Supporting children as researchers

My story in four chapters

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OVERVIEW

CHAPTER 1   1993-2000: Article 31
Children's Consultancy in the UK

CHAPTER 2   2001-2009: CESESMA
Children's Consultancy in Nicaragua

CHAPTER 3   2011-2012: We want to live without violence
Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents

CHAPTER 4   2012-2018: Developing Partnerships with Children
An analytical tool

Slides 3-10: Photos by PLAYTRAIN, featuring young consultants in The UK, 1998-2000. Other photos by CESESMA, featuring young researchers in Nicaragua, 2007-2015. All photos taken and reproduced with permission of the young researchers featured and the supporting organisation.
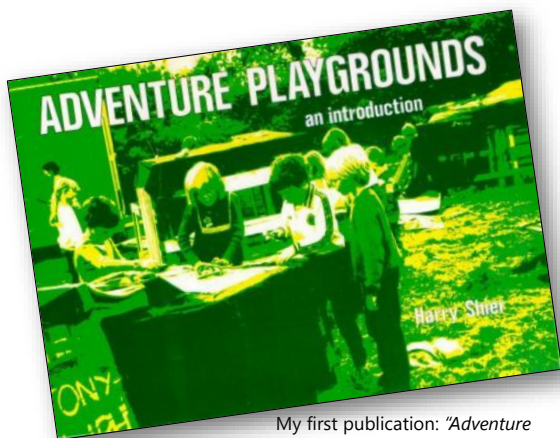
CHAPTER 1: 1993-2000

ARTICLE 31: CHILDREN'S CONSULTANCY IN THE UK

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This all started in Australia in 1993...

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

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

This experience changed the course of my life.

I realised that, whatever issue you are concerned about, children's rights provides both an underpinning framework and an overarching approach – which I have been committed to ever since

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1994, Article 31 Conference

On my return to the UK I formed an action committee to organise the first Article 31 Conference (June 1994)

The Article 31 Conference led to the Article 31 Action Pack

[Shier (ed) 1995]

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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.
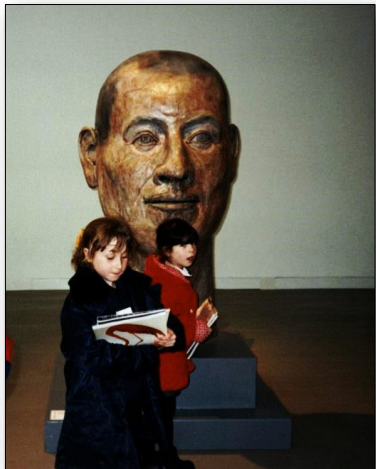
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So where do we find the experts?

"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)

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.

9

2000

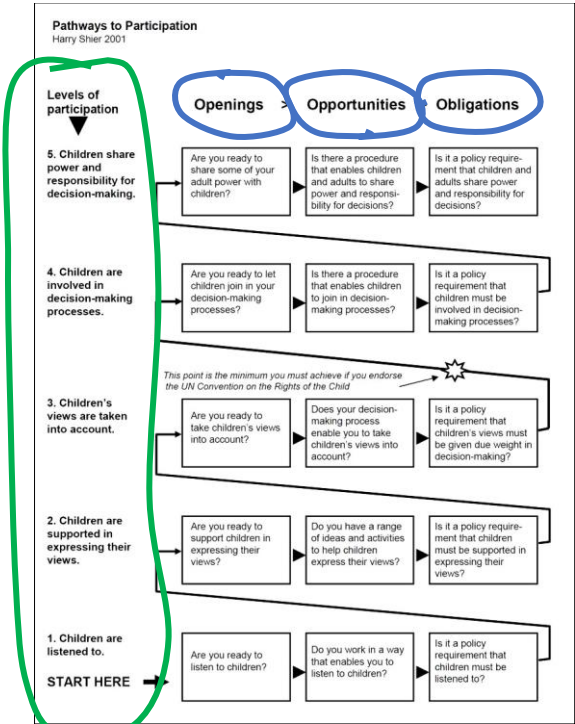Child Consultants advise managers at the Tower of London on how to make it less boring.

