

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE:

Sistematización of ten years of action-research by children and adolescents with CESESMA in Nicaragua



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OVERVIEW

- 1. “Children’s Consultancy” travels from the UK to Nicaragua
- 2. From “Children’s Consultancy” to Transformative Research: 10 years of practice and development
- 3. “SISTEMATIZACIÓN”: A Latin American action-research methodology
- 4. Sistematización of ten years of action-research by children and adolescents with CESESMA

1. “CHILDREN’S CONSULTANCY” TRAVELS FROM THE UK
TO NICARAGUA

ROOTS IN THE UK: 1997-2000

The publication of the Article
31 Action Pack in 1995...



[Shier (ed) 1995]

...was the inspiration for the launch of
the Article 31 Action Network in 1996...



... then in 1997, the
Article 31 Children's
Consultancy Scheme



There was a fashion for making programmes
and institutions “child-friendly”, particularly in
the arts, culture and recreation sectors.
“Expert advice” was being sought.

SO WHERE DO WE FIND THE EXPERTS?



Children are experts on what is child-friendly and what isn't, what works for children and what doesn't, what's fun and what's boring, what makes them feel included and what makes them feel excluded.
(Shier, 1999)

1998



Child consultants advising the management of the new Manchester City Art Gallery on how to create a child-friendly gallery.



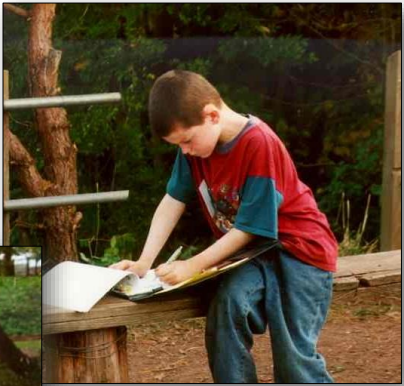
1998

Child consultants commissioned by the British Waterways Board to research the educational and recreational potential of the English canal network.



1999

Child Consultants from the New-Age Traveller community in the South-West of England commissioned by The Children’s Society to advise on play and recreation opportunities for traveller children.



2000



Child Consultants advise managers at the Tower of London on how to make it less boring.



In 2001, after working for 25 years in England, I moved to Nicaragua ...



2007: National conference on violence against children. The organisers needed an expert to do the keynote speech.
Who should they ask? Someone from UNICEF, or from Save the Children?

We said, “Why shouldn’t children do the keynote speech? They are experts on the topic of violence against children”.

And so a team of child coffee workers from Santa Martha coffee plantation became the first child consultants in Nicaragua.



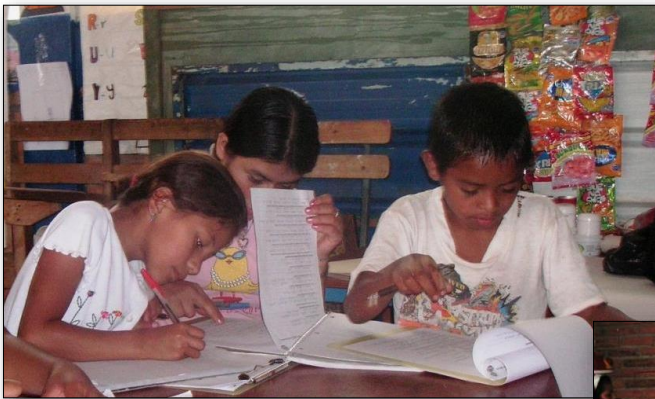
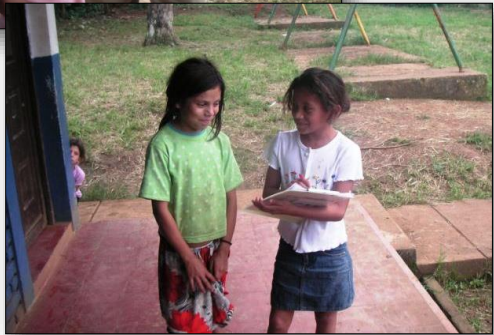
NB: These are the same kids as you saw in the opening slide, taken two years later

