

Small Shoes, Big Steps! Empowering Children as Active Researchers

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Abstract The concept of children as researchers has gained credence in response to changing perspectives on their status in society, recognition of their role as consumers and increased attention to children's rights. While this has led to greater involvement of children as participant and co-researchers, research *led by* children—research they design, carry out and disseminate themselves with adult support rather than adult management—is still relatively rare. Children designing and leading their own research opens up new protagonist frontiers. Children are party to the sub-culture of childhood which gives them a unique “insider” perspective critical to our understanding of their worlds. Child-to-child enquiry generates different data from adult-to-child enquiry because children observe with different eyes, ask different questions and communicate in fundamentally different ways. This paper explores some of the issues in empowering children as active researchers and draws on theory relating to participation, empowerment, voice and emancipation. Its primary focus is to celebrate and value children's own research and includes the full text of an original research study by an 11-year-old girl.

Keywords Children as researchers · Child voice · Child participation · Children's rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) require that children should be informed, involved and consulted about all decisions that affect their

lives. One consequence has been increased involvement of children as participant researchers and co-researchers. This paper focuses on a step further in the participation continuum, the empowering of children as researchers in their own right. Child-to-child enquiry generates different data from adult-to-child enquiry. There is no suggestion that children's own research will or should replace child research by adults, rather that it should complement it. The nature, process and impact of child-led research are examined within theoretical frameworks of participation, empowerment, emancipation and voice and illustrated with research undertaken by an 11-year old.

Theoretical Frameworks

Children are among the highest users of state services in the Developed world, yet one of the most governed groups (Hill et al. 2004), and participation sits uncomfortably within this paradox. It is a contested concept in political and social dialogues. The reality of children's participation is neither singular nor simple and requires a process of continual adjustment to changing needs of the societies children inhabit. The shift toward increased participation has been driven by three main influences: the recognition of children as social actors, their concomitant recognition as consumers or “users” of products and services, and the increased attention paid to children's rights (Cairns and Brannen 2005; Coad and Lewis 2004; Kirby et al. 2003). There is much critical work around children's participation in research that has been undertaken globally in the last decade. A good example is Skelton (2008) who refers to this in terms of an entitlement, “If children are seen as competent social actors, then they have the right and the ability to act as participants” (p. 8).

Featuring an original research study by Manasa Patil aged 11.

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To have an understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of participation it is necessary to examine how the theoretical frameworks have been constructed. Hart's (1992) "Ladder of children's participation" was the first real attempt to define the concept and is cited and criticized in equal measure. He refers to the first three rungs on his ladder—*manipulation, decoration and tokenism*—as non-participation and describes four further rungs—*assigned but informed, consulted and informed, adult-initiated shared decisions with children, child initiated and directed*—before the eighth and top rung of the ladder: *child-initiated shared decisions with adults*. Some have found it to be a powerful evaluation tool (Pridmore 1998), whereas others criticize the implicitly sequential nature of the model (Reddy and Ratna 2002) that implies a "hierarchy of values." Treseder (1997) notes its failure to acknowledge cultural contexts. Treseder's own model of participation uses Hart's top five levels but arranges them in a circle rather than a ladder to show that they are different, but equal, forms of good participation.

Shier is the other seminal author of participation frames of reference. Shier's model (2001) focuses more on the adult roles than the status of children within projects. From the lowest level ("children are listened to") to the highest ("children share power and responsibility for decision making"), Shier frames questions for adults to consider when planning or evaluating participatory projects around "openings", "opportunities" and "obligations." He emphasises collaborative activity between adults and children to bring about the most effective participation, reflecting a Vygostkian approach to scaffolded outcomes.

Historically, children have been denied the right to make decisions about matters that affect them, being judged to be cognitively and morally incompetent (Cunningham 1996), which is epitomized in the paternalistic stance of so-called "child savers" (Archard 2004) seeking to protect children from themselves (Cockburn 2005; Franklin 2002). This perspective has been robustly challenged by liberationists who argue that even young children can make rational decisions (Hyder 2002; Lansdown 2002). Listening to children's views is not the same as sharing decision-making processes. Power held by some adults seeking children's views is evident in their control over topic, the methods used to ascertain those views, the time frames in which consultation takes place and the impact the consultation has (Miller 1997). Thus children are, to a large extent, dependent upon adults to mediate their perspectives.

