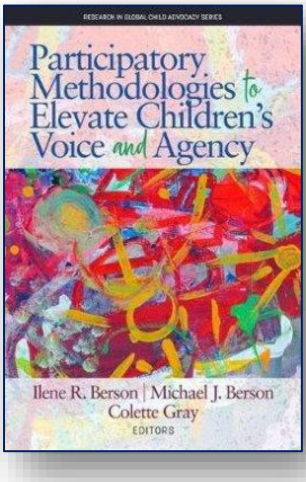

CHAPTER 13

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

Harry Shier

ABSTRACT

All researchers whose research involves children and adolescents have decisions to make about how and when to engage with those involved in and/or affected by their research; who to engage with and who to leave out. This paper offers a tool that researchers can use to help them address these issues in a purposeful and ethical way. The paper discusses earlier work on child-rights-based approaches to research which influenced the approach taken here. However the main inspiration for the proposal was the author's own research with children working on coffee plantations in Nicaragua; in particular the Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents methodology that was used, and the critical reflection on methodology prompted by this experience. The tool is presented as a matrix which can be used for planning and designing, as well as evaluating research.

It seeks to foster coherent critical thinking around three related dimensions: At what stage in a research process should researchers seek to engage with children and adolescents? What type of engagement is appropriate, particularly in relation to the sharing of decision-making power? And finally who is included in the process and who is excluded? The matrix is used to carry out a reappraisal of a recent research project by the author, showing how this analysis can shed light on a number of issues that might not otherwise be given sufficient attention.

INTRODUCTION

For some academic researchers, children are little more than statistical data, while for others they are actively engaged subjects, advisers or co-researchers (Kellett 2010a). However, all researchers whose research involves children and adolescents have decisions to make about how and when to engage with those involved in and/or affected by their research; and also, very importantly, who to engage with and who to leave out. These decisions may depend on a range of factors related to the purpose of the research, efficiency, validity, and resources available; but there are also factors that relate to the methodological approach of the researcher and its underpinning paradigm, not to mention the culture and traditions of research establishments. These might include a commitment to (or alternatively a resistance to) community engagement, to the emancipation or empowerment of those involved, and to a children's-rights-based approach.

This chapter offers a tool that researchers can use to help them address these issues in a purposeful and ethical way, so that these important decisions are informed and considered. With this aim in mind, the paper is structured in six sections. Following this introduction, the next section considers the literature on engaging children in research, focusing on two child-rights-based approaches to research with children. The third section talks about my own research with children working on coffee plantations in Nicaragua, and in particular the *Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents* methodology that I used, and the subsequent reflection on this that sparked the development of the tool to be presented here. The fourth section discusses the development and design of the tool, and presents it in its current form. The fifth section discusses how it may be used by researchers, and, by way of a "worked example", uses it to re-evaluate children's engagement in my own research. This is followed by section six which offers a brief conclusion.

THINKING ABOUT HOW ADULTS ENGAGE WITH CHILDREN IN RESEARCH

There is a large and ever-growing literature on research with children (Kellett, 2010a; Clark et al, 2014; Ergler, 2015; Black & Busch, 2016), in which two basic typologies stand out. Christensen and Prout (2002) identified four ways of seeing children in the research literature: "The child as object, the child as subject and the child as social actor… and a nascent approach seeing children as participants and co-researchers" (p. 480). Kellett (2010a) proposes a slightly different fourfold distinction, identifying research on, about, with and by children.

Much of the literature focuses on children as the data sources for research by adults, and deals with the nature of adult researchers' interactions with their child subjects (Bolzan & Gale, 2011; Randall, 2012; McCartan et al, 2012; Kruger and Mokgatla-Moipolai, 2014), and the ethical issues that arise from these interactions (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Powell et al., 2012).

