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Consulting young people: a review of the literature

A Report for Creative Partnerships

Sara Bragg, Open University

These reports have been commissioned to introduce readers to the main principles, theories, research and debates in the field. They aim to introduce the major themes and writing pertaining to each area of study and to outline key trends and argument. The executive summary and bibliography offer pointers for further research and application.

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Consulting young people: a review of the literature

A report for Creative Partnerships by Sara Bragg, Open University

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Foreword

Creative Partnerships aims to develop schoolchildren's potential, ambition, creativity and imagination, by building sustainable partnerships between schools, creative and cultural organisations and individuals, which impact on learning. Phase 1 of the programme ran from April 2002 to March 2004. Sixteen Creative Partnerships were established in areas of economic and social disadvantage. Each Creative Partnership brokered partnerships between 15-25 schools and creative individuals and organisations. Nine Phase 2 Creative Partnerships areas joined the initiative in September 2004 and eleven Phase 3 areas joined during September 2005.

Creative Partnerships aims to influence policy and practice in both the education and cultural sectors. It was established by Arts Council England, with funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in response to the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) report by Ken Robinson: *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*. It spearheads a raft of initiatives designed to develop creativity and encompasses social, personal and economic domains. As a flagship project, Creative Partnerships can have maximum impact if teachers, parents, children, youth and creative practitioners learn from the experience and activities that are delivered through the programme. For this reason one of the most significant legacies of Creative Partnerships will be the product of its research and evaluation and how that is effectively communicated to stakeholders.

However, because Creative Partnerships works by creating partnerships drawn from the widest fields of endeavour, the different stakeholders recognise that there is a 'knowledge gap' between reflection, analysis and learning from Creative Partnerships. In addition, the wide focus of approach, which is fundamental to the eclectic nature of creativity, means that people are often working at the limit of their disciplines.

For these reasons we have commissioned a series of research monographs exploring the key issues in a range of current literature and summarising the latest developments in each subject. Each monograph is written by an experienced and respected author or authors in their field. The reports aim to be accessible, clearly referenced and to act as 'stepping-stone' resources to underpin the research conducted by and for Creative Partnerships.

This report surveys the literature analysing how and why young people can or should be consulted. It is especially relevant to the broader ambitions of Creative Partnerships because consulting young people and encouraging their participation is central to our work. We need to hear young people's views about what we do, and

we need to find ways to draw on their creativity and insights, to maintain the project's dynamism and sustainability. However, this will not just happen – it needs to be thought about and structured carefully to ensure that we listen to a range of voices, not just the loudest, or those that fit our own existing agendas.

Some methods and methodologies for consulting with, and gathering the views of, young people are surveyed in this report. Its main message is that consulting young people is not a simple or straightforward process and that we need to consider carefully how best to learn about and interpret their views and opinions.

We hope that the report will be a useful and practical handbook for those interested in consulting young people. Above all, we believe this report highlights some of the reasons why young learners should be listened to, and explains how to go about it in a way that unleashes their creativity and generates genuine dialogue and collaboration.

Dr David Parker, Creative Partnerships
Dr Julian Sefton-Green, Creative Partnerships

Executive summary

This review introduces readers to the field of consultation work with young people. It is not a comprehensive review of all published literature (as is, for instance, the review by Coad and Lewis, 2004), but it indicates some relevant references, broad schools of thought, major conceptual issues and practical approaches, as a guide for those who are interested in this area.

The first section discusses why the views of young people should be sought, listened to and acted upon. It looks at a number of factors that make this an increasingly commonsense step to take. These include:

(a) legal models, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(b) Government policy agendas, such as Every Child Matters;

(c) the recent emphasis on citizenship;

(d) theoretical frameworks that have argued for a view of children as 'social actors';

(e) commercial drivers, such as children's disposable income and influence over family spending in an increasingly consumer-dominated society; and

(f) evidence of the benefits of consultation to young people themselves.

In Section 2, the review discusses outcomes and the important message that young people need to feel that being consulted has had some impact and that they have been listened to. These are issues that must be clarified before embarking on any consultation with young people.

There is a range of methods and methodologies available to researchers investigating the perspectives and opinions of young people, and the choice of approach will affect considerably the data collected and the results obtained (3.1). Indeed, there is increasing attention being given to inviting young people themselves to participate in research, as researchers or consultants. Section 3.2 briefly explores this terrain. The bulk of the third section provides an overview of the main methods that have been adopted by researchers in recent years. It examines the main forms of 'traditional' social science research methods:

- 3.4 quantitative research: surveys and quasi-experimental designs.

- 3.5 qualitative approaches: group and individual interviews; ethnography and observation.

- 3.6 traditional forms of representation such as Youth Councils, and more recent versions of these, such as consultation events and deliberative approaches.

Recent research generally, but perhaps particularly with children, has produced a number of innovative methods that aim to access different aspects of children's experience and to allow views to be expressed in a range of forms. Section 3.7 therefore discusses creative and non-verbal forms such as photography, art, multi-media, and audio approaches; logs and scrapbooks; guided tours; 'bedroom culture'; toys; role-play and drama; vignettes and scenarios; and projective techniques. Section 3.8 looks at how information and communications technology (ICT) is being used to develop online approaches to consultation, potentially over wide geographic areas.

Section 4 is devoted to research with younger children, defined as aged 11 and below, and it also looks at work with under-5s.

Section 5 considers ethical issues and contains a checklist of key questions about ethical issues.

Section 6 compares and contrasts more detailed examples of consultation with children and young people. It is deliberately drawn from different sectors to show how funders, methods and aims all affect outcomes.

Finally, a bibliography that indicates particularly useful texts is given at the end.

Working definition of terms

In this review, we use the term 'young people' or sometimes 'children and young people' to refer to all those aged under 18. This is the age range covered both by most of the writing reviewed here, and by the work of Creative Partnerships in schools. Legally, the term 'child' in the UK refers to those under 18 (Masson, 2004). However, this ignores the considerable differences between, for instance, infants and teenagers, as well as within similar age groups, and indeed how the meanings of age vary across cultures. Whilst it may be helpful to think in terms of 'early childhood' (0-5), 'middle childhood' (6-11) and 'young people' for those aged 12 and above, nonetheless, the broad term 'young people' carries the associations of agency and partnership that are desired in this context.

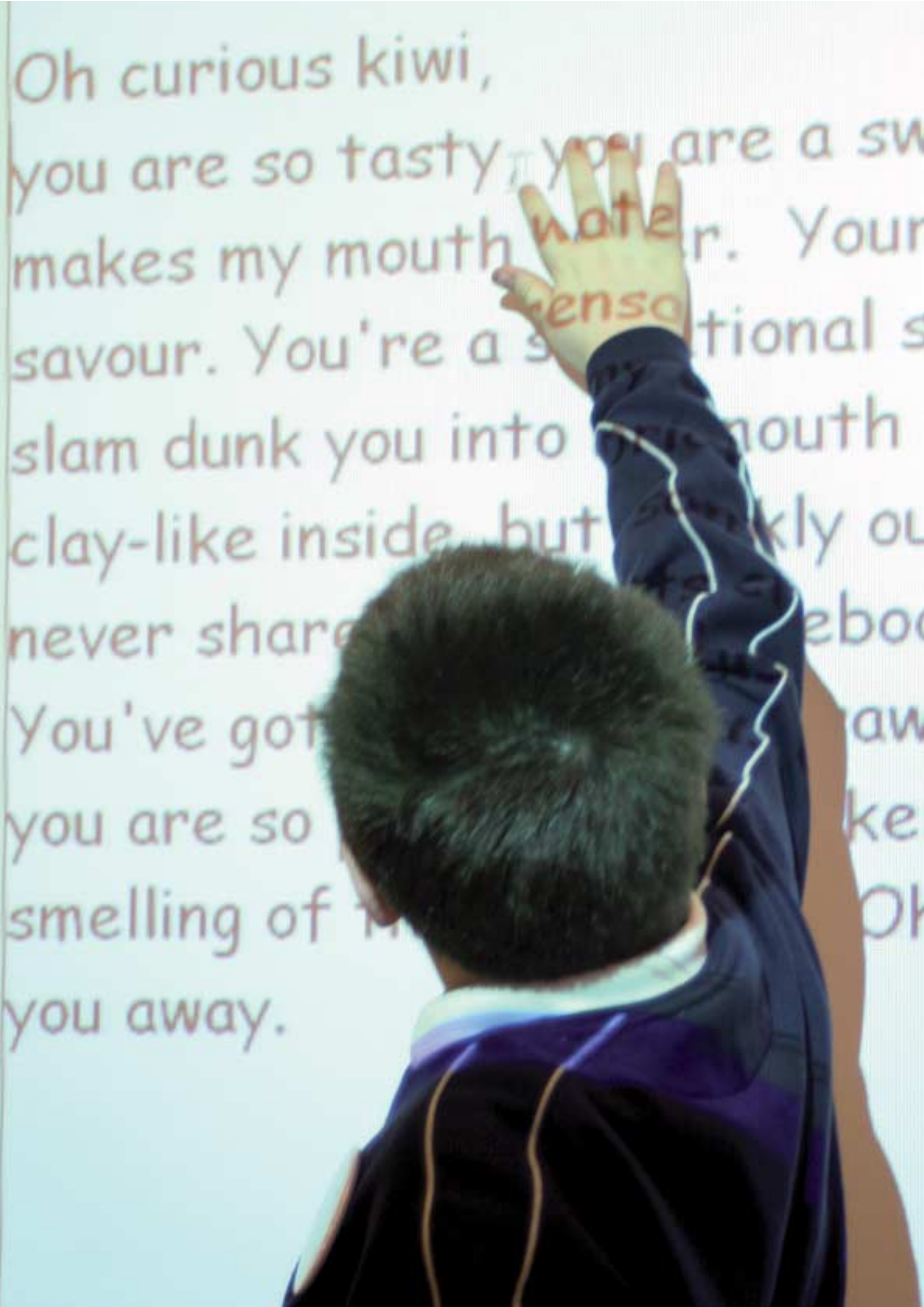
We should also distinguish between participation and consultation, research and evaluation, and in the case of evaluation, between formative or summative evaluation. Although the methods used in each case are often similar, their aims may differ considerably; it is assumed that readers of this review will formulate such aims for themselves.

