval is often conceptualised as a one-off event, where the ethical issues in the research can be pre-identified and pre-resolved before the research begins. However, this is only the first stage of an ongoing process for the morally ethical researcher who continually needs to be reflecting on the ethical dimension(s) of the research, both by themselves and with any co-researchers. Thus what is needed is a 'morally active researcher'; or, as Hugman (2010: 151) characterises it, as doing 'what is right is encountered in the qualities of the person acting', not in the pages of completed ethical applications.

Whilst we have been discussing codes of ethics it is important to remember that there are inherent weaknesses in their operation. First, like the discussion on ethical principles, they are always in need of review and updating. They will never cover every eventuality, engaging in research and practice requires researchers and practitioners to confront the nuances, contradictions and dilemmas of social behaviour that cannot easily be commodified (McLaughlin, 2012). Secondly, there is the issue of who polices the implementation of the ethical codes that researchers sign up to? This is inherently weakly monitored and challenged even though, in extreme circumstances, it could lead to a researcher losing their employment, being barred from their association or profession, or being open to criminal charges.

Ethical issues before the research commences

The key issues to be addressed in this section include: who writes the bid; gaining ethical approval; the role of gatekeepers; recruitment of children for the research, as either research subjects or co-researchers; informed consent; payments and rewards; and the training of children as co-researchers. This list is neither exhaustive nor does it necessarily imply a sequential pattern but highlights key issues for consideration.

Who writes the bid?

Ideally, where children are being invited to become co-researchers, this would be a collaborative process; in reality, it is more likely to be undertaken on 'behalf' rather than 'with' children (Kellett, 2005a). If this is the case, it is important to consider how children can be involved in the process at the earliest stage; and to provide space within the bidding process to include their views and so help them to shape the research process. Even if children are not to be included as co-researchers, those writing the bids should seriously think about including children as advisors to help improve the bid and to ensure it will be child friendly.

In writing the bid, it is also important to consider the nature of the research funder. If this is to be a recognised research council, charity, the Department for Education, National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) or local authority there is not likely to be a problem. This may not be the case, however, if the funder is a cigarette manufacturer or a company that makes its profits by exploiting child labour: both could be deemed unethical. But what about companies who promote fast foods or teenage alcohol consumption?

Gaining ethical approval

The English position concerning young people is complex and potentially concerning. Since 1991, there has been a centralised system for health research through Local Research Ethics Committees (LRECs) coordinated by the Department of Health (England). In comparison, education and social work research has been left relatively ungoverned. The Department of Health had sought to address the shortfall in social work by introducing a research governance framework for health and social care (Department of Health, 2001; 2004).

At the beginning of this initiative, the Department of Health held responsibility for adults and children's social services but, following structural changes after the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003), responsibility for children's services and adult social services was split. Children's services were realigned with educational services and are now located in the Department for Education (DfE). In the foreword to the draft *Research Governance Framework: Resource pack for social care, 2nd edn* (Department of Health and others, 2008), it notes that the research framework only applies to those covered by the Secretary of State for Health: even though the resource pack was endorsed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (the forerunner of the DfE) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services. This means that local authorities were required to have a research governance system for research applications in relation to adult services but not necessarily for children's services. McLaughlin and Shardlow (2009) noted that this has led to some local authorities including children's services alongside adults'; whilst others have taken the view that children's ethical scrutiny can wait until the government tells children's services to implement a research governance structure. In December 2010, Boddy and Oliver undertook a scoping exercise for children's services that acknowledged that the increasingly integrated nature of children's services had resulted in a blurring of boundaries, which had given rise to particular issues in relation to children's services:

However, the main conclusion from this work is clear. To develop a coherent and transparent system of research governance – a system that can be applied across the diverse, and increasingly integrated climate of children's services – necessitates a simple, and flexible, approach. The approach must be based on clear principles, whilst being flexible in its implementation around key minimum standards.

(Boddy and Oliver, 2010: 6)

While such an approach still awaits government guidance, children are not afforded the same protection as their adult counterparts. The author is aware from discussing children's research projects with local authority research governance officers, that there are examples of researchers, on finding out that their proposal will be subject to a research governance assessment, withdrawing their request and reapplying to authorities where such arrangements are not in place.

This potentially means that that the level of ethical scrutiny in research projects involving children as research subjects and as co-researchers may face different degrees of ethical scrutiny, depending on whether they are seeking to be involved in health or in local authority children's services, including education, social work and youth services. This situation has become even more fragmented as we now have significant numbers of academics that are independent of local authority control and presumably will have their own ethical arrangements.

The above is not to detract from the view that research on children or involving children as co-researchers is likely to experience greater ethical scrutiny where research governance systems exist in universities, health services or in those children's services that have adopted the draft framework. Furedi (2002) has observed that research ethics committees often act like bureaucratic gatekeepers: being too protective and too paternalistic, and therefore inappropriately restricting which research gets approved and which does not.

The role of gatekeepers

It could be argued that we should have moved on to the recruitment of children as research subjects or co-researchers here: but depending on the age, maturity and ability of the child, the researcher may have to first approach a gatekeeper. Negotiating with gatekeepers can be a very time-consuming process, so researchers need to consider this when planning their research strategy. Gatekeepers are those people – such as parents, carers, teachers, social workers, doctors or other professionals – who have influence over whether children can be accessed as research subjects or co-researchers. Balen and others (2006: 32) capture this dilemma, between the legal duty to care and the responsibility to allow the young person to develop:

In what circumstances does adult gatekeeping become interference in the rights of children to impart information through their participation in research? Given that parents are seen as the 'natural' protectors of their children, to what extent does bypassing parental consent (albeit in pursuit of according children greater autonomy) deprive children of their parent's protection?

There is no easy answer to this conundrum. At the extremes of our age range, it is likely to be agreed that children under five will require parental permission and that 18 year olds should be allowed to decide for themselves. However, this position may be challenged if the 18 year old is in the care of the local authority, when their permission will be required. Shaw and others (2011) also advise parental or carer's consent should be obtained where the 16–18 year old is particularly vulnerable, for example if they have a learning disability, or if the interview is to be undertaken in the carer's or parent's home. This immediately raises the issue of degrees of vulnerability and where the tipping point may be. Whilst many of us can see the logic in the first of these situations, there is a problem with the second example as it suggests that parents are able to decide for 16–18 year olds whether or not they should exercise their own agency and participate in research. However, a researcher risks being open to allegations of unprofessional behaviour or conduct in interviewing a 16–18 year old in their home alone. Practically and tactically, it is likely to be more effective to obtain a carer's or parent's permission before interviewing their child in their home.

The position for those in the middle years is somewhat more complex, with the 'Gillick principle' or 'Gillick competency' invoked to suggest that those under 16 years old who are assessed as having sufficient knowledge and understanding of their own wishes can override parental consent (Thurston and Church, 2001). It should be noted that, whilst the Gillick principle allows parental consent to be dispensed with, it does not advocate the automatic barring of parents or carers from such discussions. Shaw and others (2011) also identify situations where parental consent may be waived for children under 16 years old where the research has been an integral part of a project or service intervention, that the child and their parents or carers have already given their consent for. A second circumstance identified by Shaw and others (2011) involves the situation in which to achieve adult consent would potentially breach the child's right to confidentiality. This could include situations where they were using a sexual health agency or drug treatment programme without parental or carer consent. Balen and others (2006) identified examples, primarily in America, where children were involved in research without their parent's consent and where it was argued that parental consent was not required, as it would have potentially undermined the validity of the research making it by definition biased.

A problem exists here: that when parents or carers are made aware of such a possibility they cannot then be made unaware of it. Once a gatekeeper is made aware then there exists the possibility for conflict. The adult may either seek to influence the young person not to be involved against their will; or seek to influence them to be involved when they do not wish to be. Neither position is desirable: the first impinges on the young person's right to decide for themselves which activities they engage in; whilst the second could be interpreted as abusive, requiring a young person to engage in research against their will.

The role of gatekeepers is even more complex when you remember that children are likely to require not only their parents or carer's permission, but often also their social worker's, teacher's or doctor's permission, before they can engage in research. In particular, such gatekeepers will want to ensure that there is minimal interference or burden on the staff in their day-to-day work; that the research has demonstrable value; and that it will be conducted safely. They may also ask to view a copy of a disclosure and barring check (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>); and researchers should discuss this with potential research sites so that such checks can be undertaken before any fieldwork commences. Where co-researchers are aged 16 years and over, such checks will also need to include them if they will be having unsupervised access to other young people. Gatekeepers, in exercising their duty of care, may act in such a way as to further restrict children's opportunities to engage in research as subjects or to experience becoming a co-researcher due to concerns about the child's 'best interests', which may inappropriately conflict with the child's wishes and desires.

The recruitment of children for research

The recruitment of young service user co-researchers needs to be undertaken in a way that is both inclusive and open. It is important that if a research strategy emphasises participative approaches and seeks to promote the empowerment of young people, it also demonstrates this in its recruitment of research subjects and co-researchers. It may be possible to approach established settings such as schools, children's homes or hospital wards where it will be essential to gain the co-operation of the gatekeepers who may, in trying to be helpful, select the sample or identify the co-researchers who they believe to be most confident or most likely to present the service in a positive light. This is to be avoided as it is potentially denying entry to those who are identified as unsuitable by the gatekeeper, prejudicing any data. It is thus important for the researchers to be clear about their inclusion and exclusion criteria.

It is also possible to consider alternative methods of recruitment, using the Internet or social media, or advertisements in local or specialist press, although I have always found personal contact to be the most successful.

Informed consent

Informed consent is a central issue of all research textbooks, all research codes and all research ethics committees that require researchers to ensure they not only have a participant's consent, but their informed consent, before any personal data is collected. As noted earlier, children's research may require a number of informed consents before they may be able to participate as a research subject or as a co-researcher. This includes the informed consent of gatekeepers, which the researcher may be required to obtain before they are able to approach any children. Research ethics committees like to know how research participants will give their informed consent. Informed consent implies that all human subjects should be fully informed and be able to understand what is required of them in a research project before they agree to take part. Included in this information should be:

- who is funding the research
- information about the right to participate
- the right to withdraw without prejudice
- what the participant's role will be
- the degree of confidentiality, with any exclusion criteria identified
- the right to anonymity in any report or publication
- what the intended outcomes of the study are
- where and how participants can access the results of the study.

Issues of confidentiality and anonymity are to be discussed later in this chapter. This model of informed consent requires the researcher to be able to provide information to the children in an appropriate format and medium. It is inappropriate to ask BSL (British Sign Language) users to respond to such information in a spoken format; any requests should be in the service user's preferred language. There is also an issue as to how much information to provide without providing too much. Similarly, it is expected that the respondent will not merely respond positively just to please the researcher. Issues of power are particularly relevant in research with children where their experience of adults is likely to have come from teachers, parents and carers who stand in a powerful position in relation to them at home and at school. It is important to try and avoid children just taking part, or not taking part, because a powerful adult in their life has decided that this is what they should do. Likewise, it is important to ensure the respondent is aware that they can exit the study at any given time without prejudice. As Thompson (2002: 99) comments:

Researchers cannot assume that consent given before a project's commencement is the same as consent given during or after a project's completion. If research is ongoing as is often the case in qualitative research, so too is the informed consent process. Individuals must be free to withdraw from the process at any time.

Whilst it is seen as normal practice to gain the informed consent of research subjects, it is also important to consider obtaining the informed consent of children as co-researchers. Co-researchers who are children, are unlikely to understand what it means for them to become a co-researcher without experiencing the process. This should not stop any adult researcher from seeking to explain this in an accessible and easily understood way, paying due regard to the age and maturity of the child. This however cannot be considered sufficient, as what is needed is an approach that emphasises the situated nature of research, where ethical consent is contextually contingent and always-in-process, requiring an attitude of informing-for-consent at each stage of the process.

Informed consent as discussed above can be characterised as active consent, so this should also include a means of recording children's consent, whether this is signing a consent form or giving verbal consent to a researcher. This is often referred to as opting-in to research; so there is also the potential for opting-out of research, that is, when potential research participants are asked to tick a box, telephone, text or email a researcher if they do not wish to be involved in the research any further. The decision as to whether to include an opt-in or opt-out consent process is likely to depend upon a range of factors including: the age, maturity and vulnerability of the participating children; the nature of the research demands on participants; and the sensitivity of the research subject (Shaw and others, 2011).

Cocks (2006) notes that informed consent may have unwittingly contributed to the marginalisation and under-representation of children with complex needs' involvement in research. Tarleton and others (2004) have identified how people with learning difficulties have been excluded from the research process except to be measured, quantified and pathologised. In contrast, they identify how children with learning difficulties can participate: as members of advisory groups, commenting on how the research should be conducted and which questions should be asked. Cocks (2006) describes a research study involving children living away from home in specialist facilities, some of whom received 1:1 support, some of whom could effectively use language, and others who used Makaton – a modified version of British Sign Language – and a further 25 per cent who had no recognised communication method. In these circumstances she invoked the notion of assent, which is represented by trust in the relationship between the researcher and the researched and the acceptance of the researcher's presence. Assent, she argues, challenges the adult-centric notion of maturity, competence, completeness and allows children, who would otherwise be excluded from research, to be included.

Other writers, like Lewis (2002), have noted that there is a continuum of informed consent from assent to failure to object and that gaining informed consent can become a major challenge. It could also be argued that it may in effect be nigh on impossible to achieve genuine informed consent and that researchers are always having to do the best they can, in the circumstances in which they find themselves, by acting as morally active researchers.

Payments and rewards

Paying children to be involved in research may be considered as either bribery or justifiable recompense for their skills and time (Hill, 2005). If we are to value the contribution of children in research, as both participants and as co-researchers, it is imperative that they should not be financially penalised for engaging in research and that expenses are covered and appropriate rewards are provided. Shaw and others (2011) suggest that high-street gift vouchers may be suitable for the involvement in a focus group as an appropriate 'thank you'. Where participation is required over a longer period, a larger financial remuneration may be considered. Other forms of reward in such circumstances may include buying some equipment for a youth club or organisation that the children attend or support.

It seems highly unjust for the adult researchers to be remunerated and the children's co-researchers not to be. Where children are financially rewarded, many research commissioners will not allow them to be paid money but prefer them to have high-street vouchers that might then be redeemable in a shopping mall or particular store. This is done partly in the belief that young service-users, if given money, will use that money to buy drugs, alcohol or cigarettes. This point of view is hypocritical: what is to stop the children co-researchers from selling their vouchers to buy the undesirable goods?

If children are to act as co-researchers or as members of an advisory group, a certificate is also a good way of acknowledging their contribution(s) and it may later be used by them when either applying for work or to university.

It is important that in involving young children as co-researchers they should not feel, or be, exploited. Expense payments need to be refunded speedily. Transporting children to training or research sites may entail two fares, to ensure children can be accompanied, or a mileage allowance, so that a parent or carer can transport them.

Training of children as co-researchers

It is unethical to consider involving children as co-researchers without first ensuring they have the skills to undertake the tasks being requested of them. Training for co-researchers is not just about skills for research, for example interviewing; it will also include a focus on group dynamics, and issues like the limits to confidentiality and need for anonymity of research respondents. Such training should take due regard for the maturity of the young people, be interactive and fun. The training should also cover issues to do with health and safety, child safeguarding, and how to manage conflict and aggression.

Ethical issues once the research is underway

It is tempting to suggest that all the ethical issues should be covered before a research project begins collecting data and ethical permission has been granted. This is obviously not the case.