What do children themselves think about participation? Graham and Fitzgerald's (2008) Australian study explored this precise question with 15 children aged 10–13 and found that the consensus view was of participation as a status issue. To the young people in their study,

participation was about being recognised for who they are in the here and now, and for their place in social and cultural life, which leads to increased levels of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. A problematic area of children's participation is ethical research practice that does not take account of the child's perspective. Children are not afforded the same rights in relation to consent issues as adults (Skelton, 2008) and, rather than opening up possibilities for participation, this can close them down. The position is further compromised by legal limitations. In the UK, children can drive a car at 17, have sex at 16, make decisions about their medical treatment from 14 (see Gillick 1985) but cannot consent to participate in research until the age of 18 without written consent from a legal guardian (Alderson and Morrow 2004).

Hart (2002) defines voice as personal perspectives, expressed both internally and interpersonally, that develop the human capacity for existential thought and choice. This is a useful, if somewhat clinical, definition but it fails to take into account social and cultural dimensions. Individual voices are not neutral; they are layered with other people's voices, and the social practices and contexts they invoke (Maybin 2001). Voice is a social construct operating in a cultural context where shared meaning is negotiated. This immediately raises problems for children's voice because in order to have influence, their voice has to transcend the cultural boundaries of childhood and negotiate a shared understanding in the adult world, yet much of children's voice is not expressed in words—least of all adult words—and the rich tapestry of their non-verbal communication frequently goes unheard.

Lundy (2007) takes the concept of children's voice much further than Hart. She conceptualises it as being constituted in four parts:

- Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views
- Audience: The view must be listened to
- Influence: The view must be acted upon as appropriate (p. 933)

This perspective depicts an explicit chronology for voice and highlights the inefficacy of voice operating in a vacuum. Creating space for children to express their views is underpinned by the "assurance" of this cited in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989). This article assumes a responsibility to be proactive, provide for, and encourage children to express their views in a safe space without fear of reprisal. Equally, children have a right to dissent—not all children want to express a view, and some are hostile to the endless round of consultations that do not lead to any tangible benefits for them. Several writers support the notion that

children's voice cannot just happen. As Lundy (2007) demonstrates, there is an important prerequisite to voice in the discursive spaces required that enable children to experiment with and develop voice. This assertion supports Lensmire's (1998) assertion of voice as "project," as requiring work to be done, and accords with the Bahktinian perspective (see Maybin 2001) of the "struggle" to make words carry meaning when they are populated with different connotations and associations. Wyness (2006) argues for child-friendly spaces to be created that reflect local needs, interests and children's preferred ways of engagement so that children's voices do not become a tool for reinforcing adult governance. Children and young people identified some of these discursive spaces as access to child-friendly information, sufficient time to digest the issues on which they will form a view, a child-led infrastructure in which to formulate their views and training for adults in how to overcome their resistance to child voice (Bennett Woodhouse 2003).

The requirement for audience emerges from another phrase in Article 12, which refers to the right of children for their views to be given "due weight." This is, arguably, the most powerful mandate in the Article because it requires adults to *listen* to children and not just *hear* what they have to say. A combination of circumstances is needed for child voice to have influence, not least of which is a pre-disposition on the part of adults to value what children have to say and to appreciate the uniqueness of their perspectives. Better understanding leads to better provision for children. This is entirely dependent on good will and explains why there are so many discrepancies in the way child voice is received globally.

The notion of child researchers as protagonists emerges from two important arenas: power and emancipation. These paths have been well-trodden by feminist, ethnic minority and disability research groups. Power issues relate to whose interests the research serves, who owns the research and whom the research is for. Emancipatory elements challenge the legitimacy of research that does not empower groups (in this case, children and young people) who are either invisible or oppressed. Hence the interests of children and young people, as a relatively powerless group, are served when they set their own agendas and lead their own research. "Those who have in the past so often been the mere objects of investigation, themselves become the agents of their own transformation" (Fielding 2004, p. 306). Historically, research is based on an adult way of looking at the world and the ensuing knowledge generated is in the adult experience. The legitimacy of research into children's worlds and children's lived experiences where the research is conceived wholly from an adult perspective is open to challenge. The research agendas children prioritise, the research questions they frame and the way in

which they collect data are substantially different from adults and can offer valuable knowledge and insight.