Preparation





Field research



Data analysis

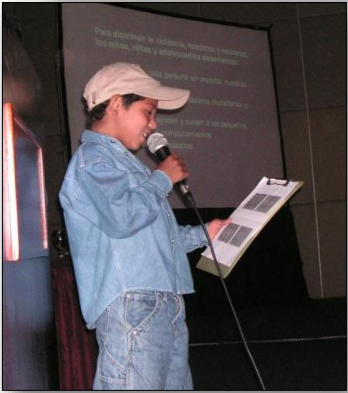
Drawing up recommendations



Preparing a final report



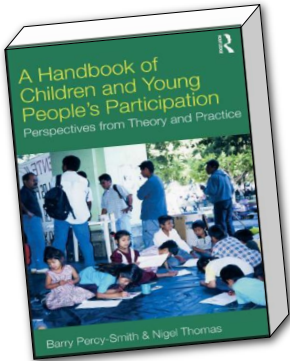
Rehearsing the formal presentation



Journey to the national conference in the capital city, Managua

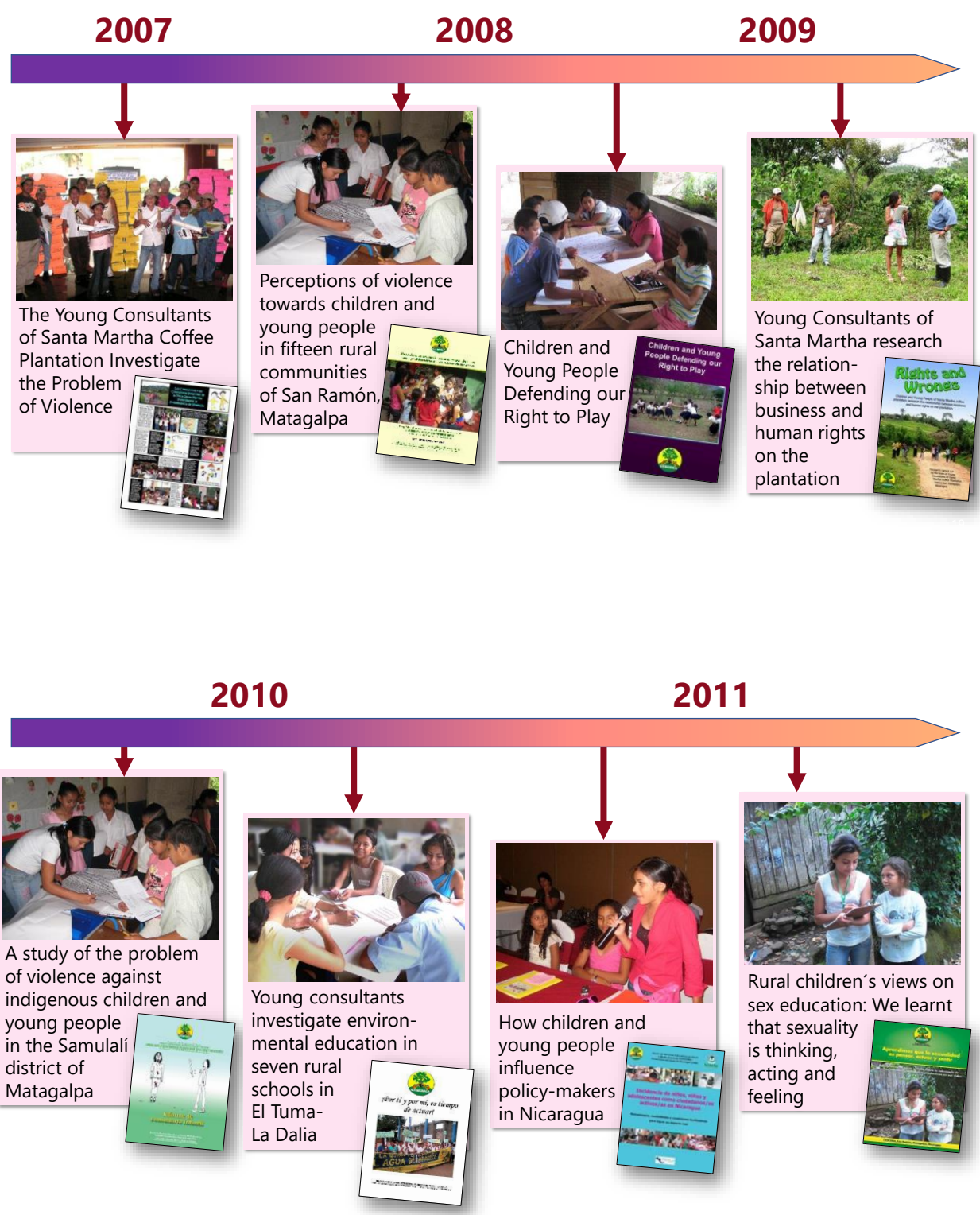


The following year the children retold their experience in words and pictures in “A Handbook of Children and Young People’s Participation”.