Consultation involves seeking views, often about an existing programme, normally at the initiative of decision-makers; it can be more or less collaborative and does not necessarily involve participation. Participation is often held to be more profound in its reach, engaging a range of stakeholders, or those affected by an issue, project or proposal from the start of a process, in order to generate ideas, deepen debate, come up with solutions, and involving them in taking decisions about matters that affect their lives. Voluntary and public sector organisations have been particularly instrumental in pushing forward participatory consultation methods, and there is a history of participatory development in the third world that also includes young people (Ackerman *et al*., 2003). However, if it is to be meaningful to young people and effective in influencing change, participation needs to go beyond one-off or isolated programmes, and to be embedded in relationships and ways of working (Kirby *et al*., 2003). Creative Partnerships has observed that consultation with young people about a programme or project often produces the finding that they would like to have been more involved in it from the beginning.

Evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the content, characteristics, and outcomes of a programme to make judgements about it, improve its effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future activities (Kirby and Bryson, 2002). There are debates about what makes 'evaluation' different from other 'research', but the distinctive purpose of evaluation is the aim of improving practice. Kirby and Bryson observe that formative evaluations feed into the development of a project during its lifetime;

summative evaluations judge a programme's overall impact or effectiveness at its end. Pilot projects may be best evaluated by formative self-evaluations; summative evaluations should be carried out for established and promising projects (ibid).

Research – most loosely defined as 'finding things out' – may have a range of purposes: market research, for instance, has generally been represented as seeking to enhance profitability, a goal that generally serves to justify its exclusion from consideration in academic contexts. It is included here in part because it forms such a substantial part of the investigative machinery surrounding young people, because methods are often shared across different sectors, and because of the increasing use of similar approaches within the public sector for 'accountability' to stakeholders. However, market research should be distinguished from much of the other research discussed here, which aims explicitly to improve young people's lives within a framework of social justice.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1 Why consult young people?

By the end of the 20th century, the idea that young people should have a say about many local and national policies, services and issues was becoming widely accepted, and even embedded in legislation and policy guidance. We can distinguish different places in which young people's views are sought: local and national government, public and voluntary sectors, in relation to education, health, family and social services, leisure, the arts and culture, family law, urban or area regeneration, and the environment; international development; academic research; and not least, the private sector, such as commercial and media companies aiming at a youth market.

However, there are questions about the aims and intentions of work in these different sectors; questions about which subjects or issues young people should be consulted on (e.g. those deemed relevant only to youth or relevant to the wider community), and questions about how consultation should be carried out, why, and with what consequences. Research has already identified a gap between rhetoric and practice in this area (Prout, 2001). Young people can feel sceptical of participative and consultative measures, especially if nothing happens, or appears to happen, as a result.

1.1 Motivators and drivers behind consulting young people

There are various legal, political, academic, economic and social reasons behind this new interest in accessing and understanding children's perspectives on their own lives, each of which leads to differing frameworks for the approach to consultation. In practice, however, most people's motivations will involve a mix of many or all of them.

1.1.a Legal models and frameworks

The main legal influence has been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted by the UN in 1989 and the UK in 1991. It brings together the familiar view of children as in need of protection and provision (as objects of concern), with a different view, of children as individuals in their own right, as 'social actors', who can form and express opinions, participate in decision-making processes and influence solutions. Article 12 calls for State parties to

> *assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

Whilst it is not legally enforceable, it is proving a rallying point and lever for children's rights advocates.

Image, left: Roughwood Primary School, Yorkshire, worked with poet in residence, Matt Black over the course of a year to raise attainment, appreciation and confidence in oracy and creative writing. Photographer: Gavin Joynt

Justifications for consulting young people made with reference to the UNCRC will generally stress children's intrinsic rights as autonomous individuals deserving of equality, choice, respect and consideration, rather than meeting other goals.

Individuals associated with this framework in the UK include, amongst others: Priscilla Alderson (Alderson, 2000b), Roger Hart (Hart, 1992), Mary John (John, 1996, 2003), Perpetua Kirby (Kirby *et al.*, 2003), Gerison Lansdown (Lansdown, 1995), Ginny Morrow (Morrow, 1999), Audrey Osler (Osler and Starkey, 1998), Willow (2002), and see the authors collected in *The New Handbook of Children's Rights: Comparative Policy and Practice* (Franklin, 2001). Organisations include many voluntary sector groups: CRAE (Children's Rights Alliance for England: www.crae.org.uk) is an alliance of voluntary and statutory organisations, and see also Arch (Action on Rights for Children: www.arch-ed.org). The Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) is a global networking organisation that disseminates information about and supports the implementation of the UNCRC (www.crin.org); Article 12 Scotland does this nationally (www.article12.org). The Children's Legal Centre publishes *ChildRight*, a journal on children's rights: www.childrenslegalcentre.com.

1.1.b UK politics and policy frameworks

There have also been political initiatives in the UK to represent children's views and to safeguard their interests. The examples below relate to England and Wales, but similar initiatives apply in Scotland:

- The Children's Act of 1989, implemented in 1991, makes it a legal requirement that young people are consulted and involved in the process of decision-making on matters that affect them, and that professionals whose work has an impact on the lives of children, consider how this is carried out (Davie, Upton and Varma, 1996).
- A Children's Commissioner for London was appointed in 2000, for Wales in 2001 and for England in 2005.
- The Government created the Children and Young Peoples' Unit (CYPU) and announced the involvement of children and young people as a core principle across Government Departments. Recent publications convey this through their titles: for instance, *Building a strategy for Children and Young People*, (CYPU 2001a), *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children & Young People* (CYPU 2001b), *Working Together: giving children and young people a say,* (CYPU 2003), *Listening to Learn: Action Plan from the DfES,* (DfES 2002), *Listening, Hearing and Responding* (Department of Heath 2002).

- The DfES 2003 Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (followed in 2005 by *Youth Matters*) calls for children to have a say in developing policies that affect them, recognises the importance of children having a voice and expresses a new seriousness in approaches to children. This has led to particular interest in consulting young people by local authorities and other public sector agencies: for instance, the Children's Fund, aimed at children aged 5-13 at risk of social exclusion, carries a requirement that its multi-professional partnerships actively ensure that children's views influence the shape, delivery and subsequent evaluation of services (Coad and Lewis, 2004).
- The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) school inspection framework now requires inspectors and schools systematically to seek the views of young people. The Education Act 2002 places a duty on schools and Local Authorities to consult pupils about decisions affecting them, in accordance with the Secretary of State's guidance.
- Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships have been required to conduct annual audits since their formation in 1998, including the requirement to gather children and young people's preferences for childcare and other support services (Clark, McQuail and Moss, 2003).

In policy contexts, it is worth noting that participation by and consultation with young people is often emphasised as a means to other ends. It is said to lead to better decisions and outcomes that can improve institutions, services or projects. It is often argued that users of services have a fund of implicit knowledge or experience (even 'expertise') about them that can be mobilised. Thus, for instance, it is claimed that consultation:

- will make services more appropriate for young people's needs
- will ensure sustainability because young people will be more committed to and enthusiastic about these services
- can help raise the profile of projects or initiatives and give them an identity, so that more young people will be encouraged to use them
- will improve policy by making it more sensitive, helping policy-makers to understand young people's lives and perspectives
- will, in some schools, help overcome disaffection and enhance school improvement
- will lessen young people's resistance, if they feel their views are being taken into account.

For some, the goal is to change adults' perceptions of young people's capabilities so that they become more willing to enter into dialogue with them. Craig argues that children have proved 'more robust, articulate and willing to be heard' than adults had assumed, and that this serves to legitimate their further involvement (Craig, 2003). Nonetheless, in many cases, listening to young people can be instrumental (a means to an end), rather than following the more radical rights-based agenda described in 1.1.a above. Hence the then Education Secretary of State, Charles Clarke, writes optimistically that 'giving children and young people a say in decisions that affect them will impact positively on standards, behaviour and inclusion' (CYPU 2003). A book title *Consulting Pupils: what's in it for schools?* (Rudduck and Flutter, 2003) is similarly clear about the institutional self-interest behind consultation.

As Kirby and Bryson (2002) point out, the assumption in the participation literature that services will be better if they involve young people in planning, has rarely been investigated. Indeed, it can sometimes be hard to evaluate because of the extent to which it has become an item of faith. Others have also pointed to the potential manipulation in this model – that it serves to incorporate young people, possibly blunting more critical voices about the fundamental purposes of the services or institutions under consideration (Hadfield and Haw, 2001).