Co-researcher support

It is good practice to provide support for research respondents when the research covers sensitive areas and is potentially upsetting for the research respondent. There is a similar need for such a

service for children's co-researchers. Just because they have been part of the research planning, and of decision-making about research questions, it is foolish to assume they will neither be affected by the potential pain of their research respondents nor that painful emotions will be triggered by the process. It is important, therefore, that arrangements are not only made for supporting the research respondent's but also for the children's co-researchers (Kirby, 2004; McLaughlin, 2006).

Child protection and safeguarding

As mentioned earlier, it is unlikely that absolute confidentiality can be guaranteed to children as either research respondents or as co-researchers. Specific consideration needs to be given to how a research participant's child protection or criminal offence disclosure will be dealt with. Thought needs to be given to a protocol for dealing with such issues; and this should be acknowledged in the information provided as part of the informed consent process.

The morally active researcher

Training can, and should, consider a number of potential research scenarios but it is likely that once the research is underway unanticipated events will occur. It is thus imperative that the adult and children co-researchers adopt the attitude of the 'morally active researcher' as discussed previously.

Ethical issues following fieldwork

Following completion of the fieldwork, the ethical issues to consider for working with children as research respondents or co-researchers include: authorship and anonymity, research dissemination and endings.

Authorship and anonymity

There are two issues here: one concerns how children as co-researchers are acknowledged in the report; the other, whether proper names are used or not. Butler (2002: 247) provides some guidance by noting that research publications:

should properly and in proportion to their contribution, acknowledge the part played by all participants.

This is more easily said than done. It is quite easy to agree that if a co-researcher contributes from the beginning to the end of a research project they should receive acknowledgement as a co-author. This situation becomes more difficult if they only contributed to part, or one aspect, of the research. In these circumstances, it may be appropriate to include a list of who contributed to which parts of the process.

The second issue of authorship concerns identification and anonymity. For many situations child respondents, children's co-researchers and their gatekeepers will be happy for their child's proper name to be used. However, if the research is about sensitive subjects like living with parents with AIDS/HIV or surviving domestic violence, authorship and identification in the report will not only identify the child (whether co-researcher or research respondent) as a survivor of these conditions, but also potentially identifies their parents or carers. Once a report is in the public domain it is not possible to control how it is used. The adult researcher cannot abrogate their duty of care but must consider, with the children's co-researchers, the risks involved in publication prior to the report being completed. This may lead to a difficulty when the children co-researchers want their full name on the report but the adult researcher feels that this is an unacceptable risk. In such circumstances, a potential compromise could be to use nicknames; but if this is not

acceptable to the children co-researchers, and they are then overruled, they need to be given a clear reason for this overruling, one that arises from the negotiations at the start of the project.

Research dissemination

Child co-researchers can be very effective presenters and disseminators of research findings. In certain situations they carry much greater weight than adult researchers. However, issues of identification and training need to be considered. The first ethical issue, that of identification, is the same issue as that arising in authorship: in undertaking videos or conference presentations the children should consider whether their interests are better served by using a pseudonym or nickname, appearing behind a screen, with a mask or in a darkened part of a stage.

The second ethical aspect acknowledges that it cannot be assumed that all children co-researchers will naturally make excellent presenters. Some may do so, but most will require training and support to project themselves and their message effectively in such arenas.

Endings

When the research report has been accepted there needs to be an 'endings plan' in place. The 'endings plan' acknowledges the emotional engagement of the young people and may cover such items as a celebration of the work done; an awards ceremony to give out certificates of achievement; and some discussion about what they can do next (McLaughlin, 2006). The last point is critical, as groups of children co-researchers often want to continue with research so some thought needs to be given to signposting future opportunities.

Endings may also be very important in children's research where a researcher has built up a relationship with a research respondent. Goode (1991) describes a research project where he built up a trusting and complex relationship with Christina, a deaf and blind child. When the research finished it proved very difficult for Christina, who was then left without an ally and whose behaviour regressed. Goode was also affected by this situation and it raises ethical issues about whether it is appropriate for children's circumstances to worsen as a result of their involvement in research?

Final thoughts

Involving children as research respondents and as co-researchers is potentially one way of promoting participative research approaches. This is not to deny that there will be power imbalances between the children and adult researchers, or between children. While this chapter has focused on children as research participants or as co-researchers, Kellet (2005b) has been working on child-controlled research, which also contains many of the issues identified here. This chapter has highlighted that research is not a neutral activity, and adopting an ethical approach to children's involvement in research is not without its difficulties. The chapter has identified a number of the key themes to be considered whilst arguing for the need to adopt the attitude of the morally-active researcher: unethical research cannot be good research.

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Chapter 3

Children and young people as researcher and research advisors

Perspectives from the NCB Research Centre

Cathy Street

NCB Research Centre is committed to the involvement of children and young people in our research and evaluation activities – indeed in many of the Centre's research studies, one of the key groups that we seek data from are children and young people whose experiences and perspectives we see as vital to really understanding the issues we are exploring. It is our belief that involving children and young people in research about issues of concern to them improves the quality of research and can make research more relevant. Involving children and young people from the outset can also improve recruitment, ensure that research tools are appropriate for research participants and improve the interpretation of data and communication of findings.

To deliver the Centre's work, we support a group of Young Research Advisors (YRAs). The YRAs work in a number of ways, in particular, they are central to the delivery of the Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) element of NCB's project with the Policy Research Unit in the Health of Children, Young People and Families (Children's Policy Research Unit – CPRU), a consortium led from the University College London and Institute of Child Health (www.ucl.ac.uk/cpru). All YRAs receive a high street voucher as a thank you for their input into any research activity and all travel and expenses are covered.

The CPRU is one of the projects described in this chapter which provides a snapshot of some of the recent or ongoing NCB Research Centre work where children and young people are involved as co-researchers or advisors. We have grappled with many of the ethical issues set out by Hugh McLaughlin in chapter 2, and in the descriptions that follow, we outline some of the challenges we have faced, our learning from these experiences and our thoughts on how we might take forward children and young people being actively involved in NCB's policy work, practice development activities and research in the future.

The CPRU project

The aim of the CPRU is to improve the health of children, young people and families by undertaking research to provide evidence for health policy and practice. There are a number of broad areas of research within a five-year programme including; the healthy child, healthcare provision, mental health and adolescence and long-term health conditions.

The healthy child theme explores how children's health can be promoted and protected and how policy can enable families to thrive, focusing on factors that are amenable to policy change. The healthcare provision theme covers access to services, especially for children with chronic illness or disability. The focus is on preventive health, especially injury prevention and interventions for vulnerable and looked-after children. The mental health theme was established because the mental health needs of children, young people and families are a key policy concern.

In the adolescence theme, research into interventions that address risky behaviours and promote wider health (e.g. diet or physical activity) was the focus for the first projects. More recent research activity has examined children and young people's transitions between services, alongside a number of studies focused on children and young people with diabetes, a serious long-term health condition that affected 29,000 children in 2009 and has been on the increase since then (Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health, 2009).

The work of the CPRU is informed and supported by four cross-cutting areas of expertise: the PPI provided by NCB Research Centre and the YRAs, social care, health economics and medical sociology. To deliver the project, in 2011, NCB Research Centre recruited two new groups, one of children and young people – the YRAs – and the other made up of parents and carers known as the Families Research Advisory Group (FRAG). What follows explains more about the work of the YRAs.

The YRAs are a diverse group of around 14 young people aged between 11–18 years recruited from across England. The actual make-up of the group varies over time (due to people usually leaving the group when they turn 18 and new young people joining) but as much as possible, we try to maintain a roughly even split of young men and young women. The young people bring to the group a variety of experiences – for example, some have health conditions or have been identified as having ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and most recently, has included young people with experience of transition between different mental health services.

When the YRA group was first set up, the young people initially received training on research methods and health policy and a programme of quarterly day-long meetings, held on Saturdays, was put in place. At a 'typical' YRA meeting, there would be sessions on two or three of the projects within the CPRU. This could include where, for example, the young people might be consulted on the research questions or might work with the researchers to think about how they might disseminate their study findings to different audiences, including making this material accessible to children and young people.

Considering the impact of the work of the YRAs

Feedback gathered from the YRA group suggests that they have found the experience valuable. One YRA commented:

We joined the group for a variety of different reasons but each of us loves being part of it. We provide advice on research into different topics. During the past year our group has looked at a range of research proposals in areas including the environment and health education. We were glad to give our own opinions for the better use and hope that they have influenced the way research is done.

One of the challenges the Research Centre has encountered in its work with the CPRU is thinking about how to make the involvement of children and young people meaningful. This is particularly challenging when some of the research projects have been based on analysis of complex medical, statistical or longitudinal survey data and where there has been quite limited scope for the YRAs to influence the research questions. Despite this, feedback from some of the researchers the YRAs have worked with demonstrates that their input has most definitely had a positive impact, for example:

We found their input invaluable in shaping our thinking on a number of projects. Their thoughtful, incisive comments really helped us modify aspects of our approach that we would not have considered otherwise (both in terms of presentation and content).

As our experience of working with the YRAs developed, alongside the portfolio of research projects within the different thematic areas growing, it also became apparent that we needed to refine some elements of our approach and pay particular attention to:

- The ongoing training needs of the group and to think about how the skills and knowledge they have acquired through the project could be accredited. Options to offer ASDEN qualifications in, for example, life skills are currently under consideration.
- In some circumstances, in order to give a better 'fit' with the specific subject area of a CPRU project, recruiting smaller subgroups of young people with direct experience of the topic under study (as opposed to recruiting a group with more generic experiences of this age group).
- Thinking about creative ways of delivering the PPI element of the work. This is important to make this an attractive project for young people to be involved with. In addition, during the life of project, there were considerable developments in the use of social media that has significantly altered the way that research findings and policy announcements are often announced and or disseminated.

Involving young people in the development of new engagement materials for a national health survey

In this project, the NCB Research Centre was asked if some of the YRAs, plus some Young NCB members, could help with the development of a range of engagement materials for a new national survey aimed at 15-year-olds. This included designing an information leaflet, a postcard, commenting on the invitation letter and style of the website, and most importantly, coming up with a 'young person friendly' title for the survey and branding.

To deliver this work, it was decided to offer a group of 14 young people the opportunity to go away for a two-day residential and a programme of sessions focused on the survey materials, interspersed with opportunities to try out a range of outdoor activities was then developed.

This was the first time the group had been offered a residential programme and it proved to be a highly enjoyable and successful way of supporting the group to create a way of working together, in-depth and at some speed, to develop the first drafts of the various materials.

One of the key aspects that facilitated this appeared to be the provision of a dedicated private space for the group to work in for the duration of the programme, supported throughout by an experienced participation officer. This allowed for the early ideas and versions of the materials to be left untouched and on display, which in turn allowed the group to easily build on and develop their ideas from session to session, thus avoiding the need to 'start all over again' each time the group reconvened.

Other learning from this project included:

- The **size of the group** – 14 young people, whilst quite a large group and therefore requiring a number of staff to attend the programme, proved to be ideal in terms of providing enough people to be able to work in small groups on different topics. This also allowed for debate and discussion about the different key messages the young people felt needed to be included in the materials.

- The importance of **planning sessions thoroughly** beforehand and including a **mixture of activities** in order to appeal to different interests and ways of working, also allowing enough time for informal discussion and for making changes and adaptations to the programme if required.

On the second day of the programme, representatives from the organisation commissioning NCB to undertake this work also visited the group and it was clear that this was appreciated since it conveyed a sense of interest in the group's work and that it was valued.

Interesting learning also emerged from the project about young people's views about the branding of materials aimed at this age group – the group emphasised that it is important that branding is *"not too childish, wacky or trying to be cool."* With regard to surveys, they highlighted that not only must these be simple, quick to complete and clear as to how to complete them, it is also important to make it clear what the benefits of completing a survey might be to a young person and to be quite explicit how any data may be used.

The VIPER Project

VIPER stands for **Voice, Inclusion, Participation, Empowerment and Research** and was a research partnership project funded by the Big Lottery Fund which ran from 2010 to 2013. It had a dual purpose; to explore the participation of disabled children and young people in strategic decision-making about social, health and education services and to train and support a group of 16 disabled young people to work as co-researchers.

The project sat within the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), a part of NCB, with the Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE), the Children's Society and the NCB Research Centre as partners. As part of its work on the project, the Research Centre was asked to undertake an independent evaluation of the processes involved and its impact. Mixed methods were used to gather information from the differing stakeholders' perspectives, including in-depth interviews with the young researchers, project personnel, parents and carers and senior civil servants. The VIPER project also involved a number of events and the production of a bulletin and an online survey sought feedback about these aspects of the project.

Findings from the evaluation indicate that the project was highly successful and the model of participation showcased that using young people as co-researchers at all stages of the project and co-producers of the project outputs, was one of the most influential aspects of the project. The evaluation found that the recruitment, training and support provided to the young people were effective, well planned and positively received. This enabled the Vipers to successfully undertake a wide range of research tasks including conducting primary research, designing questions, carrying out fieldwork, analysing data and presenting research findings. It was also apparent that their own life experiences helped to shape the research questions and informed the qualitative fieldwork, analysis, reporting and dissemination, ensuring a real resonance with the issues under investigation.

In terms of the key enablers and challenges encountered in the project, the evaluation highlighted the following as key:

- The commitment shown by everyone on the team to participation.
- The role, experience and insight of the participation worker.
- Working in a way that responded to individuals' needs and which allowed for plans to be adapted to meet emerging changes and challenges.
- A responsive way of working that promoted making everything as accessible as possible.

The VIPER project provided valuable learning about how to recruit disabled young people into research activities and highlighted a major challenge, namely a lack of universal understanding of what disabled young people's participation means and how to apply this in practice. It also revealed that personal assistance may be essential for some young people and that assistance from parents or known people was preferred over, for example, employing previously unknown personal assistants. However, it was emphasised that the nature and level of assistance may change over time and cannot be assumed or static – with this being clearly illustrated over the three years of the project wherein many of the Vipers became evidently more independent of all external sources of support.

Findings and recommendations from the project include:

- allowing more time when bidding for participatory projects wherein young people may act as co-researchers;
- that it is important to train all personnel and project participants in the different concepts and models upon which a project may be based;
- to allow sufficient time and funding for inclusion and for employing participation staff;
- crucially, to go beyond the 'usual suspects', that is, not select from those young people who may be easiest to recruit,
- inviting participation in all aspects of the work and listening to all views.

As one young Viper noted:

Hear it all, not just bits that conform with how you already think.

The success of the project is illustrated through a number of its other achievements which include: the group being commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner to research the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities; the group being commissioned by DfE to produce *Hear Us Out: A VIPER Guide to participation in decision making* and a member of the group being recruited in summer 2014 to join the DfE EPIC (Equality, Participation, Influence and Change) Advisory Group to advise on the SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) reforms.*

Conclusions

This brief overview of young people's involvement in a number of NCB's recent or current projects provides clear evidence that involving children and young people brings benefits. It brings benefits across a number of different domains; positive outcomes for young people themselves alongside arguably, projects that are more tightly focused, with outputs that are relevant to the issues of concern to children, young people, families and carers. Alongside this, it is evident that there are challenges to be addressed, not least in ensuring adequacy of time to undertake thorough planning and preparation of research and participation activities – time staff in the NCB Research Centre feel is well spent and something to protect and develop in our future activities.

* The various research outputs from the VIPER project, including the *Hear Us Out* guide and the full evaluation report *I did exactly what I wanted: evaluation of the participation of young disabled people in the VIPER Project* via the Research Centre and Council for Disabled Children sections of the NCB website, www.ncb.org.uk.

