Research partnerships with children: PPI through a child-rights lens

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OVERVIEW

1. Children's Consultancy - an early version of PPI

2. Nicaragua: From Children's Consultancy to Transformative Research

3. COVISION: PPI through a human rights lens

4. The UN's 9 basic requirements

5. A tool to help researchers develop partnerships with children.

Photographs by Playtrain, featuring young consultants in the UK, 1997-1999; by CESESMA, featuring young researchers in Nicaragua, 2007-2015; and by COVISION at UCD, featuring members of COVISION CRAG and Co-design teams, 2022, all taken and reproduced with informed consent of the organisations and the young people featured.
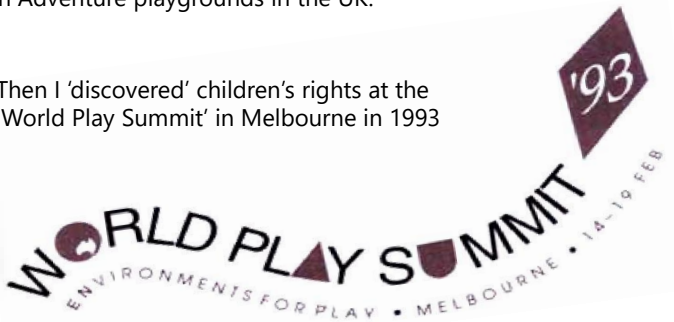
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1.   Children's consultancy - an early version of PPI

I started my career in the 1970s, working on Adventure playgrounds in the UK.

Then I 'discovered' children's rights at the 'World Play Summit' in Melbourne in 1993

My first publication: *"Adventure Playgrounds, an Introduction". 1984.*

This experience changed the course of my life.

Whatever social problem or issue you are concerned about, children's rights provides both an underpinning framework and an overarching approach – which has guided my work ever since.

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On my return to the UK I formed an action committee to organise the first Article 31 Conference

The Article 31 Conference led to the Article 31 Action Pack

[Shier (ed) 1995]

Then the launch of the Article 31 Action Network

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.
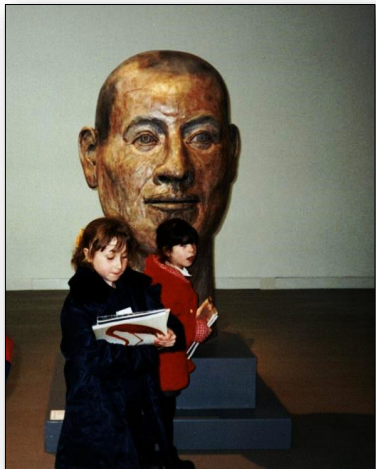
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So where do we find the experts?

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)

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1998

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

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1998

Child consultants commissioned by the British Waterways Board to research the educational and recreational potential of the English canal network.
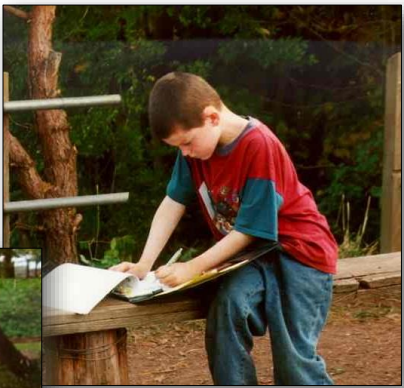
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1999

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.

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2. Nicaragua: From Children's Consultancy to Transformative Research