The 'Inspiring Schools' publications and website www.participationforschools.org.uk contain material and case studies exploring the impact of young people's participation.

1.1.c The Citizenship Agenda

The currency of citizenship as a political issue, and statements by the Government about 'stakeholder democracy' have also strengthened calls for increased involvement of young people as members of communities (McNeish and Newman, 2002). Citizenship education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) put the emphasis on young people developing skills of participation in their schools and wider communities, and may be helping to revitalise Youth Councils and other forums.

Many people argue that consulting young people, and more specifically involving them in decision-making, is not only about recognising their rights, but also about developing skills of cooperation which are necessary in order to achieve a more cohesive and democratic society (e.g. Osler, 2000). It is also hoped that they will be more likely to get involved in democratic institutions when they are older and that 'practising' participation in community affairs and political events can foster a culture in which people take their citizenship rights and responsibilities seriously. This process

addresses children as citizens, rather than as consumers. In a 'radical' version, consulting young people in sites such as schools will model a greater democracy than currently exists, and by prefiguring it, bring it into existence. In a more pragmatic model, participation is said to teach children the skills of compromise and coping with disappointment, that are features of adult political life.

Examples include, in school, School Councils, and in relation to government, Youth Councils and Parliaments, that are area-wide and linked to Local Authorities. These are promoted and supported by organisations such as School Councils UK (www.schoolcouncils.org). The Secondary Heads Association has published a Framework for School Councils. ESSA, the English Secondary Students' Association, is a student-led organisation (www.essa.org.uk). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has also published in this area – see, for example, Young People's Citizenship (Neale, 2004). The Citizenship Foundation promotes more effective citizenship through education (www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk). www.participationworks.org.uk is an online gateway to children and young people's participation activities and organisations.

1.1.d Theoretical frameworks

Interest in children's perspectives has been further stimulated by significant conceptual and theoretical developments, in particular in how children are viewed and understood within the social sciences. The new social studies of childhood have challenged the tendency to consider children either in relation to larger entities of which they are a part (such as families, schools, nations), or as 'becomings' (that is, as persons growing to reach mature adulthood, of interest primarily because of who and what they will become in the future). Instead, new studies have argued for a view of children as 'beings', fully-formed now, whose present ideas, approaches to life, choices and relationships are of interest in their own right. They argue that children should be recognised as competent agents, who are participants in, and producers of, rather than passive recipients of, social and cultural change. For instance, children are social carers and economic producers, engaged in cultural activities and in creating identities and meanings, and their views of the world do not necessarily match those embodied in adult beliefs and institutions. This change in emphasis places great importance on gaining children's perspectives.

Academic analyses have also challenged the extent to which the increasing emphasis on children's rights and responsibilities is simply a mark of progress and enlightenment. Neo-liberal policies pursued by governments in the past 30 years have dismantled state protection and rights, and require individuals to see themselves as autonomous and self-regulating subjects (Rose, 1999). Even

participatory measures that are benign in intent may contribute to this neo-liberal agenda by obscuring the structural factors behind inequalities, in favour of individual responsibility-taking in a 'power-loaded game' (Triantafillou and Nielsen, 2001). Academics in this area have therefore studied the pressures to which children are subjected in this challenging climate, and have pointed out the extent to which they are increasingly regulated and controlled, despite the insistence on their supposed free agency (Prout, 2000).

Some writers associated with this work include: David Buckingham (Buckingham, 2000), Anita Harris (Harris, 2004), Malcolm Hill (Hill and Tisdall, 1997), Allison James (James and James, 2004; James and Prout, 1997), Alan Prout (e.g.: Prout, 2004), Chris Jenks (James, Jenks and Prout, 1999; Jenks, 1996), Berry Mayall (Mayall, 2002), Michael Wyness (Wyness, 2000) and see authors collected in (Qvortrup, 2005). Useful collections of essays by some of these and other authors about working with young people can be found in Christensen and James, 2000; Fraser *et al*., 2004; Greene and Hogan, 2005; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000; Lewis *et al.,* 2004.

1.1.e Commercial drivers and the consumer model

Alongside these developments must be set more pragmatic shifts: children in the West are increasingly seen as an important market in their own right, whose disposable income is growing. They are also increasingly important influencers of choice on family purchases such as cars, computers, groceries and holidays.

As a result, marketers are spending considerable sums on finding out about children's perspectives and interests in consumer culture, in order to provide data that will improve the development or sales of products. Logistix Kids, for example, claims to speak each month to 400 different young people aged 7-14 and to spend more than £500,000 each year investigating trends in the child marketplace. Such data collection is beyond the means of most academic or voluntary sector researchers. However, not only is the data usually confidential, it is often restricted in its scope, concerned with targeting 'emerging, untapped consumer behaviors,' in the words of one US market research website (Datamonitor 2005). So they are concerned with children's consumption rather than their civic participation. Too often, however, discussions in the public sector about consulting young people ignore this economic aspect altogether. This review contends that much can be learned from this area – about contemporary society, about young people and about methods.

In addition, marketing models are increasingly infiltrating public services, with children, as well as adults, being redefined as the

(quasi or enforced) ‘consumers’ of the services and goods they receive, rather than as citizens. This again justifies the emphasis on finding out what they want and think.

1.1.f The personal development model

One of the most frequent arguments in this area is that the process of being consulted will benefit young people personally (Kirby and Bryson, 2002). Commonly listed benefits are to their self-respect, competence, confidence, trust in adults and themselves, self-esteem, social inclusion, sense of responsibility for taking increased control over aspects of their lives, understanding of decision-making processes, fun and enjoyment, and definable skills that might be useful in future employment or education, such as managing time, running meetings and public speaking. It is also emphasised that without action and response, the effect can be the opposite. In education, writers have argued that consulting young people about their learning will enhance their capacity to become self-reflective learners (Fielding and Bragg, 2003), a skill often held to be necessary to thrive in today’s flexible, ‘knowledge’ economy; Hannam’s study also discusses links between school participation and achievement (Hannam, 2001).

However, it is noticeable that the benefits of consultation are generally confined to the necessarily small numbers who take part, and thus the benefits for the other young people in their communities remain to be quantified. It is also unclear how far young people who get involved in such activities are motivated by these personal benefits, rather than by the hope of change or being listened to. Further, Hadfield and Haw (2000) suggest that this argument may reflect a lack of confidence about success in other areas, such as shaping policy.



2 After the consultation - interpretation and outcomes

Before discussing how to go about consulting or involving young people, the importance of having a clear purpose for the consultation should be emphasised. Roberts (2003) remarks that research expertise lags behind our capacity to do something meaningful with the findings. As this suggests, there is widespread concern about how to make consultation meaningful and effective, rather than short term and tokenistic, and about how to evaluate its impact (Kirby and Bryson, 2002). A strategy should be drawn up at the start to address issues such as: What happens to young people's views once they have been gathered by whatever means? Who owns the data gathered? How will it be interpreted and disseminated, and by whom? What is realistically to be achieved? Is it just an exercise in making all participants feel good? Roberts argues that if consultation is cosmetic, it draws on 'one of the few resources over which children and young people exercise some direct control – namely, their time', and she concludes by asking for long-term follow up (2003). Other researchers, too, draw attention to the responsibility of researchers in interpreting and representing children's 'voices' (Alldred and Burman, 2005). As noted in Section 3.2, young co-researchers tend not to get involved in data analysis, although where they have been in control of the process, their involvement has been shown to be successful and they have written reports with recommendations for change - see examples in Fielding and Bragg, 2003.

Without a commitment to giving a response (even if nothing can be acted upon immediately) - young people can quickly become disillusioned and the whole exercise can be counterproductive. Of course, dissemination has resource implications, as findings may need to be communicated in a number of different ways. Conventional written reports and summaries, on websites, in newsletters etc, can reach a number of diverse and broad audiences. Other creative methods such as workshops, video or audio recordings or other feedback events, may suit young people better. Involving young people themselves in the dissemination has been shown to have a strong impact on adult audiences, but care should be taken not to put young people in difficult situations, such as those where they receive negative responses, for which they are unprepared.

Young people can be involved in checking whether changes have taken place as a result of their proposals. For instance, a research project into Personal, Social and Health Education provision in one school led to the establishment of a panel of staff and students who discussed changes together. In another school, research into improving lunches was made visible by explaining on the printed menu that it had been produced through consultation carried out by the Students as Researchers group and inviting further comments (Fielding and Bragg, 2003).

Image, left: Pupil from Henry Compton Boys School in West London interviewing Fraser James, actor, in January 2007. Photographer: Sam Friedrich

3 How to consult young people?

This section provides an overview of the main methods that have been adopted by researchers in recent years, including the main forms of 'traditional' social science research methods, i.e. quantitative (survey based) research and qualitative approaches, such as interviews and focus groups. This section of the report will refer to some of the arguments about research methods in general but, as will be shown, these principles are inflected in particular directions when applied to children and young people. Recent research, particularly with children, has produced a number of innovative methods that address children's competences, experiences of the world and ways of communicating. There may be no research method that is unsuitable for use with children (Christensen and James, 2000), and some have argued that it is often adult perceptions of children that are at issue, rather than children's inherent differences (Punch, 2002a). The new perspectives on childhood discussed in 1.1.d have meant that researchers have increasingly been able to challenge earlier research that concluded that children were not capable of reflection or sustained engagement with complex issues (Connolly, 1997).