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2. FROM “CHILDREN’S CONSULTANCY” TO TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH: 10 YEARS OF PRACTICE AND DEVELOPMENT



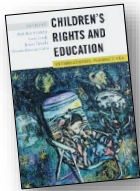


3. “SISTEMATIZACIÓN”: A LATIN AMERICAN ACTION-RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

SISTEMATIZACIÓN

Action-research methodology popular in Latin America where a group of people who have lived through a shared experience come together to recount, capture, and reflect on that experience in a structured way that enables the key lessons learnt at each stage to be acknowledged, explored, analysed and re-formulated.

NOT equivalent to the word “SISTEMATIZATION” in English.



Sistematización of CESESMA and Save the Children’s “Safe, Quality Schools” programme 2008-2012
(published in English in Shier et al, 2013)



- ❑ The process of sistematización maximises the potential for sharing and reproducing the learning.
- ❑ A significant feature of sistematización is that it can only be done by the people who have personally lived through the experience.
- ❑ An example of “learning without teaching”.

Sistematización of experience of Kenya Child Safeguarding Steering Committee 2016-2018
(published in Misen Cara, 2020)



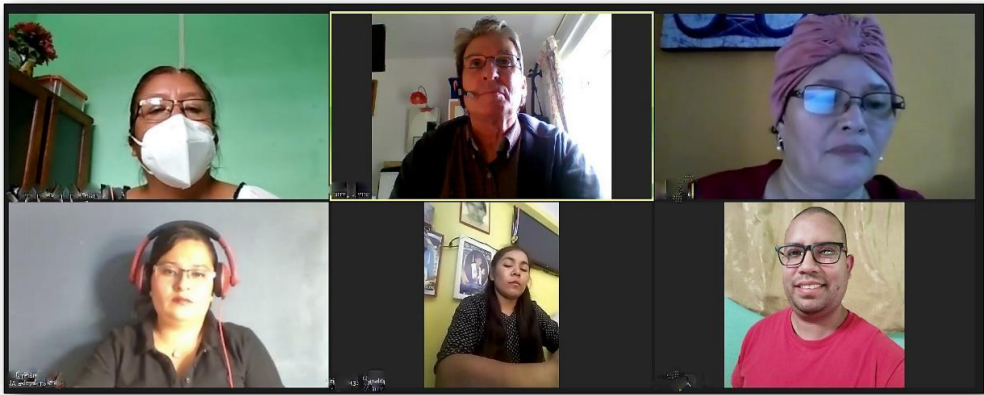
There is massive literature on Sistematización in Spanish, but not much in English.

- Try:
- ✓ Jara Holliday (2012)
 - ✓ Sarmiento & Herard (2015)
 - ✓ Tapella & Rodríguez-Bilella (2014).



4. SISTEMATIZACIÓN OF TEN YEARS OF ACTION-RESEARCH
BY CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH CESESMA

- I relocated to Ireland in 2012 to do a PhD in Children’s Rights.
- The CESESMA team continued the work in Nicaragua, facilitating more projects of Transformative Research.
- In 2020, as COVID-19 shut-down the work on the coffee plantations, the team decided to take advantage of the lull in community activities to undertake a *sistematización* of the past twelve years’ experience of supporting child researchers.



- I was available so they roped me in.

These days there is internet connectivity in rural Nicaragua. We couldn’t travel to remote villages and coffee plantations as in earlier years, but engaged with young people in appropriate ways.



← Osiris (centre) from Santa Martha Coffee Plantation became a Young Consultant in 2007, aged 11.



