Scoping paper on participatory research methodologies for creating a research model to work with vulnerable young people

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SECTION 1: BACKGROUND CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF THIS SCOPING PAPER

Purpose of this scoping paper

This scoping paper stems from some commissioned desk-based research which requested C.A.R.P. Collaborations to:

1. Review existing methodologies and approaches to develop a strong rationale for a favoured approach which responded to the particular needs of vulnerable young people, including safeguarding issues, and supported their participation in research about sensitive issues of emotional well-being.
2. To outline a methodology for a research model for the commissioner.

A confidential report was written for the commissioner to fulfil these objectives and this scoping paper is the product of the review of participatory methodologies and approaches that can be used within research with children and young people and ethical considerations that should accompany the design of participatory research projects. It is therefore available as a resource to signpost to various participatory approaches and is descriptive not analytical.
SECTION 2: SCOPING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH APPROACHES

Why scope participatory approaches?

Traditional social research involves the researcher deciding what should be found out, the methods for doing so and what the content of the research findings should be. This is a form of extracting information whereby the researcher maintains power and control and appears to be the expert whilst the research participants solely provide information. There are two problems with this traditional model when applied to research with children and young people:

1. It produces data from the researcher ‘about’ children rather than providing data that will detail children and young people’s views and perspectives (Fleming and Boeck 2012).
2. It is not a child accessible model and therefore reduces the likelihood of sensitive emotional issues being explored; particularly those issues that the researcher has not anticipated.

Both of these problems would be exacerbated if a traditional research model were applied to exploring emotional well being because it would risk being inaccessible to children and young people, and the project would be defined by the researcher rather than enabling young people to define the issues themselves. Therefore alternative approaches need to be sought that will enable child voice.

There are 4 ways in which children and young people can be involved in research:

1. ‘objects’ to be studied
2. Subjects in their own right
3. Social actors, able to act, change and be changed by their actions
4. Active participants in the research process; able to shape, change and challenge the process and production of knowledge.

(Christensen and Prout 2002)

Whilst the first three approaches may involve children and young people to a greater or lesser degree, only the last way of producing research enables child voice because it involves research that, by its’ design, methods, analysis and dissemination, enables the research participants to be involved in the process. This is more than just providing a researcher with data.

Whilst there is a wealth of academic research regarding education, health and social care interventions; little of this research includes the child’s voice or discusses methodology (Holland 2009; Brodie and Morris 2010) although there are a few exceptions to this (Winter 2010). Whilst there is little research that gives children and young people voice, there is even less that discusses methodology and appropriate methods for this cohort of people and this subject matter. The author would suggest that, in part, this problem stems from the nature of how research is created. Researchers design research according to the research question at hand, often without recourse to the cohort of people the research will involve, and researchers generally undertake research analysis about the issues that emerge rather than analyse the methods that were involved. In terms of the purpose of this paper i.e. scoping methodologies there is little, if any, existing research that examines methods with this cohort of people and for this subject matter. The paper therefore outlines material where it exists, but draws on methodological discussions from other areas of sensitive inquiry, such as poverty and disability.
There are 3 different imperatives for undertaking participatory research. Firstly there are legislative and policy imperatives. Recent policy and guidelines surrounding user involvement in health and social care, such as the NHS’s ‘Involving People’ programme, have set a precedent for good practice in working with people; and social and health care research process needs to reflect this mode of working. Secondly, there is a moral imperative. Participatory research easily fits a rights based approach (this is explained further below within the ethics section) and enables rights to be realised more easily than traditional forms of research because it removes the category of ‘other’, enables skills exchange and recognises the expertise of the participant. Lastly there is a pragmatic imperative. Participatory research enables higher levels of validity and reliability than traditional forms of research, which contributes to more effective recommendations and outcomes within the research. (Morrow 2012; Bennett and Roberts 2004)

This section outlines and discusses three participatory research approaches that can be used to enable child voice in the research process- participatory research, action research and peer research.

