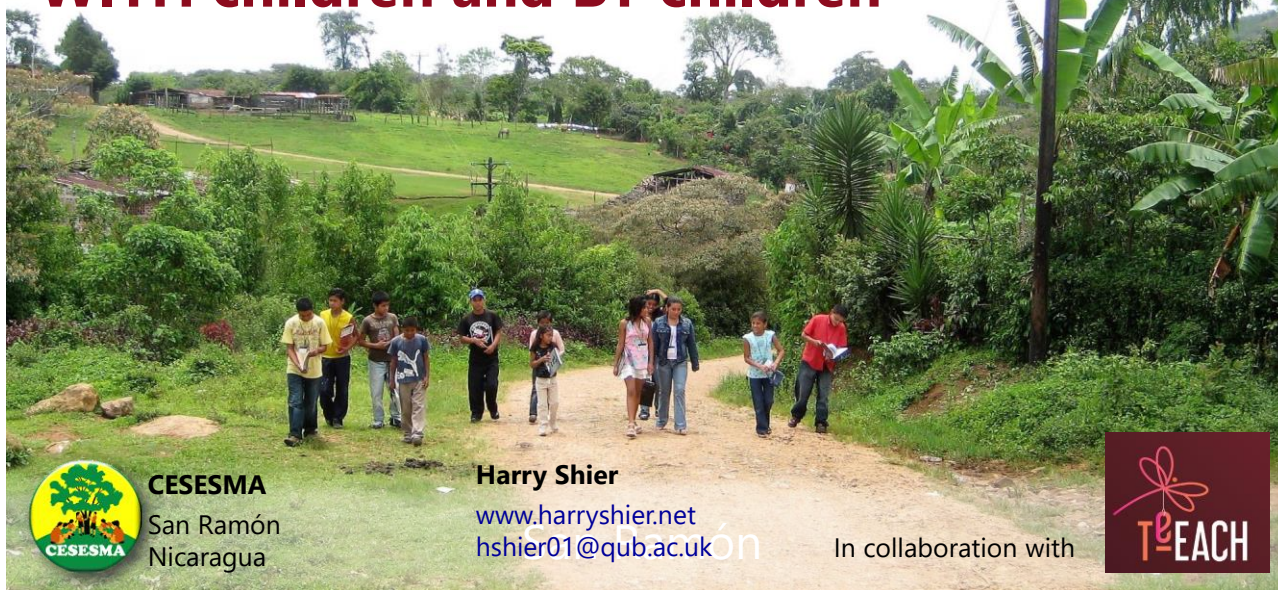


# Research ON children, ABOUT children, WITH children and BY children



**CESESMA**  
San Ramón  
Nicaragua

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In collaboration with



## OVERVIEW

1. The many, evolving roles of children in research
2. Learning from experience: Researching with children in Nicaragua
3. An analytical tool to help researchers develop partnerships with children and adolescents
4. A final thought: Participation and Protection



# 1. THE MANY, EVOLVING ROLES OF CHILDREN IN RESEARCH



Mary Kellett was founder and Director of the Children's Research Centre at the Open University in the UK. She identified four types of research involving children in the research literature:

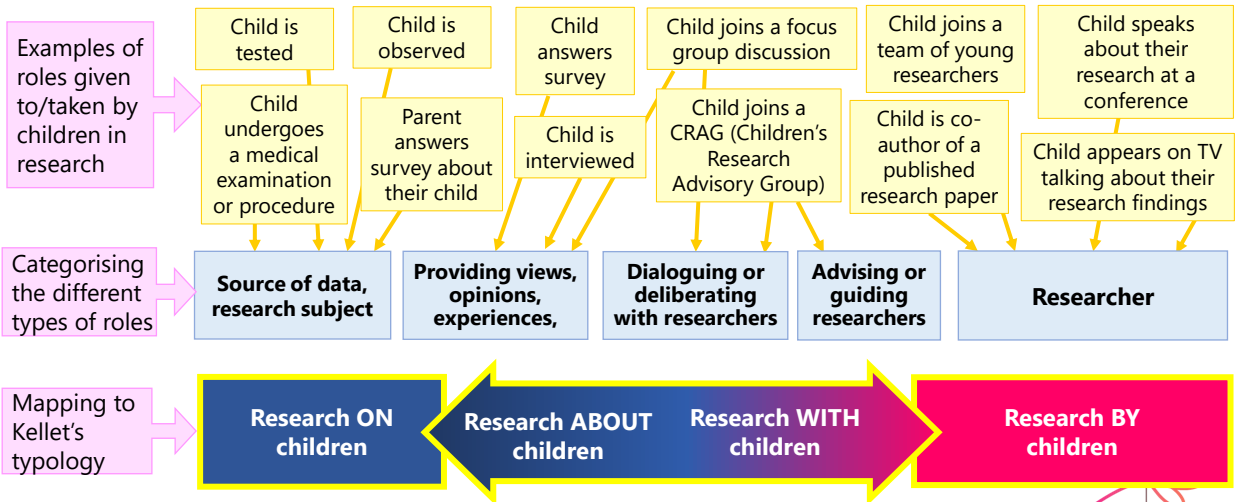


- ✂ Research **ON** children;
- ✂ Research **ABOUT** children;
- ✂ Research **WITH** children;
- ✂ Research **BY** children.



