

Participatory research with children and young people: philosophy, possibilities and perils

Author: Jill Clark, Bsc. (Hons.), MPhil

Position: Senior Research Associate

Mailing Address: School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne and Wear,
United Kingdom
NE1 7RU
Email: Jill.Clark@ncl.ac.uk

Biographical Sketch: Jill has worked as an academic researcher for 12 years. Although now working in the field of educational research, Jill has a strong background in Social Sciences research. Her first degree is in Behavioural Sciences and she then completed her postgraduate degree in Criminology at Cambridge University. Her professional interests focus very much on those issues and factors which can be called 'out of school' but which inevitably may affect the performance, attitudes and behaviour of young people in school.

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on the involvement of children and young people¹ in participatory action research *as* researchers rather than merely subjects *in* and *of* research, with a particular reference to the discipline of education within the United Kingdom. In the UK, there has been an increasing focus on outcomes, content and delivery, and the ‘voice’ of teachers and pupils has largely been ignored and unheard. This review paper outlines the philosophy and characteristics of participatory research, including the issues of power and empowerment, alongside the methodological, practical, and ethical considerations that apply to involving young participants, particularly pupils, as researchers. Projects and case studies of participatory research involving children and young people are used to highlight the potential benefits to research and the researchers themselves.

Key Words:

Review

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Participatory research with children and young people: philosophy, possibilities and perils.

Introduction

The underlying philosophies of participatory research are that it gives a 'voice' to those being researched, by questioning the acquisition and usefulness of knowledge, the power relationship between the researchers and the researched, and the stance of the 'objective' researcher. At an academic level, participative research challenges conventional ideas about what is useful knowledge, who should have that knowledge and how it should be produced and disseminated (Hobbiss *et al.* 1998). Participative research is thought to produce knowledge in a social constructionist way, that is useful to those people whose situation is being researched, alongside the dispersal of power that 'professional' researchers have within more traditional research processes (Dodson and Baker, 1995).

Empowerment of both the researchers and the researched is key for those concerned with social justice, and within social work research, for example, the emphasis of involving participants in conducting research is often on empowering disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities (Martin 1995) and battered women (Hart and Bond 1995).

Although discussed under many headings such as participatory action research, community research, community-based research, etc. – participatory research is not new. The participatory approach arose out of efforts in East Africa in the 1970s (CCEA 1991)². This paper aims to provide a review of this particular approach, with a specific reference to children and young people and education. Whilst many articles now focus on empirical and theoretical research, literature reviews have been less popular. However, this paper will be particularly pertinent to those researchers new to the field, and issues which will be discussed include the theoretical underpinnings of participatory research, the factors and issues to consider when attempting to involve children in research, and examples of 'good practice' alongside case studies which highlight the potential benefits for both the children and the research teams. The review starts from the social constructionist perspective that we cannot know reality apart from our interpretations of it, rather than the objectivist stance of being objective and neutral. As with any review paper, the bibliography is comprehensive and will provide an excellent starting point for those researchers new to participatory research.

Participatory Research

A major feature of participatory research is that there is less emphasis on objectivity. Historically, an underlying assumption in most research methodology textbooks is that those being asked to conduct research normally have some level of experience or knowledge of actually doing research and that the individual will normally be an 'outsider' (Robson, 1993). However, more recent debates in research have centred on questioning the objectivity of the researcher. The value of ethnography and the need to be reflexive in research is discussed eloquently by Hammersley and Atkinson

(1995) and other researchers suggest that as ethnographers, we can never be fully outside or inside the 'community', we are researching (Naples, 1997).

Participatory research was initially regarded as an alternative social science research methodology. The distance between the researcher and the researched, the dichotomy of the subject and object, the reliance on statistical and quantifiable techniques all were subjected to a comprehensive critique (Hall *et al.* 1982). Participatory methods use flexibility to allow for different groups within a community to articulate complex and non-quantifiable cause-and-effect processes, and has a potential and a role that goes beyond simply augmenting and complementing 'conventional' research (Holland and Blackburn 1998). Chambers (1992) describes participatory research as if community participants are handed the 'stick of authority', presenting, analysing and interpreting their own reality in the field.