Barriers

Sceptics maintain that children are not competent enough to engage in their own research, and age is commonly used as a delineating factor within this competence debate. Yet, this perspective, predominantly from an earlier developmental psychology discipline, which links competence to age and developmental "stages," is being robustly challenged (Woodhead and Faulkner 2000) and supplanted by the principle that social experience is a more reliable marker of maturity and competence. Children's competence is "different from" not "lesser than" adults' competence (Solberg 1996; Waksler 1991). The claim that children do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding does not stand up to close scrutiny (Kellett 2005a; Kellett et al. 2004). Undoubtedly adults have greater knowledge than children in many areas of life but with regard to childhood itself—in the sense of what it is like to be a child—it is children who have the expert knowledge (Christensen and Prout 2002; Mayall 2000). Moreover, the substantial body of evidence from researchers who have been working with children on participatory research for more than a decade supports this position. To dismiss the research efforts of children as simplistic and conclude that adults could research the topics more effectively misses several important points:

- Children succeed in getting responses from within their peer group in ways that would not be possible for adult researchers because of power and generational issues.
- Their work adds to the body of knowledge about children's experiences from a genuine child perspective.
- The dissemination of research carried out by them and, crucially, owned by them, is an important vehicle for child voice.
- The experience of participating as active researchers is an empowering process that leads to a virtuous circle of increased confidence and raised self esteem, resulting in more active participation by children in other aspects affecting their lives.

Although children's knowledge and understanding of childhood and children's lives are evident, a genuine barrier to children engaging in research is their lack of research knowledge and skills. This impacts particularly on issues about validity and rigour. Reflecting on the skills needed to undertake research, it is apparent that these are not synonymous with being an adult; they are synonymous with being a researcher, and most researchers have

undergone some form of training. Many, perhaps most, adults would not be able to undertake research without training. Thus, a barrier to empowering children as researchers is not their lack of adult status but their lack of research skills. The task of making research process accessible to children has been the focus of ongoing research to develop and evaluate appropriate methods (see Kellett 2005b).

In the study referred to above, groups of children aged from nine upwards have participated in training programmes facilitated in a variety of settings including schools, community venues and university sites. The training programme (Kellett 2005a), specially written for children, is interactive in style and taught by University staff. Children learn about the nature of research and its different approaches, about research ethics and about how to frame a research question. They spend time practising common data collection techniques: designing valid questionnaires, doing participant and non-participant observation, learning about different types of interviews and about experimental research design. Further training instructs them in the different approaches to data analysis: data reduction and coding techniques in qualitative analysis and simple statistical operations in quantitative analysis. Through learning about research process in this way, children are able to make informed choices about research design and methods from the outset. Children lead and adults (University, school and community staff) support them with tasks such as transcribing interviews and entering data onto spreadsheets, a role reversal in that the adult is acting in the role of the child's assistant. This frees children to focus on the important design aspects of their projects and analysing their findings. An important distinction is drawn between adult support and adult management that distinguishes this kind of child-led research from children as participant or co-researchers, where they work alongside adult researchers.

Child Researchers as Protagonists

There is a growing body of research in which children's participation has protagonist outcomes. Space is limited, but one such study is the UNESCO international project involving young people in creating better city environments. It spawned a host of excellent literature in several countries including Griesel and Swart-Kruger's (1999) account that critically reviewed children's participation in building better cities in two Johannesburg sites in South Africa, as well as Driskell's (2002) manual *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth*. Such accounts illustrate the powerful part children and young people can play in constructing their own environments. Other protagonist

examples include marginalised groups of young people such as Mencap's recent project WeCan2 (2008). Here, young people with learning disabilities participated in a research project exploring youth democracy issues and created a toolkit for more effective participation of young people with a learning disability in decision-making forums. Headlines (formerly Children's Express) is a youth news agency that operates on a world stage (www.headliners.org) and The Children's Research Centre (<http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk>) trains and supports children and young people as empirical researchers. This brings us to the primary focus of this article, the valuing and celebrating of research undertaken by children themselves.