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Chapter 4

Young Children's Voices Network

A project to embed listening into everyday practice

Sue Owen and Lucy Williams

Introduction

The Young Children's Voices Network (YCVN) at the National Children's Bureau (NCB) was originally a government-funded initiative promoting 'listening to young children' in Early Years services. The network, developed by NCB's Early Childhood Unit, set out to support English local authorities in developing good practice in listening to young children, so that young children's views could inform policy and improve early childhood services. Initially, twenty participating local authorities established local networks to support practitioners in developing a listening culture in their settings by offering opportunities to share effective practice, provide training and undertake projects. This chapter outlines the history of the project, its principles and the practice it supports and provides some case studies of its work.

The story of the Young Children's Voices project

In 2000, with government funding from the Sure Start Unit, the National Children's Bureau's Early Childhood Unit (ECU) set up a project called 'Listening as a way of life'. It was designed to pull together information on the methods that have been developed for talking to very young children about what they would like to see in the services they use. There were many strategies for, and examples of, consulting with adults and with older children, but all too often there was (and still is) an assumption that the smallest children aren't in a position to talk to us rationally about what they want or, indeed, may not even think about it.

A moment's thought should tell us this isn't true. Babies tell us very forcefully what they need; it may be hard to listen to or to know how to respond, but it is the beginning of the dialogues that can lead to sophisticated discussions only a couple of years later. Early childhood education is full of examples of such sophisticated discussions that go on all day long between children and their parents, other children and early years workers. In fact, this is what good early years practice is all about: listening to children (with your eyes as well as your ears, as one Montessori nursery school pointed out to us); thinking about what they are 'saying'; developing discussions and activities based on this; then feeding it all back for review and development. It becomes a way of life, and those strategies which have been developed to ask children more specifically about their likes and dislikes, such as circle time discussions and using disposable cameras, can be built into this rather than being separate and unconnected activities. Most young children are happy to tell us what they think; they haven't yet learned to be disillusioned, cynical or polite and, if encouraged by

seeing their ideas put into practice, they will enter into this enterprise enthusiastically. The accepted view that it is harder to consult with young children is actually the opposite of the truth, and perhaps gives us ideas about how to do it more effectively with other age groups. This was the basis on which ECU and its national advisory group built the Listening as a way of life project, and the national network that has arisen from it.

A *Mail on Sunday* report of the project was entitled:

Taxpayer-funded scheme asks the under-FIVES how the country should be run.

It gave a somewhat contradictory comment from the then Shadow Secretary for Children, Schools and Families, Michael Gove:

'A child of three could come up with better policies than this Government. Most taxpayers will wonder why, when the Government ignores the views of so many adults, is thousands of pounds being spent taking lessons on local government from toddlers.'

'Listening as a way of life' set out to provide an initial review of listening in England. The consultation project comprised a national advisory group, a research study and dissemination of information through regional events. Findings from the project are summarised in the report *When are we having candyfloss?* (McAuliffe, 2003) that indicated some clear ingredients for good practice when consulting with very young children. The report brought together a selection of examples of practice from across the country and found that the following cycle was common to all the effective approaches adopted:

Listen – Document – Reflect – Take action – Feedback



- Listen: an active process of receiving, interpreting and responding to communication.
- Document: recording a child's likes and dislikes helps practitioners remember as well as ensuring continuity of care if practitioners change.
- Reflect: essential to uncover what may not be obvious at first glance and to engage all practitioners in the process of learning and changing.
- Take action: key to gaining trust, children need to see evidence that their views have been listened to.
- Feedback: the difference between being listened to and *feeling* listened to – even if the children's wishes cannot be met, honest feedback and discussions about why not are essential.

This cycle was then used to underpin the further work of the project, such as the Young Children's Voices Network which was set up in 2005, again with central government funding; *How can Local Authorities and Early Years Settings Assess and Plan the Participation of Children in Early Years Services* (Hamer and Williams, 2010); and 'Developing a listening culture', one in a series of nine *Listening as way of life* leaflets highlighting effective practice from the local YCVNs across the country (Clark, 2011).

NCB has always believed in working in partnership and building on existing good practice, so a national advisory group was central to the development of this work. Experts in the field of listening to young children were invited to become part of the project from the start, ensuring that we built on existing good practice and could take advantage of their extensive contacts. They then continued to meet to shape the development of the YCVN from 2005 to 2011.

Members included:

Alison Clark, author of *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach*

Mary Dickins, author of *Starting with Choice: Inclusive strategies for consulting young children*

Penny Lancaster, co-author and trainer of Coram's *Listening to Young Children* pack

Judy Miller, practitioner with 30 years' experience and author of *Never too Young*

Nicky Road, consultant on innovative local authority projects that focused on listening to young children

Ginny Morrow, of Barnardo's and Brunel University (now Young Lives project, Department of International Development, University of Oxford).

Through quarterly meetings, the advisory group offered expert guidance on how the YCVN could offer support to local authorities, early years settings and practitioners. The group informed project objectives, innovations and products. They provided a unique resource to the project, offering diverse expertise and professional experiences in participatory research practice with young children; early years pedagogy; and strategic leadership on listening projects in local authorities. Members expressed passion and commitment for listening to young children that they shared at over 20 national events, through delivering training, informing resources, and contributing to Early Childhood Unit web pages dedicated to the listening project.

The extension of the project, in 2005, provided funding for 20 local authorities to set up local networks of good practice. The aim was to support local authorities in meeting their duty to listen to young children to inform policy and the improvement of early years provision (Childcare Act 2006) (McAuliffe, Linsey and Fowler, 2006) by supporting them to set up a local network, which would in turn help to develop the skills of listening to young children. In addition, it sought to help authorities utilise existing knowledge that practitioners already had about young children's views. The objective being for local YCVNs to develop and disseminate good practice, and facilitate the wider sharing of information, in order to influence local policy on early years provision.

It was always envisaged that these networks would differ from each other according to the needs and interests of the local group. Authorities participating in the final evaluation differed in terms of who they included in their network membership; how they coordinated it; and how much the network engaged strategically within their respective local authorities.

Two examples of YCVN projects are Dudley and Brent:

Dudley is where an existing group of practitioners had been meeting monthly for a year since they had attended a study week in Reggio Emilia. Inspired by the Reggio philosophy, the group had been reflecting on their own practice and trying to think of a way of disseminating this more widely. The timing was perfect for them to join ECU's YCVN as a pilot, and they commissioned PlayTrain to look at listening practice in-depth in four settings before the group was set up – early indications were that listening needed to be better embedded.

Ten settings were represented in the YCVN, including primary schools, children's centres, day nurseries, voluntary sector arts groups and childminders. Staff time was also given to the project: from the quality assurance manager, who oversaw the work; and a foundation stage advisory teacher, who had a specialism in communication skills. Ninety practitioners were released to do the ECU training.

Brent had a network focused on sharing good practice: both between settings; and of researchers and policy-makers working more strategically. Practitioners met each term to participate; and children's centres, schools and private nurseries were all involved. Advisory staff within the borough, as well as a dedicated trainer from the ECU, trained several hundred practitioners in good listening practice; then a conference was held to celebrate lessons learnt and the progress made in listening to children. The Network then decided to focus on sharing children's views on settings – with practitioners visiting each setting engaged in the network. They also linked up with older children's listening work, for example a Hear by Right group, and the youth council.

The national project was evaluated in 2008 and found to be effective and popular:

The impact of the work was most immediately visible through reports of raised skills and confidence of practitioners. Listening work is most effective when it complements existing skills and knowledge and builds on these to embed a fundamental listening approach, rather than imposing a set of additional responsibilities.

(Gill, 2008: 3)

Issues raised by the evaluation included the following:

- the importance of engaging influential 'champions' early on who could support the work strategically
- the need for access to a bank of resources on the effectiveness of a listening culture that could add weight to the efforts of the champions
- the need for some financial support to ensure staff capacity, for example release for training
- some difficulties in engaging schools and childminders in the process, often because of the timings of meetings and the extra resources needed to release practitioners.

Over the past 13 years, the work of the ECU and the national network has clarified and developed the principles and practices of listening to young children in a way that is designed to truly make it 'a way of life', integral to good early years practice. The following sections outline some of these foundations, using examples from the Network's projects.

Why do we listen to young children?

We listen to babies and young children because it acknowledges their right to be listened to and for their views and experiences to be taken seriously; it informs our understanding of children's priorities, interests, concerns and feelings; and is a vital part of establishing respectful relationships to support their learning.

The United Nations Convention on the **Rights of the Child**[†] states, in Article 12, the importance of children having their say and their opinion being taken into account in decisions that affect them. YCVN raises awareness of this particular right, so that practitioners know that young children are entitled to have their preferences and perspectives valued alongside parents' and practitioners' views whatever their age or stage of development.

In England, the most significant legislative driver for listening to young children came about partly through the work of the Network: **Section 3.5 of the Childcare Act, 2006** places a duty on English local authorities to have regard to information about the views of young children.

The **Early Years Foundation Stage** (EYFS), a comprehensive statutory framework for birth to fives, was introduced in England in 2008 and set out the standards for learning, development and care of babies and young children. Revised in 2012, the EYFS emphasises how enabling participation is fundamental to taking a child-centred approach and is essential for fostering good relationships with parents to best support their children's learning and development. The importance of listening to young children is implicit throughout the EYFS and the framework. Together with initiatives such as YCVN, the EYFS has helped embed the practice of listening to young children into practitioners' everyday way of working and interactions with children.

But apart from legal requirements, there are many other child development reasons for supporting good listening practice in early years settings. Listening is important for the children who are being listened to but it is also important for the adults who are listening: whether at home or outside the home, in an early years setting, a school, at a local authority level or in national government. If children's views and experiences are taken seriously, then adults may decide to make changes to daily routines such as enabling children to help themselves to water through the day, or gaining open access to the outdoors (which most surveys of children's views shows to be their biggest priority!).

Working in a more democratic way with young children can also relieve practitioners and parents from the burden of needing to know all the answers. Listening to young children may reveal different possibilities for engaging children as well as new interests to explore together. The sharing of children's perspectives can provide the chance for early years practitioners to reconsider the relationships they have established with young children as well as to rethink routines, activities and the physical structure of the settings. This process of reflection can be 'contagious' in a multiagency environment, with changes to one service's practice leading to changes in neighbouring services.

A good example of the need to change practice came in the government-funded project looking at how best to roll-out the free entitlement of 15 hours of nursery education. This description of children having to fit into an adult-led schedule is common and can lead to frustration and disruptive behaviour – all of which could be avoided with more flexible routines.

A number of observations were made of children sitting on the mat anxiously waiting for parents to arrive **'My mummy is coming now', 'I wonder who's mummy is next', 'Now, it's only me'** (when there is only one child left). In some instances children were sitting on the mat waiting with their coats on, **'I don't like sitting on the carpet – it's too long'**. In contrast, some end of session transitions were managed more successfully with children involved in group activities such as music, discussion or group games where they appeared

† The UK signed the convention on 19 April 1990, ratified it on 16 December 1991 and it came into force on 15 January 1992. <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/healthandwellbeing/b0074766/uncrc>

less anxious. Children often asked practitioners for reassurance when they were arriving and leaving settings.

(Williams, 2010: 19–20)

There is also the possibility that listening to young children may lead to some children sharing serious concerns. This is more likely to be the case if listening is embedded in everyday practice and if listening to children is not limited to adult-led agendas. Such circumstances may be rare but those cases of significant child abuse, which we tend to read about only when the child has died, show how important it can be for adults to take seriously what they hear and see when working with children. Again and again, serious case reviews have highlighted the fact that children have not been listened to and that adults' views have been prioritised – this is a by-product, but a vital one, of making listening into a way of life.

How to listen to young children[‡]

Effective listening requires respect for whoever we are listening to. We need to believe that children of all ages, backgrounds and abilities are important and unique and worth listening to. This is connected to our view of children: do we see the child we are working with as a strong child, a skilful communicator, a competent learner and a healthy child? This includes babies; and children who may be seen as having communication or other difficulties.

Listening also requires us to be sensitive to a variety of ways of expressing feelings.

Children are individuals, with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and different physical capabilities, and they may use a variety of ways to communicate their perspectives which require us to be open, receptive and willing to learn. Similarly we need to respond to the preferred ways in which children choose to communicate their views and experiences. This is particularly important with disabled children. One way to achieve this may be to work closely with parents or other adults who know the children well. Listening can be a collaborative activity.

Honesty is also required to make listening effective. We need to be clear about why we are listening. If we are listening to children's views and experiences about a particular issue, we need to explain this carefully to children in ways appropriate to their levels of understanding. We need to be honest about how far we may be able to act upon children's views and to explain how other people's views may need to be taken into account. We need to be honest in feeding back the outcome of a consultation, so that children can see how their views have been taken seriously and where and why it hasn't been possible to act on their suggestions.

Effective listening takes time. Patience is essential when working with very young children, especially if they have communication difficulties or delays. Listening requires us to be sensitive to timing. The best times for listening will vary according to individual children's emotions, feelings and routines. How we ourselves are feeling will also effect how well we are able to listen. Children's timing may be different from our own. Children may choose to express their feelings and wishes at the very moment we are least prepared.

Lastly, we must use all our senses, not just our hearing. This includes using our eyes and senses of touch and smell, in order to listen to how children are communicating to us. We need imagination in order to design ways of listening which are enjoyable and varied and which take into account children's different strengths and abilities. Imagination may often be required in order to act upon young children's ideas and expressed interests.

[‡] This section is taken from Clark (2011).

There are many creative and engaging ways to listen to young children that support their learning and development and enable participation. Three key ways are highlighted below and illustrate how children can have a say in decisions that affect them day to day, as well as a role in contributing to whole-setting decisions:

- **Observation** is an important starting point for listening to young children in order to understand their abilities, needs and interests; and it underpins effective early years pedagogy. Observation of children's body language and engagement in activities, for example, can be used effectively to inform planning to meet young children's individual needs as well as to shape provision and setting policy. When thinking about listening to babies or children who are non-verbal, observation is a key tool for 'tuning in' and enabling participation on children's own terms.
- **Opportunities for making choices.** Children can be supported to make daily decisions: such as what activities they do when and where, and what they have to drink or eat. Having a say in these kinds of decisions can build children's sense of self by encouraging expression of preferences and children's sense of control over their routines.
- **Designing spaces.** We can involve children in deciding what early years spaces can look like and be used for in order to maximise their learning environments. Practitioners can talk with children about their likes and dislikes in the nursery setting. This can be through a fun activity, such as child-led 'tours' where children can take an adult around the setting and take photos of what is important to them as they chat along the way. Practitioners can then work with children to reflect on their preferences and discuss possible changes to settings, taking on board different children's responses and needs. Children can, for example, participate in choosing new equipment to purchase and get involved in setting it up, providing a sense of ownership over the space they use.

Young children can change policy

The YCVN has had an active role in informing early years guidance and policy in England; and can fairly claim that its work contributed to the decision to include a requirement to consult with young children in the 2006 Childcare Act. Local YCVNs have also had a strategic impact on the planning within local authorities, as was shown by the evaluation report of the project in 2008:

The emergence of listening strategies, and the embedding of listening work into early years business plans, were examples given of how the YCVN was starting to have an impact at a strategic level. The development of strategic links with participation departments and their strategies was another mechanism seen to be 'giving weight' to listening to young children by bringing it to the attention of areas traditionally focussing on listening to older children or targeted groups of children such as children in care. It was felt by several interviewees that following this route could facilitate a greater opportunity to influence local authority policy. Examples given of how young children's voices have been used to influence policy included informing the parenting strategy of one authority and informing the budgeting processes of another.