**Participatory research**

Participatory research is not about adding voice to traditional forms of research but enabling participation in the process and direction of the research, including sharing research questions, setting agendas for research inquiry, undertaking analysis, contributing to report structures etc. It is not about giving power, but sharing power, enabling two different worlds of expertise to come together. The researcher and the researched are broken down into one research team. (ESRC participatory research seminar programme 2014)

There is a political aspect to participatory research and it has its roots in a number of qualitative research traditions. Research does not sit outside social power hierarchies and in many research discourses there have been attempts to recognise the power hierarchies within the research process and incorporate participants into the research process. Examples include feminist sociology, disability focused research (Oliver 1992), which in more recent years is referred to as emancipatory research; and research exploring issues of poverty and community development (Fleming and Boeck 2012; Bennett and Roberts 2004). Qualitative research findings can contribute to power hierarchies, explain them or challenge them and participatory research seeks to explain and challenge the status quo from participants own perspectives. It positions itself as research that has a role in challenging discrimination or reducing vulnerabilities through its process, findings and dissemination.

Additionally, research that is focused upon those who have a vulnerability risks over-highlighting the vulnerability or the ‘victim’ nature of the participants, whereas participatory research can highlight resilience (Bennett and Roberts 2004). This is most clearly exemplified within anti poverty research and the ensuing Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approaches, emancipatory research that supports the independent living movement (Oliver 1992; Barnes 2003) and more recent research within social care supporting the realisation of children’s rights (Thomas 2012).

A participatory research project needs to establish how to get beyond just having participants supply established researchers with information. Having insider knowledge helping researchers make sense of data may be more effective than training people as interviewers, or having a participants planning group may help to set the agenda. However, this latter suggestion raises the last issue of who sets the agenda for the research project- participatory approaches can enable a joint approach or for the initial direction to be set by researchers with planned time and scope for debate and for participants issues to be explored. Some projects enable participation in analysis in order to feed participant voice into potential policy recommendations or service developments.
**Action Research**

There is a wealth of methodological information regarding processes of action research, so this section highlights the main generic issues of action research as an approach to qualitative research. Action research is research that is specifically designed for service change, and is therefore most commonly used in health, social care or education. It is research that is planned in stages and these stages typically include periods of practitioner and service user reflection and trying new systems based upon the reflection in order to improve outcomes for the service user.

There are two different traditions of action research:

1. **The British tradition**, which is closely linked to educational reflective practice. Simply explained, this is a form of self inquiry designed to improve practice and therefore improve the circumstances of people who use a particular service. (Carr and Kemmis 1986).
2. A tradition that is used in the social welfare field and American social research, whereby action research is a planned, systematic approach to collecting information, practitioner and participants reflection, re planning and re enacting in order to address particular issues faced by a group of people. The aim is social change via changes in both practice and experiences (Bogdan and Biklen 1992).

It is this second tradition that this scoping paper will focus upon. This form of action research is described by its’ creator as:

‘A type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice.’ (Lewin 1948: 202-3)

Lewin identifies certain steps and a cycle which creates the structure of an action research project:

1. identify a general idea or initial thoughts regarding a particular issue
2. Reconnaissance and fact finding. This will lead to refining the initial idea and will create a planning stage for the overall project.
3. Plan what you are going to during the action research- i.e. plot it into steps, but in the knowledge that each step will be review and subject to refinement in the light of what has been learnt
4. Take the first action step
5. evaluate what worked and what did not
6. re plan action
7. take second action step
8. Step 4 to 7 is repeated until the project is finished, lessons learnt, practice refined etc

Stringer (1999) identified 4 main difficulties within Lewin’s model. Firstly it proposes to be flexible but is very sequential. Secondly, there are practical difficulties such as how do you know when the project ends and fit this into available resources. Thirdly there are methodological difficulties because there is no clarity regarding the extent to which the process is research and could present problems of consistency of data. Lastly, while it claims to be equitable it ignores the differences in knowledge and power bases between the researcher and the research participants. He took Lewin’s model and suggested 3 phases to an action research project:
1. Look- find out and examine. What are people doing? How many are doing what things? What is the interaction? Is the problem a shared problem? Who is it a problem to? How do other people view this problem?
2. Think- interpret and explain. What assumptions are being made? How are realities different?
3. Act- Resolve the issues or problems. What is needed? What might make them worse? Participants support the action so it’s jointly identified.