Why are children and young people important?

If we are to move away from the traditional view of the truly 'objective' and 'independent', usually academic, researcher, and if we are genuinely interested in researching children and young people, then why not involve children and/or young people as researchers? Kirby (1999) claims that involving young people as researchers is a good way of collecting good quality research data, and is entirely appropriate and proper if, for example, an academic researcher wishes to carry out in-depth research about the lives of young people. Other researchers, such as Alderson (1995), agree and Kirby (1999) offers an excellent discussion of why any researcher (be they academic, practitioner, etc.) would consider including young people as researchers, and contains a very practical guide to involving young people as researchers.

There is a substantial body of literature reporting successfully completed research projects in which young people and children have been involved (see Clark, *et al.* 2001). The level of involvement varies, and the range of participatory research projects undertaken represent many fields and specialities, and include mental and community health, drug resistance strategies, care-leavers, social work, disabled and ethnic minority children. Although the premise of participatory research is to focus on the 'consumer' - which is certainly not a recent discovery within these disciplines mentioned - education is somewhat behind in its commitment to involving children (as students and pupils) in participatory research. As Flutter & Ruddock (2004: xi) state, '... in education, providers and policy-makers have been slower to realise the potential of consulting "consumers"'.

However, recently there has been an increase in the involvement of pupils in educational research (Kirby 2001b) and limited examples exist (see Cuninghame *et al.*, 1999; Warren, 2000 and De Winter *et al.*, 1999). Children and young people are increasingly regarded as a group for whom having greater power and knowledge, and consequentially, a 'voice' is vitally important. Political changes have attempted to bring children and young people to the fore and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that children are entitled to have their voice heard regarding situations and contexts that affect them. However, this appears to have been more accepted in legal and social work practice than in education. Depressingly, as

recent as 1991, Fullan asked of education, 'What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?' (Fullan, 1991: 170).

Similarly, Kerr *et al.* (2002) carried out a study in 28 countries – which included the United Kingdom – and found that only one quarter of students were encouraged to voice their opinions about schooling. Europe has recognised the need for this to be redressed and the European Commission's 2001 White Paper 'A new impetus for European Youth' proposed that there is: '... an urgent need to increase young people's participation in the process of change both within and outside the school system'. There are several educationalists that are beginning to speak out in support of the need to actively involve students in the research process (Fielding 2004; Kerr *et al.* 2002).

At the same time, investigating pupils' perceptions and attitudes is not a new idea in education research (Mieto 1994) and this idea of pupil consultation and the pupil voice movement (see Fielding 2001b; 2004) in education can, argue Flutter and Ruddock (2004), offer a different path for the future development of education:

The issues currently attracting policy-makers' and media attention – such as truancy, male underachievement and classroom discipline – may look rather different when viewed through the lens of pupil perspectives. (Flutter and Ruddock, 2004: 6)

Researchers such as Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000: 61) argue that it is essential within education to listen and consult with children: 'the reality experienced by children and young people in educational settings cannot be fully comprehended by inference and assumption.'

However, involving children and young people in research, in particular, as researchers, is easier said than done. There are many issues and factors which can influence the success (or not) of participatory research, for example, just how involved can children be? What are the benefits for them and the research? What are the ethics of such an approach? The following section highlights these issues, drawing on specific examples of participatory projects and research case studies as evidence.

Full participation or tokenism?

Participatory research is particularly relevant to those individuals, groups or communities whom we regard as 'silent', vulnerable, disempowered, poor and disadvantaged. However, involvement in the research, or consultation with those researched, is not regarded as 'enough'. Going beyond this, there is a strong commitment in participatory research for those involved to be *fully* participative, and beyond the perfunctory:

Tokenism is a particularly difficult issue to deal with because it is often carried out by adults who are strongly concerned with giving children a voice but have not begun to think carefully and self-critically about doing so. The result is that they design projects in which children seem to have a voice but in

fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, or no time to formulate their own opportunities. (Hart, 1997: 41)

De Koning and Martin (1996) state that there are various definitions of participatory research where:

- the researcher and research community design the research together
- researchers design the study and then collect data with the help of the community
- the community works closely with the assistance of a non-governmental organisation.