← Pablo when I first met him as a young researcher aged 12 in 2011

Osiris today, aged 24, is a community leader at the coffee plantation and still picks coffee. She participated in the sistematización via WhatsApp. →



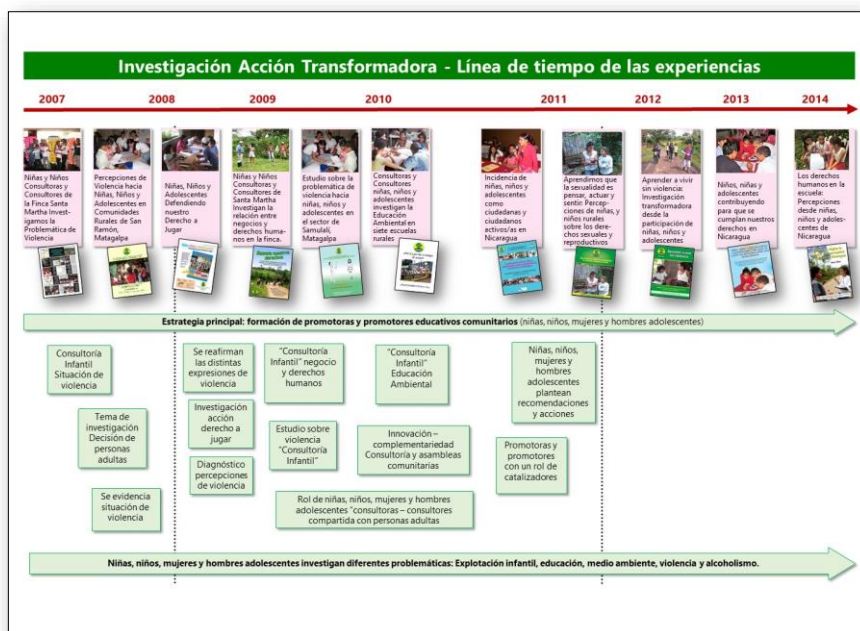
→ Pablo today, aged 21 (in 3rd year of teacher training), reflecting on the experience, and the impact it had on him and his community.



With support from Swiss NGO *Terre des Hommes*, CESESMA plans two products:

- ❑ A learning report based on the sistematización.
- ❑ A practice guide for others who would like to use this approach.

We could not create a giant wall-chart as before, but we worked by sharing screens on Zoom.



EARLY FINDINGS

REINFORCING EARLIER LEARNING:

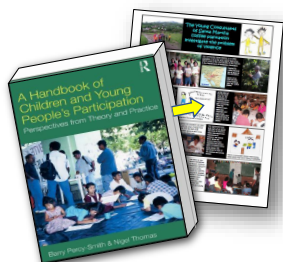
- Importance of skilled facilitation and good technical support for young researchers.
- The nature of "empowerment" and how it can be supported (see Shier, 2019a, published by CRN).
- The four transformations:
 1. Empowerment of children and adolescents.
 2. Transformation of family and social attitudes.
 3. Transforming attitudes, perspectives and practices of adults working with children.
 4. Transformation through action in society.
- The value of an action plan to disseminate findings and push for action.
- The need for institutional commitment (and allocation of resources) to implement the action plan.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING:

- The use of drawing as a way to support children exploring issues has been a constant throughout.
- The move from "Young Consultants" to "Transformative Researchers" is not just a new label. It is a cultural shift from researcher as *outsider* to researcher as *insider*.
- Developing awareness of safeguarding policy and practice; in particular the added demands of supporting children researching sensitive, taboo or divisive issues.
- The central importance of working in solidarity with parents, family and local community.
- A valuable role for adolescents supporting younger children as researchers.

A NEW HANDBOOK OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION: "CONVERSATIONS FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE"

- The first experience of children's consultancy in Nicaragua (2007) was featured in the original *Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation* in 2010.



- A call for contributions is out now for the "New Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation".
- Simple one-page "Expression of Interest" form.
- Deadline 30 January (a week on Saturday).
- <https://alliancecpa.org/en/child-protection-news/call-contributions-new-handbook-children-and-young-peoples-participation>

Annex: Template for Expression of Interest

A New Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation: Conversations for Transformational Change

1. Name of author(s)	
2. Institution/ Agency (affiliation)	
3. Country & region (if a author, and if the participant work the paper is focused on)	
4. Abstract (< 400 words)	
5. Which theme(s) your paper contributes to (< 50 words)	
6. Whether, and if so how, children and young people are involved as contributors to the paper (< 150 words)	
7. A brief overview of the ethical principles underpinning your proposed paper or alternative media product (< 150 words)	
8. A brief biography for each contributor (< 150 words)	
9. Focal point name and email for communication	

Please submit to nenparticipationhandbook@qub.ac.uk by 30th January 2021.

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