This 3 step process can have different starting points. Firstly, action research can provide a snapshot, with the research element comprising of a one off exercise that is then used to refine a service or approach. This starting point is good for small scale research to start participative processes, for example in one service or location. A second starting point is one of exploring. This comprises of a series of sessions that enable an issue to be explored. This starting point creates intensive inquiry over a relatively short period of time and aims to enable understanding before action is decided upon. Lastly, it can start with investigation. This involves systematic sessions over a period of time to unpack a large issue/ build up to sensitive topics. This last starting point is useful for larger scale research (e.g. across services), provides evidence for policy and practice change, and enables participation within those changes. (EYSIP 2000)

Some practitioner- researchers refer to ‘formative dialogue research’ which is another form of action research comprised of dialogue, reflection and critical thinking. The process involves using creative tools and reflecting upon the information each one yields before undertaking compilation across the tools and whole project analysis. This form of action research enables service change to occur during research and incorporates research into service delivery rather than undertaking changes at the end of the process. By engaging participants it enables them to fully explain the issues (Save the Children Norway 2008).

The literature outlines other models and processes of action research, but they all involve similar patterns of planning, researching and reviewing. The main advantages of action research are that it is purposeful and related to creating change in a planned and investigative way (EYSIP 2000). It is also an approach that lends itself to practice and can enable testing changes in a transparent way which involves both service users, researchers and practitioners. Lastly, it authentically shows service users that they are being listened to and hence can shift power balances between practitioners, researchers and service users. This can significantly reduce the need for consultations and aid the engagement of service users.

**Peer research**

Peer research involves a researcher, or research team, training and including people who are a part of the same social group as the research participants. Peer researchers undertake the same roles as non-peer researchers and are involved in every stage of the research process as established team members.

‘Peer research is based upon one key principle: the researcher belongs to the same peer group as the research subjects’ (Mackie 2012: p. 175)

Early peer research developed from a rights based motivation. With the advent of the UNCRC being ratified and the participation of children and young people becoming more important in services and policy, researchers began to expound the virtue of participatory and peer research as a right. However, peer research also has well documented impacts which are described below.
Impact 1: Insight
Peer research takes away the power and hierarchy between the researcher and researched. Practically, it strips away the traditional research roles of the knowledgeable researcher and “service user” and if working with children or young people it reduces the problem of children or young people saying what they feel adults want to hear. Peer research is highly effective in enabling more honest (and therefore more valid) data because there can be open frank conversations regarding common concerns. It has been found to be particularly effective for researching socially unacceptable activities and for social groups who experience social exclusion. Mackie (2012) describes how he undertook a study conducted by adults in 2008 on services for homeless young people but this study did not find the same depth or level of emotional issues as a similar study conducted by the author and peer researchers in 2010.

Impact 2: Innovation
Peer researchers will instinctively innovate and know what tools may work, how to set the scene/opening questions and which issues that should be explored and are often in the position of advising academic researchers on these issues (Kilpatrick et al. 2007).

Impact 3: Interest
Participation in any research is via informed choice and consent, and interest in the subject matter from peer researcher is invaluable to the research process; firstly through their enthusiasm for doing the work and addressing the issues which helps to create positive team dynamics. Secondly, they can challenge the adult researchers on assumptions and be pivotal in securing change during dissemination stage.

There are some issues that need careful consideration if implementing peer research. There must be adequate resources for training and support. Peer researchers will often require mentoring rather than managing and they may be insecure regarding their abilities at the outset of a project. Consideration needs to be given as to how they will exit the project; particularly if they have vulnerabilities or life circumstances which may enhance their feeling of loss at the project’s end. The recruitment process of peer researchers may not fit with organisation’s current recruitment practice. Some peer researchers are recruited by peers who will be the research subjects. Peer researchers may have low levels of literacy and therefore creative methods may need to be employed during recruitment and throughout the research process. Lastly, there is the issue of payment. Payment will vary according to the length of time of the project, benefit regulations, young people’s decisions themselves, the [research] institution undertaking the work and laws on working practice for under 16’s. Nottingham University’s Centre for Social Action which has aimed to avoid extractive research and develop participants’ inclusion through all stages of the research process has regularly recruited peer researchers and paid them as a part of the research team (Fleming 2012).