Other research literature suggests that there are different levels of participation. Hart (1992) talks of eight levels of young people's participation in projects (which includes research projects) and these are depicted by using a ladder metaphor. Hart (1992) argues for full participation of children and young people and not tokenism. If we are to design, develop and conduct research with young people that is truly participatory, therefore, we must, it seems, involve young people and/or children in all aspects of the research. Hart (1992) argues that young people can, if they feel some sense of ownership, design and manage complex projects – which includes at least partially designing the goals of the project themselves – demonstrate great competence.

De Koning and Martin (1996) argue that participatory research should occur at all stages of the research, should serve the shared interests of both researchers and the researched, and should emphasise the process of knowledge production.

A similar model to that of Hart, but which is specific to education – 'The ladder of pupil participation' - is proposed by Flutter and Ruddock (2004), and is based on five rungs 0-4, and describes the various levels a pupil can participate in school:

- 0 = pupils not consulted
- 1 = listening to pupils
- 2 = pupils as active participants
- 3 = pupils as researchers
- 4 = pupils as fully-active and co-researchers.

Flutter and Ruddock highlight the importance of 'consultation' with pupils and the change in role that this can bring about:

Consultation offers a means by which the young learners can be invited into a conversation about teaching and learning so that their role changes from being an "object" of research attention to one of active participation. (Flutter & Ruddock, 2004: 20).

Within education during the last decade, there has been an increasing focus on content and delivery within the classroom, alongside many external initiatives that target outcomes. In the UK Ofsted³ inspections, the Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) performance tables (aka league tables), target-setting, etc., have dominated the classroom, leaving teachers feeling like they are the problem rather than part of the solution (Myers and MacBeath, 2004). Although exploring pupils' perceptions and attitudes is not new, earlier researchers held the view that pupils are 'sources of data whose behaviour and responses should simply be studied, measured and recorded'

(Flutter & Ruddock 2004: 3). However, more recently there has been a move towards putting teachers back at the centre of research, followed (more gradually) by the pupils themselves.

Although much of the literature acknowledges the valuable contribution that children and young people generally can make 'to' research (Hood *et al.* 1996, Mahon *et al.* 1996, Morrow and Richards 1996), research such as Alderson (1995), Ward (1997) and Kirby (2001a) believe that young people and children can be much more active participants in the research process. Academics in the education field are now also becoming aware of the benefits of involving pupils/students in research (Nixon *et al.* 1996) and talk of pupil views playing a valuable part in promoting changes in both teaching and learning (Gross 1997).

The ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme has funded research projects under the theme '*Consulting pupils about teaching and learning*' and there are now examples of research projects that involve pupils as researchers and co-researchers. Funded through this programme, the work of Flutter and Ruddock (2004) highlights particular case studies of schools involving pupils as researchers and co-researchers. They report that in some schools, pupils have been given the opportunities to set the agenda of enquiry (Crane, 2001) to take on roles as researchers or co-researchers and to support teachers in monitoring and evaluating outcomes of the initiatives. Harding (2001) – a pupil researcher himself – argues that being both a pupil and researcher not only helped him to remain at school, but that it '... deepened his engagement with education' (p.56).

Motivation

Motivation is a key issue, and if the research idea comes from adults, it is important to consider what will motivate the children and young people to take part (Kirby 1999). Issues to consider might be whether they are interested in the research topic and whether it is relevant to their own lives; how will they benefit; how much time they will need to spend; the level of support offered. The attitudes of the researchers (or adults) can also influence motivation, and according to Green *et al.*, should not be underestimated:

The key to participatory research lies not with any given method, but rather, in the attitudes of researchers, which in turn affect how and for whom the research is constructed and conducted. (Green *et al.* 2001: 28).

