

Research Partnerships with Children



Dr Harry Shier, CESESMA, San Ramón, Nicaragua

www.harryshier.net



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

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

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:

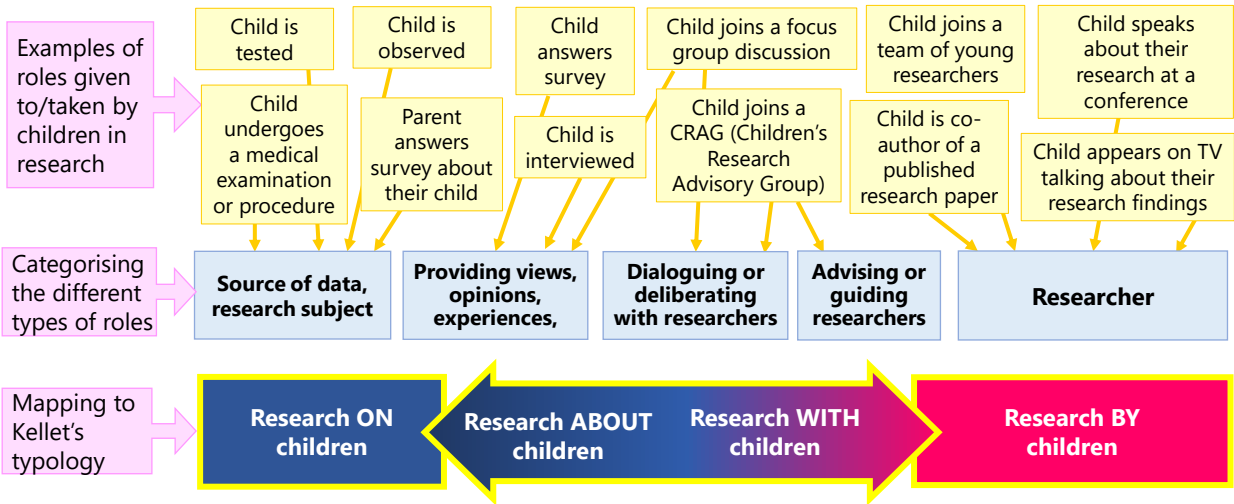


- ❑ Research **ON** children;
- ❑ Research **ABOUT** children;
- ❑ Research **WITH** children;
- ❑ Research **BY** children.

(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

(Shier, 2014, 2022a)



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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.

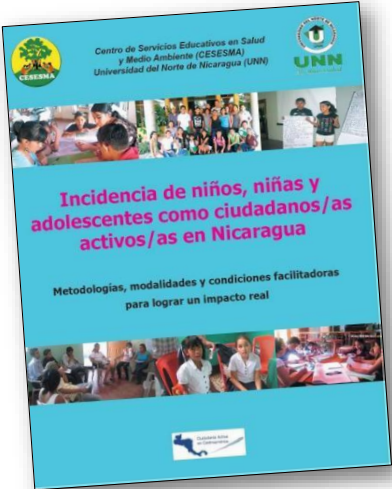
(See Shier, 2010)

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Research projects WITH children and BY children:

How children and young people influence public policy in Nicaragua

Working with children as **research partners** (co-researchers)



(CESESMA/
University of
the North of
Nicaragua
2010)



We want to live without violence

Supporting children as **autonomous researchers**



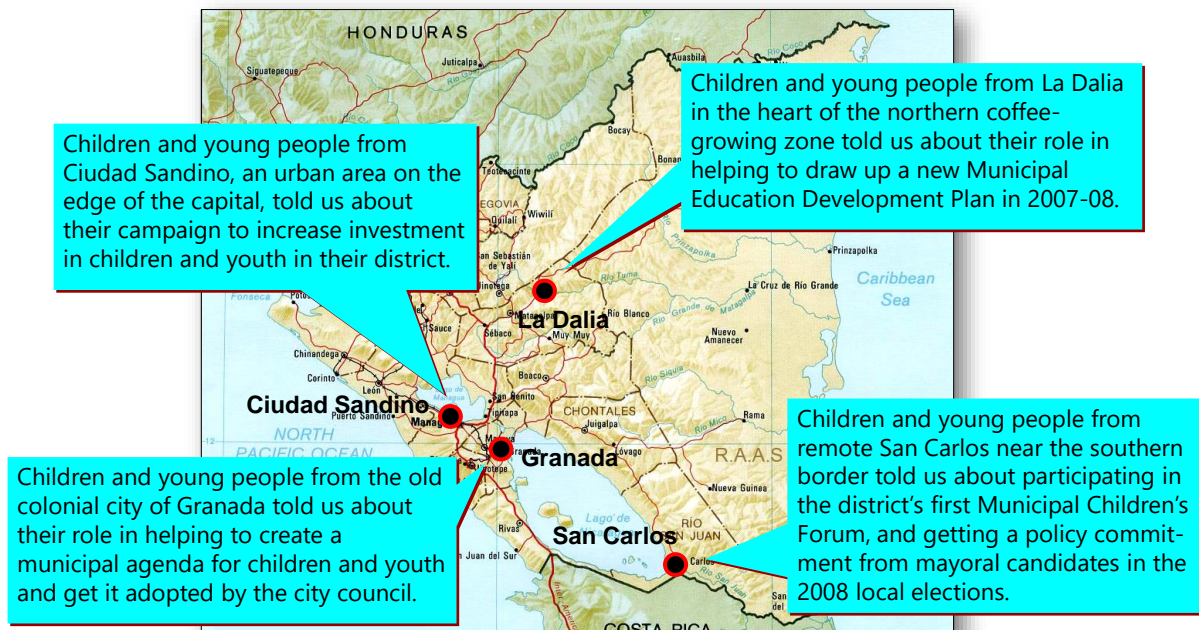
(Transformative
Researchers from
Yúcul, Monte
Grande and Cerro
Grande, 2012)