Yet there are many other roles that children can take besides being data subjects, and here another important distinction emerges between those roles which locate children as researchers (that is, as the *doers* of research, be it data gathering, analysis, or writing up/reporting), and those that identify them as advisors to adult researchers, but not themselves researchers (Casas et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2015; Lundy & McEvoy, 2012b). In the former case, where children do the research themselves, again there is a wide range of possibilities, from small scale school projects with negligible follow-up or impact (Alderson, 2008; Spalding, 2011; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015) to larger projects which may have a significant impact (Save the Children, 2010; CESESMA, 2012). In all these cases, questions arise about how child researchers are recruited and selected (Johnson et al., 2014); how they give (or withhold) consent at different times (Powell & Smith, 2009); how they are safeguarded (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010; Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015); how they are guided, facilitated, or manipulated by adults (Shaw et al., 2011; Kim, 2015; Johnson et al., 2014); how they are rewarded (Powell et al., 1012; Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015); how their findings are disseminated and who gets credit (Robb, 2014); and what, if anything, is done as a consequence of their research, and by whom (Ruxton, 2014; Shier, 2015).

Child-Rights-Based Research

The methodological approach that most influenced the proposal being presented here is that of 'Children's-rights-based research'. There are two main strands of writing about rights-based approaches to research with children: The 'Right to be properly researched', associated with Judith Ennew and colleagues (Bessell et al, 2017), and the child-rights-based approach developed by Lundy and McEvoy. Although these are closely related, because of their distinct origins, conceptual bases and emphases, it is worth considering them separately.

The phrase 'The right to be properly researched' appears in Ennew's publications from 2004, but Ennew herself said she started to develop the approach in Jamaica in 1979 (Smith & Greene 2014, p 81). Although it thus predates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Beazley el al. (2011) mention CRC-inspired international advocacy for children's participation rights as one of the factors that influenced its subsequent development, together with the advent of the new sociology of childhood, and a growing interest in children in the field of human geography. However they go on to suggest that these developments alone were insufficient, and that:

> The impetus for the development of rights-based research with children was the submission of the first reports to the CRC Committee in 1992, and the Committee's realisation that available data, particularly information that fell outside the conventional health-education-psychology-demography nexus, were insufficient for monitoring the CRC. (Beazley et al., 2011, p. 160)

Thus by 2004 the 'Right to be Properly Researched' was established as both a *vision* for rights-based research with children (Beazley et al., 2004), and a step by step how-to-do-it manual (Ennew & Plateau, 2004). By 2009, this had become a boxed set of ten manuals (Ennew et al., 2009).

Proponents of this approach do not claim that 'The right to be properly researched' is itself a legal right (Ennew and Plateau, 2004), but use this expression as a convenient shorthand to describe how "a nuanced interpretation of four key articles of the UNCRC" (Bessell et al, 2017, p211) can be used to guide researchers as to how children must be treated, as set out by Ennew and Plateau in Table 13.1

The approach to research with children that is inferred from the combination of these articles is described as having five key characteristics:

1. It is respectful of 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)

In a sustained critique of this approach, Alderson (2012) raises a number of objections to Beazley and colleagues' insistence that rights-based research with children must be participatory in nature, mentioning unresolved issues such as: Who gets the opportunity to participate? How are they paid or rewarded? If everything is reduced to children's level, what happens to theoretical, statistical or systematic-synthetic analysis? And finally, "If anyone can do research with similar competence, what is the point of studying for years to become a postdoctoral researcher?" (p. 237). These are very much the kind of issues that the tool presented here will help researchers to address.

TABLE 13.1 The right to be properly researched

CRC Article	What it means for research
Article 3.3. 'States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, the numbers and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision'.	Research must conform to the highest possible scientific standards. Researchers must be carefully recruited and supervised.
Article 12 1. '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'.	Children's perspectives and opinions must be integral to research.
Article 13 1. 'The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice'.	Methods need to be found, and used, to help children to express their perspectives and opinions freely in research.
Article 36 protects children against 'all…forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare".	Children must not be harmed or exploited through taking part in research.

Source: Ennew and Plateau, 2004, p. 29

A key feature of the 'Right to be Properly Researched' approach, stressed in all the publications mentioned, is its insistence that all 'proper' research with children involves the rigorous application of scientific methods, including replicability. However, researchers from ethnographic, narrative, indigenous and reflexive traditions may question whether this must always be the case.

