Researching Poverty: Research partnerships with children

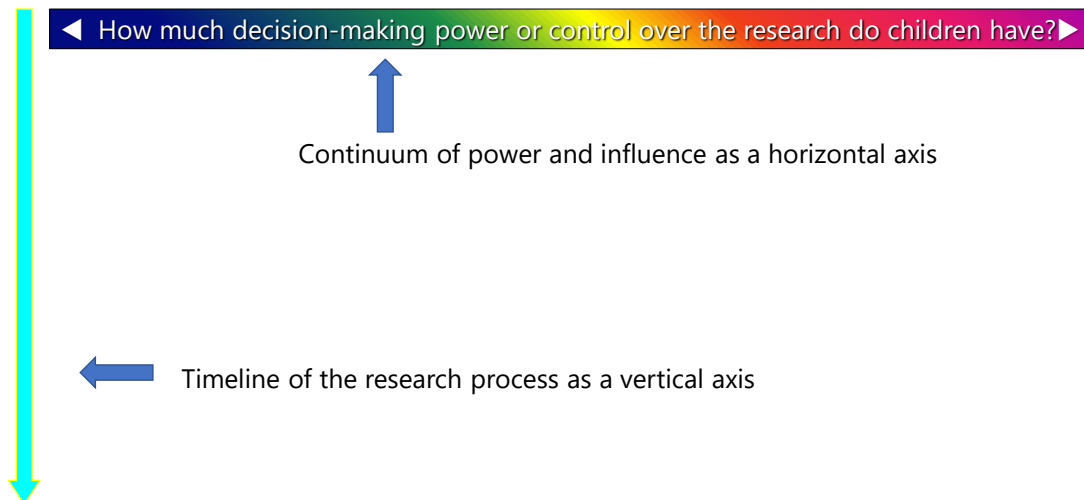**Harry Shier**

www.harryshier.net

OVERVIEW

1. An analytical tool to help researchers develop partnerships with children and adolescents

2. Researching poverty with children: Learning from the lit. review

3. Returning to the matrix

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

2

1. An analytical tool to help researchers develop partnerships with children and adolescents

Building a matrix

◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ►

Continuum of power and influence as a horizontal axis

Timeline of the research process as a vertical axis

For the horizontal axis: Lansdown's simplified typology of participation

Consultation:

Is when adults ask children for their views, and children are not involved beyond this.

Collaboration:

Is when adults and children work together, sharing roles and responsibilities in planning and carrying out an activity.

Protragonismo (child-led):

Activities initiated, organised or run by children and young people themselves (adults may still provide support, though not always necessary).

Taken from *"Every child's right to be heard"* (Lansdown 2010): A user guide to UN CRC General Comment 12

The vertical axis: Phases of the research process as a timeline

1. Identify a research question: problem analysis, consultation.
2. Develop research design, select (or develop) method-ology, draw up a plan (find funding, resources)
3. Design instruments, seek ethical approval.
4. Identify and recruit participants, obtain consent.
5. Generate data
6. Data analysis: findings, conclusions, recommendations.
7. Produce a report
8. Dissemination of findings: formal publication, wider publicity, media engagement.
9. Advocacy, public mobilisation, campaigning, policy impact, action for social change.

(Based on Kumar, 2014)

COMBINED IN THE MATRIX...

	◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do children have? ►				Who is involved and who is excluded?
Phases of research process	**Children are not involved**	**Consulted**	**Collaborate with adult researchers**	**Child initiated or directed** / Led by us...	
Deciding on the research question		Children asked about problems that concern them.	Children and adults jointly define research question.	Children choose their own research question.	Who has a say in the research question?
Designing the research and choosing methods		Children consulted on what research methodology to use.	Children and adults deliberate and jointly decide on the methodology to use.	Children decide what methodology they want to use.	Who is invited to get involved in the research design?
Preparing research instruments		Children consulted on (and perhaps test) research inst-ruments before use.	Children and adults work together on design of research instruments.	Children create their own research instruments.	Who gets to work on the research instruments?
Identifying and recruiting participants		Children asked to advise on recruiting participants.	Children and adults jointly identify and recruit participants.	Children identify and recruit research participants.	Who has a say in choosing participants?
Collecting the data		Research involves adults interviewing children or surveying their opinions.	Children and adults collaborate on data-gathering activity.	Children organise and carry out data collection activities.	Who gets involved in data collection?
Analysing the data, drawing conclusions		Adults show preliminary findings to children and ask for feedback.	Children and adults work together to analyse data and determine conclusions.	Children analyse data and draw their own conclusions.	Who has a say in what the conclusions are?
Producing a report		Adults consult children on aspects of the final report.	Children and adults work together to produce a report.	Children produce their own report in their own words.	Who gets credit for the report?
Dissemination of the report and its findings		Adults consult children on how to disseminate findings.	Children and adults collaborate on dissemination and awareness-raising activities.	Children undertake activities to disseminate their findings.	Who is actively involved in dissemination?
Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact		Children consulted about possible advocacy actions.	Children and adults work together on plans for advocacy and mobilisation.	Children develop and implement an action plan for advocacy and mobilisation.	Who is active in follow-up campaig-ning and advocacy?

2. Researching poverty with children: Learning from the lit. review *(Shier, 2024)*

Mary Kellett was founder and Director of the Children's Research Centre at the Open University in the UK. She identified four types of research involving children in the research literature:

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

(Kellett, 2010)

In the *"Researching with children on Poverty"* literature review, I found...