Young people who have a fully participatory role in the research will inevitably affect their commitment to the research, which could, in turn, influence their motivation. Saunders and Broad (1997) report on research that examined the health needs of young people leaving care, who were involved throughout the research process. They believed that young care leavers would be more likely to talk with their peers rather than another 'professional'. In addition, Saunders and Broad (1997: i) argued that the young people would be actively involved as trained researchers and as steering group members because 'young people are best suited to assessing their own needs, and finding creative ways of meeting them.' A key feature of this research project was that the young people were trained, and helped to design, the interview schedule that they

were then going to use. There was a strategy for supporting the young people - they could also drop out at any time - which included a debriefing session after each interview. This helped to offer support to the young people when distressing emotions and feelings of anxiety arose from the interview experience. Saunders and Broad (1997: viii) concluded that the young people involved in the research were '... thoughtful, articulate, creative, sensitive, resourceful, and, surprisingly, hopeful.'

Ethics

Depending on the definition of 'young people', there may be ethical considerations on involving young people in research. Morrow and Richards (1996) offer a good discussion on the ethics associated in involving children (i.e., those under 18) and Alderson (1995) offers an excellent debate on the ethics of children and research. Important features mentioned in such literature are informed consent and protection of research respondents. When debating whether to involve young people in research as researchers is, according to Mahon *et al.* (1996: 149), the decision should be judged '... on the basis of the research topic, the research methods, and the degree of skill and responsibility (and hence, age or maturity) required of the researcher.'

The commissioners of research should consider and question what benefits they expect to gain from the involvement of young people as researchers. Within some research, there was an expectation that the young researchers' friendship networks would produce some participants (Laws *et al.* 1999). However, this expected 'snowballing' effect did not happen - the researchers did not know many other young people who used mental health services, the particular focus of this research.

The main issue of concern ethically is the 'structural vulnerability' (Lansdown, 1994) of young people (especially those under the age of 18) which makes it hard for them to give informed consent in a process which may well be initiated, if not dominated, by adults. Additionally, young people may 'stray out of their depth' and become exposed to distressing emotions which may highlight their own difficulties (France, (2000); (Kane, 1996); Morris (1998) and Saunders and Broad (1997).

De Koning and Martin (1996: 3) maintain that the experiences of participants should not just be 'a situation where local people work with a researcher for the latter's convenience.'

The researcher - researched relationship

Other research literature refers to the relationship and status of the researcher, and it is worth considering that the simple fact of a young person becoming a researcher can change their identity. Setting up a formal research situation (e.g. an in-depth interview) can shift the researcher-researched relationship so that the young researchers are no longer perceived as 'peers', but attain the status of 'researchers'. As with any research, young researchers may find that some interviewees are uninterested in the research interview (Saunders and Broad 1997, Precht 1998) and young people may tell other young people what they think is needed rather than what they really think (Precht 1998). This is also true in the classroom, where young pupils

can be influenced by the interview situation and are more likely to give answers that 'please' the interviewer, particularly where the interviewer is also their class teacher (Dochrell *et al* 2000). Ways around this problem include asking children to act as interviewers and involving external researchers.

Although extremely dated, Simmel (1921) contends that people will share confidences with a 'stranger' (as opposed to an 'insider') that they may not share with friends and acquaintances. Much more recently, Kirby (1999) reports that there is a lack of research which asks young people who they would like to be interviewed by and how this is affected by the topic being researched.

Further benefits that young people can bring to a research project are outlined in the excellent work of Kirby (1999). These include:

- the ability of talking the same 'language'
- being able to talk about 'taboo' subjects with peers
- ability to share common experiences
- being on the same side
- in addition, knowing others.

In addition, Kirby maintains that young respondents may feel less intimidated by young researchers.

With regards to the area of 'mental health' at least, it may be that young people would, in fact, not prefer to talk to 'someone like them' (Laws *et al.* 1999). Equally, the young researchers themselves could be expected to have 'more than their share of problems as well.' However, Laws *et al.* (1999: 17) go on to say that they felt that the young people were more at ease talking to someone who had been through similar experiences.