The Process of Supporting Children as Active Researchers

The research report that follows is an original study by an 11-year-old girl, Manasa Patil. Her father is a wheelchair-user, and Manasa carried out her research to raise awareness about the impact this has on everyday aspects of childhood. Manasa was one of several children from local schools attending the Children's Research Centre at the Open University, UK, where they received training in research methods from University staff. This involved learning about the nature of empirical research, ethics, data collection and analysis techniques at an accessible level for their age and ability. University staff then supported them to undertake a research study of their own choosing about something they identified as important to children and young people. The role of the adult staff was to facilitate opportunity, smooth the way with gatekeepers, and help with, for example, transcripts or graphical representation of quantitative data. Adult supporters did not manage the research; this was the responsibility of the children who designed and led their own research. This preserved the insider perspective of the child throughout the research, from concept initiation to dissemination. The adult helpers all had a strong ideological commitment to the empowerment of children and to enabling them to have a research voice. For more information on how to support children in similar ways, see Kellett (2005a).

Getting Around as the Child of a Wheelchair User: a Small-Scale Research Project Manasa Patil, Aged 11

Introduction

There is quite a lot of research about wheelchair users, young and old, but what is rarely researched is what it's

like to be the child of a wheelchair user and the impact of this on childhood itself. Because my dad is disabled and relies on a wheelchair, I have an understanding of this. So I decided to investigate this in more depth and focus on transport issues.

Methodology

I used a combination of methods to investigate this,

- I set up three specific journeys: bus, pedestrian and train and did some systematic observation on each.
- I kept a research diary.
- I put together a life narrative from my memories and experiences.

My Findings

The findings of my research are in three parts, each one relating to one of the modes of transport.

1: Getting Around by Bus

On the bus journey I made some observations and recorded them onto a dictaphone. This is a summary of what I found out along with my research diary data and my life narrative data:

We waited at the bus stop but my dad was not allowed onto the first bus. The bus driver slowed down at the stop but as soon as he saw my dad's wheelchair he started to pull away shouting that there was already a pushchair in the wheelchair space.

It was very cold and we had to wait another 15 min for a bus. This made us late. I felt really upset that the bus driver hadn't even stopped to explain properly why we couldn't get on the bus. By the time we got off the bus we were late for our appointment.

From my memories I know that this happens quite a lot. Sometimes if it's raining and the bus driver doesn't want to have to get out and put up the ramp they just don't stop even though there is a space for the wheelchair on the bus. This affects what I can do as a child out with my dad. For example once I was really excited to be going to the cinema with my dad to see the new Harry Potter film. I had wanted to see it for ages. All my friends in my class had already seen it. But we were refused entry onto the bus even though there was a space and we were very late and I missed quite a lot of the film. My special treat was ruined. It happens a lot!

There are some really helpful bus drivers but I wish it could be all of the time. For example once a bus driver didn't allow my dad on the bus because his wheelchair was battery-powered; however, my dad has always been

travelling on buses with his battery-powered wheelchair and has not had a problem; therefore, I think that the bus drivers should be more well informed about these kinds of things.

There are some really nice bus drivers but sometimes some can be quite rude in the way they talk to us and I think this is because they don't actually want to have to get down to lower the ramp for the wheelchair.

Another big problem for my dad is that there are only two buses in our area that have a ramp and a wheelchair space which makes it even more likely that we will be unable to travel. I really love going out with my dad but I am constantly disappointed and this makes me feel sad and angry. Even though I am not disabled myself it feels like my childhood is disabled because I can't do normal things with my dad like other children can do.

All the buses that we have travelled on in the past (and now) have a really narrow wheelchair space, so my dad has difficulty positioning his wheelchair in it. Sometimes the bus drivers get impatient of waiting and drive off before he has properly adjusted the wheelchair.

Lastly, it is hard for my dad to put the bus tickets into the machine that checks them, because the machine is too high and my dad cannot reach it.

From this first part of my research study I would like to make some suggestions to the bus company that would help people like me and my dad.

- All buses (not just a few) should have wheelchair ramps
- All the ramps should be electronic so that bus drivers don't have to get out of the bus to put it in place
- There should be a space for a wheelchair AND a pushchair not one or the other because too often the wheelchair can't get on because of pushchairs.
- There should be more training for bus drivers about disabled people and wheelchair users so that they might be more understanding about our difficulties particularly about trying to manoeuvre the chair into a very narrow, awkward space.
- For the future design of buses, these problems should be taken into consideration and the necessary improvements should be made. This may result in better facilities on buses for other wheelchair users.

I hope these suggestions are not too much to ask for because they would make a really big difference to the quality of my childhood. I could do more things with my dad more easily and more often—just like other kids do!