Each method has strengths and weaknesses. For instance, it has been argued that visual methods elicit a range of views beyond those of the most literate, and give access to unconscious aspects of responses. Yet such methods may also be seen as intrusive and thus ethically dubious, for the same reasons. There are also debates over the methodologies, practices, philosophical and political issues involved, although these are not dealt with in detail here. Similarly, this report refers to techniques for research, evaluation, consultation and participation, although these terms are subject to a range of definitions and distinctions that are only touched on here.

3.1 What kind of 'voice'?

It is disingenuous to see children as finding, discovering, or being given a voice, as if we can simply access their authentic core being. What they say depends on what they are asked, how they are asked it, 'who' they are invited to speak as in responding; and then, in turn, on the values and assumptions of the researcher or audience interpreting their 'voices' (Connolly, 1997).

Hadfield and Haw (2000; 2001) argue that 'voice' as a term and concept is being used in an increasing number of contexts and practices, such that its meanings are being stretched. They develop a typology of three kinds of voice: authoritative, critical and therapeutic. Each type of voice represents a different process of articulation and intended outcome. They argue that using this typology with young people helps them understand what kind of a voice they might choose to develop, the kinds of obstacles they might face, and the kinds of voice that might achieve the changes they desire.



Image, preceding page: Students at City Hall in the Mayor of London's Debating Chamber, taking part in 'Architecture of the emotions' with live arts company Innovision Media. Photographer: Rehana Mughal

An 'authoritative' voice is intended to be representative of a particular group of young people, of varying sizes. Larger groups are often thought to be best represented by surveys, which may limit young people's role to that of respondent, but this voice can include qualitative work that provides powerful, illustrative quotes. Whether it is listened to depends on a number of factors, including how convincingly it is articulated and how far it fits with the existing agendas of its audience.

A 'critical' voice, by contrast, is often about challenging existing policies, practices and views or stereotypes of a group or issue. It is more concerned with presenting unheard or alternative views to a specific audience, such as professionals, often through a process where young people work intensively with committed researchers or workers.

Finally, a 'therapeutic' voice validates and supports speakers' own difficult experiences, and suggests ways of coping with similar problems faced by others. Examples might be peer mentoring schemes.

We might add to this typology the 'consumer' voice in market research, since, as noted above (1.1e), it is a voice that young people are often asked to express, with little discussion of what it might mean to give their opinions as consumers, or how the findings might be used.

Other critics have extended the voice metaphor to think about voice in terms of 'volume' or the 'acoustic' of an institution, to draw attention to those voices that are most and least heard, by whom, and the extent to which being heard relies on being able to express oneself in an already acceptable style and language (Arnot *et al.*, 2004). It has also been pointed out that we need to listen to 'multiple' voices, as they rarely agree.

Some critics have also questioned how far it is always appropriate to ask young people to express their views at all. They argue that silence can be an important tool of resistance, and young people should have a right to privacy. Anita Harris, writing about young women, argues that

> *The current emphasis on youth voice and visibility is occurring at a time when young people have few opportunities for unmediated, unscrutinized expressions of culture, recreation, critique and social commentary. It also coincides with the disappearance of a genuine public sphere in which participation typically takes place (2004: 149).*

She remarks that there is very little shaping of the agenda by youth themselves – especially as youth engagement with each other is increasingly regulated. In relation to education, Mimi Orner asks 'whose interests are served when students speak?' (Orner, 1992). She argues that calls for student voice as a central component of student empowerment 'perpetuate relations of domination in the name of liberation' because they do not take into account the intersection of identity, language, context and power that informs all pedagogical relations. Elizabeth Ellsworth too argues that 'every expression of student voice [is] partial and predicated on the absence and marginalisation of alternative voices' (Ellsworth, 1989).

3.2 Who gets involved and how? – young people as researchers

Despite the ideal that all young people are 'stakeholders' in issues that affect them and should be involved, there is some evidence (Kirby and Bryson, 2002) that only a limited range of people get involved in consultation, particularly if it places high demands on individuals. In theory, schools offer an environment in which it is possible to reach a diverse range of young people. Yet even there many hard-to-reach young people go unheard. There may be gender differences in who gets involved or is most enthusiastic - evidence would seem to suggest girls more than boys (ibid). This has led to some consideration of the advantages of compulsory involvement (where specific groups can be brought into the process, but commitment may be low, and ethical issues about the right to withdraw are raised – see Section 5), as opposed to voluntary attendance (where commitment and possibly enjoyment or positive feelings about the consultation are higher, but the reach less extensive). As discussed in Section 5, public and voluntary sector consultation often places a moral value on inclusion of otherwise 'marginal' voices, such as children in care or those with disabilities.

The UNCRC's recommendation that children should be informed, involved and consulted about all activities that affect their lives has led to a growing practice and body of literature on the role of children and young people as researchers, and reflection on how they can be involved in projects.

Roger Hart's 'ladder of participation' (Hart, 1992) is well-known and much-used or adapted. In brief, the lowest (non-participatory) rungs involve forms of manipulation, decoration or tokenism, which do not allow young people to assume important roles and indeed may actively exploit them for adults' agendas. Higher rungs involve information-giving about roles allotted within adult-initiated projects, and even consultation about their purpose and outcomes. The highest rungs involve shared decision-making on adult-initiated projects, projects initiated and directed by young people with support

from adults, or youth-initiated projects with shared decision-making. There is a certain amount of debate about which of the highest rungs should represent the most significant and beneficial achievement. Some analysts stress the importance of dialogue and power-sharing between adults and young people, while others emphasise young people's autonomy. Practical, as well as philosophical, considerations play a role here. For instance, organisations such as schools, with a perpetually changing cohort of young people and a more stable staff, may find the 'dialogic' model more effective in instilling long-term changes in adult attitudes and skills, that can be reactivated with successive groups of young people. Nonetheless, the model has proved useful to many groups and organisations as a guide in assessing the place of young people in the work they do.

In education, Fielding explores attempts to authorise young people's perspectives and interpretive frames, and to move them from being a 'data source' to a 'significant voice' (Fielding, 2001). He outlines a number of models for student researchers, including dialogue, co-researchers (working alongside adults on adult agendas) and students as researchers in their own right, shaping the direction and outcomes of research more directly. Fielding and Bragg identify a number of benefits to be gained from engaging students as researchers, for the young people involved, their teachers and their schools (2003). Louise Raymond and colleagues working within the Bedfordshire Schools Improvement Project (www.bsip.net) have been influential in implementing student research work within schools.

In relation to co-researchers, Prout (2002) and Rayner (2003) both discuss how children helped with design of research instruments and interview guides, conducted peer interviews and took photographs. In other instances, young researchers have been trained in traditional research approaches (reading other research, formulating hypotheses, and using methods such as surveys and interviews) and have conducted research themselves (Kellett, 2005; Kirby, 1999; Warren, 2000). See also http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk/; www.consultingpupils.co.uk; www.soundout.org. In other cases, particularly with younger children, the research element is less formal. For instance, children might act as journalists or reporters, interviewing others about their experience and communicating that in a video, newsletter or newspaper front page. Such research and journalism offer a real and ready audience, and roles that young people often value. Photojournalism is more popular and immediate for some students (Seiter, 2004). It should be noted that young researchers often require substantial support from youth workers or teachers, as well as from professional researchers, and therefore this is not a low-cost option. Adults may take a variety of roles – facilitating, training, challenging, developing ideas, advising, or doing

things on children's behalf. They may also need support from others (Fielding and Bragg, 2003).

However, Kirby and Bryson (2002) observe that young researchers often suffer from the same problems raised in relation to typical social science methods (such as poor response rates in the case of surveys, or lack of skill in interviewing). They suggest that some overstated claims have been made in this area:

> *The assertions that young people design better tools, have better access to their peers or make good interviewers are usually based on the views of participating young people and workers, and rarely do evaluators give an independent assessment of these. No study has yet asked other young people whom they would prefer to be researched by. There has been little analysis of what characteristics make a good young researcher other than (or even instead of) their youth. A detailed study of peer research on transitions concluded that it offered "little new knowledge or understanding to these debates" (France, 2000). This was partly because the project "focused more on the research tasks rather than theory building" although the evaluator concluded that theory building (i.e. highlighting and explaining social phenomena) would not have been outside the capabilities of the peer researchers. Young people are rarely engaged in the analysis stage, which they often find boring and/or difficult (particularly statistical analysis).*

It should be noted that the use of youth consultants is flourishing in consumer research. Young people may be recruited to supply their own views on products and advertisements, or to publicise 'cool' new products to their friends. Many have argued that this is exploitative (a notorious example is the lack of reward for the young person who came up with the idea of squeezy ketchup bottles) and have criticised the relationships that market researchers establish with consultants as shallow (Quart, 2003; Schor, 2004). However, the issue of whether and how to maintain relationships with young people involved in consultation is challenging in any context.

3.3 Methods

There are distinctions to be made between qualitative or quantitative methods, although in recent years one trend has been towards the use of mixed methods, with emphasis placed instead on methodology (the underlying philosophies and intentions of the work) rather than on the selected methods alone.