Research WITH children: 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.

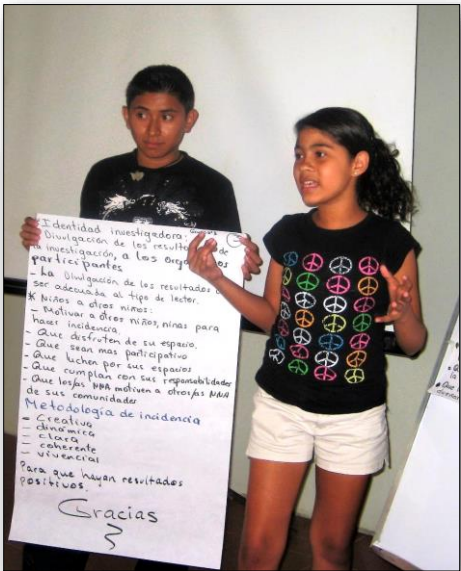
We selected four contrasting case studies, from different parts of the country:



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.

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.



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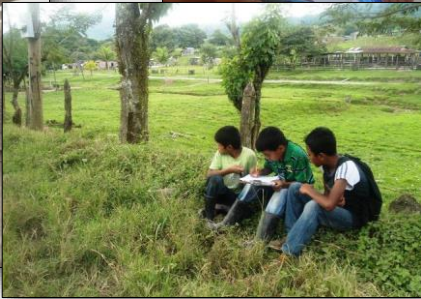
Summary in English



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Research BY children: ‘Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents’ (TRCA)

From 2007 we started working with children and adolescents as researchers.
(Shier, 2015)



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“We want to live without violence”

Children from Yúcul formed a research team and chose the an issue affecting their families and their community that they want to find out more about.

The topic they chose to investigate was how alcohol is related to violence in their community.



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Planning

Interviewing



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Analysing data



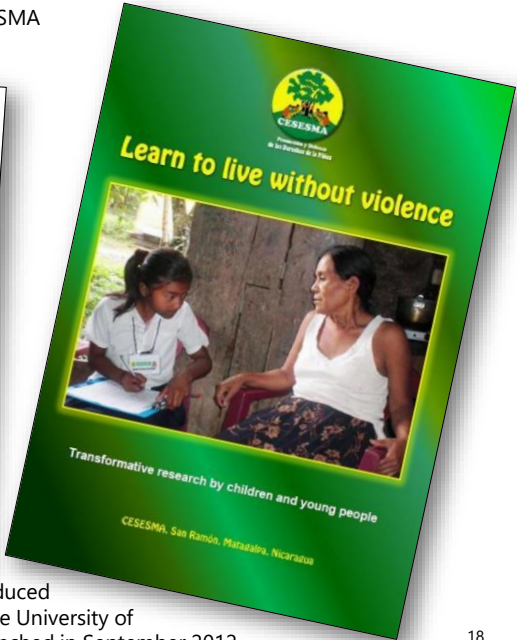
Preparing the report and recommendations



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The Young Researchers' report was in this book published by CESESMA in Nicaragua in March 2012.



An English translation produced jointly by CESESMA and the University of Central Lancashire was launched in September 2012.

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Follow-up and impact...

- ❑ The Young Researchers presented their findings to the government's 'Family Life and Security Commission', which decided to make the alcohol problem a top priority.
- ❑ Local government and party officials admitted they had been aware for the issue for years, but it wasn't till the children came forward with their research that they felt forced to act on it.

