Doing research ON children? ABOUT children? WITH children? BY children?
Who's in? Who's out? Who decides, and how?

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Overview

1. Children as researchers: The literature

2. CESESMA in Nicaragua

3. Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents

4. Creating a tool to help researchers plan and evaluate children and adolescents' participation in their research.

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1. Children as researchers: The literature

Christensen and Prout (2002) identified four ways of seeing children and childhood in the research literature:

- The child as object;

- The child as subject;

- The child as social actor;

- "... and a nascent approach seeing children as participants and co-researchers".

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Kellett (2010) also proposes a fourfold distinction:

- Research *on* children;

- Research *about* children;

- Research *with* children;

- Research *by* children.

(Similar to, but subtly different from, Christensen and Prout).

Kellett sees these four research approaches as products of a historical evolution:

"Instead of research *on* children as we saw in early developmental psychology experiments, or research *about* children in explorations of socially constructed childhoods, or research *with* children in participatory agendas ..., came the prospect of research *by* children. Research *by* children goes a step further than children as participant or co-researchers."

(Kellett, 2010)

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Kellett, as Director of the Children's Research Centre at the Open University in the UK, developed a model for training and supporting children as researchers, and identified four principal reasons for advocating "research *by* children":

"1. Children succeed in getting responses from within their peer group in ways that would not be possible for adult researchers because of power and generational issues.

2. Their work adds to the body of knowledge about children's experiences from a genuine child perspective.

3. The dissemination of research carried out by them and, crucially, owned by them, is an important vehicle for child voice.

4. The experience of participating as active researchers is an empowering process that leads to a virtuous circle of increased confidence and raised self-esteem, resulting in more active participation by children in other aspects affecting their lives."

(Kellett 2010).

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How do children become researchers

Alderson (2008) identified three broad ways in which children assume the role of researcher:

1. At school, where doing research projects is now commonly part of the curriculum.

2. In adult-run research projects, where it is increasingly common for them to be offered roles as "co-researchers".

3. In research projects mainly initiated and/or directed by children and young people themselves. Most of this type of research is facilitated by adults working in the NGO sector.

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Ethical issues
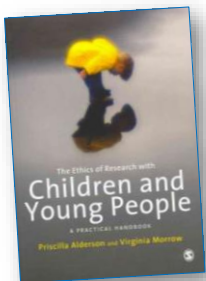
The ethics literature is mostly about children as subjects of adult-run research.

However, the 2011 edition of Alderson and Morrow's handbook also discusses ethical issues in involving children as researchers:

- Issues in the recruitment and selection of child researchers;
- Appropriate training and support for child researchers;
- Issues of payment and rewards (especially where volunteer child researchers work alongside paid adult researchers);
- Problem of raising expectations that research will be taken seriously by decision-makers which are subsequently frustrated.

(Alderson and Morrow 2011 edition).

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Gatekeeping versus autonomy

Much of the ethical discussion focuses on the need to protect children engaging in research from possible harm.

Skelton (2008), however, identifies a tension between ethical frameworks based on protection and the participation rights established in the UNCRC.

For example, some university ethical guidelines require that children be approached via an adult "gatekeeper" such as a school head; whereas the children themselves may not want such a person to control their access to a research opportunity.

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Academic research and action-focused research

Another of Alderson's observations:

> "Young researchers are usually keen to produce findings that will achieve changes in, for example, provision of services, and respect for their rights. They therefore often emphasise the follow-up stages of disseminating and implementing the findings". *(Alderson, 2008)*

Alderson contrasts this with university research which tends to concentrate on collecting and analysing data and writing reports.

She considers a lack of funding for the follow-up work that turns research into social action to be one of the barriers to children's participation in research.

Similarly Shier and colleagues (2014) found that lack of support for the necessary follow-up work was one of the main obstacles to children and young people influencing policy-makers.

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The "participation versus rigour" debate

"The research process has inherent within it certain quality demands which some (perhaps many) young people find difficult to meet. The more fully they are involved in research, therefore, the less likely it is that the research will meet those demands adequately" *(Dyson and Meagher, 2001).*

"Challenges to engaging children in data analysis represent considerable barriers to children's participation in research; particularly the resistance from academic institutions, sponsors, policy-makers and professional researchers working in conventional research paradigms".

(Coad and Evans, 2008).