The second important strand of thinking about rights-based research with children is that developed by Lundy and McEvoy. Whilst it acknowledges Ennew's work, this draws its conceptual framing in large part from the way human-rights-based approaches have coalesced in the field of international development; specifically the three core principles found in the 'Statement of Common Understanding' agreed by the main UN agencies in 2003:

1. All programmes of development co-operation should further the realisation of human rights;
2. Human rights standards must guide all development cooperation and programming;

3. Development cooperation should contribute to the development of the capacities of duty-bearers to meet their obligations and/or of rights-holders to claim their rights (United Nations, 2003, p. 1).

Lundy and McEvoy reformulate these principles as a new proposal for a children's-rights-based approach to research based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, restating the principles as follows:

> The research aims should be informed by the CRC standards, the research process should comply with the CRC standards; and 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. Cutting across all of this is a requirement to ensure that the process furthers the realisation of children's rights. (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012a, p. 79)

Using examples from previous field studies, they go on to show how these principles might take effect across the three main phases of the research process: framing, conducting and disseminating research (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012a, pp. 79-90). The main implications of this analysis are summarised in Table 2 below.

A distinctive feature of this approach is the way every piece of research is supported by at least one Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG). Children who become members of CRAGs are considered to have an advisory role, and as such are expressly excluded from the category of research subjects. That is, CRAG members may advise adult researchers on formulation of research questions, appropriateness of methods, design of data-gathering instruments, analysis and interpretation of findings, or design of dissemination materials and methods; but do not provide data for the research. This allows children to be engaged in every stage of the research, as appropriate to the circumstances, and 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, but children know that the advice they give on these matters will be taken on board. Also, if the circumstances are appropriate, CRAG members can go on to engage with duty-bearers in advocacy activities relating to the research, but are not required to do so, and other methods may be proposed for influencing duty-bearers (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012a, pp. 81-86). In critiquing Ennew's approach, Alderson asked: If anyone can do research, what is the point of studying to become a professional researcher? The way adult researcher and child advisor roles are constructed and negotiated here is one way of answering that question.

TABLE 13.2 Summary of Lundy and McEvoy's proposal for a Children's Rights-Based Approach to Research

Elements constituting a children's-rights based approach	**Stages of the research process**		
	Framing	***Conducting***	***Disseminating***
Overall/cross-cutting requirement: Research furthers the realisation of children's rights.	Children's participation in the research design is CRC-compliant.	Researchers' engagement with children is guided by CRC standards.	Children contribute to research outputs, and are informed about how these will be disseminated.
Aims: Research aims are informed by CRC standards.	Research aims to further the realisation of CRC children's rights standards.		
Process: Research process complies with CRC standards.	Research questions are framed with CRC standards and associated jurisprudence (though research questions are often set by funders, there may be opportunities for 'translating non-rights-based research questions into rights-based questions').	The conduct of the research respects the rights of the children involved; Research methods are of high quality and appropriate to address the issues investigated; Children are engaged meaningfully in choices about methods and how these are employed.	Ideally children are involved in dissemination of findings, and engaged in influencing duty-bearers (but this is not considered a necessary component).
Outcomes: (a) Research outcomes build the capacity of children to claim their rights.	An objective of the research is to inform children involved about their CRC rights. Children are meaningfully engaged in development of research questions and instruments used, e.g. working with Children's Research Advisory groups, (CRAGs), and building their capacity in relation to the substantive topic of the research as well as the methods involved.	Deliberate steps are taken to ensure that children have opportunities to form and express their views freely across all stages of the research, including the significance or meaning attributed to findings; Children are made aware of who has responsibility for acting on the research findings.	Children are engaged in shaping the dissemination outputs. Deliberate and conscious effort to engage with children in meaningful ways (directly or indirectly) to influence state actors whose policy and practices impact on their lives.
(b) Research outcomes build the capacity of duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations.	An objective of the research is to inform duty-bearers about their obligations.	Where possible, opportunities are harnessed to engage with duty-bearers during the conduct of the research.	Outputs are presented to duty-bearers in ways that build their capacity to fulfil their obligations to children.

Source: Derived from Lundy & McEvoy, 2012a.