How can these approaches be applied to a research study?

These three approaches do not have to be implemented on a stand alone basis; they can be mixed together. Action research enables a high level of structure and planning and directly relates to practice, which is ideal if service or policy changes are required. However, participatory research may be better as a stand alone option if the research question is just to be explored and ‘discovered’.

Peer research can lend itself to action and participatory approaches. However, if peer research is to be included there needs to be careful consideration about how it will be implemented. The advantages of peer research, particularly for a social care organisation could be multifold, but to an extent these
advantages may depend upon organisational criteria such as supporting employment and education of service users within the organisation; communication and ease of relationships between practice and policy departments and strategic direction within organisational priorities. Participatory research is highly flexible and can be applied to different settings, communities and locations in different ways with participation at any point of the research process.
SECTION 3: SCOPING CREATIVE RESEARCH TOOLS

Why scope creative research tools?

Traditional research tools, such as interviews and questionnaires, assume a level of literacy and communication skills, and are mainly word based. These tools are not always accessible for children and young people who often express themselves through creative means and play or struggle with explaining opinions through words alone. Research projects with children and young people need to use accessible research tools that are reflective of how children and young people communicate rather than being based solely upon adult and literate forms of communication. Research data can be gathered in a number of ways and therefore, scoping these options enables the most effective tools for data gathering to be utilised. Additionally, it can be easier and more accessible for children and young people to express emotions through creative methods such as drawing or story telling through film or drama.

This section outlines different possible creative methods that could be used for research project and is descriptive rather than analytical in its approach. It up to the reader to decide which method or methods to implement depending upon the research question they are exploring and the participants preferences.

Visual methods

These methods comprise of 2 different types of tools- mapping techniques, including participatory appraisal and drawing and art.

Participatory appraisal and mapping techniques
Mapping techniques are commonly used in non UK, overseas research, particularly in relation to human geography and community development. They are particularly effective for use in outdoor, or transient settings and with children who may have low literacy levels (Young and Barrett 2001).

Participatory appraisal is a collection of tools, some of which include mapping techniques, that aim to give voice to all in a community. Participatory appraisal recognises participation as a process and is designed to enable community members to have power within the data gathering process (Buhaenko, Butler et al 2004) and enable deep rooted issues to arise, with specific creative tools that enable community members suggest their own solutions (Pretty, Guijt et al 1995).

Drawing and art
There is a wealth of methodological data regarding the use of drawings and art in social research. Geographers apply drawing as an extension of the mappings techniques that both physical and human geography employ. Some researchers who practice visual sociology use children’s drawings as the research data itself; explaining the child’s world and viewpoint through the drawing. However, drawing is a creative process which can lend imagination to the final output of the drawing, and therefore the data can become subject to high levels of individualised interpretation. Additionally, this interpretation is influenced by researcher bias such as academic discipline, culture, age, gender or ethnicity.

However, drawing can be a useful tool if accompanied by discussion. All of the author’s research projects with children and young people has involved drawing. If drawings are framed around certain interview questions, they enable children to talk about hopes and fears; past experience and current life circumstances. They can be highly useful as a tool for balancing individual work with group work.
Children and young people can create individual drawings within group settings, and have conversations on a one to one basis with a researcher about the drawing; so the visuals become a catalyst for an interview. Drawing techniques can also be undertaken as a large group, for example, creating murals on sheets, which can give children a voice in report outputs and dissemination.

Caution should be exercised with regards to age and gender. Girls under 10 enjoy drawing whereas boys do not (Butler 2012). Young people may feel patronised if asked to ‘draw’ but will create graffiti and cartoons so any drawing needs to be carefully structured for the context and address a clear research question.