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Responses to this:

- Providing adequate training and preparation for child researchers. *(Kellett 2005).*

- Giving children advisory rather than leading roles *(Lundy and McEvoy, 2012).*

- Developing a more effective model for facilitation and the role of facilitator *(Shier/CESESMA 2012).*

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"Transformation" as a concept in the literature

1. Buzz-word in organisational/management theory. Seems to imply that something changes into something different, as opposed to a bigger or better version of the same thing. *(Appelbaum and Wohl, 2000).*

2. Assumed to be harder to reverse than an ordinary change.

3. Also a buzz-word in development studies: "Transformative participation" linked to empowerment and contrasted with top-down or manipulative participation. Both people's reality and their own sense of it are changed irrevocably (including their sense of themselves) *(White, 1996).*

4. Theory of 'transformative learning': Person is able not just to acquire new knowledge, but to change the frame of reference that they habitually use to understand the world *(Mezirow, 1997; Tibbetts, 2005).*

5. Tisdall (2013) and Teamey & Hinton (2014) have explored the possibilities for seeing children's participation as "transformative".

…as a research paradigm

The "Transofrmative Paradigm" is an alternative paradigm for social research, proposed by Donna Mertens (2007) to stand alongside the 'postpositivist', 'constructivist' and 'pragmatic' paradigms.

Basic principles of the transformative paradigm:

1. Primacy of qualitative methods;

2. Interactive link between researcher and participants;

3. Accommodating cultural complexity;

4. Explicitly addressing power issues;

5. Acknowledging contextual and historical factors linked to discrim-ination and oppression.

(Mertens, 2010, p. 11).

"The Right to be properly researched"

Approach developed by Judith Ennew and colleagues,

Five key characteristics:

1. Respect for children as partners in research (i.e. their participation must be meaningful on their own terms, not imposed by adults);

2. It is ethical, and does not exploit children;

3. It is scientifically valid, using methods that are systematic and can be replicated;

4. It involves robust analysis, both descriptive and statistical;

5. It prioritises local knowledge and expertise.

(Beazley et al., 2011, p. 161)

Comprehensive guidance materials mainly aimed at those doing research in non-academic settings such as NGOs and community groups, with particular focus on the global South

"The Children's-rights-based approach to research"

Approach developed by Laura Lundy and Lesley McEvoy,

Key principles derived from UN *"Statement of Common Understanding on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Co-operation"* (2003):

1. The research aims should be informed by the CRC standards;

2. The research process should comply with the CRC standards;

3. The research outcomes should build the capacity of children, as rights-holders, to claim their rights, and build the capacity of duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations.

4. Cutting across all of this is a requirement to ensure that the process furthers the realisation of children's rights. *(Lundy & McEvoy, 2012, p. 79)*

Key features of this approach in action are:

- Every research project involves a *Children's Research Advisory Group* (CRAG). NB. Children are not usually <u>doers</u> of research, but are advisers to the adult researchers.

- Strong emphasis on building capacity in participating children, so they are well-informed about issues being researched.

2. CESESMA in Nicaragua
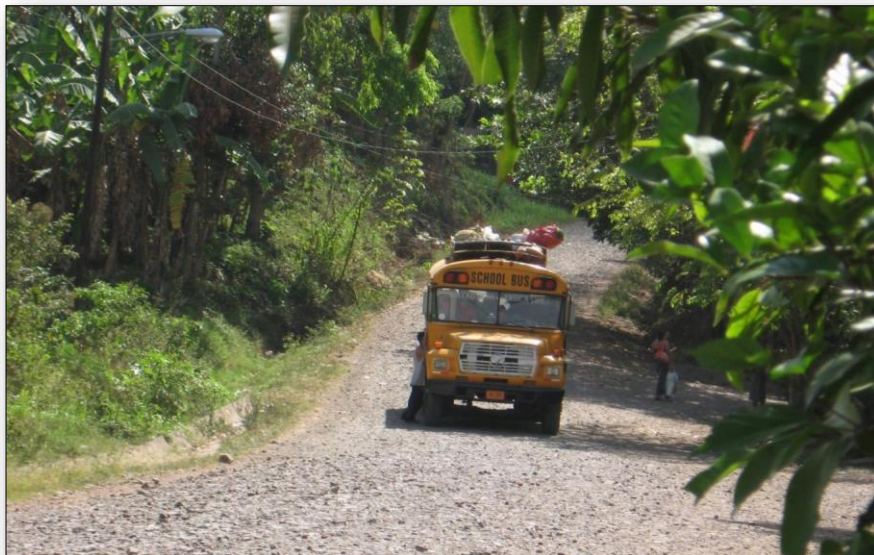
After working for 25 years in England, in 2001 I moved to Nicaragua …
A new life in a new country.