☑ **Research ON children:**
Lots of quantitative research, analysis of poverty statistics etc.

☑ **Research ABOUT children:** Two kinds:

a) Studies where parents spoke ABOUT their children.

b) 17 studies where researchers heard children's voices, collecting data directly from children through individual or group interview (focus group), including a few using visual methods like drawing or photography.

☑ **Research WITH children:**
I could only find <u>one example</u> of a research study on poverty where children actively collaborated with an adult researcher beyond providing information.

> Horgan (2011) reports a Northern Ireland study where research methods and instruments were developed in partnership with an advisory group of young people in youth clubs in Derry and Belfast.

(Shier, 2024)

☑ **Research BY children:**
I found four examples of children and young people undertaking their own research project, with appropriate support and accompaniment from adults.

Children's Commission on Poverty (2014).
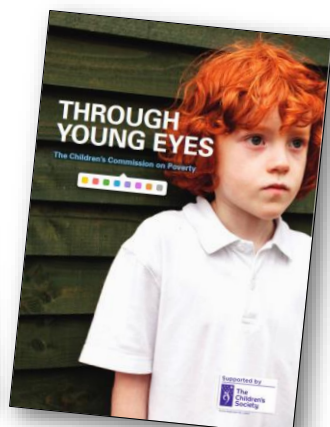
Young Welsh Researchers (2013).

Children's Commission on Poverty (2013).

Belfast Youth Forum. (2017).

4. Returning to the matrix...

Kellett's typology maps easily onto Lansdown's:

❑ Research **ON** children is when **"Children are not involved"**

❑ Research **ABOUT** children is when **"Children are consulted"**

❑ Research **WITH** children is when **"Children collaborate with adult researchers"**

❑ Research **BY** children is **"Child-initiated or directed"**

Applying the matrix to the Belfast Youth Forum research

Applying the matrix to the Young Welsh Researchers' project

Applying the matrix to Horgan's collaborative research

Applying the matrix to the 17 studies where children were consulted to hear their voices

In 2019, a scoping review by Grace and colleagues looked at methods of participatory research with children in Australia.

They analysed 211 published papers which presented research described by its authors as *"participatory"*.

They discovered that, in the vast majority of studies reviewed, children were not involved at all outside the data-collection phase, thus proving that the **RED LINE** on this chart is the norm for involving children in research. *(Grace et al, 2019)*
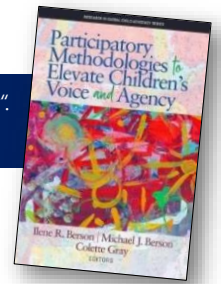

This is the norm for involving children in research
(Grace et al, 2019)

The matrix tool is available in…

Berson, Berson and Gray (2019) *"Participatory Methodologies to Elevate Children's Voice and Agency".*
Also at **www.harryshier.net**

(Shier 2019)

❑ DO use it as a tool for planning research projects involving children.

❑ DO use it as a tool for reviewing and evaluating research projects involving children.

❑ DO use it as a check-list to be sure you are not excluding children through narrow thinking.

❑ DON'T use it to make judgments about whether any particular approach is right or wrong; it just helps you ask good questions, and so make wise decisions about what might work well in a particular situation.

References

Belfast City Council Youth Forum. (2017). *Poverty: It's not a choice, research report.* Belfast City Council. https://ehq-production-europe.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/c1cc8df156734acf99fbccea924b5e562d912494/original/1723028773/a5c028494d90aee5badee759b2a23cd3_Poverty_It%27s_not_a_choice_Belfast_Youth_Forum_Report.pdf

Grace, R., Knight, J., Baird, K., Ng, J., Shier, H., Wise, S., Fattore, T., McClean, T., Bonser, G., & Judd-Lam, S. (2019). Where are the silences? A scoping review of child participatory research literature in the context of the Australian service system. *Children Australia*, *44*(4), 172–186.

Holloway, E., Mahony, S., Royston, S., & Mueller, D. (2014). *At what cost? Exposing the impact of poverty on school life*. Children's Society. https://childrenssociety.info/system/files/At%20What%20Cost%20-%20Exposing%20the%20impact%20of%20poverty%20on%20school%20life.pdf

Horgan, G. (2011). The making of an outsider: Growing up in poverty in Northern Ireland. *Youth & Society*, *43*(2), 453–467.

Kellett, M. (2010). *Rethinking Children and Research: Attitudes in contemporary society*. Continuum.

Kumar, R. (2014). *Research Methodology: A Step-by-step Guide for Beginners*. Sage (Original work published in 1999).

Lansdown, G. (2011). *Every Child's Right to be Heard*. Save the Children. https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/5259.pdf/

Pople, L., Rodrigues, L., & Royston, S. (2013). *Through young eyes childrens commission on poverty*. Children's Society. https://basw.co.uk/sites/default/files/resources/basw_21021-9_0.pdf

Shier, H. (2019). An analytical tool to help researchers develop partnerships with children and adolescents. In I. Berson, M. Berson, & C. Gray (Eds.), *Participatory Methodologies to Elevate Children's Voice and Agency* (pp. 295–315). Information Age Publishing. https://www.harryshier.net/docs/Shier-Analytical_tool_for_research_partnerships.pdf

Shier, H. (unpublished). *Researching with children on poverty, welfare and the cost of living: A literature review.* (contact the author).

Young Welsh Researchers. (2013). *Small Voice, Big Story: Reducing the impact of poverty on the educational achievement of young people in Wales*. Save the Children.

14