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Emergence of a new analysis

Shier, H (2001). Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations. *Children & Society,* 15: 107-117

Pathways to Participation
Harry Shier 2001

CHAPTER 2: 2001-2009
CESESMA

CHILDREN'S CONSULTANCY IN NICARAGUA

Three weeks after "Pathways" was published, I arrived in Nicaragua...

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.

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Children become expert consultants in Nicaragua

2007: National conference on violence against children. The organisers needed an expert to do the keynote speech. Who should they ask? Someone from UNICEF, or from Save the Children?

We said, "Why shouldn't children do the keynote speech? They are experts in the topic of violence against children".

And so a team of child coffee workers from Santa Martha coffee plantation became the first child consultants in Nicaragua
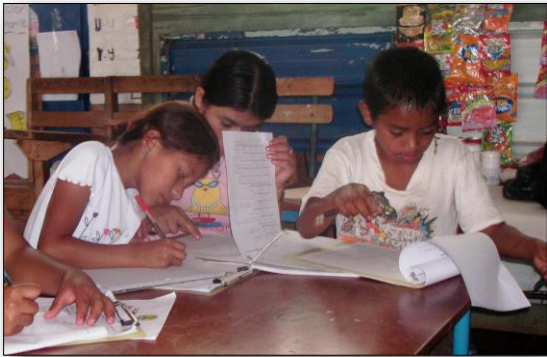
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Preparation

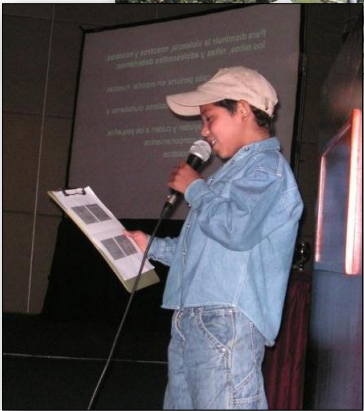Field research

Data analysis

Preparing a final report

Rehearsing the formal presentation

Drawing up recommendations

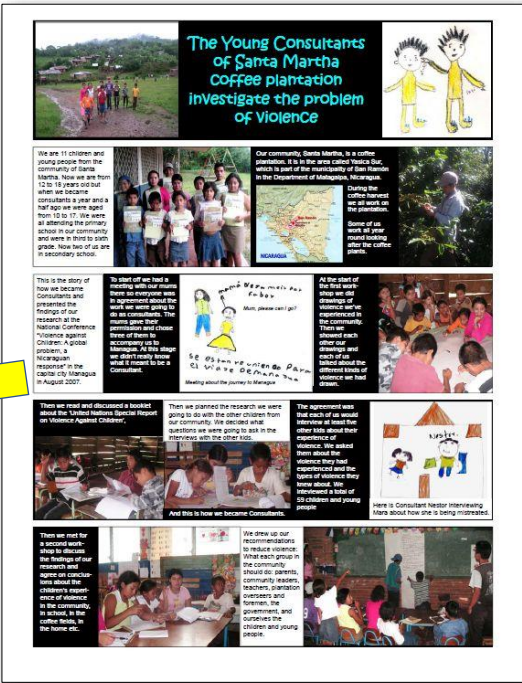## Journey to the national conference in the capital city, Managua

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A direct challenge to the Minister for the Family...

...and to all the conference delegates

The following year the children retold their experience in words and pictures in "*A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation*".
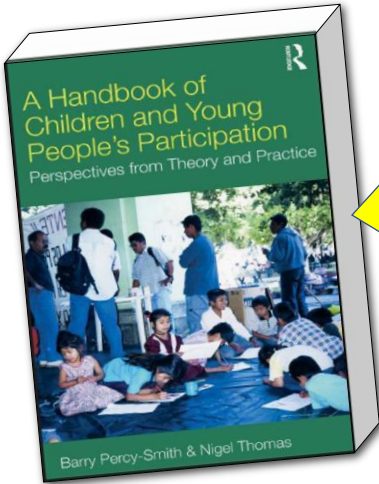
CHAPTER 3: 2010-2012
WE WANT TO LIVE WITHOUT
VIOLENCE

**TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH
BY CHILDREN AND
ADOLESCENTS**

21 21

From 2010 onwards, we called the child investigators "*researchers*" rather than "*consultants*".