Research by young people, and with other young people (16-21) leaving care, was conducted by West in 1995. The research was designed and carried out by a group of young people who had themselves been in care, and had an important benefit of drawing out the views of young people they interviewed about their experience of leaving care. The interviewees reported that they felt comfortable talking with their peers, and especially felt a rapport with other young people who understood and felt their experiences and circumstances.

Building on both the subject matter of this research and the philosophy underpinning it, Hobbiss *et al.* (1998) offer another clear example. They define young people as being under the age of twenty-five, and although small-scale and locally based, their research focuses on the issue of young people living in, and leaving, residential care and their attitudes and experiences of food and diet. A key feature of their work is that young people guided its development and conducted the fieldwork. Hobbiss *et al.* (1998: 62) worked from the assumptions that the young people would be:

- 'experts on their own lives'
- able to relate to other young people better than adults
- less intimidating than other adults
- able to talk the same language
- more able to know when the respondent was 'pissing about' or not and

- able to make the interview situation ‘informal’.

Hobbiss *et al.* maintained that it was essential for the young people to be involved in the research throughout, and claimed that the personal reflections of the young people offered unique, invaluable insights into the research process.

Developing skills and research training

Having the necessary skills and experience to actually conduct research is important, and is referred to in much of the literature about ‘doing participatory research’. There is the general view that certain skills must be present for anyone to conduct ‘good’ research, be they young, old, an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’. Within qualitative research, where there is often more scope for subjectivity and personal investment, the skills and characteristics of the researcher and the effects on the interviewee and the research are well documented (Robson, 1993). Anyone conducting research should have some relevant skills and experience in order to reduce potential biases and maintain a level of standardisation (and therefore reliability), and professionalism. This assumption is equally (if not more) important when involving young people as researchers. The importance of providing training cannot be ignored:

Continuous training, support and supervision are all essential to ensure data is collected accurately, and to ensure that people understand the use of the information they are recording (Gosling and Edwards, 1995: 93).

Dodson and Baker (1995) offer an interesting discussion about how the community researchers in their research wanted to be viewed as ‘experts’. Having received considerable training in research methods and techniques, Dodson and Baker (1995: 11) acknowledged that the methods used would be ‘scrutinised, not just as research techniques, but also because of who they were, local people and not “professionals”’.

The work of Laws *et al.* (1999) reports on a peer research project that was set up to look into young people’s experiences of using mental health services. It was essentially participatory research, and the young people (aged 16-25) were trained and employed as the key researchers. The research was designed in co-operation with the young people, and they took part in a training programme to give them the tools to understand the research process. They were trained in research methods with the expectation that through training, the young people would gain enough understanding of the research process to be able to have a say in how the work was done.

Aside from the potential benefits to the research process itself, the possible benefits to the young people who participate is well-documented. The research of Hays and Kirby (1998) illustrates some positive qualities of young people conducting research, and argues that young people were allowed to have a voice. Additionally, peer research (for example young people researching other young people rather than young people researching adults) can allow peers to talk about shared experiences (Ash *et al.*, 1996) and can act as role models to their peers (Precht 1998).

Kirby (1999) argues that involvement in research can lead to a general sense of increased participation, and can be one way of involving young people as citizens. It

can increase their knowledge and access to decision-making structures. Saunders and Broad (1997) reported that the involvement of young people as researchers led to a sense of achievement and a greater understanding of the care system and how professionals worked.

On a more individual level, Kirby (1999) also talks of the potential for involvement to improve the personal development of young people. There appears to be a general view that the research experience (as researchers) can increase the personal development of the young researchers themselves and help them to gain knowledge, skills and confidence. Precht (1998) reports several benefits for young people, such as improved confidence, development of new skills such as listening, understanding, inter-personal communication, etc. (see also Kirby 1999). Hall and Hall (1996) talk of social sciences research in terms of opportunities for researchers to develop and exercise various personal transferable skills, such as oral communication, teamwork, motivation, initiative, leadership, organising ability, etc. Similarly, there can be benefits for community members as researchers, as reported by Dodson and Baker (1995). They reported that participants had learned valuable new skills, they became a confident and vocal group in terms of their own knowledge of research, were able to critically comment upon other people's research, rather than taking it as fact.