Theatre of the oppressed

Theatre of the oppressed is a particular set of drama tools that were created by Augusto Baol from the theories of Paulo Freire’s educational philosophy regarding the pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire 1970). Based upon a participatory ethos and ethics of giving voice to communities that are usually unheard, it comprises of a number of drama tools that enable participants to explore their own issues, identify their own solutions and explain those issues to change agents (policy makers and people in power within systems) via dramaturgical form. The tree diagram below shows the ethical roots of this approach, and the different types of theatre forms that are associated with these drama tools, the most well known of which may be forum theatre. Forum theatre can comprise of drama games, short vignettes that are discussed and changed by participants or full plays. The aim is that the drama piece is central to an agora- literally taken from the greek debating hall- so the drama piece creates debate. In a research context, it is this debate that highlights differences and similarities between the participants and enables issues to be thoroughly explored. There is little available literature about the mechanics of using forum theatre as a research tool but the author has experience of forum theatre within a research project with young people leaving special school and exploring issues they face during transition (Butler 2001) and of using some of the games when exploring how racism is experienced by girls in Cardiff (Butler, 2007). Vignettes have been used to explore sensitive issues with children (Barter and Renold 1999).
Photography, digital diaries and film

Diaries have often been used in social research and oral history research and photography and film have their own strand of methodological developments in social anthropology, sociology and history disciplines. This section is therefore limited to certain aspects of these tools and does not engage with the breadth of data and information that is available in scholarly publications.

Photography
Photography can be very useful for enabling participants to choose the important aspects of their community or show pictures of their life. For research purposes pictures need accompanying dialogue that enable the audience to understand what is being captured within a particular photo and why it is of significance. The Generation 2020 project (Butler 2005) contains examples of how photography enabled children under 11 to participate research regarding their own perceptions of participation and contribute to a research report.

Digital diaries
Digital diaries are not commonly used in academic social research although they would easily lend themselves to play a part in the development of ethnography, which in its simplest sense is telling social stories (Murthy 2008). Digital diaries could be used as blogs or as private film that is then edited with
other participants private film to create a story of common issues faced by the participants of a research project. The advantage of digital diaries is that they can enable privacy and give participants complete control over when the research is undertaken, what they want to focus upon, how they want to film etc. If using blogs additional safety and ethical standards need to be implemented.

**Film**

Participatory research can incorporate the making of films. Consideration should be given to the content and purpose of the film. If using film for research the process of making the film is as important as the final quality of film. Children and young people often enjoy the freedom that accompanies making film and can enable expression of sensitive issues in a way that spoken word cannot.

**In conclusion**

Photography, digital diaries and film can be incorporated into research projects and used as a dissemination tool. This can be a powerful way of enabling a wordy report to have a human element and for participants who may have low literacy levels to be included within the report outputs and dissemination. There is little available literature that explains the mechanics of using film or photography within a research context but the author has experience of using film to accompany a UK wide report exploring the experience of families living in poverty (Harris, Treanor and Sharma 2009) through the making of the film ‘Hope’. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_rNcEiqmMk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_rNcEiqmMk))

**Games and physical methods**

There is little literature regarding the practicalities of using physical games and activities in a research context, although toolkits do suggest their use for enabling participation in services (Dynamix 2003; Dynamix 2008; EYSIP 2000; Participation Unit 2007) and some researchers have developed these techniques for research contexts with children and young people (Save the Children Norway 2008; Butler 2005, 2007). Combining information within toolkits and the limited available research, it is clear that games can be used within research to gain data and discussion in a manner that is familiar and fun for children and young people. There are different games suggested for different age groups within the toolkits and from author experience games need to take account, not just of age, but also of gender dynamics and recording mechanisms. It is also possible to create digital games as a part of the research process, but this will depend upon resources and technological know how within the research team as well as across the group of participants.
SECTION 4: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are a number of ethical issues to consider when designing research projects; and more when research involves children and young people or explores emotionally sensitive topics.

Policy drivers

There is a legislative and policy context to undertaking participatory research that utilises methods that enable meaningful engagement. UK ratification of the UNCRC means that children’s rights should be realised, and research processes are included within this, particularly in relation to realising article 12. Additionally some of the UK nations have developed policy guides which must be adhered to within work with children and young people. Within Wales there are the National Participation Standards for Wales and for people over the age of 18, The National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales. England produced the ‘Hear by right standard framework for the participation of children and young people’. Scotland’s commissioner for children and young people has produced ‘7 golden Rules for participation’ and Northern Ireland has ‘Ask First!: Northern Ireland standards for children and young people’s participation in public decision making.’ Additionally each country’s NHS has a form of the ‘Involving People’ programme. These standards are applied to health, education and social care settings and therefore research within these settings should also adhere to principles of participatory good practice.