(Kellett, 2010)

## LOOKING DEEPER



(Shier, 2021)



## 2. LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILD RESEARCHERS IN NICARAGUA

From 2001-2012, I lived and worked in Nicaragua, central America



Child labour on coffee plantations



The struggle for the right to education



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## CESESMA, THE CENTRE FOR EDUCATION IN HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

A local voluntary organisation based  
in San Ramón, Nicaragua.

The CESESMA team in 2010.



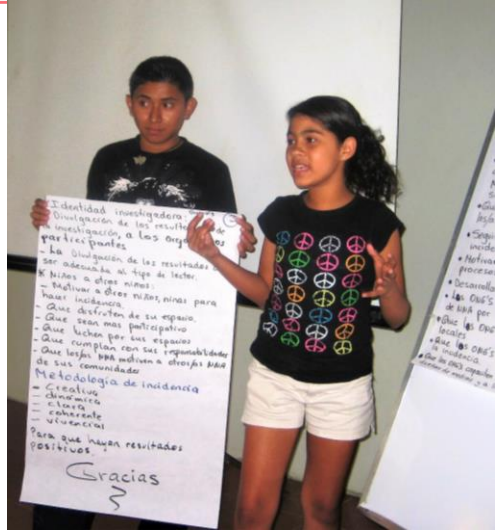
CESESMA's office in the town of San Ramón  
– bought and renovated with support from  
the Irish Government through Irish Aid.

(See Shier, 2010)



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# HOW CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE INFLUENCE PUBLIC POLICY IN NICARAGUA



(CESESMA/University of the North of Nicaragua 2010)



Adults and children collaborated to analyse four case studies of experiences where children and young people's direct influence on public policy was clearly documented and attested by public officials.





We selected four contrasting case studies, from different parts of the country:

Children and young people from Ciudad Sandino, an urban area on the edge of the capital, told us about their campaign to increase investment in children and youth in their district.

Children and young people from La Dalia in the heart of the northern coffee-growing zone told us about their role in helping to draw up a new Municipal Education Development Plan in 2007-08.

Children and young people from the old colonial city of Granada told us about their role in helping to create a municipal agenda for children and youth and get it adopted by the city council.

Children and young people from remote San Carlos near the southern border told us about participating in the district's first Municipal Children's Forum, and getting a policy commitment from mayoral candidates in the 2008 local elections.

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We investigated these four case studies through:

1. Interviewing at least one key decision-maker (e.g. town mayor, senior education ministry officials) in the four local authorities, in order to confirm beyond doubt that the authority's public policy decisions were influenced by the young people's proposals.
2. Focus groups with children and young people who had participated in the experience.
3. Focus groups with adult professionals who had helped facilitate the processes.



- Two-day residential bringing together children and adults from all four areas to consider the findings and jointly formulate recommendations.



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- Final "Validation Event" in the capital city: Representatives chosen by each group of children and young people presented their recommendations in a public arena with NGO leaders, public officials and media present ,

Note how the roles taken by the young people evolved as the research progressed: from focus group participants, to co-researchers, to a public role in presenting the findings and consolidating research impact.