3.4 Standard social science research approaches: Quantitative

3.4.a Surveys and questionnaires

Children have often been excluded from large-scale quantitative research, or data has been collected about them from carers and parents, in line with the view that they are not competent social players. However, as children's roles as consumers and citizens are being taken increasingly seriously, more attention is being paid to collecting data from them (Roberts, 2000). Alderson shows that children as young as seven years can fill out questionnaires if they are presented appropriately (Alderson and Arnold, 1999).

Professional surveys gain a representative sample by having quotas of respondents according to given criteria, such as national statistics for gender, ethnicity and age, in order to make wider claims on the basis of their findings. Organisations can buy into surveys carried out by specialist survey organisations to seek responses on particular themes.

Surveys and questionnaires can be carried out by post, in the street, anonymously, door to door, or with known populations (such as school children taking part in an event). Survey questions may be developed from focus groups (see below), and should be extensively pre-tested to ensure that children will understand the questions. They might seek responses about different dimensions of an issue (for instance, not only seeking opinions of an issue or event, but also asking whether it is considered important in any case). They may be structured or semi-structured; the former consist solely of closed questions, the latter include more open-ended ones, suitable for those confident with writing. Closed statements make them easier or quicker to answer as well as to analyse, and for others to use. Responses can be given in a straightforward 'yes / no' format, as a multiple choice, on a three- or five-point sliding scale (eg from strongly agree to strongly disagree), with words to circle, or with sentences to complete; 'smiley' faces can be used with younger children (MacBeath et al., 2003). Some surveys have used aural formats successfully, where children listen to and record their answers on tape (Roberts, 2000).

Respondents may answer in groups or as individuals. Since children can respond differently in different contexts, the location of the interviews (e.g. home or school) is likely to influence how they respond (Roberts, 2000). Self-completion questionnaires can sap children's motivation. Where questionnaires are answered face-to-face with researchers, the latter can help with problems in understanding wording and give prompts for unclear answers, but confidentiality is lost to some extent.

Surveys and questionnaires have both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, it is claimed that:

- they are generally confidential, private and anonymous
- they are economical, in that they gain broad-brush responses from large numbers of people
- responses can be organised and analysed quickly and efficiently
- arguably, they are popular with young people, perhaps because they are a familiar form (not least from youth media such as magazines)
- they seem inclusive, and can be suitable for young people who are shy or dislike writing
- they can be devised in collective or participatory ways, involving young people in their design and/or advising on their wording.

On the other hand, their disadvantages include:

- they can be overused (hence provoking flippant responses)
- they tend to deal with only a narrow range of issues, which are capable of being expressed in a limited form
- responses can be hard to analyse, as reasons for answers are not given
- they tend to rely on reading skills; younger children may require support and more time to complete them
- amateur or untrained researchers, in particular, may design questionnaires without a clear end use or understanding of how to use answers
- they can be misused or manipulative (for instance, shaping questions to ensure a particular response is given or to approve policies that have already been decided)
- there can be a poor response rate, except with a captive audience (such as school children required to complete them in class)
- recruitment can be time-consuming – for instance, negotiating access to the young people and the cooperation of participants
- There are issues about whether to offer incentives to respond and how doing or not doing this might skew responses either way.

3.4.b Experimental and quasi-experimental designs

Strictly speaking, experimentation refers to approaches where researchers create settings (e.g. in a laboratory) where variables can be strictly controlled and then manipulated – often without being explicit about the true purposes of the research. It is worth

mentioning experimental designs briefly. For instance, school projects may want to collect baseline data on school attendance, punctuality, grades, homework completion and participation in extra-curricular events and compare these at the start and end of a project, or compare 'control' groups (such as a class not taking part in a project). The problem here, of course, is the difficulty of ascertaining a causal link between a changed indicator and a particular project. It is important to find qualitative indicators of success, too (Craig, 2003).

3.5 Standard social science research approaches: Qualitative

It is generally believed that qualitative methods are more effective than quantitative methods if the aim is to find out what people feel, think and believe. They include:

3.5.a Interviews

Individual interviews are among the most popular tools used for gathering views and perspectives. They can be conducted in situ, in a neutral venue, or on the phone. Unlike a survey, where respondents are all asked the same questions, they can be loosely structured to pursue issues of interest. Responses may be written down or audio-recorded. Their advantages are that:

- they often yield much information and thoughtful responses
- they allow interviewers to probe and understand the reasoning behind responses in detail
- they can bring up new issues that researchers were not aware of
- they are often liked by participants, provided the relationship with the interviewer is positive
- they can be more personal and private than group interviews, and may be perceived as more confidential.

However, against this it is also argued:

- interviews are more intrusive than observation or more 'passive' research methods
- some young people are not used to talking to an adult one-to-one and may be nervous and anxious
- interviews reach relatively small numbers
- they are expensive and time-consuming – to conduct, to transcribe, and to interpret
- they require considerable skills to conduct well

- it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality, for instance if a child reveals information on which the interviewer is obliged to act.

Some concerns have been expressed as to the appropriateness of interviews as a tool for listening to younger children. Children being questioned may become monosyllabic, or may try to 'second guess' what adults hope they will say, particularly in an educational context where children are used to the teacher knowing the answer. However, the extent to which children are necessarily more suggestible than adults is open to debate (Roberts, 2000). Some suggest that children's views are no less valid than those of adults, yet problems arise when their views compete with those of adults (Craig, 2003). Many problems may be avoided with simple rules such as specifying 'don't know' answers as valid in order to avoid best guesses, avoiding leading questions (Roberts, 2000) and interviewing in friendship pairs.

3.5.b Group interviews and focus groups

To counter the power imbalances involved in an adult researcher interviewing one child, group interviews may be used, where children give responses in turn to questions. Focus groups are in effect a group interview, but they may be designed to draw specifically on the interactions between participants to develop responses. Generally, such groups consist of between three and eight participants, depending on factors such as the time allotted.. Smaller numbers may better enable the focus to be on the topics for discussion, rather than on group dynamics. With larger groups, two interviewers may be helpful, with one observing and taking notes. Some evidence suggests that friendship groups are likely to be more productive. Market research focus groups would generally consist of 8-12 participants and last 1-2 hours; this length of time is unlikely to be available to those researching in school time.

Groups may be homogenous or diverse to generate debate, and it is important to be aware of power dynamics such as younger participants feeling intimidated by older ones, girls by boys or vice versa. In some cases it might be appropriate to run single sex groups, especially where an issue is likely to be viewed differently according to gender; although mixed groups may promote debate about those differences. Special groups may need to be run for those with particular needs or learning disabilities. In some instances, young people may be recruited to discuss without an interviewer present at all, only a tape recorder (Barker, 1998), or an adult may withdraw allowing participants to continue a discussion on their own. Commercial market research may also recruit focus groups according to particular profiles or target markets, such as 'influentials' (those held to shape peer opinions) or demographic representatives.



Image left: ‘Creativity Works’ event in Leicester where young people played the role of young consultants to help choose creative practitioners to join their school on a 3 year creative journey. Photographer: Alan Fletcher

Advantages of groups include:

- group talk may be less stilted, more natural, more reflective, and allow for the ‘social nature’ of children (Lewis, 1992)
- children may be less intimidated – they can build on familiar primary school practices such as Circle Time (where children are given an object to hold when it is their turn to speak), and interviewers can do warm-up activities to relax them
- they may be more practical in some settings
- they may allow for more depth and breadth in responses than individual interviews, e.g. through individuals being prompted or questioned by others in the group, or feeling able to challenge the interviewer’s questions
- the group consensus that is likely to be generated may be useful if investigating experiences that are also social (e.g. about teaching)
- they can raise unexpected or unanticipated issues
- they are less expensive than individual interviews.

Points to remember about group interviews include:

- since they are dependent on words, and on group dynamics, some group members may be inhibited from speaking
- some group members may feel that they are not confidential, and this issue should be raised at the outset, with an agreement of confidentiality between all participants
- they can be derailed by irrelevant topics
- they may be dominated by particular individuals, shaping the overall feel of the group and possibly generating an unrepresentative consensus (although as noted above, this consensus can also be revealing)
- as with all interviews, there are dangers in relying on what people say they think or do, which may not reflect what they actually think or do
- attention needs to be paid to issues such as how to record (especially how to distinguish voices), and the skills needed to chair and facilitate
- videoing groups makes it easier to distinguish contributions, but may be impractical and or intimidating. Facilities commonly used by market research organisations, such as rooms with one-way mirrors for observation, are unlikely to be available to public sector researchers.

Choosing between group or individual interviews requires consideration of a range of factors including research setting, sample, gender and the topic. Reporting of findings should be clear about the origins of the different types of data.

3.5.c Stimulus material and prompts in interviews

Straightforward questioning may be supplemented with prompts and stimulus material (see also section 3.7). Some examples include:

- controversial or representative statements to spark reactions: e.g. McCallum et al used four 'statements cards' about learning as prompts with children aged 6 and 11 (2000)
- focus groups may use colour cards to access feelings – different colours evoke different emotions or approaches, and are a way to talk about positive and negative aspects of a project, whilst holding a card; when the card moves on, the feelings go with it. (This draws on the work of Edward de Bono (De Bono, 2000))
- timelines – participants draw a timeline and mark on it the ups and downs of a project, their own lives, etc. These could also take the form of 'confidence lines' that show how a person's confidence has changed over the course of a project, or what they can do afterwards that they could not do before
- ranking exercises: where children are given a set of cards or photographs of activities or issues to rank in order of importance.