(Gill, 2008:10)

One good example of this work at a national level came in 2009. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (now the Department for Education) commissioned the Early Childhood Unit at NCB to consult with young children as part of a wider consultation on the Draft Code of Practice on Provision of the Free Entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds. The entitlement was being extended from 12 to 15 hours a week and amended to allow for flexibility in the sessions in which it was taken. This was designed to better meet the needs of working parents, but how might this affect children? In partnership with Hertfordshire's local network, ECU developed and delivered

the consultation with practitioners from 10 settings and key findings from the project were published in a report, *Am I staying for lunch today?* (Williams, 2010).

'Flexibility' within this policy, and in the context of this project, referred to the way in which settings might deliver the 15 hours to enable families to access it over 3, 4 or 5 days across a week, rather than a traditional structure of prescribed sessions. The ten Hertfordshire settings were already delivering the 15-hour entitlement and the consultation involved 58 children aged 3 and 4 years old.

The consultation aimed to find out about children's experiences of 'flexibility' by examining the structure of their individual free entitlement (that is, their length of session, timing of session, weekly schedule). It also aimed to examine how the way the entitlement was structured affected children's experiences of continuity in terms of their friendship groups, relations with staff and engagement in play, which are all important elements of quality in children's experiences. The new variation in individual offers, for instance, meant that children sometimes ended up going to different sessions from their friends and becoming confused about when they would be in the setting and for how long. Research has shown that children like the security and knowledge of routines and it is important for their emotional well-being and development.

From what the young children in the study told us, we learnt the following things:

- Play was very important to them and it appeared that transitions were easier if children were able to go straight into play and were involved in play at the end of sessions.
- End sessions were managed less effectively than beginning sessions.
- Children were more anxious when they were waiting to register or be collected, or when they were unsure of their own individual routine.
- They could become confused by attending different length sessions on different days throughout the week and this meant that many turned to practitioners for reassurance or to remind them if they were staying for a full day or half day.
- Friends are important in supporting their daily transitions – and there were many examples of children searching the room for their friends when they arrived, helping other children to settle, and comforting each other when tired or upset.
- A child's key person can reduce anxiety during transitions by using their knowledge of children's preferences to support them, for example by taking them to favourite toys or friends.
- Food and drink and the routines attached to them were significantly important to children.
- Outside play and creativity were the most popular of children's preferences.

The project informed changes to practice in every setting involved, as staff were often surprised and inspired by the things they learned about the children. Practically, many practitioners commented that the consultation helped them to evaluate their provision and provided useful information to record in their Ofsted self-evaluation forms. It also affected their communication with parents, as they sought to share the new information or check things out with parents more routinely than before.

It was decided, at a local authority strategic level, that this data would feed into training and guidance for new settings. This would start on the flexible funding pathway; then the following recommendations would be embedded into the Hertfordshire *Code of Practice* for the Free Entitlement policy, and the guidance, training and advisory support for all settings delivering the offer:

- Practitioners should ensure end-of-session transitions are improved, using play to manage this.
- Practitioners should focus on children's awareness of routine, to ensure that they know what is happening on specific days and times.

- Practitioners should have an awareness of the importance of children's friendships and find ways to support children's friendships when delivering the 15-hour entitlement.
- Practitioners should ensure there is a disciplined approach to using the key person, one which supports the needs of all children receiving the free entitlement.

Recommendations from the study also led to an amendment to the DCSF national Code of Practice that was currently being drafted. Its final version read (additions in bold):

The Government has set national limits outside of which local authorities should not deliver the free entitlement. These limits secure an offer which will enable children to access regular, quality provision, in keeping with the evidence of the benefits of doing so; whilst also maximizing flexibility for parents, **continuity for children** and ensuring a degree of stability for providers.

Local authorities should offer providers guidance on limiting disruptions to continuity resulting from the flexible offer, meaning key person, friendship groups and children's interests are prioritised during implementation.

YCVN going forward

Since the journey began in early 2000, many local authorities and early years services in England have come a long way in terms of listening to young children. Training has been rolled out across the country direct to practitioners, and local networks have helped to place an emphasis on young children's participation that had previously been seen as 'leftfield'.

YCVN no longer operates as a funded project, however the network and its resources are integral to what the ECU offers to the sector. The 'Listening Cycle' of Listen–Document–Reflect–Take action–Feedback now underpins YCVN training and resources that are available from the NCB. In 2013, the ECU integrated all its networks into one to form the ECU network, to provide a coherent offer to the early years workforce across England. This network will bring together special interest groups from the original networks, including YCVN, and aims to maintain a focus on the key aspects of effective practice, including listening and participation; partnerships with parents to support children's learning; challenging inequalities; and leadership to support continuous quality improvement in early years. This meets the aim of the original project back in 2000 – that listening to young children and incorporating their views into the planning and delivery of services should become 'a way of life', rather than an extra activity to find time for in a busy working week.

This does imply, however, that we want to know what children think and we're prepared to act on it. At a recent conference, one delegate brought the proceedings right down to earth by reminding us that young people tell us all the time what they think, through words, actions and behaviour. If we really do want to design services that are based on what children say, then we need to listen, pay attention and reflect on what they are telling us in their daily lives. If practitioners, whether working alone or in teams, do not have the time or the encouragement to reflect on their practice and share their knowledge of the young children they work with then our services will not improve. This must lead us to acknowledge the other side of the listening equation – that practitioners need to be listened to as well. If staff feel that their own views and needs are not taken into account, then it will be hard to engage them in listening to young children and it will set a poor example to those children. Hence the importance of developing a listening *culture* for the setting as a whole.

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Chapter 5

Childminding as young children see it

Malene Karlsson



'That's Ann': Photo by AI, 2 years 6 months

Introduction

Quality in childcare has always been an important topic for discussion, as has childminding or family daycare. Part of these discussions has been about the issue of who should decide what quality care is. Should it be officials and inspectors, national or local? The parents? The childminders? Or the children themselves?

The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them. The views of the child should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. What the convention does not discuss is at what age a child is capable of expressing his or her views.

In this chapter, I will present some of the findings from several projects where very young children, most of them less than 3 years of age, have been given the means to express their views about their life in childminding.

The projects involve 30 children from two regions in Denmark in 2006 and 2007; 20 children from five regions in Sweden in 2008–2009; and 14 children from various regions in Ireland in 2008.

The projects were inspired by The Mosaic Approach, in which researchers at Thomas Coram Research Unit at London University developed a method to give 4- to 5-year-old children at daycare centres a chance to express how they would like their outdoor environment to be (Clark and Moss, 2001; 2005). To make this possible, the researchers used a whole catalogue of methods, including interviews, observations, the children's drawings, and photos taken by the children. In this way, the children had a chance to express what they thought. In particular, the use of disposable cameras was shown to be very successful and, through them, the researchers obtained information they would not have been able to get otherwise.

As a researcher, I wanted to include in our projects not only the child-minded children but also the childminders. In this research, I have been influenced by participatory action research (Maguire, 1987; Fals-Borda, 1991) and by participant-based research (Forsberg and Starrin, 1997). This means that the participants themselves have an important role in shaping the research, and in this way get a chance to influence it. Participant-based research aims to make it possible for 'normal people' to obtain influence over the production of knowledge: in contrast to traditional research, where a researcher observes a group of people.

The design of this research was formed through a dialogue between me, as the researcher, and the childminders in the first project, on the island of Bornholm. The carers carried out the collection of material that I analysed, and I then discussed the findings with them. I had used this model earlier with good results (Karlsson, 2002). In the later projects, in Denmark and Sweden, the childminders were presented with my findings and asked to comment on them, whereas the Irish childminders did not have that opportunity due to constraints of distance and time.

Method

The method that we co-constructed was:

- The childminder chose only one child at a time.
- The child should be 2–3 years of age (in some cases a child was just over 3).
- The child was given a disposable camera and was invited to take a photo of whatever he or she found interesting and amusing (in some cases, in Sweden, the child used a digital camera).
- The childminder was instructed not to suggest what the child should take photos of.
- The project should last no more than one week.
- The childminder took notes of the situations in which the child took photos.
- The childminder interviewed the child when viewing the photos.

Some childminders were a bit reluctant and doubted that children so young could really handle a camera. But in almost all cases they were proved wrong. A few children did not show much interest in photographing but generally they were very quick to learn how to handle a camera and were very proud and happy to be trusted with the task. Sometimes it didn't work out so well, when for instance a child turned the camera and photographed him or herself. Many children were surprised that there was no display where they could view their photo immediately but most of the children were engaged, quick learners. One childminder thought she could prevent a child from taking photos of the same subject all the time, by not showing him how to wind the film forward. The boy watched her doing it once, and then knew how to do it himself!

Similarities

In my analysis of all the photos, I started looking for similarities in the chosen subjects of the photos. Some were commonly chosen, independent of country:

The near surroundings, including the child's own family, the childminder, her house and garden, her pets and family.

Nature, including grass, trees, views, clouds, water, etc. and all kinds of animals, from insects to horses and cows.

Vehicles, including bikes, car, buses, tractors, trains and excavators.

Playgrounds, with various equipment such as swings, trampolines, sandpits, etc.

The other children in care, this was by far the most popular subject for almost all the children. We have a large number of lovely photos of young children, often with very loving comments from the photographer.

Differences

Just as interesting were the differences between the children's chosen subjects. I looked for differences according to personality, gender, local environments and the country.

There were big *individual* differences. For instance, one child was especially interested in car-washes, another in washing, and yet another looked for interesting patterns.

I especially looked for differences according to *gender*, but did not find many. There were more photos of vehicles taken by boys, but one single boy took many of them, and girls also looked for vehicles. Both boys and girls took photos of their friends, of both genders, so there were not any significant differences there.

The *local environments*, on the other hand, had a great impact on the choice of subjects. The children in Bornholm live on an island and thus the sea, boats and ferries were popular. Children living in towns had more photos of vehicles and houses; and those living in the countryside had more of cows, horses and chickens.

The *country* of the children did not really show up in the photos, besides the appearance of the houses of the childminders, and to some extent the organisation of childcare. From Ireland, there were examples of children being cared for in their own home; in Denmark, the children are transferred to centre care when they turn three; and in Sweden, many childminders meet their colleagues in their local preschool. These differences could all be seen in the photos.

The *weather* had a big impact on the photos. As most photos were taken outdoors, the activities differed according to the weather. The Swedish children photographed in the winter; whereas the Danish children were photographing in early spring or autumn; and the Irish in the summer. Sweden in wintertime is quite dark and cold. The Swedish children wear lots of clothes and many photos look grim; whereas the Danish and Irish children look as though they live a much easier life in the sunshine.

What else have we learned?

Although we can find many similarities in the subjects, it's easy to conclude that *each child is unique*. Their preferences vary, their interests vary, and their way of handling the camera varies. To talk of young children as a homogeneous group is a naive generalisation.

Young children are capable! Thanks to the notes taken by the childminders, and the interviews made by them, we know that some of the children really planned carefully what to take photos of.

One boy of almost 3, for instance, had planned where he wanted the childminder and the rest of the children to go for their daily walk, so that he could catch the subjects he wanted. A girl of two-and-a-half carefully placed her camera on something steady to increase the sharpness. Yet another girl, just over 2 years old, fetched what she wanted to photograph and placed it on a table. Some children had difficulties in aiming at their subjects, but most of the children were very well aware of what their subject had been.

Many photos show that *children investigate* their surroundings. One boy of two-and-a-half wanted to take a photo of a certain drainpipe every day to assess how much water came out. A girl followed the building of a house, to see how far the process had gone. A girl studied how the rain ran from the garden path into a gutter; and a boy wanted to check the sea-level on the beach every day.



Small children are *observant* and notice much more than some adults realise. A boy studied a tyre of a car, and was worried about the air-level. Another boy exclaimed, when seeing a lorry from a brewery: 'That's a beer-lorry. My granddad loves beer!' A girl photographed a newly repaired swing on a playground and explained 'It's back now. They have mended it!'

Young children are *empathetic* and really try to understand the emotions

of others. When looking at their photos, many children try to explain what things other children, adults and animals are doing and why. 'He is sad because she took his hat', a boy says. On finding a feather, a girl explains: 'Oh, the poor little bird is ill.'

The photos teach us much about the perspective of children – *small children really are small*. They are so close to the ground that they really see much that bigger people don't. We had many photos of leaves, worms, spiders, various bugs, and even of dog-poo. Most photos of adults show them from their hips down. To the children, an adult standing up must seem enormous. No wonder children often don't hear what we say to them!



'Jessica's leg: we were running really fast'

That *play is vital* becomes evident from the photos. We can see other children in playgrounds, but also in many other environments where they can and will play. Running fast is popular and not always so easy to portray. Hide and seek, building huts, climbing and 'cooking' is fun. Many children prefer their childminder's back garden, and they know the flowers and stones and follow what happens all year round. However, special outings, to theatres or zoos, naturally are exciting for the children as well.



Children obviously want *time*: time to stand still and observe their interesting finds, and time to sit and think. A girl has taken a photo from a swing. The photo shows some clouds, a mast far away and some little dots. When she explains what it is, she says: 'The swing! I look at the birds, on the trees and that one (the mast) and the clouds. The sun there (behind the clouds), it comes out. I close my eyes when it comes!'

The huge number of photos of other children in childcare tells us that even to very young children, their *friends are extremely important*. Once, it was believed that children below three were not sociable, could not play with others. These photos clearly show that it is not so. Young children certainly care about their friends, have warm feelings for them and play intensely with each other. In Denmark and Sweden, all childminders cooperate closely with other childminders in the neighbourhood, and they meet once a week with their colleagues. That this, too, is popular among the young children is apparent in their photos.

Children's quality standards

Based on the results of these studies, I think we can conclude that quality in childminding for young children includes the following:

- one main childminder, who knows and understands the children, gives them time and listens patiently to what they want to say or do
- a small number of children with whom the child can develop strong bonds and friendship
- being allowed to play, using whatever is around for the play, and running, climbing and jumping
- the home and garden of the childminder, which is a safe and well-known environment
- visits to the local environment, shops, playgrounds, parks and so on, where the child recognises people, houses, trees and animals
- regular visits to a playgroup where the child can meet more children and adults.

Evaluation

After the research projects, the childminders were asked to evaluate what they had been part of. The evaluations are extraordinarily positive, here are some examples:

This study has made me more aware of how the children see the spaces they have and how they enjoy that space.

(Patricia, Ireland)

I have learned more about children through this project than I have ever before at various courses.

(Mia, Denmark)

I am definitely going to repeat this once a year to follow up on the children.

(Madeleine, Sweden)

Follow-ups

After having described this project at several conferences, I have learned that many childminders have started using the method regularly. The photos of young children can be used for:

- learning and understanding more about small children, individually and as a group
- informing the parents of the children in care about their child and about everyday life in childminding
- planning the work better, having realised what the children are most interested in
- marketing and informing others of what childminding is and what it can give children.

And the project can be used as a base for comparative studies with more countries involved; research on gender perspectives; on training perspectives and much more.

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Chapter 6

Can young children be researchers?

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Introduction

This chapter tells the story of how one enquiry addressed perceived marginalisation of young children's research by the academy. The Young Children as Researchers (YCAR) project (Murray, 2012a) adopted a value orientation committed to social justice for young children and was co-constructed within the multi-disciplinary, evolving field of early childhood, the period up to 8 years (OHCHR, 2005). The study matched form with function to focus on what counts as research and how research activity may present in young children aged 4–8 years. A complex, reflexive research design revealed young children in their early childhood settings and homes engaging naturally in behaviour recognised by academy members as research. The developmental journey of the YCAR study, co-constructed with academics, children, practitioners and parents in their everyday lives, is detailed here, together with tensions, challenges and limitations negotiated during the study's progress. It is intended that the chapter may be useful for people wishing to recognise young children's research engagements.