They had started investigating and taking action on issues they identified in their own communities, rather than advising adults from other organisations.

(Shier, 2015)
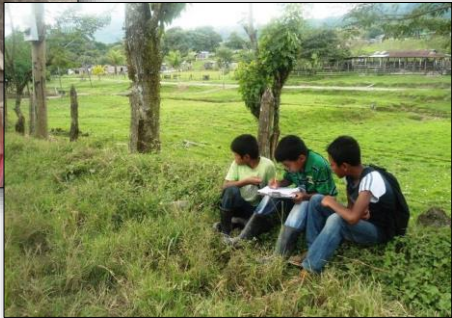
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"We want to live without violence"

Children from Yúcul formed a research team and chose 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.
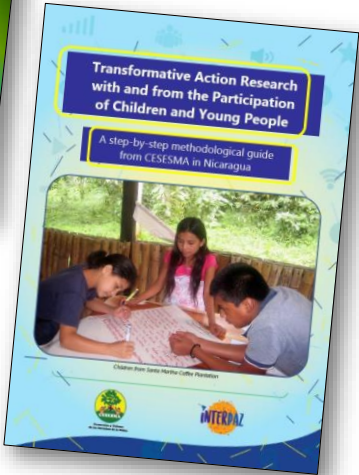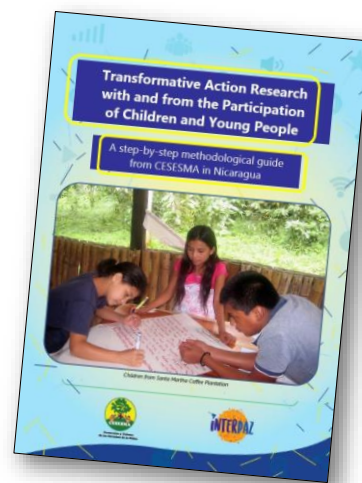

Finally, last year we published a step-by-step methodological guide.

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

Methodological steps in Transformative Action Research

1. Identification and selection of children and young people to form a research team
2. Organisational preconditions for convening a research team of children and young people
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. Design the research
8. Design and development of the research instruments
9. Preparations for field research
10. Preparation of young researchers
11. Field research
12. Data management and analysis
13. Reaching a consensus on conclusions
14. Formulating recommendations
15. Writing the report
16. Drawing up an action plan
17. Actions to disseminate findings
18. Evaluation of the Transformative Action Research process

Transformative Action Research with and from the Participation of Children and Young People

A step-by-step methodological guide from CESESMA in Nicaragua

CHAPTER 4: 2012-2018
DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS
WITH CHILDREN

AN ANALYTICAL TOOL

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In 2012 I returned to my native land, enticed by the offer of a funded PhD studentship at Queen's University Belfast

- My topic was to research children's perceptions of their rights at school in Nicaragua.

- My methodology was to apply the **Transformative Research by Children and Adolescents** approach we had developed in Nicaragua.

- My challenge was to make this child-led approach work within the rigorous constraints of a PhD study.

- In 2013 I returned to Nicaragua to mobilise a new team of child researchers... *(Shier, 2016)*