Child labour on coffee plantations
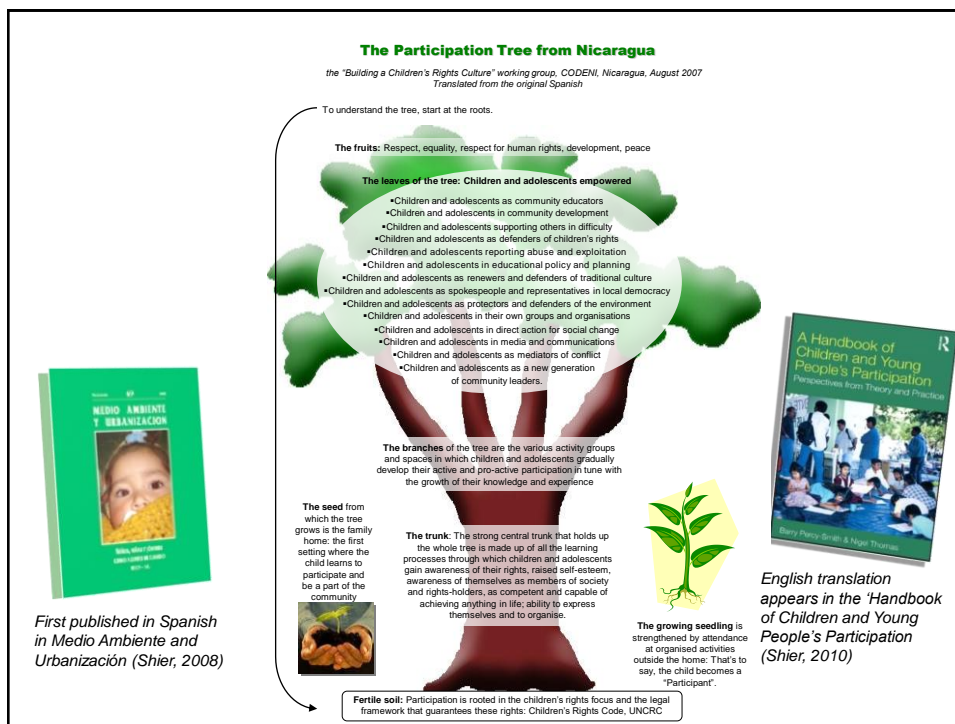

The struggle for the right to education

A new approach to participation: "Protagonismo Infantil"

Children and young people organise, advocate, take the initiative

The Participation Tree from Nicaragua
the "Building a Children's Rights Culture" working group, CODENI, Nicaragua, August 2007
Translated from the original Spanish

To understand the tree, start at the roots.

The fruits: Respect, equality, respect for human rights, development, peace

The leaves of the tree: Children and adolescents empowered

- Children and adolescents as community educators
- Children and adolescents in community development
- Children and adolescents supporting others in difficulty
- Children and adolescents as defenders of children's rights
- Children and adolescents reporting abuse and exploitation
- Children and adolescents in educational policy and planning
- Children and adolescents as renewers and defenders of traditional culture
- Children and adolescents as spokespeople and representatives in local democracy
- Children and adolescents as protectors and defenders of the environment
- Children and adolescents in their own groups and organisations
- Children and adolescents in direct action for social change
- Children and adolescents in media and communications
- Children and adolescents as mediators of conflict
- Children and adolescents as a new generation of community leaders.

The branches of the tree are the various activity groups and spaces in which children and adolescents gradually develop their active and pro-active participation in tune with the growth of their knowledge and experience

The seed from which the tree grows is the family home: the first setting where the child learns to participate and be a part of the community

The trunk: The strong central trunk that holds up the whole tree is made up of all the learning processes through which children and adolescents gain awareness of their rights, raised self-esteem, awareness of themselves as members of society and rights-holders, as competent and capable of achieving anything in life; ability to express themselves and to organise.

The growing seedling is strengthened by attendance at organised activities outside the home: That's to say, the child becomes a "Participant".