Another distinctive aspect of Lundy and McEvoy's approach is their emphasis on building capacity in participating children, particularly those who are members of CRAGs. This emphasis is based on interpretation of three key CRC rights in combination: Article 12 provides the right to form and express opinions which must be given due weight by decision-makers; Articles 13 and 17 provide the right to receive information; and Article 5 permits responsible adults to provide 'appropriate direction and guidance' to children on matters relating to the exercise of their rights (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012b). It is, in fact, questionable whether Article 5 applies in the case of researchers carrying out research with children, as the text of the Article restricts it to parents, guardians and "other persons legally responsible for the child". However the underlying principles remain relevant, and so it is proposed that an adult-guided capacity-building process can help children express opinions that are not just 'formed' but also 'informed', and so enhances their contribution to research.

The central role of capacity-building with children in Lundy and McEvoy's approach does, however, raise an issue about the risk of adult manipulation of children's views. Information-giving is never politically or ethically neutral, and in the case of adult researchers collaborating with child research advisers, there is also a significant power differential (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015), so it is inevitable that the capacity-builder, whether described as 'assisting' children (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012b), or 'facilitating' them (Larkins et al., 2015), influences the kinds of (in)formed views that children are assisted towards. Some may approach this in a self-aware, reflexive way, seeking to recognise their own biases, and modifying the way 'information' is selected, presented and discussed to try and counteract these. Others may not be so aware, and influence children's opinion-forming in certain directions without meaning to. Yet others may have beliefs about what kinds of opinions children *should* form about an issue, and seek to assist children to these views, either honestly (e.g. by confessing a religious or political position) or by less honest manipulation (Hart, 1997, pp 40-42). If the building of children's capacity by adult researchers is to be a central part of rights-based research, further guidance is needed on how to recognise, make explicit and minimise the extent to which adults, knowingly or unknowingly, lead children towards the kinds of views that they, the adults, approve of, instead of uncovering those that children themselves are drawn to.

An important difference between Ennew and colleagues' and Lundy and McEvoy's approaches to child-rights-based research is their different orientations. Ennew and colleagues' approach has been packaged and marketed to those doing research in a wide range of institutional settings, including NGOs and community groups, with particular reference to the global South (Ennew et al., 2009). Lundy and McEvoy, on the other hand, are concerned with defining a child-rights-based approach that can also inform the kind of research done in universities.

MY RESEARCH IN NICARAGUA

The tool that will be described in the next section developed out of my doctoral research on children's perceptions of human rights in school, which was carried out with children working on coffee plantations in Nicaragua in 2013, informed by the literature discussed in the previous section. This chapter is not concerned with the substantive findings of the research (for which see Shier, 2016), but rather with the methods; and specifically with the outcome of my critical reflection on the experience. The research project will be described briefly here to provide a backdrop for the methodological reflections that follow.

The research project arose out of the recognition that, for the many thousands of children in poor countries who drop out of school and so lose out on the life-chances that education might offer them, the notion of a 'right to education' has little meaning. Though poverty and child labour were recognised as important factors, lack of respect for human rights in education was seen as a contributing factor for many children. The research was therefore designed to explore how children and adolescents in Nicaragua's coffee sector perceived their human rights in school, in order to provide insights that would contribute to the development of effective human-rights-based approaches to schooling, particularly in poor countries where the right to go to school must itself be claimed and defended.

To come as close as possible to understanding how children themselves perceive their rights in school and the issues that concern them, the adult researcher worked in partnership with a team of child researchers in Nicaragua. Using a distinctive methodology known as *'Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents'* (CESESMA, 2012; Shier, 2015), a team of 17 young researchers was formed, aged 9-16, and these were facilitated in developing and carrying out a research project using qualitative interviews to address the above issues, while I gathered background information from parents, teachers and other adult informants. With the young researchers' approval, I subjected their original data to a more thorough thematic analysis, which was compared with their own analysis.

Four main themes emerged as important findings:

1. Developing positive human relations is fundamental for a rights-respecting school, with relations among students (e.g. reducing bullying) seen as every bit as important as student-teacher relations;
2. Students saw some forms of behaviour management as rights violations, for example depriving them of playtime as punishment;
3. Lack of attention to the complex relationship(s) between rights and responsibilities had led to confusion and misunderstandings (echoing similar findings in the UK and elsewhere);

4. The child's right to be heard was not an important issue for the children in this research, which raises questions for adult researchers interested in this topic (Shier, 2016).