The hidden costs

Involving young people as researchers in a research study can be expensive. It can take considerable time, effort, energy, planning and money to fully involve young people as researchers. Factors which should not be ignored (in either a practical sense or a financial one) include the identification of potential young researchers; recruitment; training; piloting; evaluation of performance; collection of data and payment of services. Kirby (1999: 29) states: 'It should not therefore be thought of as a fast and cheap alternative to 'professional research'. Of particular importance is the quality of the research – if this is not high, then the method of using young researchers is expensive, and the research might be of less use to inform policy and practice. These points are reiterated by Dodson and Baker (1995: 32) who argue that it is:

... misleading and untrue to see research carried out by communities to be a 'cheap' way of doing research. Resources are essential in making sure that the research is completed in such a way that it achieves its original aims and objectives without exploiting local people.

Another point made by Morris (1998) is that it is very important to pay young people for their time and expertise and will help to ensure that consultation is not a token gesture, but is taken seriously by both those being consulted and those doing the consultation. Payment, Morris argues, gives the message, 'We value your views' and it also says, 'We expect you to take this seriously.'

Support mechanisms

The issue of support for the young people who become researchers should not be ignored. Saunders and Broad (1997) in their research project looking at young people leaving the care system, reported that the young people as researchers felt responsible for the interviewees. They were worried when the interview made the interviewee upset, and felt badly about bringing up past events and then leaving people, and felt a counsellor should have been provided. For the interviewers themselves, the interview also brought up issues which meant something to them, and 'they found it hard to just swallow their feelings and carry on' Saunders and Broad (1997: 65). We therefore cannot afford to ignore the recommendations made firstly by Morris (1998: 48), and secondly by Kane (1996: 107):

It is important that research projects offer follow-up support and advice, and identify a strategy for passing things on.

The most vulnerable are probably the participants in your research, and the repercussions of your research on them must always be the first consideration.

The work of Morris (1998) examined the views and experiences of disabled children and young people (15-24 years old), which is more about involving young people in the research rather than as researchers. Despite this, an important supportive feature of this research was the participation of a 'reference group', who had a key role in the whole research process. This group was comprised of six young disabled people aged between 16 and 30, who had experienced being away from home as children.

Exploitation or empowerment?

Holland and Blackburn (1998: 192) make an interesting point, which is about disempowering the powerful in order to empower the powerless, and they say:

... it is more difficult for 'us' to disempower 'ourselves' than to empower 'them', local people... there is a tendency for power to get stuck at every level, often with corrupting outcomes. University researchers, for instance, may become élites and advocates, retaining control over what they believe are community perceptions.

Kane *et al.* (1998: 32) are concerned that research is about 'how to give something back to the community in what have been, so far, data-collection missions. They trained 13 Gambians (all young people) in various research techniques, to carry out research, analyse the material, produce a study on constraints on, and options for, girls' education, and make recommendations for action.

Other works refer to the issue of empowerment as a possible outcome of involving young people as researchers. Allard (1996: 166) argues that for empowerment to take place rather than 'exploitation', the following components should be in place:

- a genuine desire to listen to what young people have to say
- a group of young people who want to be involved and are concerned about the issue and
- at least one worker with enough skill and courage to work with young people on what they want to do or say.

Allard (1996: 167) argues that allowing and enabling young people to play an active role in research can be empowering, and can lead on to a role in policy development:

...changing things is not easy and you need to exert all the influence you have got – and the genuine voice of those who have actually experienced the impact of current policy is one of the most effective forms of persuasion around.

Barriers to participation?

Research by Treseder (1997) into the views of young people in care, however, indicates that effective participation in decision-making processes is not yet a reality for substantial numbers of young people in care. Treseder (1997: 24) goes on to report a series of ‘common myths’ about children and young people regarding involvement and participation, and that they:

- don’t really want to be involved
- are not representative
- are irrational
- are unreasonable
- are too emotional.