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

Child labour on coffee plantations

The struggle for the right to education

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.
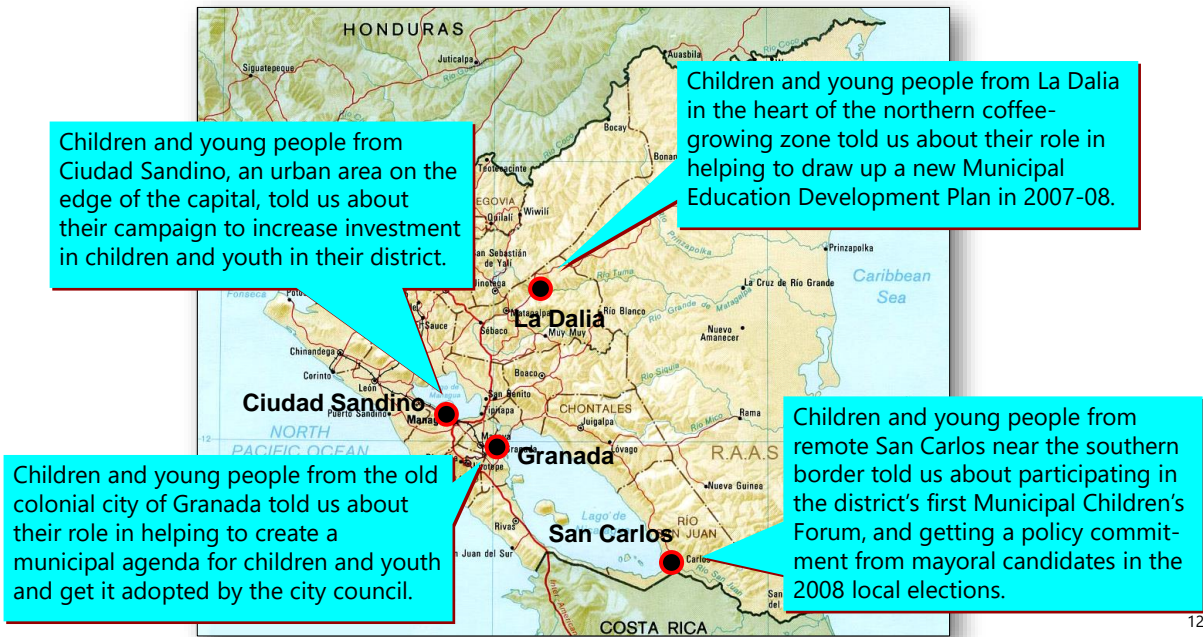
2010: A national research project: "How children and young people influence public policy in Nicaragua"

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.

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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 commit-ment 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.

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4. Two-day residential bringing together children and adults from all four areas to consider the findings and jointly formulate recommendations.
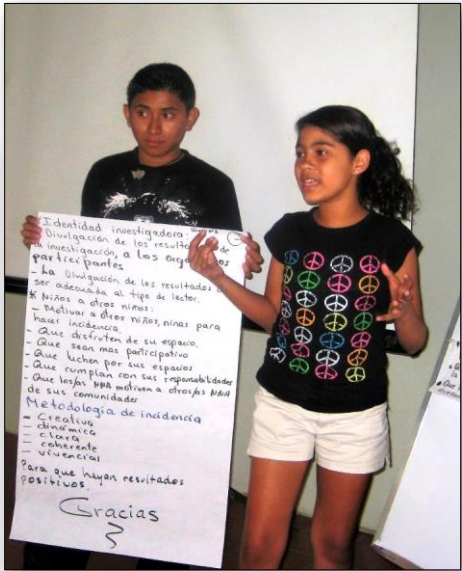
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5. Final "Validation Event" in the capital city: Representatives chosen by each group of children and young people presented their recommendations in a public arena with NGO leaders, public officials and media present ,

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.
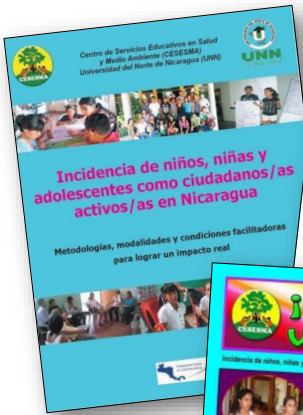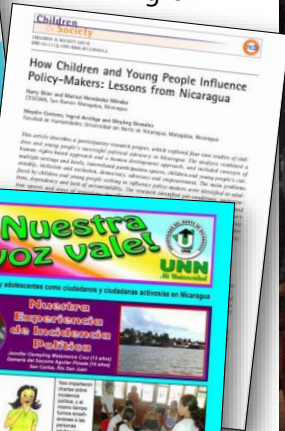

Summary in English

Final report

Child-friendly report

Why "Transformative" research?

CESESMA's four transformations

First Transformation:
   Empowerment of the young researchers

Second transformation:
   Transforming adult attitudes in the community and beyond

Third transformation: Transformation of those adults who support and facilitate through mutual learning

Fourth transformation:
   Social change, policy change, improving conditions of life through research impact, advocacy and community action.

(Shier, 2015)

The Transformative Paradigm

An alternative paradigm for social research, proposed by Donna Mertens 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 discrimination and oppression.