Team-building

Sharing experiences

Informing the parents

Planning the field research

Peer-to-peer interviewing in the community
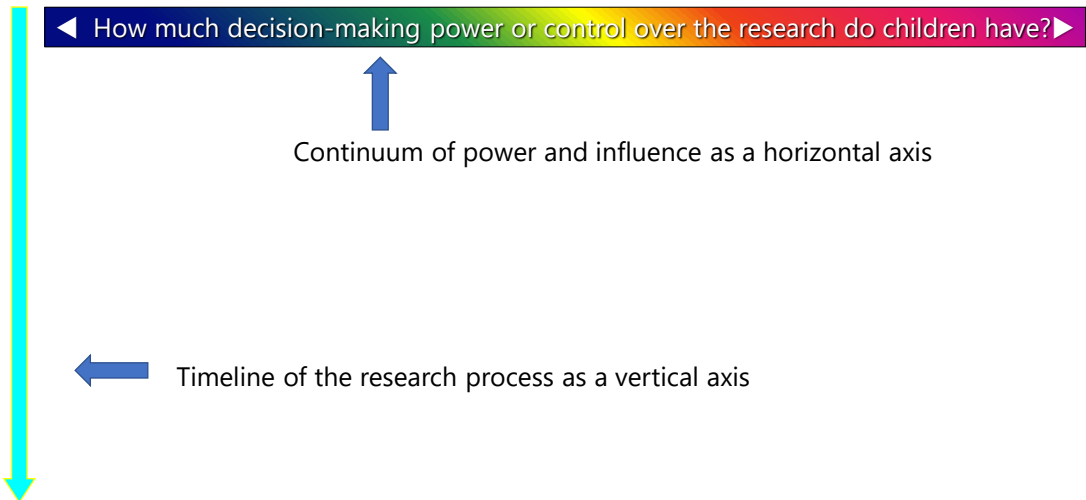
Data-analysis

Posing

Creating a final report

Presenting the findings to an international audience of senior officials from Save-the-Children

This experience inspired the development of a new 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 axis: Phases of the research process as a timeline

1. Identify a research question: problem analysis, consultation.
   ▼
2. Develop research design, select (or develop) method-ology, 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...

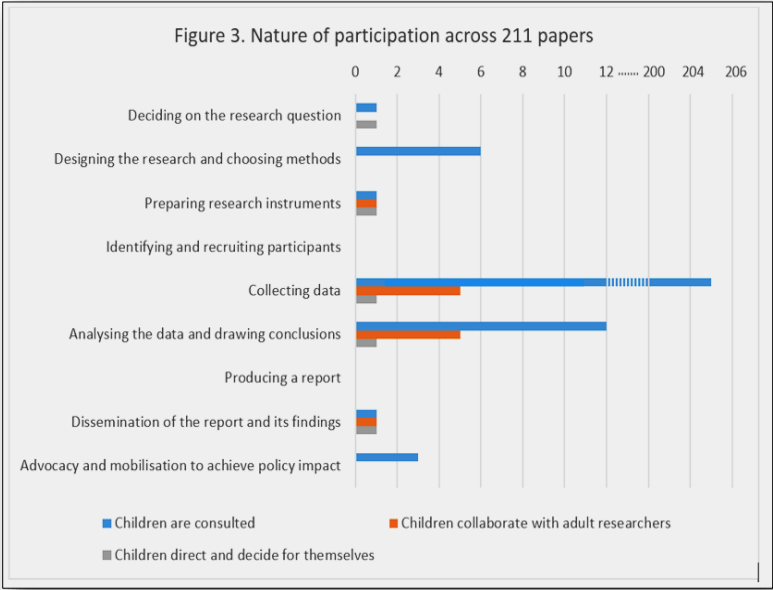| Phases of research process	◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ▶				Who is involved and who is excluded?
	Children are not involved	Consulted	Collaborate with adult researchers	Child initiated or directed (Led by us…)	
Deciding on the research question		Children 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?

COMBINED IN THE MATRIX...

- Applying the matrix to the Yucul children's research project

Phases of research process

How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have?	Children are not involved	Consulted	Collaborate with adult researchers	Child initiated or directed / Led by us…	Who is involved and who is excluded?
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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 children's research project

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

Phases of research process

	◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ►				Who is involved and who is excluded?
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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**
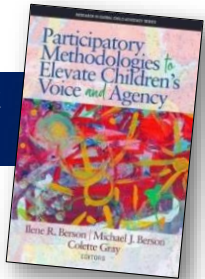
❑ DO use it as a tool for planning research projects involving children.

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

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Young Consultants of Santa Martha. (2010). The Young Consultants of Santa Martha coffee plantation investigate the problem of violence. In B. Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation: Perspectives from theory and practice* (pp. 228–229). Routledge. http://www.cesesma.org/documentos/CESESMA-Young_Consultants_of_Santa_Martha.pdf