2: Getting Around on Foot

It was easier getting around on foot than travelling on the bus although there were a few difficulties. The roads were bumpy and rocky in some places which meant that my

dad's wheelchair got punctured and sometimes the pavement was too high for us to get the wheelchair up onto it. In some places, the pavement was too narrow and it was difficult for my dad to ride on it. These things mean that we had to find an alternative route and it made the journey a lot longer but otherwise getting around on foot as the child of a wheelchair user is not difficult.

3: *Getting Around by Train*

The train journey I collected data on was from Oxford to Banbury, which takes about 30 min each way and has three stops. I made some observations and recorded them onto a Dictaphone. This is a summary of what I found out along with my research diary data and my life narrative data.

My dad had to book 24 h in advance for a place on the train. This is because the train staff need this time for safety reasons and seat availability in both departure and arrival trains. The train had 4-s class carriages but only one wheelchair space. If someone else had booked that space we would have been unable to travel. Having to always think ahead and always wondering if we will be able to get a space on a train makes some social outings very difficult and it is impossible to be spontaneous. Other children can be spontaneous with their family. If it is a nice sunny Saturday and they decide to have a day out on the train, they will generally be able to do this without any difficulty. For me as the child of a wheelchair user a fun day out on the train can never be a spontaneous event. This makes me feel sad especially as it is not me who is disabled but my dad but it still affects the quality of my childhood.

It was hard for my dad to position his wheelchair in the space provided because the space is very narrow. The passage leading to the wheelchair space is also narrow and very curvy, so it is hard for my dad to move around the train.

The staff were very kind and polite but they didn't seem to be very well informed about what it's like for wheelchair users and particularly what it's like for children of wheelchair users.

Another major problem was that when our train arrived back at Oxford, nobody came with a ramp to help my dad get down. Luckily my mum was with us on this occasion and informed someone and my dad was able to get down. However, this has happened to me before, when I was travelling with just my dad. No one came to our stop with a ramp to help my dad get down, even though we had informed the staff in advance. As I was quite young, I couldn't really help my dad. I felt anxious and scared and I started to cry. We ended up missing our stop. We got down at the next stop but then had to find another way of getting home. It was scary. I hear my friends talk about the excitement of train journeys and feel a bit envious because

so many of my memories are of being frightened and anxious. It's easy for other children. People forget how hard it is for children whose parent is a wheelchair-user.

On the occasion when I collected my data the train was not very busy so I was able to stay next to him. But on other journeys I have done with my Dad and the train is crowded it is difficult to sit close to him because the wheelchair has to go in a special place and only the wheelchair space itself is reserved not any seat nearby. For a child this can be quite upsetting. I felt nervous and scared sitting next to a stranger when my Dad wasn't close by.

I know there are not many problems with the train, but the existing problems are very serious and should be taken into consideration for the future.

- I think that there should be better communication between the train services;
- I think that ALL trains should have an electric ramp installed into them because this would make it a lot easier for wheelchair users, as the existing ramp can only be put down by a member of staff but sometimes they may not be informed and wheelchair users may miss their train/stop.
- Only some trains have a ramp facility so that limits the transportation for my dad and other wheelchair users.

The train is the hardest and riskiest way to get around because there is no guarantee you'll get a ticket when you want or need to travel especially if you want to do something spontaneous. You might miss your stop because of poor communication about needing a ramp and this is very frightening for a child. This has given me a bit of a phobia of travelling on a train even when I'm not with my dad.

Overall, the train journey was quite convenient, but it is also quite risky because of all the serious problems, nevertheless, the staff are very helpful and polite. This was only a short local journey and I feel daunted by the thought of a longer train journey as the problems could be even greater. This is a shame because I would like to be able to visit other places with my dad.

Conclusions

I felt it was important to explore how children like me get around with a parent who is a wheelchair user and the impact of this on childhood and how this will impact on my feelings about transport when I'm older. There are some things that are hard to forget and will stay with you a long time. The experience of being shouted at by bus drivers and felt to be a nuisance is upsetting and embarrassing and this will stay with me a long time even when I'm older and not travelling with my dad. The fear of missing my stop because no-one will get the ramp that will enable us to get off the train has given me a bit of a phobia about travelling

on trains. Many of my childhood treats have been spoiled by transport difficulties but I hope that my research has raised awareness about some of these things from children's viewpoints. I hope that it might help other children like me have happier experiences getting around in the future.