(Mertens 2009, 2010, 2021)

3. COVISION: PPI through a human rights lens

The issue

Children are capable of responding positively and creatively to the challenges presented by COVID-19, helping themselves and others to survive and thrive in taxing times.
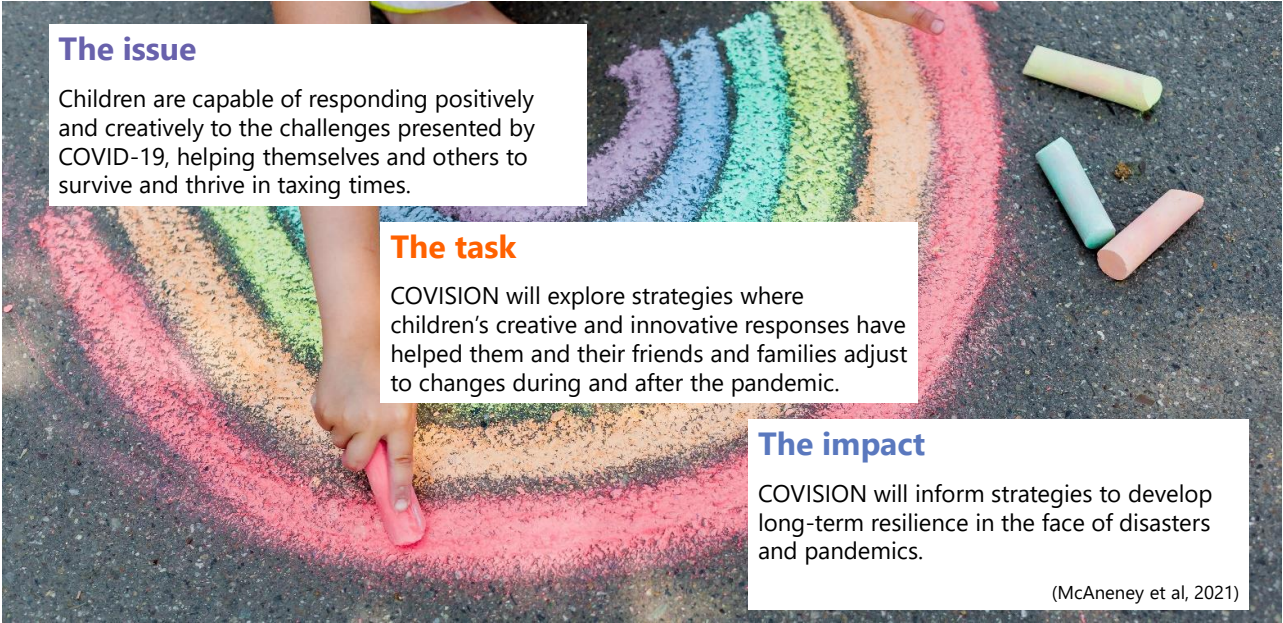
The task

COVISION will explore strategies where children's creative and innovative responses have helped them and their friends and families adjust to changes during and after the pandemic.

The impact

COVISION will inform strategies to develop long-term resilience in the face of disasters and pandemics.

(McAneney et al, 2021)

The COVISION global partnership

University College Dublin
Ombudsman for Children's Office
Children's Health Ireland

University of Edinburgh

University of Windsor

University of Maryland

Universidade Federal Fluminense

Monash University
India /Australia\

University of Melbourne

Ming Chuan University, Taiwan
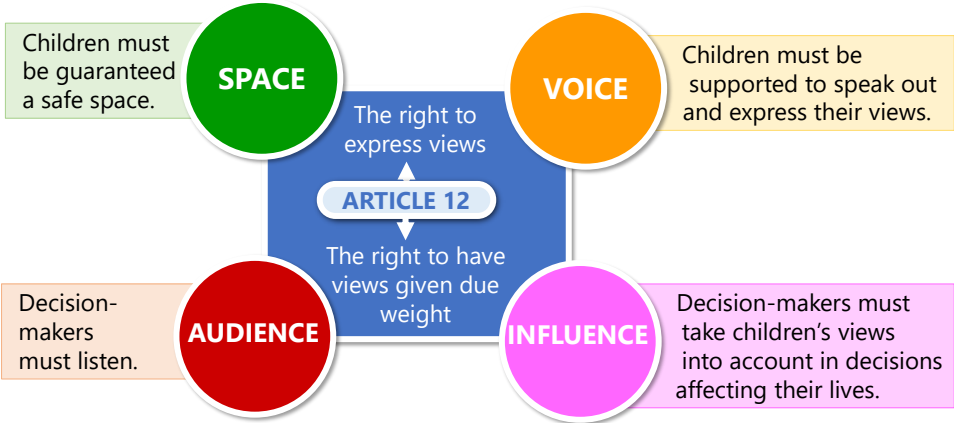
University of Auckland

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The COVISION CRAG

What is a CRAG?