Rationale for the YCAR study

For two decades as an early childhood teacher I witnessed anecdotally young children investigating, questioning, developing systems to achieve goals, testing and exploring; subsequently, I moved 'over to the academy' (Griffiths, 1998: 137), where, as a university lecturer in a School of Education, I observed adults planning, implementing and discussing research with, on and about children (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008). Yet children seemed 'excluded ... from the 'rarefied world' of the academy (Redmond, 2008: 17), which separates itself from the general population, privileging particular ways to produce knowledge and reifying power inequalities (Foucault, 1989; Hargreaves, 1996).

In fairness, the academy has recognised some activity undertaken by children and young people as research but this recognition has tended to require children and young people to adopt adults' agenda. Equally, whilst a new sociology of childhood positions children as competent social actors from birth (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) emerging participatory research approaches have generally been confined to older children and young people (Cammarota and Fine, 2008). Although a few attempts have been made to recognise young children's own research activity (*i.a.* Clark and Moss, 2011), these are relatively rare. A reason for younger children's marginalisation from research may be due to adults' inability to recognise meanings underlying young children's behaviours (Alderson and others, 2008; Fumoto and others, 2012). Equally, another factor may be the idea of evolving capacities which counterbalance children's participation with protection (Lansdown, 2005). Nevertheless, perspectives regarding young children's abilities to construct

knowledge have long been contested. Whilst young children's competences to develop 'a philosophy of what counts as knowledge and truth' – epistemology (Strega, 2005: 201) – were established years ago (Isaacs, 1944), Piaget (1972) proposed that children's 'higher levels' of knowledge can only be constructed over time, through experience. Thus tensions present between views of the child as an evolving human and as an expert in his or her own life from birth (Langsted 1994).

Alongside this discourse, research is argued to be a 'right of a special kind' to which universal access is not yet secured (Appadurai, 2006: 167), so young children's exclusion from research may be regarded as an issue of social justice (Truman and others, 2000). In the YCAR study, young children, their parents and practitioners, as well as academics, worked together to reveal children's own naturalistic behaviours and explore whether – and how – some may be claimed to be research. In this way, the YCAR study challenged perceived marginalisation of young children from the academy's research spaces.

Emergent research design

The YCAR study contests the premise that knowledge can only be constituted in one way by one privileged group (Hekman, 1990). However, although the study was committed to social justice for young children, as it was my doctoral study I was required to conduct it within the academy's construction, to plan ahead and to ensure ethical compliance. Therefore, in some ways, YCAR looked set to reinforce the academy's hegemony even at its inception. Attempting to overcome this tension presented challenges.

As required, I devised an aim at the start:

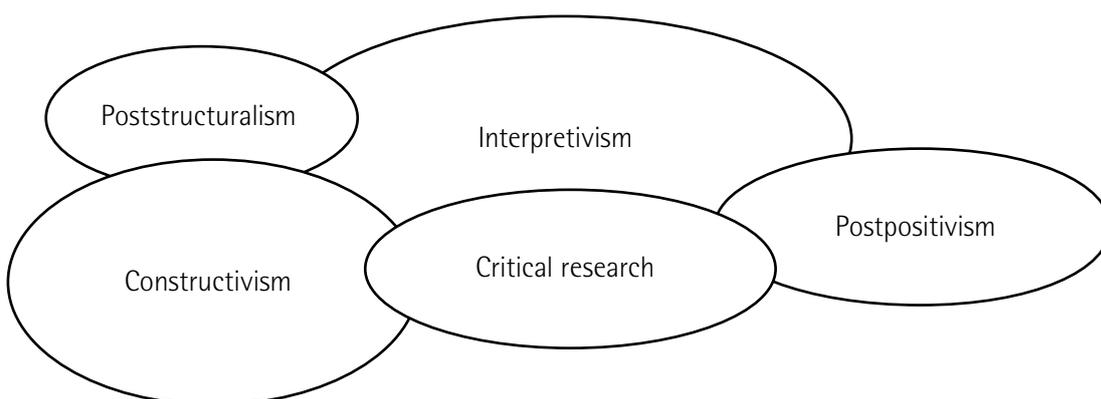
To conceptualise ways in which young children aged 0–8 years are researchers and may be considered to be researchers.

However, as the project unfolded, it became evident that data co-constructed with children aged 4–8 years were so prolific that it would only be possible to work with this age range within the study's scope. As an unintended consequence, therefore, infants and children up to 3 years became marginalised from the YCAR project. Four questions shaped the study:

1. Within the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC), what is the nature of research?
2. How can a study be conducted to establish young children as researchers?
3. What enquiries are important to young children and how can they engage in them?
4. What support structures might encourage young children to participate in research? What barriers might prevent this?

To foreground children, YCAR was located predominantly in the contexts they inhabited and adopted a dynamic research design allowing for collaboration. In order to emphasise participants' perspectives rather than methodological rubric, a plural paradigm model was constructed (Figure 1). Instead of a constraining single paradigm (Kuhn, 1970), the plural paradigm model comprised various 'postmodern epistemologies' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010: 199), with each element adopted for a specific reason.

Three principled approaches reified YCAR's value orientation: induction, participation and emancipation. An inductive approach enabled analysis to emerge from empirical data co-constructed with participants (Charmaz, 2006). Equally, discourses surrounding democracy and rights influenced the study through the study's participatory approach (Freire, 1972; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005), whilst an emancipatory approach underpinned a critical position regarding power inequalities (Habermas, 1987).

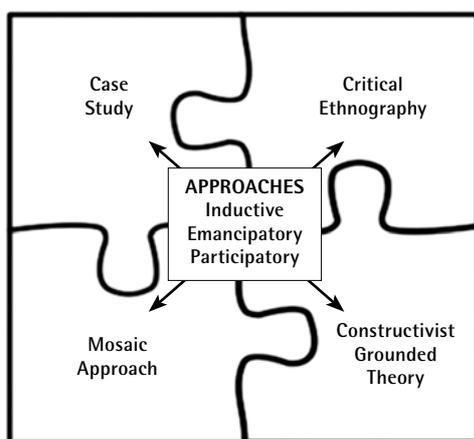
Figure 1: Plural paradigm model

The three principled approaches combined with four single complementary methodologies to form a 'jigsaw' methodology (Figure 2). Aligning with the plural paradigm model, the jigsaw methodology proved valuable. Grounded theory (GT) underpinned YCAR from the start (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as it accommodated the study's three principled approaches, but the full jigsaw methodology emerged as the study unfolded, responding to – and facilitating – participants' perspectives. For example, early in the project, a participating academic suggested:

I think if you genuinely want to know what people think you have to find the best way you can to ask them ... in a very human context where you have opportunities to negotiate meaning.

Consequently, the decision to adopt GT was refined to constructivist grounded theory (CGT), allowing for collaborative constructions of data that valued 'participants' implicit meanings and experiential views', recognised 'past and present involvements and interactions' and assumed participants, including myself, were 'part of the world' we studied together (Charmaz, 2006: 10).

Nevertheless, because CGT is a set of 'principles and practices, not prescriptions', Charmaz (2006: 9) advocates that ethnography is adopted concurrently: YCAR's social justice orientation indicated *critical* ethnography (CE) (Carspecken, 1996). Reflexivity with participants is common to both CGT and CE and to the mosaic approach (MA) (Clark and Moss, 2011), which was also adopted to provide structure for collaborative constructions and interpretations of data. 'Descriptive case study' (Yin, 2012) completed the 'jigsaw', facilitating coordination of YCAR across multiple home and school sites, whilst retaining each site's individual characteristics.

Figure 2: Jigsaw methodology

Research by children, with children

The YCAR study comprised three stages of data co-construction:

Stage 1: Professional Early Years and Educational Researchers (PEYERs);

Stage 2: Children and practitioners in early childhood settings;

Stage 3: Children and families at home.

At each stage a recursive process of data gathering, analysis and interpretation was pursued.

Stage 1: Professional Early Years and Educational Researchers (PEYERs)

Whilst various definitions of research have been proposed (Stenhouse, 1981; HEFCE, 2005), there is not one universally accepted definition. Initial sampling indicated PEYERs – academy members – as Stage 1 participants and as a first step their views were sought regarding the definition of research. It was reasoned that if young children's activity could be matched to the academy's definition of research, the academy might find it difficult to justify marginalising young children as researchers.

Nine professional educational researchers participated in interview conversations and five professional early childhood researchers engaged in a focus group, eliciting a taxonomy of 39 research behaviours (Figure 3), rather than a single definition.

Figure 3: Research behaviour framework (RBF): A taxonomy

Researchers ...	
1 Seek a solution	21 Investigate
2 Want to explore	22 Enquire
3 Explore with an aim	23 Test and check
4 Explore without an aim	24 Are systematic
5 Explore with an aim which changes during the process	25 Are objective
6 Explore with a fine focus	26 Base decisions on evidence
7 Explore broadly	27 Use processes that are fit for purpose
8 Find out why things happen	28 Can replicate process
9 Find out how things happen	29 Can replicate output
10 Examine problems	30 Use and apply findings in new contexts
11 Develop increasingly better understanding of the world through exploration	31 Believe what they are doing is good
12 Increase knowledge	32 Are focused on their chosen activity
13 Find a solution	33 Reflect on process
14 Go beyond instinct	34 Reflect on results
15 Gather data	35 Do no harm
16 Build on others' work	36 Participate with others
17 Take account of context	37 Can communicate what they are attempting to do
18 Plan	38 Can communicate what they have achieved
19 Conceptualise	39 Make links
20 Question	

In Stage 1, PEYERs also indicated that subsequent stages should include young children, their parents and practitioners.

Stage 2: Children and practitioners in early childhood settings

For Stage 2, three multi-modal case studies were co-constructed with children and practitioners in ECEC settings in primary schools in an English midlands town. Each case study was undertaken over six half-days and three full days and 138 children and their practitioners participated (Table 1):

Table 1: Stage 2 participants

Ash setting	7–8-year-old boys and girls (n=32) and their practitioners (n=2)	Pedagogic approach: formal
Beech setting	4–5-year-old boys and girls (n=46) in an ECEC unit and their practitioners (n=7)	Pedagogic approach: open framework, play-based
Cherry setting	4–5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an ECEC unit and their practitioners (n=6)	

Securing equalised power relationships when engaging participants presented challenges, largely due to issues of access (Murray, 2006; 2011). While voluntary informed consent was secured with all setting participants (BERA, 2004), had setting leaders declined initially, those participants would not have had the opportunity to decide for themselves. Equally, practitioners and parents formed further layers of gatekeeping, potentially denying children decision-making regarding participation (Coyne, 2010). Moreover, issues regarding practitioners' consent arose: one headteacher limited participation to a single year group, while another specified the practitioners she wanted to participate. Also, a teacher replacing a temporary colleague halfway through fieldwork withheld consent, indicating the importance of building positive relationships ahead of fieldwork (Corsaro, 2005). Furthermore, some primary carers' voluntary informed consent proved difficult to secure. When collecting completed consent forms, my poor attempts to match primary carers with their children highlighted my 'outsider' status. Equally, because one mother declined consent, it was not possible to film in her child's open-plan setting. Although that mother believed she was acting in her child's best interests, her child was denied both an opportunity to make his own decision and the right to form and express his own views (OHCHR, 1989). Paradoxically therefore, ethical compliance (BERA, 2004) resulted in some ethically fragile outcomes (Skelton, 2008).

Nevertheless, once informed voluntary consent was secured from all the adults who were willing to give it, I sought informed voluntary consent from the children whose adults had consented. Rather than seeking the children's informed *assent*, with the caveats that their parents' consent provided legal authorisation and they received appropriate information to decide, children were deemed competent to give approval for their own participation (Levy, Larcher and Kurtz, 2003). As visual images are established as powerful in young children's meaning-making (Kress, 2010) and helpful in research with children (Thomson, 2008), these were adopted for a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation to inform the children about the project and seek their voluntary informed consent ahead of completing and signing consent forms that also contained images (Figure 4).

All children who were invited to participate appeared willing to consent and they signed their forms. However, retrospective analysis of language in the consent forms revealed inadvertent subordination of the children in the research process, for example, '*Mrs. Murray has told me what her research is about*'. The children spent their days in educational environments that often 'silenced (and) controlled' them (Cannella, 2002: 162) and the language used in their consent form reiterated that position. Moreover, my own attempts to become an insider in the settings

(Griffiths, 1998) were not wholly successful. I worked as a volunteer teaching assistant to try to access authentic, naturalistic data (Pellegrini and others, 2004) and gain understanding of cultures through 'thick description' (Ryle, 1968) but the limited time I could take from my day job in initial teacher education proved a barrier to my full immersion in the settings. In an attempt to value all that participants offered, multi-modal methods were adopted (Table 2):

Figure 4: Example of children's setting consent form

	Mrs Murray has told me:	✓
?	What her research is about	
?	Why she is doing it	
?	How it will be used	
Mrs Murray has told me that ...		✓
 ?	She may ask me questions.	
	She may watch me at school	
	She may listen to me at school	
	She may video me at school	
	And ... that afterwards she may share what she finds out with other people.	
I understand that:		✓
	My Mum or Dad has agreed to me being in Mrs Murray's research.	
My name X	My name will not be in the research.	
School Logo here X	My school's name will not be in the research.	
😊 X	I can ask Mrs Murray not to research me and she will not.	
	I can ask Mrs Murray to stop researching me at any time and she will.	
	I can read a copy of Mrs Murray's research when it is done and so can my Mum and Dad.	
		✓
😊 ? 😊	I know I can ask Mrs Murray to explain again anything I am not sure about.	
	I understand everything above.	
	I agree to taking part in Mrs Murray's research.	
Signed		

Table 2: Stage 2 Multi-modal methods

Stage 2 Multi-modal methods (Clark and Moss, 2011)	Field notes	Interview conversations
Naturalistic observations	Focus groups	Informal discussions
Documents	Children's artefacts	Photographs
Video recordings	Audio recordings	Research behaviour framework (RBF) analysis sheets

In discussion with practitioners, 17 children who presented most clearly and often with RBF research behaviours during early data gathering in settings were identified for closer involvement in the YCAR study (Table 3):

Table 3: Stage 2 Setting focus children

Setting	Pseudonym	Girl	Boy	Age (years) during setting fieldwork	Home language
Ash setting	Annie	✓		7	English
	Billy		✓	8	
	Costas		✓	8	
	Demi	✓		8	
	Edward		✓	8	
	Florence	✓		8	
Beech setting	Gemma	✓		5	English/French
	Harry		✓	5	
	India	✓		5	English
	Johnny		✓	5	
	Kelly	✓		4	
	Laura	✓		5	
Cherry setting	Martin		✓	5	Turkish
	Nora	✓		5	
	Oscar		✓	5	
	Pedro		✓	5	
	Querida	✓		4	English

Subsequently, naturalistic observations focused on these children; additionally, children contributed artefacts, and in Ash and Beech settings most participants took photographs and captured video footage. Practitioners and focus children engaged with me in focus groups, interview conversations and informal discussion addressing the nature of research and analysis of primary data (Charmaz, 2006). Using the same filtering process that indicated the 17 focus children (Table 3), Stage 2 data then highlighted two children from each setting to co-construct further data with their families at home.

Stage 3: Children and families at home

Following ethical protocols (BERA, 2004), five children from the settings and their families co-constructed their own multi-modal case studies centred on each 'home' focus child during a period of about a month (Table 4). The parents of one Cherry setting child did not want to engage at home and that wish was respected.