Fertile soil: Participation is rooted in the children's rights focus and the legal framework that guarantees these rights: Children's Rights Code, UNCRC

First published in Spanish in Medio Ambiente and Urbanización (Shier, 2008)

English translation appears in the 'Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation (Shier, 2010)

CLOSE-UP ON...
The leaves of the tree: Children and adolescents empowered

- Children and adolescents as community educators
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- Children and adolescents supporting others in difficulty
- Children and adolescents as defenders of children's rights
- Children and adolescents reporting abuse and exploitation
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- Children and adolescents in media and communications
- Children and adolescents as mediators of conflict
- Children and adolescents as a new generation of community leaders.

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3. 'Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents' (TRCA)

From 2007 we started working with children and adolescents as <u>researchers</u>.
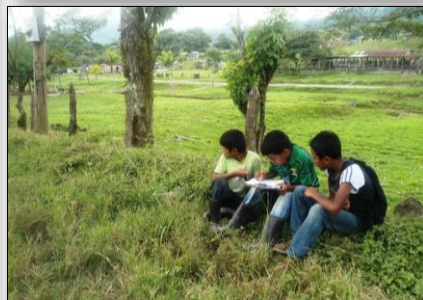
An example from 2012:

Children from Yúcul form a research team to investigate how alcohol is related to violence in their community.

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Planning

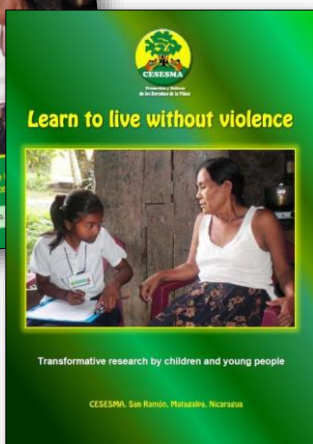Interviewing

Preparing the report and recommendations

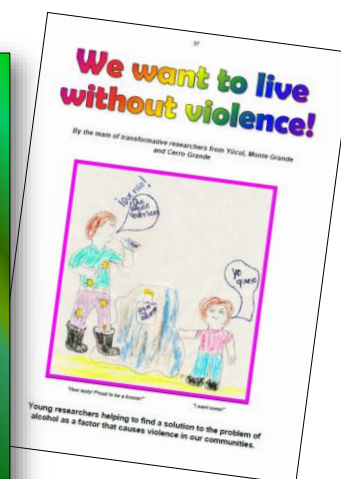A national TV channel heard about the young researchers and sent a news team…

Channel 2 Nicaragua evening news, November 2011

The Young Researchers' report was in this book published by CESESMA in Nicaragua in March 2012.

An English translation produced jointly by CESESMA and the University of Central Lancashire was launched in September 2012.

Follow-up and impact…

- The Young Researchers presented their findings to the government's 'Family Life and Security Commission', which decided to make the alcohol problem a top priority.

- Local government and party officials admitted they had been aware for the issue for years, but it wasn't till the children came forward with their research that they felt forced to act on it.
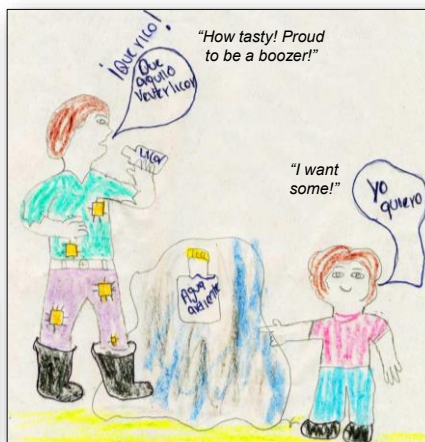
- The local police also took action; confiscating illegal liquor and closing at least two unlicensed cantinas.

- Following the news broadcast, the local authority and police have ensured no new liquor licenses are granted in the Yúcul area.

Guiding principles of Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents

1. It is founded on a human-rights-based approach;

2. It recognises children's as experts on their lives, but also that, as researchers, they can learn more about a topic, expanding and deepening their existing knowledge;

3. Children readily take on board and identify with the idea of themselves as researchers and understand what this role implies. The role of the adult is to facilitate and accompany;

4. Children and adolescents are supported in planning, organising and carrying out their own research, and provided with technical support and resources to do so.

5. Children and adolescents produce their own research report in their own words, and also control how it will be designed and presented. Reports by adults are kept separate and identified as such.