3.5.d Ethnography, observation and participant observation

Ethnographic research, based in long-term fieldwork, claims to excel in offering in-depth understanding of people and the 'natural settings' or contexts in which they live and work. It produces informed or 'thick' descriptions of ways of life, and pays particular attention to the motives, emotions, perspectives and understandings of those studied. Some argue that it is a particularly useful method for studying children, giving them a more direct voice than through quantitative forms, and giving researchers more insights into their cultures (Davis, Watson and Cunningham-Burley, 2000; James, Jenks and Prout, 1999). Traditionally, it is a time-consuming, expensive, and often long-term commitment, involving immersion in the everyday life, and amongst individuals, of a particular community (usually for over a year).

In practice, much research labelled 'ethnographic' does not meet these standards, although this is not necessarily a weakness. Instead, it may involve repeated interviews to explore specific social issues in various contexts, with 'embedded' researchers sometimes

drawing upon their general knowledge of the people and situations involved, and identifying 'key informers' as particularly important.

Market research now conducts what it calls ethnographic research, for instance focusing on 'day in the life' videos – 'a snapshot into the lives of your target teen or tween consumer [that] promotes a deeper understanding of your teen consumer's lifestyle and mindset' (www.alloymarketing.com, 2006). By contrast, academic debate has been dominated recently by concerns about power relations and attempts to develop diverse forms for presenting ethnographic work, such as 'polyphonic texts' that showcase multiple and conflicting voices, rather than a 'colonial' singular, master narrative.

Observational research may be more short-term. This involves a familiar person (who may also be a participant, such as a teacher researching their own school) spending extended periods of time in a setting, observing and recording the interactions of participants, and interpreting actions and the contexts in which they occur. There is a strong tradition of observation as a tool in early childhood education practice, as it is particularly useful for understanding the abilities, needs and interests of pre-verbal children (Clark, McQuail and Moss, 2003). Observation can inform other methods, including participatory methods where children are able to play an active role (ibid). Companies like Lego have tested their products on very young children for years. Since self-reported behaviour may not match actions, Lego takes its products to nurseries to observe children at play (www.legolearning.net).

3.6 Representation and consultation approaches

As well as these methods traditionally used in the social sciences, young people may be involved in other formats that aim to represent their views.

3.6.a Traditional forms of representation

Traditional forms of representation echo adult forms of election, nomination and representation, and views may be expressed by voting, lobbying, campaigning, etc. Such councils and forums tend to produce a mixed reaction. On the one hand:

- they may be acceptable because of the extent to which they are familiar to adults
- their structures should allow them to be transparent and democratic
- they clearly teach additional important skills that may be useful in civic participation later in life
- they allow an open forum for debating issues

- young people who take part in them are often enthusiastic about them
- where they are genuine, they have been shown to improve the quality of relationships between adults and young people, enabling the latter to achieve new levels of responsibility (Alderson and Arnold, 1999; Lansdown, 1995).

On the other hand, evaluation suggests a number of problems, particularly to do with the gap between the aspiration and the reality:

- There are questions about how far they represent the views of only a few, especially of the 'exceptional' individuals often selected (by adults) to stand for others.
- Their forms (prioritising formal channels and written procedures) might inhibit those lacking the cultural familiarity with them, and especially younger children - in other words, they may reproduce existing power relations.
- They are often seen as pursuing adult agendas, or issues that adults have defined as relevant to 'youth' (for instance, school uniform, rather than the curriculum).
- They are often accused of not being accountable to the communities they supposedly represent.
- They can easily be ignored, because young people are often not represented on committees that have real power, such as governing bodies within a school.
- Similarly, they are often seen as tokenistic; some evidence suggests that when a school council is seen as tokenistic, it may have a more negative impact than having no council at all (Alderson, 2000a).
- When young people were asked which consultation methods they preferred, forums were one of the least popular methods (Stafford *et al.*, 2003). Craig claims that young people prefer more participative ways to engage their peers in policy debate (Craig, 2003).

Guidelines on good practice have frequently highlighted the importance of such councils having broad support, wide-ranging agendas, training for those involved, rotating chairing and other roles of responsibility, and a budget controlled by young people to give them real power. Anna P. Robinson's work shows how more visual methods can be used in school councils to make them more representative and accessible (2004). Rayner demonstrates how genuine child-friendly practices can be evolved, in relation to the Children's Rights Commission (2003).

3.6.b Consultation approaches and events

Some innovative methods have evolved to find out people's views. These include:

- suggestions boxes – a familiar technique in primary schools, where children are encouraged to write down issues and post them in a box in a relatively anonymous space. These have proved to be particularly successful where children have designed them and introduced the idea to other children (Bragg, 2007, forthcoming).
- School Works, www.schoolworks.org an organisation that has developed participatory approaches to school design, suggests 'ideas booths' throughout a space, staffed by volunteers who write down suggestions. A related initiative involves 'listening posts'
- graffiti walls – where people can write comments or draw pictures, relatively anonymously. Other versions involve use of post-it notes to write comments, fastened to a poster or wall
- some approaches allow large numbers to participate in collective physical debate in a way that encourages dialogue and reflection. For instance, rather than a written questionnaire, participants in an event might be encouraged to stand on a line representing how strongly they agree or disagree with a statement; or to stand in one of four corners of a room representing different views.

Everyone involved therefore expresses an opinion, even if not verbally; whilst discussion of reasons for choices may lead some to change position, which is actively encouraged.

Bigger events may be held to bring together a number of groups, for instance over a weekend or day. Such events can be fun and effective for those who get involved, yet exclude many others, especially those who are quieter. Evidence suggests they are popular with those who have taken part in them, but disliked by those who have not.

3.6.c Deliberative approaches

Deliberative approaches aim to involve participants more fully in the background to projects so that they understand the constraints under which organisations operate and can make more informed decisions. These have been used with adults; for instance, media regulators (now Ofcom) have run longer, more in-depth workshops, experimenting with methods such as asking participants to rank and edit news items. Similar initiatives include citizen juries, where groups question experts about a topic. These claim some success in deepening understanding, but do not appear to have been used to

any great extent with children. There may however be some parallels with market researchers' 'kids' (consumer) panels', which recruit young people for extended periods of time (up to a year) to provide comments and feedback on developments and new products within an ongoing relationship – for critical accounts, see Quart 2003.

3.7 Creative and non-verbal research and evaluation methods

There has been growing criticism of mainstream qualitative methods that rely on verbal or written competence, on the grounds that these provide limited access to the emotional and symbolic aspects of young people's experiences and media-related modes of expression. In response, researchers have in recent years developed a range of additional techniques (Barker and Weller, 2003). These aim to shift the balance away from the written or spoken word to visual or multi-sensory methods, which potentially allow a wider range of children to participate in research (Davis, Watson and Cunningham-Burley, 2000). For instance, they have been used successfully to enable young people with disabilities to participate in and lead consultation projects (examples include the Ask Us project run by The Children's Society and Two Way Street, by the NSPCC).

All these methods tend to yield data such as images that need further discussion and interpretation, preferably in dialogue with the child (Coates, 2004; Prosser, 1998). Pink suggests the need to pay attention to: (a) the context in which an image was produced; (b) the content of the image; (c) the contexts in which images are viewed; and (d) how the image was produced, e.g. in terms of technology (Pink, 2003).

3.7.a Photography

Cameras and photographs are increasingly used in research or participatory projects and consultations, to produce images for illustration, historical evidence, visual record, or stimulus material. They might involve children taking photographs, the use of adult-generated photos within interviews, or children working with professional adult photographers.

For instance, children have taken their own photographs of important places and people in their local or school setting, or as a tool to explore their experiences of the wider environment. Some studies have asked children to take photographs as a starting point for interviews. The photographs also serve as a representation of children's experiences, which might not be easily articulated in other ways. This can be used in school self-evaluation (Prosser, 1992). In practical terms, this technique has generally involved children sharing disposable cameras, each taking a set of 5-8 photographs.

As digital cameras become cheaper and more widely available, they too can be used, which means fewer constraints on the numbers of photos taken.

Alternatively, children might work with adult photographers to develop work on themes (such as gender and identity, bullying in schools) or documenting their lives to challenge stereotypes (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002).

However, introducing a camera may raise issues such as:

- gathering 'negative' images that an institution might not want publicised (e.g. in a school, unsafe areas or those where bullying happens)
- the involvement of young children as subjects of the photos
- the consent of all those photographed, so that they are not intimidated
- interpreting the meaning of images.

Guidelines need to be established about how images are to be used at the time and afterwards (Prosser, 1992). Images are not neutral – they are created through devices of camera positioning, framing, lighting etc, as well as by the photographer's skill. They are then selected, and there needs to be sensitivity as to how this happens and how they are used.

3.7.b Arts-based methods

Drawing and other arts activities have been used as another avenue for young children to express their views and experiences. For instance, in one school, children decorated plates with happy and sad faces and then used these on a tour to indicate how they felt about the environment and activities (cited in Clark, McQuail and Moss, 2003). Listening to children talking about their own drawings can reveal important insights into their understandings (Clark et al 2001). Groups can produce posters collectively.

3.7.c Collage

Collages can be a way to express responses without over-reliance either on the written word or artistic creativity. They may be produced individually or collectively, using magazines or sets of images to cut out.