Table 4: Stage 3 'Home' focus children

	Ash setting		Beech setting		Cherry setting
Pseudonym	Annie	Billy	Gemma	Harry	Martin
Gender	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy	Boy
Age during home fieldwork	8	8	5	5	5
Living with ...	Mother Father	Mother Father Sister (9)	Mother Father Brother (8)	Mother Father Brother (4)	Mother Father Sister (4)
Description of homes	Modern, detached, 4 bedrooms, garden, on a development in an established English Midlands town				
Home language	English	English	English	English/ French	English
Social class category (MRS, 2006)	A	A/B	B	A	A/B
Family	A	B	C	D	E

To minimise intrusion into the families' intimate home environments and ensure power was located with the families, in Stage 3 I assumed 'outsider' status (Griffiths, 1998). The children and families co-constructed data at home and I visited each family twice. Stage 3 initial meetings were interview conversations at which I explained the project, implemented ethical procedures (BERA, 2004) and provided resources, including camcorders, digital cameras and analysis sheets based on the RBF. Family members were invited to construct data with emphasis on children's naturalistic behaviour (Pellegrini and others, 2004). During each first home visit, I ensured the children and their families were confident regarding data collection using multi-modal methods (Table 5). Second visits were arranged with families a month after initial visits to share, discuss, review, analyse and interpret data collaboratively (Charmaz, 2006).

Table 5: Stage 3 Multi-modal methods

Stage 3 – Multi-modal methods (Clark and Moss, 2011)		Interview conversations
Observations	Focus groups	Informal discussions
Field notes	Children's artefacts	Photographs
Video recordings	Audio recordings	Child/adult analysis sheets

Stages 1, 2 and 3: Analysis and interpretation

Stage 1 categorisation and coding were principally guided by Charmaz's CGT model (2006), distilling participating academy members' 653 units of meaning into the RBF (Figure 3). Many data accumulated from early in the analysis, with potential to render the project unwieldy. Therefore, a nominal grouping exercise was employed (Delbecq and VandeVen, 1971) to prioritise focus. This elicited four research behaviours PEYERs regarded as 'most important': exploration, finding solutions, conceptualisation and basing decisions on evidence. Stage 2 and 3 analysis matched children's naturalistic activity to the research behaviours academy members had identified. Analysis and interpretation were undertaken by children, their parents, practitioners and professional researchers in an evolving, co-constructed, recursive process principally guided by CGT procedures in which analysis and interpretation were interwoven with data collection (Charmaz, 2006). Equally, analytical procedures inherent in critical ethnography, mosaic approach and case study complemented CGT as part of the jigsaw methodology (Table 6):

Table 6: Phase II – The recursive process of analysis and interpretation

Transcribe data and apply numerical codes ...					
Constructivist grounded theory analysis and interpretation methods (Charmaz, 2006)		Critical ethnography analysis and interpretation methods		Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2011)	Case study (Yin 2012; Bassey, 1999)
		Carspecken (1996)	Thomas (1993)		
Constant comparison	Early memo-writing	Preliminary reconstructive analysis		Child conferencing/ listening	Analytic statements
	Initial coding	Reconstructive analysis Dialogic data generation			
	Focused coding	Dialogic data generation			
	Categories	Discovering system relations		Repeated thinking	
	Axial coding	Discovering system relations			
	Advanced memo-writing	Reconstructive analysis			
	Theoretical coding	Discovering system relations			
Using system relations to explain findings		Listening			

Focus groups, interview conversations and analysis sheets proved valuable for this process, as did the range of physical data, including video footage, artefacts, documents, photographs, analysis sheets and observation, which provided a 'third object' for shared focus (Mitchell, 1981) (e.g. Figure 5). Participants' subjective realities were represented in rich, authentic detail to provide output that was as trustworthy as possible.

Figure 5: Example of physical data: Gemma's pom-pom picture



*Gemma (5 years):
Artefact – Pom Pom Picture*

Something I did today out of school...

This is what I did...

I made A picture with Paint	AND with pom poms	AND I added some Fevs
First	Next	Then

[✓] I did it:

☺	☺☺	☺☺
On my own ✓	With 1 friend - draw more if you need to!	With a grown up - draw more if you need to!

It was good because...

It was fun

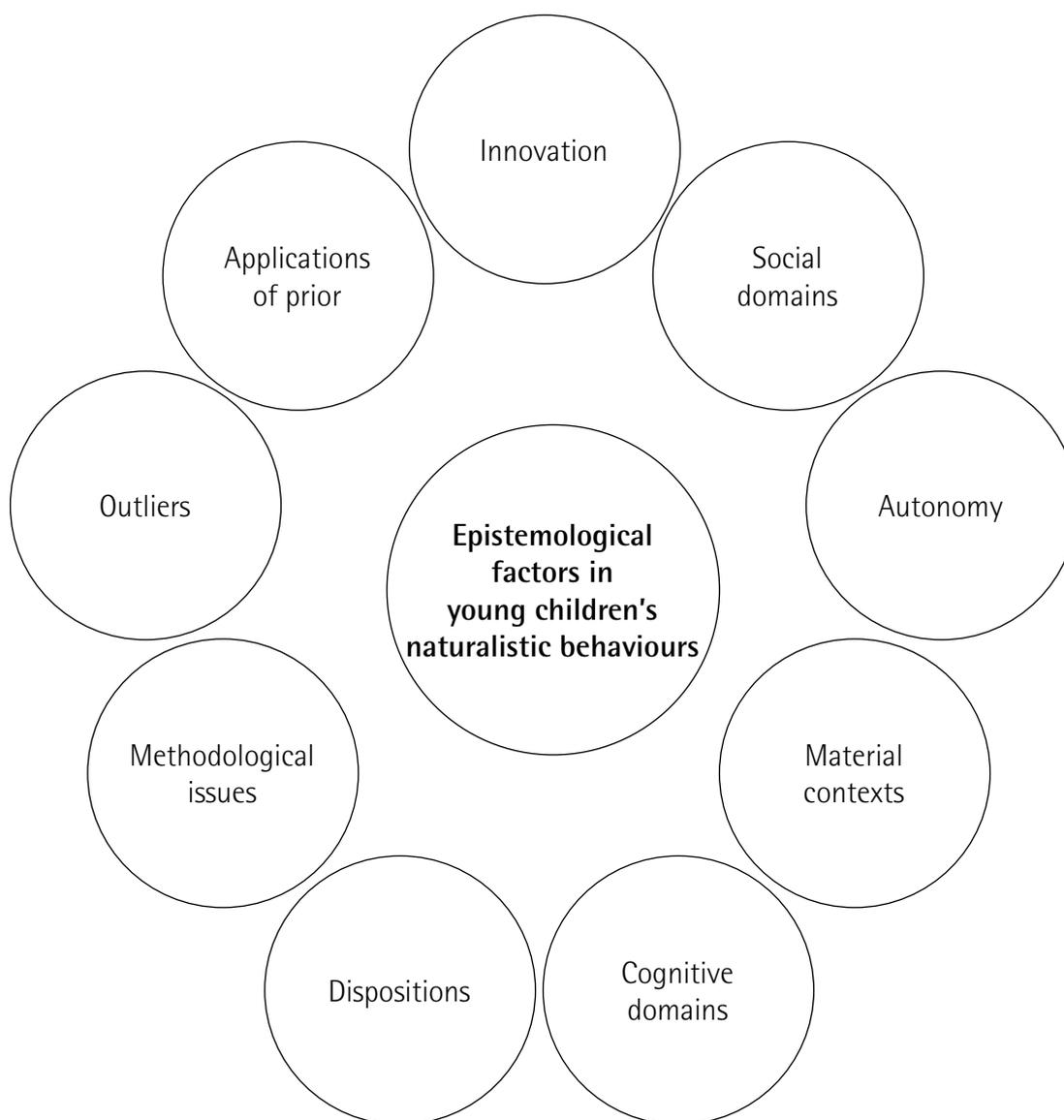
It will change how I do things from now on
[✓]

☺ Yes	☹ Maybe	☹ No ✓
-------	---------	--------

(added some feathers)

*Gemma (5 years) Home analysis sheet:
'I made a picture with paint and with pom poms and I added some feathers. I did it on my own. It will not change how I do things from now on. It was good because it was fun.'* Note parent annotation: 'added some feathers'.

The recursive analysis and interpretation process was lengthy and complex and whilst participants engaged willingly, their continued engagement with the full process would have intruded on their everyday lives: an unethical situation (BERA, 2004). Therefore, participants' analysis and interpretation were time-limited and their perspectives adopted as 'guiding ideals' (Blumer, 1969), enabling me to complete the task ethically, whilst maintaining fidelity to participants' perspectives. Within advanced memos that were part of the analysis and interpretation process, the four 'most important' research behaviours were defined and critically discussed in relation to extant literature (Thornberg, 2012). Through theoretical coding, the final stages of analysis elicited 92 axial codes across the four research behaviours. These were distilled to nine *epistemological factors* evidenced in the naturalistic behaviours of young children participating in the YCAR study (Figure 6): factors that both effected and affected the children's research behaviours.

Figure 6: Epistemological factors in young children's naturalistic behaviours

The final analysis and interpretation element comprised writing the draft (Charmaz, 2006). Each epistemological factor was deconstructed, evaluated and synthesised with extant literature in a series of vignettes depicting participating children's naturalistic activities. This process exposed sophisticated processes adopted by the children during their everyday activities to reveal congruence between their activities and the research behaviours academy members deemed 'most important'.

Findings and meanings

YCAR's value orientated attempt to align form with function in pursuit of robust outcomes led to a necessarily complex research design. In gathering, analysing and interpreting data, children aged 4–8 years, their parents and practitioners and academy members collaborated. Our shared focus was the children's naturalistic activity and its potential congruence with behaviour identified by academy members as research. At the heart of this process was making meaning of the children's behaviours, often requiring recognition of subtle nuances manifested in symbolic interactionism

(Blumer, 1969) and intersubjectivity (Göncü, 1993). An example follows of a participating child's engagement in research behaviour and how it was analysed and interpreted.

Basing decisions on evidence: Gemma and the book box

Whilst a universal definition of evidence remains elusive (Bridges and others, 2009), notions of evidence are often aligned with Hume's principle of verification (1748): information supplied by our senses is used to warrant premises and conclusions. Equally, choices in decision-making are based on rational consideration of knowledge regarding the potential consequences of those decisions (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). It can be argued, then, that the basis of decision-making on evidence is concerned with the use of information assimilated through the senses, combined with reasoning. Behaviour observed in infants and young children indicates particular functionings that facilitate rational decision-making (Anand, 1993; Levin and Hart, 2003). In the YCAR study, cognitive domains emerged as an epistemological factor; correlated with basing decisions on evidence, trial and error elimination emerged within this category (Popper, 1972). Whilst Hájiček (2009) proposes that trial-and-error is a way to 'cope with unforeseen events' (p.276), Popper (1972) posits that 'deliberation always works by trial and error ... by tentatively proposing various possibilities and eliminating those which are not adequate ... new reactions, new forms, new organs, new modes of behaviour, new hypotheses, are tentatively put forward and controlled by error-elimination' (Popper, 1972: 242–243).

One day in Beech setting, Gemma (5 years) stood tidying the books in the book box. She attempted to slide a book in sideways; the book would not slide in to begin with so Gemma tried another way round – the book still would not go in so Gemma tried another space. Here, Gemma engaged in trial and error elimination: she tried to fit books into the book box but if a book did not fit, she used that experience as a basis of evidence for trying to fit the book into the box in a different way. Gemma proposed 'new forms' of arranging the books and 'new hypotheses' about how she might fit books into the book box, moving onto the next 'form' and 'hypothesis' when she finds one that does not work: 'error-elimination' (Popper (1972/1979: 242). Gemma's behaviour is congruent with the following schema:

$$P1 > TS > EE > P2$$

where '*P*' represents a problem, *TS* a trial solution applied to the problem, and *EE* stands for error-elimination' (Swann, 2009: 260). In this vignette, Gemma appeared to base decisions about where she would put the books on evidence she derived through sight and touch, combined with reasoning (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981).

The argument for young children as researchers

Many similar vignettes were co-constructed as part of the YCAR study (Murray, 2012a), some published elsewhere (Murray, 2012b; Murray, 2013). The vignettes provide evidence for an argument that participating children aged 4–8 years naturally engaged in research behaviours in their everyday activity. Given the study's inductive approach, paradoxically this argument is based on deductive logic (Johnson-Laird and Byrne, 1991), the academy's dominant methodology (Hanna, 2006) (Figure 7). A 'valid deduction yields a conclusion that must be true given that its premises are true' (Johnson-Laird and Byrne, 1991: 2). The study's triangulated data provided confidence that the premises were trustworthy (Patton, 2001) so it can be argued that children aged 4–8 years participating in the YCAR study engaged in research.

Figure 7: Deductive argument for young children's research behaviours

The research behaviour framework (RBF) is populated with behaviours that academy members identify as research	Major premise
Children engaged in behaviours on the RBF	Minor premise
Children engaged in research	Conclusion

Reflections

The YCAR study presents a 'plausible account' (Charmaz, 2006: 149) that conceptualises ways young children aged 4–8 years behave as researchers in their everyday activities and might be regarded as researchers on the academy's terms. Although YCAR provides hundreds of examples of participating children engaging in behaviour identified as research, its relatively small scale prohibits a claim to theory; for this, a larger scale study is indicated, including children aged 0–3 years.

Based on its strong value orientation, YCAR's jigsaw methodology privileged participants' perspectives, rather than rigidly foregrounding methodological rubric; it was those perspectives that directed the study's trajectory inductively. Nevertheless, YCAR's participatory approach was partially damaged by hierarchical structures when securing informed consent (Coyne, 2010). Equally, for the academy to value and recognise young children's behaviours – as well as my own – as research, the project had to be shaped to the academy's protocols so to some extent it 'sold out to the norms and forms of ... research' (Griffiths, 1998: 139). Nevertheless, children's 'shared ownership' as co-researchers (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005: 560) and respect for their naturalistic behaviours reified the study's emancipatory approach.

YCAR revealed several barriers to children's engagements in research behaviour: sometimes the children gave up, believed they had failed and were required to conform to adults' direction. Nevertheless, YCAR data exposed hundreds of varied enquiries undertaken by children in their everyday lives, while fields as diverse as philosophy, geography and neuroscience indicated the children's higher order cognitive processing and exposed their meaningful realities. Epistemological factors revealed in the study (Figure 6) acted as tools for children to construct knowledge, meanings and understanding, while the children's research behaviours were expressions of their 'philosoph(ies) of what counts as knowledge and truth' (Strega, 2005: 201). In a sense, this study revisits old themes in contemporary contexts. However, far from Piaget's view (1972) that the origins of knowledge are only in 'their most elementary forms' in young children (p.15), YCAR appears to corroborate Isaacs' view that the 'factor of epistemic interest and inquiry ... is in every respect the same in the child as in the adult' (1944: 322).

During YCAR fieldwork, a practitioner commented:

now that you've come in ... there has kind of opened a door thinking 'Oh, could children be researchers?'

Whilst much remains to be done in the future to equalise power relationships in research, YCAR found ways to extend respect to children as research participants through research design that was genuinely responsive to participants' perspectives. Moreover, YCAR provides authentic new insights into children's lives and has shown ways that children naturally adopt research behaviours as modes of knowledge construction. The YCAR study provides evidence that young children can and do behave as researchers on the academy's own terms.