6. The organisation that supports the young researchers must make a commitment to continue to accompany and support them in drawing up and carrying out an action plan to disseminate their findings, and promote the implementation of their recommendations. *(Shier 2015)*

Using TRCA in doctoral research – a stiff test

Children's Rights in School: The perception of children in Nicaragua

Harry Shier

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Queen's University Belfast, February 2016
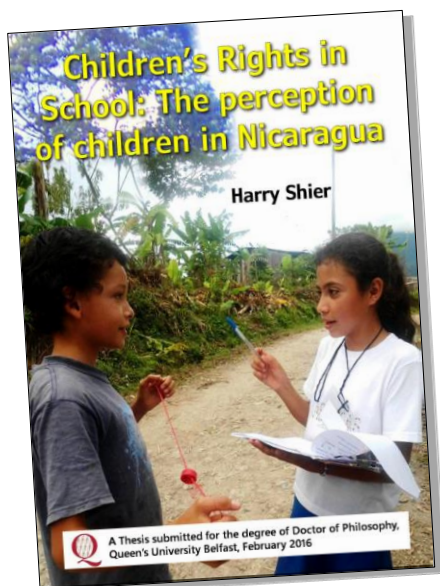
- TRCA: A methodology proven in the field but without academic precedents or standing.
- Convincing the ethics committee: Accepting local convention for child-to-child interviewing.
- Justifying the fact that children did most of the work for me.
- Proving the data were trustworthy.
- Distance – Getting back to the source.
- Separate analyses of data and reporting/publication of findings by child researchers and myself.
- Examination of the thesis.

Summary of the Young Researchers' research process

Session 1: Becoming a research team, learning about research and education rights, using drawings to reflect on their experience of rights in school.

Session 2: Planning the research, deciding questions to ask and getting ready.

Fieldwork: Between sessions 2 and 3, the young researchers collected data by interviewing other children in their home communities.

Session 3: Analysing the findings and drawing conclusions.

Session 4: Producing a final report and formulating recommendations.

Session 5: Possibilities for dissemination and follow-up, action plan and final evaluation.

Session 6: Preparing to present their report at a public meeting with international Save the Children leadership.

◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ►

Continuum of power and influence as a horizontal axis

4. Creating a tool to help researchers plan and evaluate children and adolescents' participation in their research

Timeline of the research process as a vertical axis
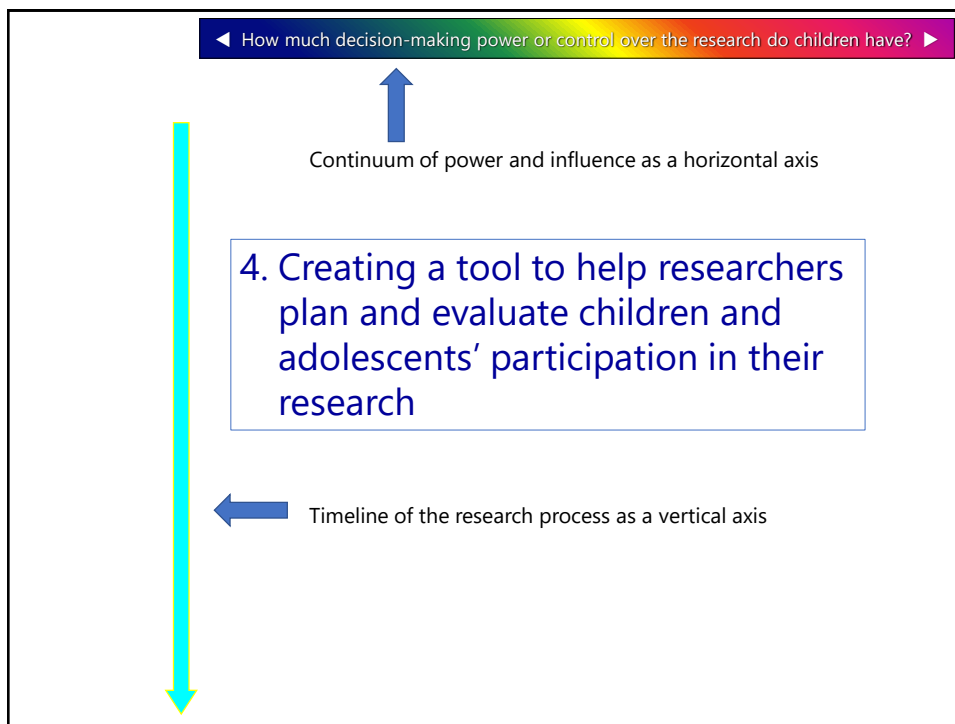
For the horizontal axis: Lansdown's simplified typology of participation

Taken from "*Every child's right to be heard*" (Lansdown 2010): A user guide to UN CRC General Comment 12

Consultation:

Is when adults ask children for their views, and children are not involved beyond this.