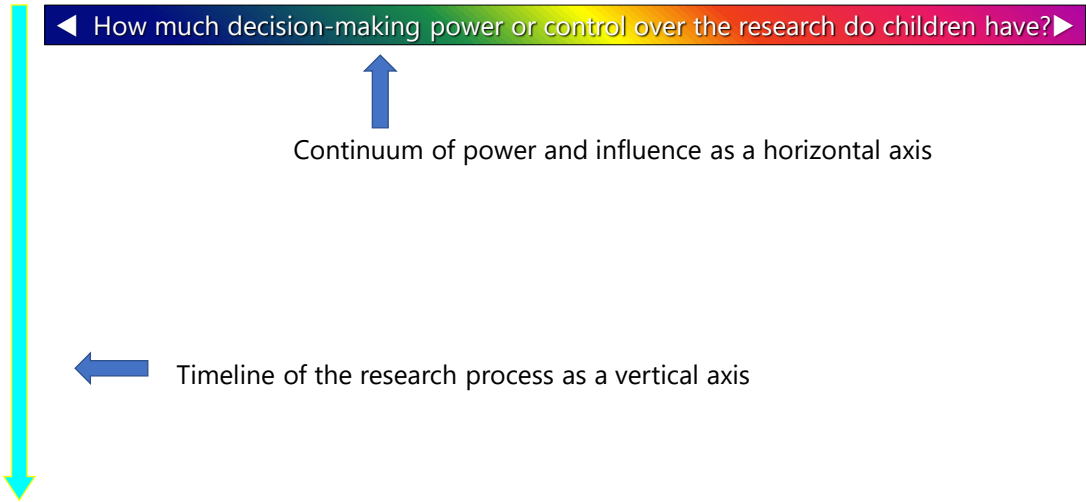


- ❑ The local police also took action; confiscating illegal liquor and closing at least two unlicensed cantinas.
- ❑ A national broadcaster heard about the children's work, and the team was featured on the national TV news.
- ❑ Following the news broadcast, the local authority and police have ensured no new liquor licenses are granted in the Yúcul area.

(Shier, 2015)

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



Consultation:



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.

A photograph of two young girls sitting on a rocky, sunlit hillside. The girl on the left, wearing a pink shirt and denim shorts, is writing on a clipboard. The girl on the right, wearing a white shirt and a dark skirt, is looking at the clipboard. They appear to be conducting a field study or survey.

COMBINED IN THE MATRIX...

Phases of research process

	◀ 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	
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 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 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		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 campaigning and advocacy?

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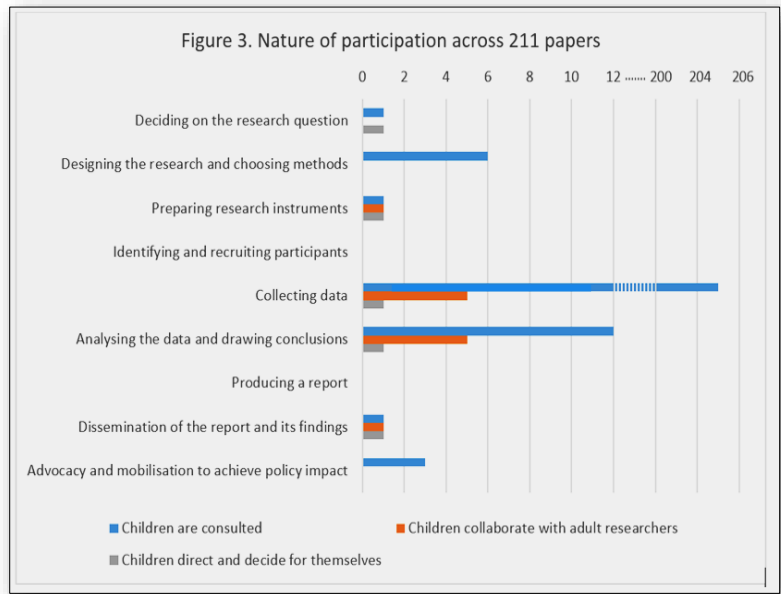
● Applying the matrix to the collaborative project

● Applying the matrix to the children's research project

Phases of research process

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



In the vast majority of studies reviewed, children were not involved at all 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)

COMBINED IN THE MATRIX...

- Applying the matrix to the collaborative project
- Applying the matrix to the children's research project
- The norm for involving children in research (as verified by Grace et al in Australia)

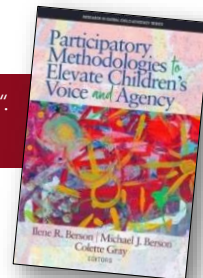
Phases of research process

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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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4. 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

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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.

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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, 2022b, p 38)



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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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