3.7.d Multi-media approaches

Some researchers have argued that in order to truly learn about young people's views and perspectives, they should be given opportunities to express themselves through their own media

productions, echoing a form that is familiar to young people who have grown up immersed in a media-rich world. In some projects, young people have not only created multi-media productions (music videos, short dramas, animations) but have also shared their creations with other youths, who can be expected better to understand the codes and conventions they use, than adults for whom such culture is less familiar. However, such projects are necessarily very demanding of young people's time, of resources and support needs (de Block *et al*., 2004; Niesyto, Buckingham and Fisherkeller, 2003).

3.7.e Audio-recording

Young children have been involved in making tapes about their experiences, interviewing others and recording responses by others. Researchers have found young children to be fascinated by the sound of their own voice. Use of such equipment requires a period of familiarisation for the children (Clark, McQuail and Moss, 2003).

3.7.f Logs and scrapbooks

Increasingly, children may be encouraged to record their views before an interview, by keeping a diary (e.g. of expenditure or of how time is spent during a day) or making a scrapbook of images on a theme (for instance, of products they like, in market research). The term 'diary' might be considered to be private and therefore to be misleading for an item that is to be used in research; it might also appeal more to girls than boys; therefore the term 'log', 'daily record' or journal may be preferred. These can be time-consuming to complete (raising the issue of incentives to participate), and return to a reliance on written literacy (see discussion in Chapter 2 of Buckingham and Bragg, 2004).

3.7.g Guided tours, 'site visits' and mapping

Tours involve young children taking researchers or other adults on a guided walk around their environment (school or community). Children can be in charge of the direction of the tour and also of how the experience is recorded, through taking photographs, making maps, drawings and audio-recordings. These have been used by, for example, the UNESCO 'Growing up in cities' project (www.unesco.org/most/guic/guicmain.htm). The market research version involves 'tag along shopping trips' observing children's consumption behaviours.

3.7.h Bedroom culture

Researchers have increasingly sought access to the places where children are at home and private in order to understand their culture. Bedrooms are significant as they are usually one of the few spaces for children where they are not supervised and can express their

individual taste. McRobbie and Garber argued that bedrooms may be better points for accessing girls' culture than 'the street' (1976). They can be useful departure points for exploring the role of popular culture in children's lives (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002). Brown *et al* study them to search for identity markers (Brown *et al*., 1994; Steele and Brown, 1995). The use of bedroom culture in market research is illustrated by a set of photos in Lindstrom (2003), where children in 10 cities were pictured in their bedrooms holding 'any items they feel they cannot live without'. However, there are obvious ethical issues about adults being alone with children, and safeguards must be put in place (see Section 5).

3.7.i Toys

Some toys are mentioned below in connection with research with younger children. However, some may also be used with older participants. For instance, Lego Serious Play ('build your way to better business') already trains and licences consultants to use Lego with companies to enable groups of employees to represent aspects of their work, or problems and solutions, in symbolic forms. Its website claims that 'research' shows that 'this kind of hands-on, minds-on learning produces a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the world and its possibilities' (www.seriousplay.com). David Gauntlett is developing this method with other groups in relation to identity: see www.artlab.org.uk/lego-groups.htm and also Gauntlett, 2005.

3.7.j Drama and role play

Role play can be an important tool for young people to express their feelings, using their whole bodies as well as words. The advantage may be that issues can be discussed in a de-personalised way, through characters rather than personal experience. Large groups may also potentially be involved in this way. For instance, in one primary school, the deputy head ran assemblies with half the school (120 children), inviting children to get involved as the voices and thoughts of various 'characters' responding to situations they had identified as important to discuss (Bragg, 2007, forthcoming).

3.7.k Vignettes and scenarios

Narratives, poetry and storytelling may be used as a way into discussion of problems, or to start people thinking creatively. Vignettes are short stories, usually about imaginary characters in specified problematic situations. These can be written down, read aloud, or (where soap opera storylines or the like are used) on video/DVD. Participants are invited to respond to them by saying how they would cope or what the characters should do. These are often used to explore sensitive topics where it is important to avoid too much personal revelation, to address moral issues, or, to pursue issues that

have not otherwise been raised. See accounts and examples in Barter and Renold, 1999 and 'Resources for Investigating Children's Experiences and Perspectives' www.lsbu.ac.uk/families/jrfsibresources.shtml

3.7.m Projective techniques

Role play and vignettes are examples of projective techniques where participants are assumed to project their own feelings, beliefs and attitudes onto others. They help to access associations, unconscious material, or that which participants might be unwilling to reveal directly.

Other examples include:

- word association
- sentence completion
- cartoons with speech bubbles, where participants fill in some that are left blank.

3.8 Online approaches

3.8.a Quantitative

Researchers have been quick to spot the potential of the internet for extending, adapting and developing existing methods. Increasingly, market researchers are using online surveys and panels. They claim these methods have advantages, such as broad reach, speed of response and analysis, which mean that more studies can be undertaken, compared to more expensive 'real world' methods. However, these methods narrow the kind of people that are reached, as not everyone has internet access at home, particularly children, whilst voting online is open to abuse. Nonetheless, websites such as www.surveymonkey.com offer tools for survey design (if you want to access the service for free, you will be limited to 10 questions and 100 responses) that might be useful for amateur and young researchers.

3.8.b Qualitative

More recently, forms of online qualitative research are being developed, using bulletin boards and real-time chatrooms to obtain responses. The advantages of such work are that it adopts a form teenagers are already using enthusiastically, does not have to be geographically specific and can be easier to schedule. However, it may be harder to recruit representative groups. Requiring written responses might rule out younger children or those with lower literacy levels.

Some market research services now offer forms of ‘virtual anthropology’, where information about customers is gained by ‘living’ amongst them – by perusing their online photos, reading their blogs, peering at them through their webcams (Harkin 2006; trendwatching.com). Academic researchers are also interested in the internet as a cultural space (Buckingham, 2000; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002). However, the kind of ethical issues that are important to academics, such as confidentiality, obtaining consent, the boundaries between public and private, are harder to reach agreement about in these methods of research.

Child researchers have also made large claims for online forums as potential new sites of democracy and learning, facilitating children’s voice and agency on a global scale. For instance Junior Summit 1998, an online forum and in-person summit, gathered together more than 3,000 children from 139 countries. ‘The children, without adult input, debated the role that technology could play in improving the world for children, came up with action plans, voted for delegates to represent them at the in-person summit, and began to implement their plans’ (Cassell, 2002). Websites can include interactive forums for debate, action and lobbying.



4 Issues in investigating younger children's views

Many of the tools outlined above have been adapted for use with children in early and middle childhood (under 12) as Clark *et al* found in their extensive review (2003). These have been combined with techniques developed in play therapy and adapted, such as involving the use of puppets. Indeed, the authors give several examples related specifically to work with children under five, including:

- utilising the popular role-play activity of listening on telephones as a research tool
- toys and puppets used as 'intermediaries' in consultations with young children. For instance, a teddy was introduced to groups of children in pre-school settings and they were asked to tell teddy about their nursery
- story-telling has also been used in conjunction with puppets, or children have been given an unfinished story to complete
- 'persona' dolls, which come in a variety of ethnicities, are designed to help children explore different feelings and situations, with the dolls acting as intermediaries for them to talk about their experiences or solutions to issues (www.persona-doll-training.org)
- role play, modelling and other creative techniques.

The Liverpool 8 Children's Research Group, formed in 1993, undertook work through local schools, play centres and youth facilities with around 1,000 children aged four to 11. The Children's Research Centre at the Open University has many examples of successful work by children in primary schools (http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk/). Playtrain, a playwork consultancy, has trained children, including children with special needs and those under four years old, to act as special consultants (www.playtrain.org).

Alderson's research has shown that children's capacities vary with experience as much as with age, and so should not be underestimated (Alderson, 1995). Others argue that the factors that contribute to reliable consultation with younger children include previous, positive experiences of consultation in the home environment (Cremin and Slatter, 2004). Clark *et al* further suggest ways that listening can be embedded into daily practice within an institution, which creates a climate conducive to successful one-off consultation. They suggest, for instance:

- prioritising time to listen to children talking, in groups and individually;
- using children's records of progress or 'profile books' as a daily listening tool;

Image, left: Children from High Crags Primary School, Bradford at the end of a visual arts workshop 'Playground of the imagination'.Photographer: Amanda Crowther

- giving young children increasing control over their personal care;
- explaining, discussing and negotiating rules;
- seeking young children's opinions and solutions to problems which arise;
- designing personal 'passports' to listen to and empower young children with special needs.

The 'mosaic' framework for listening adopted by Clark and Moss (2001) outlines important principles, such as being:

- participatory – treating children as experts and agents in their own lives;
- adaptable;
- multi-method – recognising the different 'voices' or languages of children;
- reflexive – including children, practitioners and parents in reflecting on meanings, and addressing the question of interpretation, and
- embedded into practice.

Image right: 'Creativity Works' event in Leicester where young people played the role of young consultants to help choose creative practitioners to join their school on a 3 year creative journey. Photographer: Alan Fletcher



5 Ethical considerations

Research that involves children always contains assumptions about the nature of the child, and of childhood in general, and these can affect every aspect of the research, particularly ethical concerns. Seeing children as 'social actors', not as passive participants, has profound implications for researchers who work with children, particularly in how power relations between adults and children are conceived and experienced.