Collaboration:

Is when adults and children work together, sharing roles and responsibil-ities in planning and carrying out an activity.

Pro-activism (child-led):

Activities initiated, organised or run by children and young people themselves (adults may still provide support, though not always necessary).

The vertical dimension: Phases of the research process as a timeline
(E.g. Kumar, 2014)

Identify a research question: problem analysis, consultation.

▼

Develop research design, select (or develop) methodology, draw up a plan (find funding, resources)

▼

Design instruments, seek ethical approval.

▼

Identify and recruit participants, obtain consent.

▼

Generate data

▼

Data analysis: findings, conclusions, recommendations.

▼

Produce a report

▼

Dissemination of findings: formal publication, wider publicity, media engagement.

▼

Advocacy, public mobilisation, campaigning, policy impact, action for social change.

Combined in the matrix...

	◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ►			
Phases of research process	**Children are not involved**	**Consulted**	**Collaborate with adult researchers**	**Child initiated or directed** Led by us...
Deciding on the research question		Children asked about problems that concern them.	Children and adults jointly define research question.	Children choose their own research question.
Designing the research and choosing methods		Children consulted on what research methodology to use.	Children and adults deliberate and jointly decide on the methodology to use.	Children decide what methodology they want to use.
Preparing research instruments		Children consulted on (and perhaps test) research instruments before use.	Children and adults work together on design of research instruments.	Children create their own research instruments.
Identifying and recruiting participants		Children asked to advise on recruiting participants.	Children and adults jointly identify and recruit participants.	Children identify and recruit research participants.
Collecting the data		Research involves adults interviewing children or surveying their opinions.	Children and adults collaborate on data-gathering activity.	Children organise and carry out data collection activities.
Analysing the data, drawing conclusions		Adults show preliminary findings to children and ask for feedback.	Children and adults work together to analyse data and determine conclusions.	Children analyse data and draw their own conclusions.
Producing a report		Adults consult children on aspects of the final report.	Children and adults work together to produce a report.	Children produce their own report in their own words.
Dissemination of the report and its findings		Adults consult children on how to disseminate findings.	Children and adults collaborate on dissemination and awareness-raising activities.	Children undertake activities to disseminate their findings.
Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact	✗ ✗	Children consulted about possible advocacy actions.	Children and adults work together on plans for advocacy and mobilisation.	Children develop and implement an action plan for advocacy and mobilisation.

Tested in new Australian scoping paper

Figure 3. Nature of participation across 211 papers
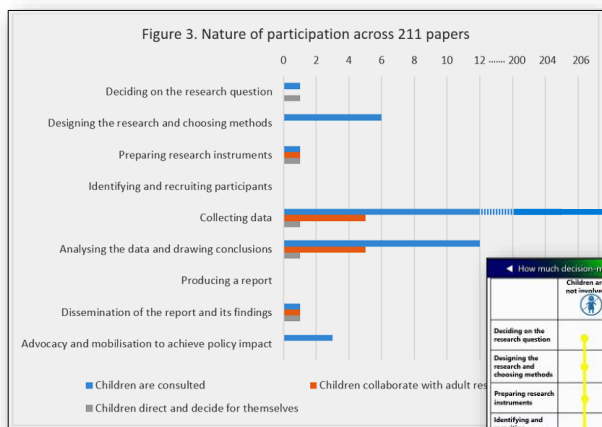
Grace et al, "*Where are the silences? A scoping review of child participatory research literature in the context of the Australian service system*". (Children Australia, forthcoming)

Hypothesis proved. This is the norm for research involving children in Australia.

Questions we could ask ourselves when planning research involving children and adolescents

1. What is the goal of our research? Is it only to generate academic knowledge (or career advancement), or are we also concerned with impact for social change and/or empowerment of the children and adolescents involved?

2. Where did the research question come from?

3. Have we thought about engaging with children throughout the process, or is it more convenient just to bring them in at a certain stage?

4. Have we considered forming a children's advisory group for this research project?

5. If we were to move along the continuum (i.e. consider increasing the engagement of children and adolescents in the research process):

   ☐ What would be the methodological and resource implications?

   ☐ What would be the challenges for us as adult researchers?

   ☐ What would be the risks, if any? (Are we under pressure to play safe?)

   ☐ What would be the potential benefits?

   ☐ Are we up for a challenge?

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