Children's Research Advisory Group: A child-rights-based approach to PPI based on Laura Lundy's model of 4 key elements: *(Lundy, 2007)*

Children must be guaranteed a safe space.

SPACE

VOICE

Children must be supported to speak out and express their views.

The right to express views

ARTICLE 12

The right to have views given due weight

Decision-makers must listen.

AUDIENCE

INFLUENCE

Decision-makers must take children's views into account in decisions affecting their lives.

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Applying this approach to research practice:

- Every piece of research is supported by at least one Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG).

- CRAG members are children and/or adolescents of roughly the same age-range as the research target group.

- CRAG members thus provide insight into the perspectives and perceptions of the target group, which guides the research process.

- CRAG members may advise adult researchers on:
  - formulation of research questions;
  - appropriateness of methods;
  - design of data-gathering instruments;
  - analysis and interpretation of findings;
  - design of dissemination materials and methods.

(Lundy & McEvoy, 2012).

COVISION CRAG in conversation at the COVISION Showcase, November 2022

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CRAG approach in practice, continued/...

- As advisers, CRAG members are expressly excluded from the category of research subjects. They <u>do not provide data</u> for the research.

- This allows children to be engaged in every stage of the research, as appropriate to the circumstances, with a considerable amount of flexibility.

- Time-consuming and complex work such as data-gathering and statistical analysis can be left to appropriately-qualified adult researchers.

- If the circumstances are appropriate, CRAG members can go on to engage with duty-bearers in advocacy activities relating to the research.

COVISION CRAG, Co-design team and facilitation team with the Children's Ombudsman, COVISION Showcase, November 2022

The research team at UCD believes the guidance provided by our CRAG from a young person's perspective strengthened the project in many ways, including:

- ☑ Better communications with children and young people.
- ☑ More accessible and child-friendly activities.
- ☑ Increased engagement of children and young people in project activities.
- ☑ Enhanced skills for on-line participatory research.
- ☑ Enhanced analysis of findings.
- ☑ Learning by reflective practice for adult researchers.

We have also seen the CRAG members grow in knowledge, skills, confidence, understanding, and recognition of their own role, contribution and capacity; in other words, they have become empowered. *(Shier 2019)*

4. The Nine Basic Requirements for effective, ethical and meaningful participation
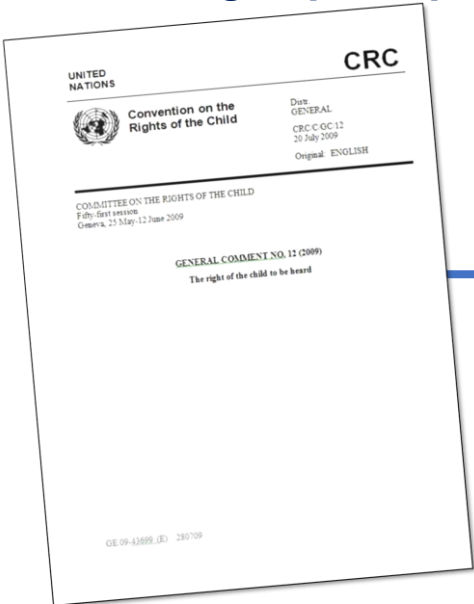
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12, *The right of the child to be heard* (2009):

> If participation is to be effective and meaningful, it needs to be understood as a process, not as an individual one-off event. Experience since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989 has led to a broad consensus on the basic requirements which have to be reached for effective, ethical and meaningful participation. *(Para 133)*

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REQUIREMENT 1: Participation is transparent and informative

Children and young people must be given information about their participation in a child-friendly and accessible format. The information should include **how** they will participate, **why** they have been given this opportunity, the scope of the activity and its potential impact.

A team of young consultants working to create a child-friendly version of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's recommendations to the Government of Nicaragua

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REQUIREMENT 2: Participation is voluntary

Children and young people on a training course to develop community education skills

Children and young people must be able to choose whether or not they would like to participate in an activity, and should be able to withdraw from activities at any time. They must not be coerced into participating or expressing their views.