Issues of informed consent

Informed consent is the process whereby research participants are informed about the purpose and process of the research and give their consent to take part within a research project. There are 3 concepts commonly referred to within social care research with regards to children’s agreement to participate. These are consent, assent and competence. Assent has been used in various ways but generally refers to ensuring a child has some understanding of the research and is often used in medical and health research to distinguish between agreement to participate in a research study and legally mandated consent (Twycross 2009). The author’s viewpoint is that researchers should work to gain children’s full informed consent and assent is best left to reside within health research that requires legal mandate (such as medical trials etc). Some research makes use of the Gillick principle which propounds that people can consent to participate within a project if they appear to have competence to understand what is being suggested and the issues at hand (Alderson and Morrow 2004). However, this risks excluding groups of people on the basis of inability as judged by a researcher and results in social research extending a researcher-led, partial world view (Butler 2012). This position in itself could be argued to be unethical, particularly in the light of policy and moral imperatives for children’s participation and rights.

The National Children’s Bureau research guidelines (Shaw et al 2011) suggest that informed consent should be a process. This is useful for research with children and young people because it moves away from judgements of ability and instead focuses upon practical activities to establish consent throughout the research process. However, for informed consent to effectively be a process best practice would suggest that researchers need to meet young people more than once and cover the issues of consent at each research session.
If engaging with children under 16 parental consent is generally needed, although there is no definitive law regarding this and it is about balancing child protection, children’s rights, family relationships and laws regarding guardianship. Guidelines on parental consent suggest:

‘The consent of parents or guardians should routinely be sought except:

- Where it is clear that participation in the research involves minimal risk (i.e. risks no greater than those in everyday life) and will not infringe the rights or impact upon the welfare of participants.
- Where parental or carer permission is impossible or would not protect the child or young person (i.e. where relations have broken down).
- Where the young people concerned are resistant to parent or carer consent being sought on the grounds of their rights to privacy and confidentiality AND where the emotional and social maturity and particular vulnerabilities of the young person have been evaluated and the risks of participation are low’

(Barnardo’s Statement on ethical practice, Barnardo’s 2008: 3-4)

Each of these points will need consideration within research with young people. It is possible that advocates or key workers could assist with issues of consent if guardians or parent are deemed to be inaccessible to the researchers.

**Informed choice**

This is partly related to informed consent. For participants to consent to be involved in research they have to understand key concepts such as ‘research’ what the research sessions will entail, the methods, what will happen to the findings and know that they can choose not to participate with no repercussions. Many children and young people will not understand these concepts straight away. By undertaking sessions before addressing the topic of the research young people are able to have a taster of the methods to be used, begin to build rapport with the researcher and gain better understanding of a research process. This is another reason for why good practice suggests using a series of research sessions.

**Explaining key principles: anonymity and confidentiality**

Within the explanation of informed consent the concepts of anonymity and confidentiality need to be included. Children and young people may be reticent to become involved because they do not know or do not believe that the work will be anonymous. Some children and young people will feel more secure and supported if regular staff attend sessions whilst others will feel unable to give true opinions if staff are present. Assuring anonymity is a way of ensuring children and young know that what they say will contribute to a report but that they will not be named. Confidentiality assures them that what they say is not going to be repeated to parents, guardians, social workers or other staff. If practitioners are present they need to understand that the research session is not a practice session or group and therefore must remain confidential even if information arises that would be useful for a practice team to know. In explaining confidentiality children and young people must also understand that this is balanced with child protection. Disclosures of harm or potential abuse cannot be kept confidential and this needs to be explicit at the start of the research. In pre planning the research the project must have established procedures for any disclosures that arise. This is particularly important when undertaking focus group work and balancing an individual’s privacy with disclosure and group dynamics.
For some research projects, it is also worth considering how to address disclosures of criminal activity. It is always possible in social research with marginalised people that some research participants may know of criminal activity, or have been involved in criminality. In research with children and young people within the social care or health arenas a specific assessment of ethics is needed because they may have higher levels of vulnerabilities, risk and exposure to harm (Alderson and Morrow 2011).

