

# The Playworker Mindset: A gift to participatory researchers

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## Overview

1. What is a "Playworker Mindset"?
2. A personal evolution from playworker to researcher.
3. Transformative Action Research by Children and Young People: Participatory research with playworker attitude.

*Photos by CESESMA, featuring young researchers in Nicaragua, 2007-2015, taken and reproduced with permission of CESESMA and the young researchers featured.*





**What is a “Playworker Mindset”?**

“For a researcher such as myself, coming from a playwork background, the ‘playworker mindset’ offers a distinct advantage in participatory research with children.”

(Shier, 2017, in...)



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So, how does it work?

**Playwork Principle 2:**

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons. (PPSG, 2005)



“One of the most basic underpinnings of the craft of the playworker is to understand that the play of children within the boundaries of a play setting must remain unadulterated by external agendas. This means that playworkers do not try to educate, train, tame, or therapeutically treat children in their time and space for play.” (Wilson, 2010, p. 9)



- Adult researchers bring a wealth of professional knowledge and experience to bear on the problems they seek to investigate. This knowledge is organised in systems developed within the professions they belong to or the disciplines they identify with. Such professional knowledge systems tend to inculcate ways of thinking including pre-set lists of 'oughts', 'shoulds' and 'needs'.
- This adult knowledge and experience fills our heads and determines our approach to every research question or issue. When adults set out to do research in partnership with children, these pre-set agendas cause problems. It is all but impossible for adult professionals to set aside, even for a minute, their strongly held professional self-belief founded in their professional knowledge and expertise.
- Playworkers, by contrast, are the only professionals working with children who (if they are good at their job) seek to follow the children's agenda, and do not impose their own professional programme.
- Thus, the playworker mindset differentiates playworkers from all other professionals who work with children, and this this gives us a clear advantage in conducting research with children in a way that is fully open to their way of understanding their world.
- This creates the possibility of different findings and new knowledge that cannot be accessed in other ways; not necessarily better or truer knowledge, but different and therefore valuable in itself.

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**Evolution ...** Different experiences, same mindset.....



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**Playwork...**

- ❑ It's not about how I understand the situation, it's about how they understand the situation.
- ❑ It's not about what I think should happen. It's about what they think should happen.
- ❑ It's not about how I think we should do it. It's about how they think we should do it.
- ❑ It's not about the result I'm hoping for. It's about the result they're hoping for.

**Can we approach participatory research with the same attitude?**



**2007**

**2008**

In 2021-22, CESESMA in Nicaragua carried out a *sistematización* (a kind of collective structured review) of 11 participatory research projects with and by children and young people, covering the evolution from children's consultancy to transformative action research:



The Young Consultants of Santa Martha Coffee Plantation Investigate the Problem of Violence