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REQUIREMENT 3: Participation is respectful

A team of young researchers present their findings and recommendations to the municipal children and young people's commission.

Children and young people should be treated with respect and provided with opportunities to express their views freely. Staff should respect and understand the family, school and cultural context of their lives.

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REQUIREMENT 4: Participation is relevant

A young researcher interviews her classmates on their experience of rights on school.

Participation activities should build on children and young people's own knowledge and should be focused on issues that are relevant to their lives and interests.

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REQUIREMENT 5: Participation is child-friendly

Children who created "The Dragon of Violence", as a symbol for violence-prevention in their community, lead the local Children's Day parade.

Child-friendly approaches, based on participants' ages and abilities, should be used to ensure that children and young people are well prepared for participation and are able to contribute meaningfully.

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REQUIREMENT 6: Participation is inclusive

Participation initiatives must provide opportunities for marginalised children and young people to be involved and should challenge existing patterns of discrimination.

Carnival parade launching a municipal festival for prevention of gender-based violence.

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REQUIREMENT 7: Participation is supported by training for adults

Staff must have the knowledge and capacity to facilitate children and young people's meaningful participation. This may involve training and preparation prior to the activities.

Primary school teachers at a training workshop on equality, respect and positive feelings

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REQUIREMENT 8: Participation is safe and sensitive to risk

Adults working with children and young people have a duty of care. Staff must take every precaution to minimise risks of abuse and exploitation and any other negative consequences of participation.

Young people at a workshop on gender equity meet an alien from a planet where there is no gender difference, who asks them to explain how gender roles work on earth.

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REQUIREMENT 9: Participation is accountable

After they have been involved in a participation activity, children and young people must be provided with feedback that clearly explains how their input has been interpreted and used, and how they have influenced any outcomes.
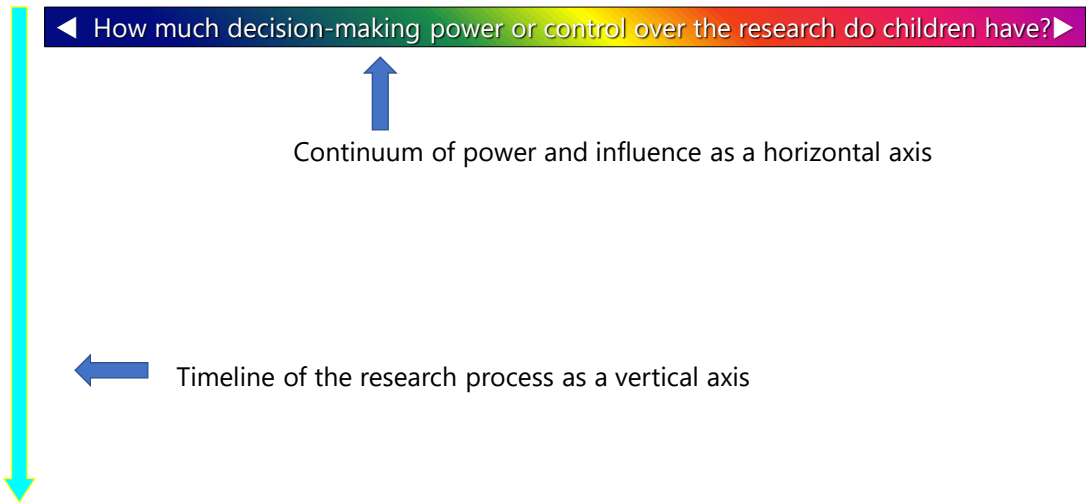
Children and adults collaborate on a research project to investigate how children and young people influence public policy in Nicaragua.

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IT IS IMPORTANT TO MEET THESE REQUIREMENTS BECAUSE...

➡ If participation is not **transparent and informative**, it is secretive and manipulative.

➡ If participation is not **voluntary**, it's being forced on children and young people against their will.

➡ If participation is not **respectful**, it's disrespectful.

➡ If participation is not **relevant**, it's pointless.

➡ If participation is not **child-friendly**, it's alien to children and young people.

➡ If participation is not **inclusive**, it's discriminatory.

➡ If participation is not **supported by training for adults**, it's being run by people who don't know what they're doing.