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Chapter 7

Using cameras to give a 'voice' and to empower socially excluded black youth

Cecile Wright

Introduction

This chapter discusses the use of visual research methods to access the life stories and experiences of young people of African-Caribbean descent excluded from school and at risk of social exclusion and marginalisation (Wright and others, 2005; 2010).¹ Successive governments since 1997 has made social exclusion a stated focus of its policies (SEU, 1999; Milburn, 2012), with socially excluded and 'problematic' young people at the nexus of this discourse. Indeed, this construction of young people is reflected in many of the policies and public projects that seek to address those labelled as 'socially excluded' or 'marginalised' (for criticism of the policy agenda regarding this group of young people see: Wright and others, 2010; MacDonald and others, 2005; Hills and others, 2002; and Levitas, 1998). Also, there has been a tendency in social research in the UK, to present black young people, particularly males, as occupying a pathological and problematic position in society (for example, Barn, 2001; Alexander, 2004). Paradoxically, though, the invisibility of young black people's voices within the academic literature and societal discourse is countered by their increasing visibility within both the social and policy literature. With regard to broader discussions of youth research, the problem is how to ensure the engagement, involvement and participation of a range of young people (Phoenix, 1994; Oakley, 1994; Cieslik and Pollock, 2002; Guardian and LSE, 2012). This is especially the case with research conducted with young people identified as 'marginalised' or 'hard-to-reach'. Allen (2002) asserts that previous work has shown that 'vulnerable' young people have been under-represented owing to a number of methodological and ethical problems (Allen, 2002: 276).

Notably, the challenge with researching this group is to redirect the power imbalance between the young participant and the adult researcher, allowing young people to participate on their own terms. With this in mind our research project aimed, in the words of bell hooks, to allow these young people to 'come to voice' (hooks, 1989: 28)² by making young people's participation intrinsic to the research process. This occurred through the application of visual research methods as a means of actively engaging participants in the research process. Their participation in visually representing their lives provides them with the scope and opportunities to negotiate the traditional hierarchical asymmetrical power relationships that can exist (Morrow and Richards, 1996). Their involvement can empower young people (Faulker, 1998), deconstructing disparities in status and power between young people and adults (Eder and Corsaro, 1999).

Similarly, the project tacitly addresses the issue of black and ethnicised identity, subjectivity, and how these are organised through social relations in our political and economic structures, policies and practices. Bourdieu (1993) argues that a fuller research strategy is required when exploring identity, subjectivity and the social context, which he terms 'social praxeology' or the study of particular microworlds within broader macro social and cultural contexts (Bourdieu, 1993). There are always a variety of methodological issues involved, as mentioned above, in conducting research. It is acknowledged that these issues are particularly evident when aiming to conduct research with groups of people who are identified as 'marginalised', 'vulnerable' or 'hard to reach' (Allen, 2002; Goode, 2000).

First, this chapter discusses the research design and use of visual research methods, particularly the use of photographs in social research. Second, it discusses the theoretical framework used to analyse the visual information produced within the study. Third, it uses a case study of a participant to illustrate young people's experiences in producing the visual knowledge. Finally, it discusses the meanings, implications and issues associated with the methodological and epistemological objectives of the study.

The study and visual methods

The research documented, over a two year period, the experiences of 33 African-Caribbean young people. Because such young people are often considered as hard to reach (Merton, 1998), a 'snowballing' sample method was used to access a sample for the study. This included contacts with local African-Caribbean community groups, black organisations, supplementary schools and black churches. Integral to the research design was the desire to both engage and empower young people, via the use of visual research methods, that is, through photographs. Incorporating this research tool was fairly easy, and agreeable to the young people involved in the study. This is because it was largely viewed by them as relatively easy. After all, being youths in an era of such advanced and widely used image-processing technology as mobile-phone cameras, YouTube and MySpace, meant that photography was considered by the them and the researchers to be an already established part of young people's cultural norms. Taking photographs was also recognised as having the capacity to be an enjoyable process, with an additional advantage being that they would also be able to keep the photographs at the end of the research project.

Using visual methods in research, particularly the use of photographs, is not new (Dean, 2007). Indeed, this approach has a varied history. Sociological interest in children as social actors has resulted in the application of visual methods to gain insights into the context of a child's lived experience. Notably, Clarke and Moss (2001) utilised this method as a tool of engagement. Yet this approach has not been widely reported on in research with young people. Early uses of photographs in the nineteenth and early twentieth century focused on a scientific realist approach in which photographs sourced scientific and objective data (Collier, 1967). A different approach emerged in the 1970s, as social researchers sought to adopt a collaborative approach (Worth and Adair, 1972; Larson, 1988). In particular, Worth and Adair (1972) trained Navajo Indians in the use of cameras to engage them in the process of 'depicting their culture and themselves as they saw fit' (Worth and Adair, 1972: 11). These approaches remain underpinned by an 'information gathering' approach.

More recently though, there has been a shift from this traditional use of photography in social research: 'The ideal suggests collaboration rather than a one-way flow of information from subject to researcher' (Harper, 1998: 35). Although our research corresponded closely to the idea of 'photo elicitation' (Collier, 1967), that is, photographs being used to stimulate discussion, our research remained guided by the core view that the photographs were a form of collaboration, one which renegotiated power relations between the researcher and the researched (Woodward, 2008). This could be seen as a move towards 'creative and engaged visual images' (Harper, 1998: 36) where

'the researcher becomes a listener' (Harper, 1998: 35). The research has developed these ideas further by engaging young people in taking the photos in an attempt to explore the concept of their identities. This process allowed them to define their own sense of self, by equipping them with the tools (camera) and providing them with a space (interview) to do so.

In this sense, the use of visual research methods was valuable in the following respects. First, we had anticipated that the traditional one-to-one interviewing would not necessarily be the best way to carry out the research with young excluded people, because they are likely to have experienced many interview situations where the aim was to 'prove' their responsibility for the exclusion. After considering other methods, visual research methods (namely participant photography) was chosen to place young people at the centre of the research process. The aim was to provide them with the opportunity to discuss and visually represent their lives from their own experiences. To achieve this, disposable cameras were given to the participants. They were asked to take pictures of 'family, friends, anyone else who has been a source of support, and people they enjoyed being with' over the course of three months. However, they were not told what to photograph, thereby leaving both the content and process to the young person to decide. Photo-elicitation interviews were then conducted with all of the young people, drawing on the photographs they had produced and developed.

Second, photographs were used as a way of overcoming the obstacle of the limited literacy ability of the participants and the often inarticulate experience of the initial interviews. A key consideration that had been anticipated when proposing the research was the young people's capacity or willingness to articulate their experiences. Thus, the technique makes the interviewing process more approachable for the young people. Other researchers have also found that poor literacy skills or language problems are a common feature of research with similar cohorts, which can create difficulties (Allen, 2002). This was not the case as the young people fully engaged and articulated their experiences. However, the majority of young people participating in the study did have low levels of confidence and self-esteem. In these cases, it took a significant amount of time to develop a relationship with them to ensure that they were comfortable talking to the researcher. Nevertheless, all the participants were particularly enthusiastic and receptive to the use of cameras. The approach provides the young people with valuable skills, experience and confidence. They expressed feelings of empowerment. For them, control over the cameras and the photographs produced gave considerable recognition to the importance of their experiences and perspectives of exclusion.

Third, the approach used in our research also has resonance with the 'therapeutic uses of photography' (Cronin, 1998: 71), where photographs are used to gather information about a client's background: 'The "information" which has been obtained from photographs by therapists ranges from [the] inferring of socio-economic status and home environment of the client, based on, for example, the appearance of the neighbourhood, the physical state of repair of the home and the depiction of domestic possessions'. Additionally, Rob Walker advocates the use of photography in educational research, which he believes can give a unique qualitative voice. He argues that the use of visual images does not just provide the observer with an insight into the lives of other people but also gives some 'glimpse of ways in which individuals create meaning in their lives' (Walker, 1993: 82).

However, as the empowerment of the research participants was at the core of the research design, further discussion of the efficacy of the status of the researcher within the research process is required. This form of reflexive thinking accords with black feminist researchers' concerns with understanding the intersection of race, class, gender and age in the research process (hooks, 1989; Bhopal, 1997). Our experiences, as black female, middle-class interviewing young black females and males, in essence our 'insider/outsider' status, meant that we were attentive to how gender, race, class and age status impacts on the research process and interactions with the young people.

For instance, whereas our racialised and gender ascription minimised our outsider status in our interaction with young women, our age and assumed class affiliation may have been taken as sources of potential domination. During the interviews we were perceived to be middle-class, because it was felt by the young people that we had access to certain information and resources that they were restricted from accessing. Some of the working-class young people sought our opinion about social and educational aspects of further and higher education. They would also ask for advice on career matters!

Goffman's conceptual framework: Front and back regions

This section applies Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model to analyse the photographs produced by the young people in our study. Central to Goffman's work is the construction of 'self' within social interaction (Goffman, 1971). Goffman explores how the self is presented; and how this presentation changes depending upon the situation. Goffman suggests that within interaction, in meeting or in talking, we have expectations of how others will behave and the expectations they may have of us. These expectations shape how individuals react to and interact with others. Using the analogy of the theatre or the stage, he also argues that a front stage is where one presents a publicly accepted self; while backstage allows a place for aspects of self which must be separated/hidden/controlled in interaction. However, though the backstage gives space to prepare, it must also be carefully managed. Control of boundaries and knowledge, specifically the boundary between the front and back stages, and knowledge about appropriate conduct in each are central to Goffman's understanding of identity performance. Those individuals, who behave in non-normative ways in front regions of their lives are penalised through social exclusion, detention or imprisonment.

In adopting this model for understanding marginalised or excluded young people in research, it is evident that their identities and behaviour are both culturally classified and categorised through interaction. One would assume that they would act in accordance with the cultural expectations of their public personal front (Goffman, 1971). However, following this model we can also identify that there are less public aspects of the self that are concealed behind the public masks and articulated in less public regions of young people's lives. Goffman identifies these as 'secondary types of presentations', dependent upon the absence of the responsibility to a public audience. Recognition of these performances allows us to focus on the micro-world of young people as the core social context, which in turn allows them to reveal the less-public spaces, networks and relationships that are significant to the negotiation and management of their public identity. The participants' use of the camera demonstrates the significance of this micro-world, as the research allows the participants to provide their perceptions of their world and their place within it (Blinn and Harrist, 1991).

In the research these 'front spaces' include public spaces, schools, parks, streets, city centres, and other populated locations attended by young people. In these regions they perform in accordance with the cultural expectations of the observing audience. One of the important features of the performance is that not only is it dramatised, it is idealised (Goffman, 1959). Therefore individuals will attempt to present themselves in the best possible light, and will adhere to roles that are compatible with the cultural expectations of identities at that point in time: 'His [or her] performance will tend to incorporate or exemplify the officially accredited values of society and more so, in fact, than does his [or her] behaviour as a whole' (Goffman, 1959: 45).

What is also significant about these regions is that a 'hierarchical demarcation between "childhood" and "adulthood" is carefully marked out and upheld through cultural and institutional norms' (Dean, 2007: 18). These divisions are marked through young people's engagement with the

education, employment and criminal justice systems. These boundaries make it difficult for adults to research excluded young people, particularly as young people have been excluded by adults (Carrington and others, 2007; Dean, 2007). As mentioned above, in contrast to the front region, Goffman argues there are also back regions. Here, these include the young people's family homes – bedrooms, living rooms – and relationships with friends. The 'roles' and 'manners' adopted by young people in these regions are less bound by the exigencies of the public front (Goffman, 1959). These regions are considered as the margins of these young people's lives: illustrating spaces, behaviour, and identities that are less integrated with the centre of society. In our research, it was envisaged that the photographs produced by the young people would not only include front regions but also these back regions of their lives, which are less accessible to the adult researcher through observation and verbal interviews.

Although Goffman's work is particularly influential, one of the underlying limitations is the lack of discussion of the extent to which ascribed social identities shape the interaction process. That is, the way socially structured categories of gender, class, age, and ethnicity or race are implicated in the construction of subjectivities and interactions.

Case study: Jason's story through pictures

In the following section, the excerpt from a case study of one of the male respondents in the research offers some insights into how this respondent actually lives, experiences and understands his life. The selected case is chosen because it presents an almost unavoidable, *prima facie* case around this young person's 'everyday life', in particular, the ways in which he 'performs' and 'constructs' his identity as he moves between the domestic and community/public spheres. Hence we examine this young person's 'identity stories in the research field' in both 'front' and 'back' regions.

Jason, a 17-year-old young black man, was excluded from school at age 15 for disruptive behaviour. The pattern of school exclusion had seriously disrupted his education as he had been unable to study for GCSEs. With the support of his family and a local voluntary organisation, he returned to the local further education college to study GCSEs. Like other young people in the research project, Jason was asked to photograph the sources of support, his social networks and so on, which had assisted him during the period of his exclusion. He produced eight photographs. His photographs were used during a one-to-one interview session. The transcript from the interview revealed that the life-testimonies derived from the spoken interview, alongside the photogenic imagery presented and produced by the respondent elicited 'identity stories' framed around being in his bedroom/personal life; and being with his friends in the community and the 'street'. Hence this reveals the straddling of the private and public realms of this respondent's life: it relates explicitly to Goffman's front- and back-regions of 'everyday life'. The 'identity stories' associated with the locality of the 'bedroom' accords with the back stage; and the situation of 'out in the community and the street' with the 'front stage'.

Back regions: Identity stories in the bedroom

Affirming and nurturing masculinities in back regions: 'He's my brother'

Jason commenced his discussion of his photos by selecting images of his brother in his bedroom.

- Interviewer:** Do you want to go through them individually and describe the people in the photographs?
- Jason:** That's my little brother.
- Interviewer:** Why have you taken a photo of your little brother?
- Jason:** He's my little brother.
- Interviewer:** He's quite special?
- Jason:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Do you live with your little brother?
- Jason:** Yeh.
- Interviewer:** How old is your little brother?
- Jason:** 10 ...
- Interviewer:** What sort of things do you do with your little brother?
- Jason:** Anything that a brother normally does. Computer games.
- Interviewer:** Do you get on with your little brother?
- Jason:** Yeh.
- Interviewer:** Do you talk about things, matters with him?
- Jason:** Yeh.
- Interviewer:** When you were excluded from school, did you talk to him about it?
- Jason:** No ...
- Interviewer:** The next photo you've got?
- Jason:** It's my little brother again.
- Interviewer:** Tell me about the photograph?
- Jason:** We're in my bedroom we were fighting that day ... play fighting.

The back regions of Jason's life that were revealed in his photographs, conveyed aspects of his personal life, located in the privacy of the home, as infused with thoughts and feelings that stem from embracing the familial relationships: looking after or bonding with younger siblings. Notwithstanding the 'play fighting' with his little brother, this region of his life appears to be at odds with the stereotyped expectations that characterise young black males' lives.

The bedroom: Duplex of the props

The set of photographs presented images of artefacts and items: possessions such as CDs, a hi-fi and computer.