On completing their research, the young researchers collaborated on a number of significant dissemination activities, specifically: presenting their findings directly to the combined Latin American regional leadership of Save the Children; publishing their report under their own names in a leading Latin American Children's Rights Journal (Niñas y Niños Investigadores, 2014); and participation in an international seminar on children's participation organised as part of the St. Olaf's Festival in Trondheim, Norway (details in Shier, 2016, pp 111-113). The question of what further outcomes may have come from the process is considered further in the "Discussion" section below.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN OF THE MATRIX

The need to justify the use of an unorthodox methodological approach gave rise to deep reflection on the methodological aspects of the research, and in particular on the wide range of possible relationships that may be established between child and adult researchers, and how to develop productive and ethical partnerships between the two. A starting point for this reflection was to recognise that there is no symmetry between adult and child participants in decision-making about research projects. As a rule, adult researchers decide when and how to engage with child participants, and with whom to engage. But how much conscious reflection or evaluation goes into the making of these decisions? A default position of "children are not involved at this stage" may be taken for granted without being given much serious thought.

The model, then, is built on an important normative assumption: namely that the quality of research is improved if decisions about who is to be involved and how they are to be involved are carefully thought through and justified, rather than taken for granted.

The decisions in question, on engaging children in research processes, involve three distinct dimensions:

1. *When* should children get involved with a research project; i.e. at what stage in the overall process?
2. *How* should they be involved: i.e. what should be their role or the nature of their engagement with the adult researchers(s)?
3. *Who* should be involved (and, equally significantly, who will be excluded or left out, and how is this justified)?

Though these can be asked as three separate questions, they cannot be answered this way; rather there must be critical reflection leading to an integrated response that deals with all three.

In developing an analytical tool to help guide this reflection, my approach was first to visualise and unpack the "when" and "how" dimensions.

Considering first the "when" dimension; every piece of research involves a number of steps or phases. There are many ways to label these, but the following is a simple generic framework derived from Kumar (2014) that works well for the present purpose: (1) Deciding on the research question; (2) Designing the research and choosing methods; (3) Preparing research instruments; (4) Identifying and recruiting participants; (5) Collecting data; (6) Analysing the data and drawing conclusions; (7) Producing a report; (8) Dissemination of the report and its findings; (9) Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact.[1]

It is perfectly possible for children and adolescents to be engaged at any of these moments, or indeed at each and every one of them.

The second dimension, where we consider *how* to involve children, seems more complicated. The wide range of different ways in which children can engage with research was mentioned above, neatly summarised by Kellett's (2010a) conception of research *on*, *about*, *with* and *by* children. Along this dimension, the key variable is the amount of control or decision-making power that children have in relation to adult researchers, and the literature on child participation offers a plethora of models for analysing different levels or types of participation; some of the best-known being Hart's (1992) *Ladder of Children's Participation* and Shier's (2001) *Pathways to Participation.* Karsten (2012, regularly updated), offers probably the most comprehensive compilation of all the different models available.

However, for our present purposes, clarity and simplicity are key, so the model used here is that of Lansdown (2011), which conveniently reduces the myriad forms of children's participation to three essential "levels of engagement" which are:

1. Consultation: When adults ask children for their views, and children are not involved beyond this (so child-to-child or peer consultation falls into one of the other categories).
2. Collaboration: When adults and children work together, sharing roles and responsibilities in planning and carrying out an activity.
3. Pro-activism: Activities initiated, organised or run by children and young people themselves (adults may still provide support, though not always necessary).[2]

To these it is necessary to add a fourth level – that of exclusion or "non-involvement".

One of the advantages of Lansdown's model is that it is simple enough to use in discussions with children themselves about how they might wish to engage with a research project.

The idea of assembling these two dimensions as a matrix to produce a tool for researchers was inspired by a similar matrix in Save the Children's *'Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation'* (Lansdown & O'Kane, 2014). The new matrix was created by using the same column headings (Lansdown's three levels plus the level of non-involvement), while for the vertical axis, replacing the five phases of the development project cycle in the original with the nine stages of the research process listed above.

The issue of *who* is to be involved at each stage (and by inference, who is to be excluded from involvement) was described above as a third dimension, and ideally should be envisaged that way to complete the model. However, in order to design a tool that can be represented on a two-dimensional page, it is easier to show it as an additional vertical column on the right of the matrix. The result is shown in Table 3 below.