However, Treseder offers a very thorough practical illustration on empowerment and participation and what this can mean for both professionals and children and young people. He refers to various case studies and offers practical ‘checklists’ and ‘exercises’. Treseder argues that these so-called common myths are exactly that, and that the reality is very different, and much is dependent on the views and positive attitudes of professionals who may also be involved in the research.

Boyden and Ennew (1997) offer a practical resource: a manual for participatory research with children (taken as being any person under 18 years old), where they question the role of the ‘traditional researcher’. It includes an exploration of research methods that involve participants, whether children or adults, and argue that in defining participation, it lies in understanding the difference between participation in the sense of ‘taking part in’ - or being present - and knowing that one’s actions are taken note of and may be acted upon – sometimes called ‘empowerment’. Boyden and Ennew (1997: 38) say that it could be argued that:

... participatory research is also the best approach to use in research with adults who are less verbally articulate or less powerful than researchers – which means in almost all social science research entailing direct contact with human subjects.

Listen and learn

An inevitable feature of research that genuinely involves young people, is that those young people are able to express opinions and views on their experience of being researchers. Much of the literature available has some evidence of these views, and is often written in a way where they can be used as guidelines. For example, in the work

of Laws *et al.* (1999) they outline the experiences and reactions of the young people involved in the study, who said that:

- there were not enough young researchers involved
- they felt under pressure to do many interviews in a short time
- they did not get enough say in the design of the research
- they found the interviews stressful and upsetting.

Similarly, the work of Morris (1998) highlighted many difficulties of involving a specialist group of young people in the research – in this case disabled children. Morris concluded that any research project or other activity seeking to involve disabled children and young people needs to allow for very long 'lead-in' times for setting up visits. Morris (1998: 35) also argued that the use of authority figures such as teachers and/or key workers as facilitators could cause problems, and could work against the whole nature of the research being participatory as 'these are barriers to research, which of course merely reflect barriers in the daily lives of the young people concerned.'

Conclusion

There is undoubtedly a wealth of literature which is concerned with involving young people and children in research, firstly as participants, and secondly, and more recently, as researchers. Within the education system in the UK, however, the idea is a relatively still a new, but promising possibility. Involving children in research, therefore, raises interesting methodological, practical, and ethical issues that all researchers face.

Previous research indicates that is important to go beyond the tokenistic involvement of young people, to as full a model of participation as possible, whilst not compromising the quality of the data collected, nor the experiences of the young people concerned. The role of the young person as researcher should not be an abusive, exploitative one, nor should it be regarded as collecting data 'on the cheap.' Participatory research involving children and young people should be ethically sound, training and development should be offered and provided, alongside continual support throughout the process, as by engaging young people as researchers of other young people, we will change their role from 'peer' to researcher.

The key then, is to do it properly, and if done so, - alongside the recent political shifts to increase the rights and the 'voice' of children in all aspects of society - then participatory action research with children as researchers could well fit the bill. The school is a particular environment where the voice of the child has been completely ignored rather than just 'unheard', and again, if done well, such research may help to remedy this fact whilst encouraging a shift away from a purely outcome-driven view of schooling.

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¹Where 'children' alone is used, this mostly refers to those under 18 years of age, and where 'young people' alone are referred to, this usually refers to any person over 16 years of age, and usually up to the age of 25 years old.

² This work by CCEA provides a full bibliography about participatory research from all over the world, and Holland and Blackburn (1998) offer an edited collection of papers that includes an exploration of case studies in which participatory methods and approaches have been used to influence policy.

³ Ofsted, (the Office for Standards in Education) Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department established under the Education (Schools) Act 1992 to take responsibility for the inspection of all schools in England. Its role also includes the inspection of local education authorities, teacher training institutions and youth work. During 2001, Ofsted became responsible for inspecting all 16-19 education and for the regulation of early years childcare, including childminders.