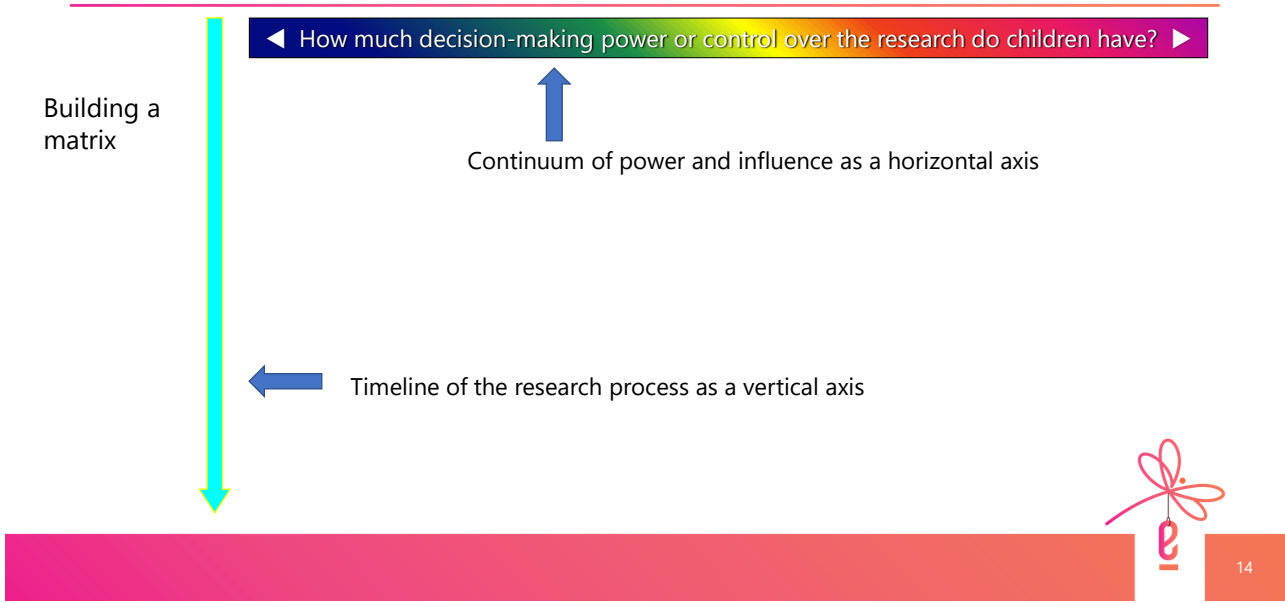


Final report

Child-friendly report



### 3. AN ANALYTICAL TOOL TO HELP RESEARCHERS DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



## 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 responsibilities 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).



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## THE VERTICAL DIMENSION: PHASES OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS AS A TIMELINE

1. Identify a research question: problem analysis, consultation.  
▼
2. Develop research design, select (or develop) methodology, draw up a plan (find funding, resources)  
▼
3. Design instruments, seek ethical approval.  
▼
4. Identify and recruit participants, obtain consent.  
▼
5. Generate data  
▼
6. Data analysis: findings, conclusions, recommendations.  
▼
7. Produce a report  
▼
8. Dissemination of findings: formal publication, wider publicity, media engagement.  
▼
9. Advocacy, public mobilisation, campaigning, policy impact, action for social change.

(Based on Kumar, 2014)



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COMBINED  
IN THE  
MATRIX...

Applying the  
matrix to the  
CESESMA research  
project presented  
earlier

Phases of research process

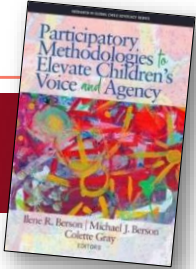
	Children are not involved	Consulted	Collaborate with adult researchers	Child initiated or directed
Deciding on the research question		Children asked about problems that concern them.	Children and adults jointly define research question.	Children choose their own research question.
Designing the research 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.

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THE MATRIX TOOL IS NOW PUBLISHED.



Berson, Berson and Gray (2019) *"Participatory Methodologies to Elevate Children's Voice and Agency"*.  
Also at [www.harryshier.net](http://www.harryshier.net)



- DO use it as a tool for planning research projects involving children.
- DO use it as a tool for reviewing and evaluating research projects involving children.
- DO use it as a check-list to be sure you are not excluding children through narrow thinking.
- DON'T use it to make judgments about whether any particular approach is right or wrong; it just helps you ask good questions and think about what might work well in a particular situation.

### 3. A FINAL THOUGHT: PARTICIPATION AND PROTECTION

#### UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD:

##### ARTICLE 12

"States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child".

##### ARTICLE 19

"States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child".

NB: Though this does not mention a right to engage in research, the fact that children have the right to be heard on "all matters" affecting them must inevitably include those aspects of their lives that are topics of research. (Ennew et al, 2009; Lundy and McEvoy, 2012; Shier, 2015).



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The right to be heard

The right to be safe

We don't get to choose:

- ▶ We cannot **silence children** in order to avoid risk.
- ▶ Nor can we **put children at risk** in order to hear their voices.
- ▶ As researchers, we are obliged to uphold both rights.





## A FINAL THOUGHT FROM CESESMA

"CESESMA has always taken the view that where children want to speak out about an issue that is of concern to them, and there is a potential risk of adverse consequences, it is the duty of the responsible adults to find a safe alternative, managing the risks so that children can be protected from harm without having their voices silenced and their right to speak violated."

(Shier, 2022, p 38)



e

*Thanks for listening*

[www.harryshier.net](http://www.harryshier.net)

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