Although the final column offers a simple "Who?" question in each box, it is important to stress that each simple "who" represents a series of more complex questions that need to be asked and answered. Depending on whether the matrix is being used to help plan a research project or to evaluate a process, the questions can be re-phrased in past, present or future tense as appropriate:

- Which children, or what kinds of children, got the chance to participate?
- How were they chosen? What were the criteria for inclusion and exclusion? If there was differential treatment, was it relevant and ethically justified? (If not, it was by definition discrimination, and therefore a rights violation).
- What efforts, if any, were made to identify those children, or groups of children, who might have wanted to participate but faced obstacles to putting themselves forward, who might have needed additional support to play a full and equal role in the process, or who never heard about the project because the information didn't reach them?

Table 13.3 Matrix for Analysing Children's Engagement in research processes

Phases of the research process ↓	← Dimension of decision-making power or control →				Who is involved and who is excluded?
	Children are not involved	**Children are consulted**	**Children collaborate with adult researchers**	**Children direct and decide for themselves**	
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 instruments 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 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 and 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.	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		Adults consult children 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 campaigning and advocacy?

DISCUSSION

> *Essentially all models are wrong, but some are useful.*
> - Box, 1979, p. 201

This matrix is being offered as a practical tool to help researchers think through important issues in planning, designing or evaluating research. It is not presented as a model intended to represent reality. For example, Lansdown's three levels of participation may be considered an over-simplification of the complexities encountered in practice, amply discussed in the participation literature, where, as mentioned above, here are many more complex models available. In particular the model as it stands does not interrogate the role of the seemingly invisible, or at least well-hidden, adult supporter/facilitator in the fifth column. Nevertheless, for practical purposes, and particularly for those concerned to involve children directly in their deliberations, this simplified scheme has proved effective.[3] Similarly, not all research projects run through a neatly ordered series of stages as implied here. Some kinds of research, action research for example, have a different internal logic and series of steps. However, the matrix sets out a framework that can easily be adapted to a wide range of different situations.

It would also be a mistake to see the matrix as a set of norms or targets to strive for. Specifically, it would be unfortunate if users got the impression that more pro-active participation is always better. As McCarry (2012) concludes, researchers should be open to questioning "models of participation which assume that the greater the level of involvement the more inclusive and empowering it is for young people, and the stronger research is as a result" (p. 68) and, as a result, should strive to be flexible and accommodating. The matrix is designed to encourage, rather than restrict, this flexibility, by helping researchers decide for themselves what is the most appropriate way to engage with children and adolescents at each stage in a research process. It is possible that at some stages involving children in a limited way, or not at all, is the best way to go. However, using the matrix means that such non-engagement will be the result of a thought-through and justified decision, rather than a mere oversight.

Though an individual researcher could work through the matrix themselves, identifying the most appropriate way to engage with children at each stage and asking the relevant "who" questions, it is better seen as an exercise for research teams to work on together or, better still, as an activity to be worked through by researchers with groups of child and/or adolescent advisers.

To give the matrix a practical text, I used it to analyse my own doctoral research project. Drawing on my own intimate knowledge of the process, I determined which cell of the matrix was closest to what had actually happened at each stage. I then marked these on a copy of the matrix and joined the dots. The result is shown in Figure 13.1.

Phases of the research process ↓	← Dimension of decision-making power or control →				Who is involved and who is excluded?
	Children are not involved	**Children are consulted**	**Children collaborate with adult researchers**	**Children direct and decide for themselves**	
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 instruments 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 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 and 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.	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 in 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	✖	Adults consult children 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 campaigning and advocacy?

Figure 13.1: The matrix used to give a visual representation of children and adolescents' involvement with the author's doctoral research project in Nicaragua in 2013.

Some issues are immediately apparent: Though the children and adolescents had an impressive level of control in the central stages of the project, it is clear that they had no say at all in deciding what was to be researched, as this had been decided in a foreign country long before they had the chance to get involved.

But should child researchers always choose their own research topics? It seems a good idea, but the issue is complicated and nuanced. A first point to note is that adult researchers do not always get to choose their own research topics, as research agendas are largely set by research funders, and research projects developed accordingly. Should child researchers have a more privileged position, or might it be beneficial for them sometimes to work within this larger reality?