➡ If participation is not **safe and sensitive to risks**, it's dangerous.

➡ If participation is not **accountable**, the powerful can and will ignore it.

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5. An analytical tool to help researchers develop partnerships with children and adolescents
Building a matrix

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

Continuum of power and influence as a horizontal axis

Timeline of the research process as a vertical axis

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FOR THE HORIZONTAL AXIS: LANSDOWN'S SIMPLIFIED TYPOLOGY OF PARTICIPATION

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).

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

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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Research partnerships with children: PPI through a child-rights lens. Presented by Harry Shier at Workshop on *Co-Designing a Resource for Ethical Collaboration with Children*, Barretstown, Co Kildare, 30 January 2024

COMBINED IN THE MATRIX...

| ◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ►					Who is involved and who is excluded?
	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.	Who has a say in the 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.	Who is invited to get involved in the research design?
Preparing research instruments		Children consulted on (and perhaps test) research inst-ruments before use.	Children and adults work together on design of research instruments.	Children create their own research instruments.	Who gets to work on the 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.	Who has a say in choosing 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.	Who gets involved in data collection?
Analysing the data, drawing conclusions		Adults show prelim-inary 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.	Who has a say in what the conclusions are?
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.	Who gets credit for the report?
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.	Who is actively involved in dissemination?
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.	Who is active in follow-up campaig-ning and advocacy?

Phases of research process

COMBINED IN THE MATRIX...

● Applying the matrix to the collaborative project

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Phases of research process

IN 2019 A SCOPING REVIEW LOOKED AT METHODS OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN IN AUSTRALIA

Figure 3. Nature of participation across 211 papers
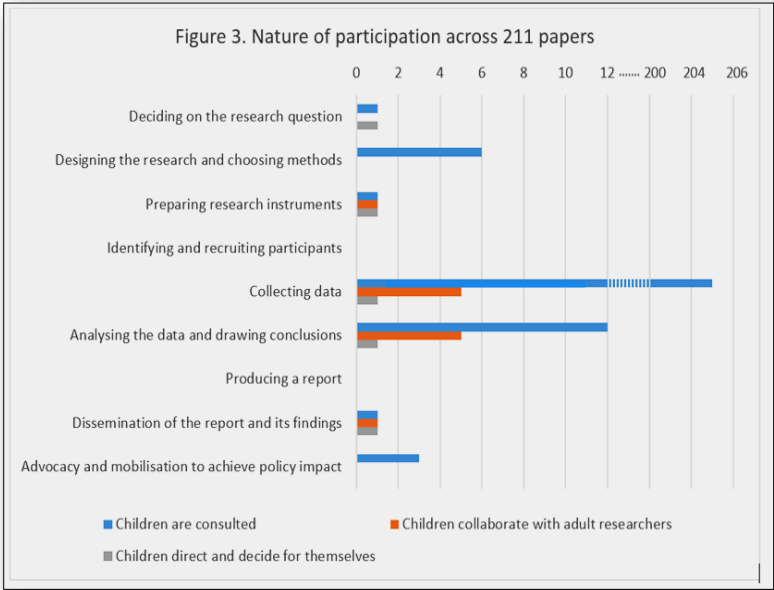
In the vast majority of studies reviewed, children were not involved <u>at all</u> outside of the data-collection phase.

Grace et al, *"Where are the silences? A scoping review of child participatory research literature in Australia".* (Children Australia, 44: 172-186)

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COMBINED IN THE MATRIX...

- Applying the matrix to the collaborative project

- The norm for involving children in research *(as verified by Grace et al in Australia)*

Phases of research process	Children are not involved	Consulted	Collaborate with adult researchers	Child initiated or directed	Who is involved and who is excluded?
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◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ►

THE MATRIX TOOL IS AVAILABLE IN...

Berson, Berson and Gray (2019) *"Participatory Methodologies to Elevate Children's Voice and Agency"*.
Also at **www.harryshier.net**
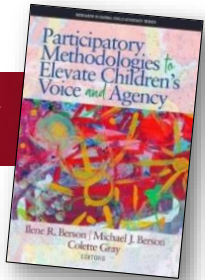
- ❑ DO use it as a tool for planning research projects involving children.

- ❑ 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 so make wise decisions about what might work well in a particular situation

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THE END

Thanks for listening

www.harryshier.net

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All works by Shier or CESESMA are available at **www.harryshier.net**

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