**Researcher affect**

The affect that researchers can have upon participants by grounds of gender, age, ethnicity or education are well documented. However, research that involves children and young people has an added dimension of the differences between adult and child constructions of social meanings (Alanen and Mayall 2001). Adults do not necessarily know better, but they do know differently and this should be taken into account through research design (Kellett 2010). One of the key mechanisms that can be used to reduce this hierarchy is implementing a participatory research design because it addresses the power hierarchy within traditional research (Bennett and Roberts 2004). Some qualitative researchers would suggest that the strength of this power hierarchy is such that it is not possible for research that is not participatory in any way to be considered ethical (Smith 2011). There is no doubt that research that involves children and young people is more aligned to implementing a rights based approach and enables more effective and valid research findings. However, this should be balanced with other ethical considerations and the purpose of the study.

**Incentives**

The section above regarding peer research included discussion of payment. It is clear that if children and young people are to undertake research then decisions need to be made regarding payment or acknowledgement of effort via other means. It is considered unethical to pay people for contributing to a research study since this can obscure true opinions and experiences. On the other hand, researchers themselves are paid and research with vulnerable groups often involves an educated affluent research team extracting information from people who live on the borders of poverty or who have low levels of cultural or social capital. Careful consideration should be given to the issue of incentives. Some studies offer a voucher as a gift of thanks. Others look for accreditation or other qualifications for people involved in research. This can only be decided upon once budgets and other resources have been established and the level of participation agreed. These decisions can be made in conjunction with children and young people so the ethical dilemma is shared with the research participants as well as the research team and principal investigator.

**Avoiding tokenism**

Lack of time, resources and experience can lead research projects to become tokenistic in their approach to participation. In planning stages, ensure there are mechanisms that will enable young people to be valued, listened to, and have a clear part in decision making processes. Without this planning there can be ‘illusionary participation’ (McLaughlin 2005). Illusionary participation can occur when researchers believe that asking opinion counts as participation or feel that their work is participatory because they have one or two young people upon a steering group. To avoid tokenism the
author suggests examining social care practice and using the same standards of participation that are implemented in social care settings.

Avoiding homogenising

Ethically any research project that uses a group approach has to balance the individual participants with the group. Children and young people are used to being in groups with each other and not accustomed to being with adults on a one to one basis unless in family or with people with assumed authority (e.g. social worker, doctor). For research to be effective it is often best to undertake focus groups but this has the disadvantage of reducing individual input. To an extent this can be compensated for within research design through asking young people to undertake work as individuals within a group setting, or by using sessions of research only some of which involve group work.

Managing expectations

The more involvement of children and young people, the more planning needs to be given to managing expectations. Having a clear purpose to the research can help ensure that young people do not have high expectations of the research as can involvement in dissemination. This is particularly important for research that aims to raise awareness or create social or political change. Children and young people can easily become disillusioned with slow time scales within political or policy processes and therefore explanations of what is meant by change should be clearly given to the participants and reinforced wherever possible.

Ensuring inclusivity

To an extent methods and approaches will rely upon the research cohort. Issues of age, disability, ethnicity and cultural heritage will effect what is perceived as appropriate method. Flexible approaches can ensure that the research design is inclusive for all young people within the research cohort, but particular methods e.g. using art, film and games are more accessible than others e.g. mapping.

Exit strategies

Traditional forms of research involve outsiders coming to meet participants and then leaving. If the research process is to be more involved, and especially if it involves peer research, then an exit strategy needs to be developed. Many young people will become attached to the research sessions and researchers risk creating a sense of loss if exit strategies are not in place. They can include dissemination days combined with celebrations of achievement; enabling participants to move between research activities and service provision, on going involvement in policy based upon the research findings; creation of decision making forums etc. Some of these suggestions are of particular importance for social care organisations because they can be in a position to fuse their research activities with their service delivery activities. For example, involvement in research can support NEET young people back to education or employment, or to have more participation within the organisation’s decision making structures.
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