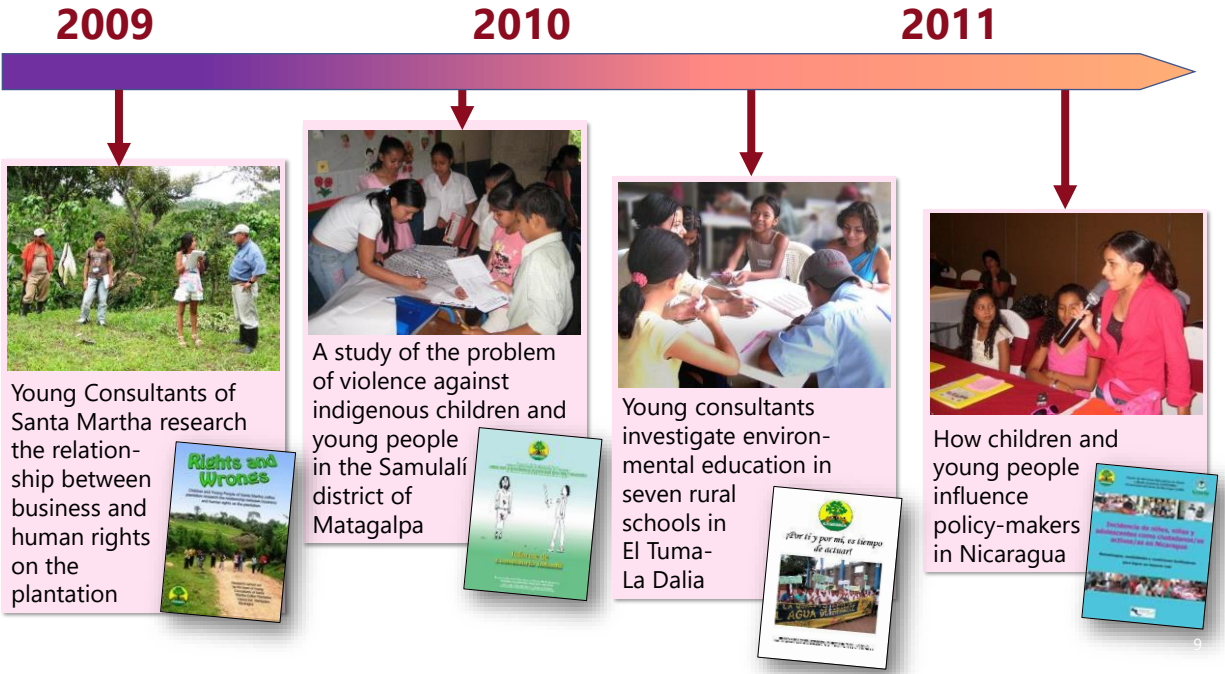


Perceptions of violence towards children and young people in fifteen rural communities of San Ramón, Matagalpa



Children and Young People Defending our Right to Play



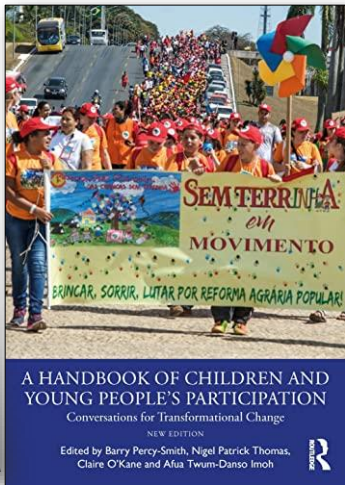




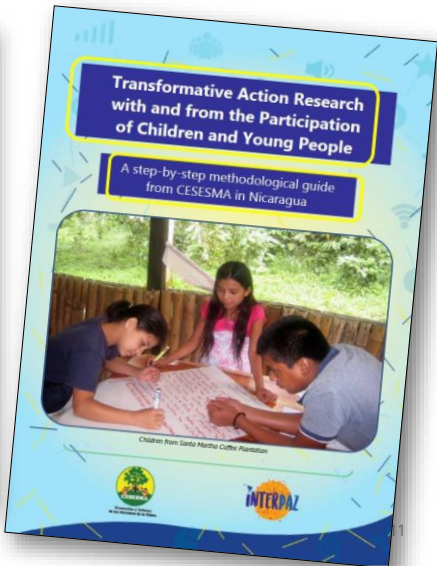
The full review and findings are only available in Spanish:



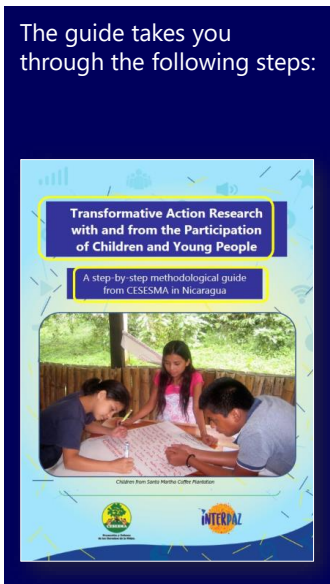
But a summary in English has just appeared in the **NEW** *“Handbook of children and young people’s participation”*:



And based on the findings, CESEMA has produced this step-by-step methodological guide – available in both English and Spanish.



The guide takes you through the following steps:



1. Organisational preconditions for convening a research team of children and young people.
2. Identification and selection of children and young people to form a research team.
3. Role of accompanying facilitators/educators.
4. Building the research team.
5. Choosing the research topic.
6. Using children’s drawings to encourage team reflection on the topic.
7. Designing the research.
8. Design and development of the research instruments.
9. Preparing young researchers for field research.
10. Supporting and accompanying field research.
11. Data management and analysis.
12. Reaching a consensus on conclusions.
13. Formulating recommendations.
14. Writing the report.
15. Drawing up an action plan.
16. Actions to disseminate findings.
17. Evaluation of the Transformative Action Research process.

This is not playwork. It is transformative action research inspired by the **playworker mindset**.

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