- Interviewer:** It's a nice bedroom, it's colourful.
- Jason:** There are pictures on the wall.
- Interviewer:** What are the pictures on the wall about?
- Jason:** Tupac and cars.
- Interviewer:** Is it a picture or a poster of Tupac?
- Jason:** A poster.
- Interviewer:** What is significant about that poster of Tupac?
- Jason:** When he was born and when he died ...
- Jason:** He's a rapper. He rapped about things.
- Interviewer:** What sort of things did he rap about?
- Jason:** All sorts, money, girls, guns ...
- Interviewer:** What did he have to say about those things, guns?
- Jason:** He said he liked them.
- Interviewer:** Do you think he was a good role model?
- Jason:** Not really.
- Interviewer:** Why not?
- Jason:** I don't like his life style, it was pretty hectic.
- Interviewer:** What happened to Tupac?
- Jason:** He got shot.
- Interviewer:** Why was he shot?
- Jason:** I don't know. It was who he was hanging around with and what he was doing.
- Interviewer:** How old was he when he died?
- Jason:** About 25 or 26.
- Interviewer:** What do you think about that, being shot?
- Jason:** It's a mad world isn't it. Mad ...
- Interviewer:** The other poster in your room?
- Jason:** That's Tupac again and Snoopdoggie.
- Interviewer:** Who is Snoopdoggie?
- Jason:** Another rapper.
- Interviewer:** Is he still alive?
- Jason:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** What sort of things does he rap about?
- Jason:** Like Tupac.
- Interviewer:** Do you like their music?
- Jason:** Yeh.
- Interviewer:** What do you think of their music?
- Jason:** It's all right. They rap about what they went through when they were young. That's why I like it's about their experiences.
- Interviewer:** How does their experiences compare with your experience of being young?
- Jason:** The same thing as my life style.
- Interviewer:** What particular things do they say that are similar to your life?
- Jason:** Friends who have been shot. Friends getting in trouble with drug and all sorts ...
- Interviewer:** Are you saying that you have experiences of your friends being shot?
- Jason:** Yeh.

Interviewer: Here in Nottingham? How many friends have you lost this way?
Jason: One through being shot.
Interviewer: What happened ...?
Jason: I don't know what they were doing. One of my friends got out the car, he was calling on someone or something, when they got to the door (of the house) the car was driving off, next thing my friend was on the floor, he had heard some loud bangs. Next he was dead.

Interviewer: How old was your friend that got shot?
Jason: 16.
Interviewer: Do you know why he got shot at 16?
Jason: They try to say the he was dealing in drugs but he was not.
Interviewer: How do you know he wasn't involved in drugs?
Jason: Because he weren't like that, he wasn't into drugs.
Interviewer: Do your friends do drugs?
Jason: Some of them.
Interviewer: What do you feel about people doing drugs?
Jason: Up to them.
Interviewer: What sort of drugs do they do?
Jason: Weed, some other stuff – hard drugs.
Interviewer: How old are your friends that are selling weed and hard drugs?
Jason: 17 years, older.
Interviewer: What do you feel about this?
Jason: Let them do what they are doing.
Interviewer: Do you think its right?
Jason: Not really, it's not safe ... People put the police on you. People seeing how much money you're getting, get jealous.

Interviewer: [Your] bedroom is a nice bedroom, how do you feel when you are in the bedroom?
Jason: Safe.
Interviewer: Do you feel comfortable, safe, happy, relaxed? Do you like being in your bedroom?
Jason: Sometimes.

The excerpts of Jason's transcript highlight the length to which cultural narratives of young blackness are taken up in personal biographies. His interview alludes to the visibility of black men in the public spaces/the front regions – in particular, identities considered to be constructed out of contemporary forms of black cultural production, such as music and art (Hall, 2004). Also, we are reminded of the extent to which, as cultural forms, these aspects are readily accessible and thus act to provide reference points for young people constructing identities. The respondent offers an enlightened understanding of the paradoxical black hegemonic masculinity that is prominent in dominant cultural forms/in the front regions, which at the same time constitute signifiers of 'pleasure', 'threat' and 'derision' inherent in blackness. Alongside this is the juxtapositioning of the respondent's talk of the bedroom as being 'safe', conveying the domestic sphere as a source of support and humanisation (hooks, 1989), a point often overlooked in theorising about young black masculinity.

Front regions: Public sphere of the streets (and/or pub)

The photographs are framed around leisure time with friends.

Interviewer: Describe the friends in the photograph?

Jason: My friend Pat he's white, he's 23. He's a joker ... Another friend of mine ... through college.

Interviewer: He goes to college?

Jason: He's going to college now. I don't know what course he's doing. Another friend Corbin. He's at college as well. My friend Ben, he's working. My other friend's little sister, he's not in the picture. That's Bianca.

Interviewer: Do you go around them ...?

Jason: Yeh.

Interviewer: How long have you been friends with the four people in the photographs?

Jason: Ben the longest, known him since primary school, then Omar, Corbin and the Pat ...

Interviewer: When you were excluded from school did you ... go around with your friends?

Jason: All of them were also excluded except for Ben.

Interviewer: Did you see them at all during the time of your exclusion? Would you say they are supportive?

Jason: Yeh.

Interviewer: What's good and supportive about them?

Jason: I can talk to them about anything. They understand ...

This is one is another friend of mine, Martin. He is a troublemaker. He is full of drama.

Interviewer: In what way?

Jason: Does a lot of drama.

Interviewer: What sort of drama?

Jason: All sorts. Fights, all sorts ...

Interviewer: Has he been convicted?

Jason: Yeh.

Interviewer: Why?

Jason: ABH. [Actual Bodily Harm]

Interviewer: Tell me what happened?

Jason: Sitting on the wall, I was talking, Martin did something to this man and he ... started beating him up, the drunk man did ... so I beat him up.

Interviewer: Martin was the one being beaten up?

Jason: Yeh.

Interviewer: The drunken man attacked him?

Jason: Martin must have did something to him earlier during the day. The drunk man when I saw him had loads of alcohol in his system and started fighting Martin.

Interviewer: What happened next?

Jason: I couldn't stand there and let my friend get beaten up so I had to join in. The police come and I got arrested. We got charged, got sent to court. That's it.

Interviewer: Will you go to prison?

Jason: No ... My sister says. I'll just get more hours on my reprobation or something.

In contrast to the private/domestic sphere of his life, in the front region – the public sphere of the street and the pub – the type of masculinity performed appeared more hegemonic in kind. Also, this is effectively reinforced through a more dramatised personal front (Goffman, 1959). The activities that significantly exemplified hegemonic masculinity included toughness, showing loyalty to friends, physical superiority and encounters with the criminal justice system.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the uses of visual research methods, that is, a disposable camera, when undertaking research into the exclusionary experiences of black African-Caribbean youth. In doing so, the usefulness of such a method to access another level of data has been detailed. On a practical level, the visual material produced was used to stimulate conversation in interviews, allowing young people to discuss issues of relevance and importance to their identities. Most of the photographs were of events or situations that were significant at this point in their lives, and for their identities and personal development. In addition, the value of the method to empower marginalised and hard-to-reach groups has also been highlighted. In utilising Goffman's 'dramaturgical model' (1959) to analyse the interviews, it is argued that photography has been particularly useful in achieving the aims of the research: they were given the freedom to choose their subject matter, allowing them to direct the areas of discussion by introducing issues of importance to their identities.

In terms of ethical issues tied up in the method's use, the development of trust and rapport were essential prerequisites to the use of photography as if asked young people to share their experiences. It also appeared that having the photographs as a focus point for the discussions made them feel more at ease than just answering a list of questions.

However, there is a need to consider at all times whether this method is too intrusive, as the camera 'reveals more than other methods' (Prosser, 1998: 30). For the most part, there were many photographs of the young people's family and friends and they were often taken in their back regions, such as their homes, bedrooms and living rooms. Nevertheless, exploration of the regions is particularly significant for understanding the relationships and resources within them. This is because the young people discussed how friends and family in these regions helped them overcome their exclusion. Furthermore, these photographs induced feelings of longing for those past relationships, homes and bedrooms, that were comforting and supportive for them prior to and during their exclusion. While all the interviewees freely offered information when describing the photographs and their reasons for taking them, it may be dangerous to assume that all young people would universally welcome use of cameras. Given the sinister side of image producing, recording and storage technologies found in modern society, researchers must ensure that an already marginalised group is not pushed further into realms of discriminatory surveillance and control.

It is argued here that inviting young people to take photographs involved them in the research process; and the results that have been produced have been very personal to them. This gives them a voice and visibility that are more difficult to achieve with a more conventional interview.

Notes

- 1 The article is based on a case study conducted in Nottingham and London, between 2001 and 2003. A total of 100 narrative interviews were conducted with 33 young people (21 male, 12 female) between the ages of 14 and 19 who had experienced permanent school exclusion from both state and independent schools. Additional data is provided from over 60 interviews with contacts nominated by the young people, including community and social workers, relatives

and friends. The research explored views of 'self' following exclusion; sources of support and coping strategies for transforming school exclusion; and views of current personal circumstances and ambitions for the future. The research was supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

2. Our study does not wish to objectify the experiences of young people, as it is not suggesting that their lives are only worth studying because they are problematic in some way. Rather, we hope to confer upon them the status of subject because, as hooks suggests, 'it is as subject one comes to voice' (hooks, 1989: 28) and giving these young people 'voices' will aid in attaining their theoretical visibility.
3. The chapter is based on the adaption of a joint paper written by Wright, C, Standen, P, Patel, T and Darko, N.

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Chapter 8

Reflections on children's involvement

Future trajectories

Hugh McLaughlin

Introduction

I hope you have enjoyed reading the individual contributions to this collection of papers and have been motivated to consider how you might more effectively involve/collaborate with children in your own practice, policy-making or research. The papers have been written especially for the 50th Anniversary of the NCB and I hope they have helped to contribute to the vision, mission and aims of the NCB in particular:

Our vision is of a society in which children and young people contribute, are valued, and their rights respected.

Our mission is to improve children and young people's experiences and life chances, reducing the impact of inequalities.

Aim 1: Reduce inequalities of opportunity in childhood

Aim 2: Ensure children and young people can use their voice to improve their lives and the lives of those around them

Aim 3: Improve perceptions of children and young people

(<http://www.ncb.org.uk/who-we-are/aims-and-objectives>)

Children as co-producers

The papers have contained a number of similar themes, which I think it is useful to try and summarise at this stage. All the authors have demonstrated their commitment and belief in involving children as co-producers of practice, or research, irrespective of their age, ethnicity or education. If you believe children should be involved in helping to shape the services they receive the barriers to their involvement then become challenges for you to overcome. This is not to say that some of these challenges may have ethical issues as highlighted in McLaughlin's chapter on ethics, feelings of social exclusion (see chapters by Wright and Street) or issues of age (see chapters by Karlsson and Owen and Williams). The issue then becomes reframed and refutes that there is something pathological that is located within the child, for example that they are too young, disabled (Street), immature or socially excluded; the issue becomes reframed as how to do we as practitioners, policy makers or researchers reshape opportunities so that they become meaningful to children and that they want to participate. Street, Owen and Williams, Murray, and Larsson in their chapters all demonstrate how imaginative methods can be adopted that allow children to participate in meaningful ways.

Children's best interests

Within the papers there is a sub-theme that we as adults, parent, carers or as practitioners, researchers or policy makers need to be aware that when we act as gatekeepers we should be acting not to merely limit the horizons for children. As Boylan and Dalrymple (2011: 24) sum up the issue:

is a child or young person an autonomous decision maker who can direct his or her representation or is the child in need of a representative who would 'discover' and then advocate for what is best for them?

Children because of their age and maturity deserve a duty of care but this should not be implemented in such a way as to unnecessarily restrict opportunities for involvement and collaboration. This raises the normative issue of who decides on children's 'best interests'? Children's 'best interests' are recognized as a principle in Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that states that 'the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration' in all actions concerning a child. The principle of a child's 'best interest' are mentioned a further eight times by the Convention suggesting that this a key concept within the Convention. It is also worth noting that although EU Charter of Fundamental Rights states is not binding on European Union member points 1 and 2 of the Article 24 of the Charter states that:

1. Children shall have the right to such protection and care as it is necessary for their well-being. They may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity.
2. In all actions relating to children, whether by public authorities or private institutions the child's best interests must be the primary consideration.

This neatly summarises the tensions between welfare and children's rights approaches whose advocates would both interpret a child's 'best interests' in different ways. Those with a welfare perspective may act to unnecessarily protect a child to promote their well-being, whilst children's rights perspectives may result in a child being put at unnecessary risk. The challenge for the childminder, the play worker, the teacher, the youth worker, the social worker, the researcher or the policy maker is to acknowledge their powerful position in relation to children and to balance welfare and rights perspectives. It is not enough to ensure that children are provided opportunities to present their views and experiences on services, policies or research matters but that this must be done in such a way that doesn't put their wellbeing at risk. It is also not enough to place children continually in a position of ignorance for fear of upsetting them or deciding that they are too immature to make a useful statement or comment.

This situation becomes even more complex when you include the child's right to be heard. Whilst it is quite possible for differing adults to have conflicting views on the 'best interests' of a child there may also be differences of view between adults and children. However, it would seem quite strange for adults to decide on children's best interests without first trying to engage children to find out their views on a particular subject. Knight and Oliver (2007) report disabled children value the opportunity to talk to someone in private, but adults have challenged their right to confidentiality either because of their belief of the disabled child's lack of capacity or need to be protected.

This balancing of welfare and best interests is obviously much easier to say than to achieve. Within the UK, as the papers in this collection indicate, we have tended to be over-protective gatekeepers; whether as parents, professionals, researchers or policy makers, and have tended to act to restrict or limit children's opportunities. The balance has been more to the welfare end of the spectrum with many of those working with children becoming more risk averse, and neglecting the

opportunities provided by adopting a more children's rights perspective. It is worth noting that the Children's Rights Alliance for England in commenting on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) after 20 years in operation stated that the United Kingdom 'Has moved further away from a culture that enjoys, respects and values children' (CRAE, 2009).

Beyond the notion of voice

Developing the notion of children's 'best interests' and children's rights to be heard concerning issues that affect them has been central to this book. Street's chapter highlights two NCB projects involving children and young people – able bodied and disabled researchers can make a difference. Karlsson's chapter highlights that very young children looked after by childminders have the ability to make their views known on the care they receive. Whilst Owen and Williams report on a Young Children's Network project to embed listening to young children into everyday practice and like Karlsson highlight young children have many ways to make their views known through words actions and behaviours. Murray's chapter takes this a stage further and argues that we should begin to reconceptualise the potential of 4–8 year old children as researchers as she demonstrates how children's own naturalistic behaviours could be claimed as research. This pushing back of the boundaries can also be seen in the introductory chapter where Uprichard (2010) argued that if we only legitimate children's views on issues that directly affect them we are limiting their potential to contribute, potentially further marginalising and disempowering them. Here becomes part of the next challenge for those of us who seek to support and to learn from children to go beyond listening and acting on their views to those issues that most affect their experiences as children but to begin to encourage them to go beyond traditional 'children's issues' and comment on 'adult' and societal issues. During my time on NCB Management Board, Young NCB a representative body for young people, have raised issues such as transport and media representations that have contributed to my understanding of such issues and have effectively contributed to wider debates on these issues.

Conclusions

These set of papers highlight key issues and provide practical and theoretical support for the involvement of children in research policy and practice. Importantly the papers challenge adults and researchers to pay attention to even the youngest child's views. They also challenge us to be more creative in how we seek those views, e.g. Wright looking at young people of African Caribbean descent reminds us of the need to ensure we hear the 'voices' of those at risk of social exclusion and identify ways, e.g. photography, which can engage young people to allow us to understand their experiences and views. This inevitably raises issues about the redistribution of power, the promotion of social justice and children's social, political and civil rights within a society where discrimination and oppression are common features of many people's lives. Are adults, professionals, policy makers and researchers willing to share power and make the necessary changes?

These papers have shown that children are not a homogenous group but that as researchers, policy makers and practitioners we need to find ways that engage children. Firstly, to encourage the development of inquiring minds and to lay a foundation for an active citizenship for when they are older. Secondly, to allow us adults to benefit from the insights, personal experiences and views that children have on our society. If we do not do this we impoverish our knowledge and potentially end up writing policies or delivering practices that remain adult-centric, do not meet the needs of children and ignore the rich potential of what our children have to teach us – if only we would listen!

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