Discussion

There are limitations that have to be acknowledged such as the subjective nature of Manasa's life narrative data and the small scale of her study. Nevertheless, the richness and simplicity of the findings seen through the lens of her 11-year-old eyes make powerful reading. The exclusionary practices she describes were directed at her father, not herself, but the outcome still resulted in the quality of her childhood being impoverished. One of the issues in child-led research is that children do still need the support of adults. This is equally the case in the dissemination of their research. Adults can open gates and seek platforms that children might find difficult to access. In this particular case, the adult supporting Manasa brokered a presentation opportunity for her with the UK Government's transport department. As a consequence, changes were implemented. These changes included fitting electronic ramps to more buses, improving the quality of diversity training for bus drivers and the locating of an escort seat next to wheelchair spaces. The unexpected death of Manasa's father only 6 months after she completed this study adds further poignancy. Although she never benefited personally from new policies and practices that her research helped to influence, other children will.

The implications of Manasa's experiences for other children are self-evident. The positive embracing of her research in the adult world and the influence it had in bringing about change gives other children confidence to engage in their own research about issues that concern them. The impact of this is explored in the next section.

The Impact of Children as Researchers

Important considerations in child-led projects are the outcomes of their research and the extent to which these make a difference to theirs and other children's lives. Space does not permit an in-depth examination of this here (for more details visit <http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk>), but two examples will serve to illustrate the point. An 11-year-old girl, Eleanor, investigated children's views about living on her local council estate that was in a deprived inner city area (see Frank 2005). Her video documentary depicted the empty social play areas, and her interview data highlighted some of the fear factors that kept children

away. Eleanor was able to find out where and why children felt unsafe on their estate. She sent her research to the local council who decided to act on some of the findings, such as installing better lighting, being more vigilant about litter build up—especially broken glass—and increasing the number, and visibility, of community workers. A second example is a group of young people with learning disabilities. They undertook their own research into social inclusion issues for young people with learning disabilities who participate in youth decision-making forums. Their WeCan2 project (<http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk>) collected 300 pages of observation data from meetings they attended about aspects that rendered their participation difficult or exclusionary. From the data, they created a toolbox with resources to help young people with a learning disability to participate in a more meaningful way. The toolbox was adopted by the local authority for all of the council-sponsored youth forums in which they were involved.

In addition to outcomes of children's research influencing their lived environments, there is evaluation data (see Kellett 2002, 2003; Kellett and Dar 2007) to show the impact that engagement in research has on children's self-development, confidence and agency.

Doing the research helped with my confidence. I was quite shy, but I stood in front of people at the conference and told them about the research. (girl, aged 9)

It's important to see things through children's eyes. Children see things differently to adults. I think if an adult had done this research they wouldn't have got the same responses. They wouldn't have asked the same questions. (girl, aged 10)

Children participating in research is not a new concept. Indeed, it has been common for some years now for children to research alongside adults. Often when children do engage in such activity, adults train them in research skills exclusively suited to the project. It is less common for children to receive in-depth training in generic research process so that they can apply, from the outset, their knowledge and skills to initial choice of research question, design and methods. It is this in depth training that shifts power dynamics toward children driving their own research agendas with support—not management—from adults. This generates bodies of knowledge with minimal adult filters and gives voice to “insider” perspectives of children.

Several benefits have emerged from the evaluation of the impact of children as researchers (see Kellett 2005a). Foremost of these is an elevation of self-esteem. When children realise their research is valued and listened to by adults, they have an increased sense of personal worth, of childhood as an important stage of life and of their ability

to influence the quality of that childhood. Some of the learning that accompanies immersion in research process develops important life skills. Developing their sceptical, critical and analytical thinking makes them less vulnerable to media and advertising spin. Training in research ethics encourages a heightened ethical awareness in other aspects of their lives and an ability to understand others' perspectives and respond to them sensitively. Enhanced communication skills flow from dissemination of research in oral and written forms. Crucially, it promotes increased participation in other issues affecting their childhoods which intensifies their own sense of agency and the exercising of their rights. Clearly, there are a number of limitations to this style of child-led research. It requires a comprehensive programme of training that may not be readily available and pre-supposes that children have sufficient free time to undertake research projects of this nature. It is vulnerable to more articulate groups of children hi-jacking research agendas and is dependent on a degree of adult support. Despite these limitations, this style of child-led research generates valuable knowledge about children's lived experiences otherwise inaccessible to adults, knowledge that those who advocate for children's meaningful participation cannot ignore.

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