Another factor to consider is the potential research impact. Where research has been commissioned and paid for, this means that someone is interested in hearing the results, so an audience can be guaranteed for the presentation of the findings, thus increasing its likely influence (Lundy, 2007). Conversely, if research is motivated by child researchers' own concerns, it may be harder to get the message across to those who can make a difference. However, in the latter situation, the young researchers may have a stronger sense of ownership and greater motivation to engage with those in power, either face-to-face or indirectly through the media (see for instance the work by Manasa Patil on getting around as the child of a wheelchair user described by Kellett [2010b, p. 201], and my own work with the Young Researchers of Yúcul on alcohol and violence [Shier, 2015, p. 212]).

The figure above supports this hypothesis: Though the young researchers did collaborate on a number of significant dissemination activities as mentioned earlier, they had no significant involvement in advocacy or mobilisation for change. Was this because, since they had no say in deciding on the research topic, they felt that getting something done about it was not their concern? (But there is another plausible explanation here: that it was the adults, not the children, who lost interest in the project at this point).

If the analysis also includes the right-hand "Who" column, it will tell us that the only children who had the chance to participate through various stages of the project were the team of 17 young researchers. Only at the data collection stage were other children involved, as the young researches interviewed 150 of their classmates to learn about their perceptions of rights in school.

The need to select a small number of participants from a larger target group must raise ethical questions about how one can identify and dismantle the barriers that privilege some children and adolescents and discriminate against others in terms of who gets involved. For example, I was fully aware that there were a number of disabled children living in the catchment area of my doctoral study, but none of them joined my team of young researchers. So I must ask myself: Did they have the same opportunity as everyone else to come forward and get involved in the project? They may not have wanted to, but the crucial question is: did they have an equal chance to opt in or opt out? For example: Did we identify those children, or groups of children, who might have wanted to join the team but faced obstacles to putting themselves forward? And those who might have needed additional support to play a full and equal role in the team once selected? And what about those who would have loved to participate but never heard about the project because no-one made the effort to reach them? In this particular project, with the benefit of hindsight, I don't think we got it right; but, learning through critical reflection, these are now questions to be asked at the start of every future research process.

CONCLUSION

The above is one researcher's reflection, stimulated by applying the matrix tool to one specific research project. It is worth repeating here that this tool cannot tell you the correct way to engage with children and adolescents in your research. What it may be able to do, though, is stimulate critical reflection, either individually or, better, collectively, that will guide you in the direction of wise and ethical decisions.

The reflection inspired by applying the matrix tool to my own research has helped me identify some further questions that we, as researchers, can ask ourselves when planning, designing or evaluating research that involves children and adolescents, and these are presented in "Questions for reflection" below. Although the questions mainly deal with methodological considerations, underlying these are more fundamental questions about the very nature of our research; its goals and purposes, whose interests it is designed to serve and who benefits. And behind these are questions asking us to reflect on ourselves and our own interests and attitudes as researchers: our willingness to take risks – or contrariwise, our preference for playing safe. And finally, when it comes to innovation in research, are we up for a challenge?

Questions for Reflection

1. Are our research goals limited to the creation of knowledge, or are we also concerned with impact for social change and/or empowerment of the children and adolescents involved?
2. Where do our research questions come from, and who is involved in defining them?
3. Have we thought about engaging with children throughout our research 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 or reference group for our current research project?
5. If we were to increase the level of engagement of children and adolescents in our research process, what would be the methodlogical and resource implications? What would be the challenges for us as adult researchers? What would be the risks, if any (and are we under pressure to play safe?), and what would be the potential benefits?

Suggestions for Further Reading

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NOTES

1. Some researchers may say that this final advocacy phase is beyond their remit, and that is their choice. However, for me it has always been a crucial part of the research process.
2. Lansdown originally labelled this third level "Child-led", but I consider this label problematic, and prefer "Pro-activism" which is the nearest equivalent in English to the Latin American concept of *"protagonismo infantil"*.
3. I worked on the international piloting of the Save the Children Toolkit (2011-2013), where the original matrix that inspired this one, and its simplified conceptual scheme, were assessed and validated in practice.

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