Public and private sector researchers seem to view ethical issues differently. The Market Research Society's code of conduct, for example, concerns itself primarily with obtaining the consent of the parent or responsible adult of a child under 16, and children's right to opt out or withdraw. It rules out certain topics such as participants' sexual activities, drugs and alcohol use, race, religion and crime, as well as subjects that might upset or disturb them, such as family tensions, income or illness. Food tested on children must be safe to consume, toys must be safe to handle, and other products should be age-appropriate – as also applies to gifts or incentives to participate. Questionnaires should be sensitively written, not overly intrusive or demanding. Respondents should not be harmed by their participation (see www.mrs.org.uk).

By contrast, public/voluntary sector and academic research tends to be more far-reaching in its ethical concerns, including issues such as involving children as potential participants with a right to know the outcomes; considering how children are represented; redressing how children's voices have been silenced, and how power differentials between researchers and the researched might be minimised (Christensen and James, 2000). Overviews of ethical issues are given by Morrow and Richards (1996), Alderson and Morrow (2004), Hill (2005), Coad and Lewis (2004), Lindsay (2000) and guidelines have been published by the National Children's Bureau, Barnardo's, British Educational Research Association and the Glasgow Centre for Child and Society, amongst others. Research Ethics Committees have been set up in universities to oversee research proposals. Similar groups could also be established on longer consultation projects to involve different stakeholders (including young people). Committees that include non-research users and children can help projects keep in touch with debates about policy, practice, ethics, and win support for the work.

Ethical issues typically include:

- Informed consent: consent is usually asked of parents, but children also need to be helped to understand the purpose of the consultation, their responsibilities and role within it, how long it will take, its funding, and the consequences and implications of expressing their views. They should also have the right to withdraw, offered at all stages of the process.

- Inclusiveness: efforts should be made to include ‘hard to access’ and marginalised groups, such as minority ethnic, abused, looked after children or those with disabilities or low literacy.
- Confidentiality and anonymity: anonymity and privacy (not revealing personal information in a way that is identifiable, and explaining who will see the data) should be assured. However, confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed, since interviewers would be required to report any personal information where this was clearly in the child participant’s interests, such as allegations of abuse. Confidentiality may also need to be discussed with other participants, e.g. in a group interview.
- Recognition and feedback: this might include the issue of rewards for participation, such as gift tokens or covering costs incurred, although these should not be presented as inducements or pressures to participate. More broadly, it might involve respecting children’s abilities and experiences, and not patronising or intimidating them. It might also cover debriefing participants and providing them with feedback about the outcomes of the research in an accessible way.
- Ownership: the difficulty of ensuring ‘ownership’ (who has access to the data) is particularly problematic in involving children as subjects rather than objects of research. Again, the contrast to commercial market research, where data is confidential to the client or only available at great cost, is marked.
- Social responsibility: this involves not harming children through their involvement, as well as considering the contribution of the consultation to children’s well-being (is it in their interest?) and to broader social goods and values.


What have you
learnt?

Image left: 'Creativity Works' event in Leicester where young people played the role of young consultants to help choose creative practitioners to join their school on a 3 year creative journey. Photographer: Alan Fletcher

The following summary of ethical considerations for consulting with children and young people is taken from Table 4.2 on p66 of Hill, M. (2005: 61-86) 'Ethical considerations in researching children's experiences' in *Researching children's experiences: approaches and methods,* ed. S. Greene, and D. Hogan (2005), London: Sage Publications

Table 4.2 Key ethical issues in research with children (Based on Alderson 1995)

	Topic	Sample questions
1	Research purpose	Is the research in children's interests?
2	Costs and benefits	What are the costs and risks for children of doing or not doing the research? What are the potential benefits?
3	Privacy and confidentiality	What choices do children have about being contacted, agreement to take part, withdrawing, confidentiality?
4	Inclusion and exclusion	Who is included, who is excluded? Why? What efforts are made to include disadvantaged groups (e.g. those with physical impairments, homeless young people)?
5	Funding	Are funds 'tainted'? Are resources sufficient? In what circumstances should children be recompensed?
6	Involvement and accountability	To what extent can children or carers contribute to the research aim and design? What safeguards and checks are in place?
7	Information	Are the aims and implications clearly explained? Is written documentation available in other languages?
8	Consent	How well are rights to refuse cooperation explained and respected? Are informal 'pressures' used? What is the correct balance of parental and child consent?
9	Dissemination	Do participants know about and comment on the findings? How wide is the audience for the research – academics, practitioners, policy makers, the public, research participants, etc.?
10	Impact on children	How does the research affect children through its impact on thinking, policy and practice? Are children's own perspectives accurately conveyed?

6 Case study overviews

The preceeding sections have been quite abstract, and focused on methods. This section compares and contrasts more detailed examples of consultation with children and young people. It is deliberately drawn from different sectors to show how funders, methods and aims all affect outcomes. Knowledge about children is a commercial, valuable commodity, which is why research carried out by commercial market researchers is often kept secret. Section 6.1 briefly explores and contrasts how children are constituted in different types of market research and 6.2 is drawn from more academic research. Section 6.3 takes examples from government and the voluntary sector and section 6.4 contains examples of children as researchers. Further case studies can be found in Lewis *et al* (2004) and Kirby *et al* (2003).

6.1 Market research

Commercial research with children is generally confidential. As a result, accounts of it often have to be drawn from secondary research, which may be written from a particularly critical perspective. In her critique of children's commercial culture, for example, Juliet Schor provides examples of qualitative market research, which she dubs 'the new intrusive research'. Nonetheless, it is clear that consumer research is quick to use or develop the 'creative' and 'in-depth' tools that academics and campaigners have often claimed to be more appropriate and ethical in consulting children. For instance, she gives accounts of the 'ethnographic turn' in market research. Researchers visit children repeatedly in their homes, spending extended periods with children in their most private spaces – bedrooms and bathrooms. They pay parents well and establish trust with both children and parents, but talk to the children on their own. They film children playing with toys and engaged in other mundane tasks such as eating, using these methods because interviews do not always reveal behaviour which children are reluctant to admit (such as playing with toys they claim to have grown out of). In this way, they access new insights: for instance, seeing children playing with empty bubble bath containers inspired the redesign of packaging.

Schor, J. (2004) *Born to Buy: the commercialised child and the new consumer culture,* New York: Scribner, especially chapter 6

The BBC regularly commissions research into its audience, both in-house and from contracted organisations. An example of research with youth is its evaluation of Blast, a programme to encourage 13-19 year olds in the UK to engage in creative activities such as dance, film, art, writing and music. In 2005, Blast was four years old, so the BBC commissioned research and a 'SWOT' (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis to use in developing its future strategy to 2008. The BBC worked with a research agency experienced with the age group. It engaged different audiences, such as those working for the BBC and related agencies; past, current and potential Blast participants, especially those in 'hard to reach' groups.

It covered different aspects of Blast's work (which includes a website, a presence at events across the UK, workshops, a Young Reporter scheme, competitions, and a BBC2 showcase for teenagers' work). The work used a range of techniques, from face-to-face interviews at events and workshops, focus groups and telephone interviews with internal and external stakeholders (including partner organisations), first-hand feedback of event attendees and also experiences from members of the Blast Youth Panel. Interviews were held with online experts and users of the website.

The reporting of the findings stressed positive aspects (approval of Blast's commitment to young people, the importance of providing outlets for young people to showcase their talent, the credibility and status lent to it by the BBC 'brand'). However, it pointed to concerns about lack of integration and information-sharing between regions, criticism of the website (particularly for more marginalised groups) and of the dominance of some arts over others, and lack of awareness and promotion of Blast: 'Blast feels like a well kept secret: *"You feel like the chosen one if you discover it" (Youth panel member)'.*

As can be seen, the research was interested both in how far the BBC could serve young people ('maximise the audience's experience,' in its words) but also in promoting the BBC's 'brand' and ensuring the best 'value for money' from Blast. The audience in this definition is a 'public' (with needs the BBC can meet) as well as a market (with 'wants'), but the research also meets the strategic needs of a publicly funded institution to justify and explain its own work. Compare the discussion of broadcasting research in chapter 4 of Buckingham et al 1999.

Information from Ros Sonderskov, BBC Research, personal communication

Logistix Kids – 'Uniting Families with brands' - is a market research body whose work demonstrates the range of methods and approaches used in the commercial sector. For instance, it buys into relevant research carried out by other agencies, such as BARB TV ratings, data on the groceries and toys markets, or 'social change analysis' carried out by another consumer research body, Future Foundation. It tracks publications concerned with the youth market, and buys into 'omnibus' studies conducted by an external agency, Carrick James.

For instance, 'Childtrack', is a regular programme of interviews carried out amongst 700-800 children aged 7-14, every month (extending to 850-950 5-14 year-olds four times per year). 'New Brands Track' measures the impact and take-up of a prompted list of new products amongst 7-14s on a monthly basis. 'Baby and Young Child Track' covers the 0-6 age groups (indirectly via mothers for 0-4s), four times a year. 'Youth' Track covers 11-19 year olds over four waves of interviews per year. Logistix also carries out extensive qualitative research, using various methods, eg '48 hours – a Family Spotlight' or 'food and drink diaries'. It offers advice to clients on 'Kids Panels' – consumer panels that enable new marketing initiatives to be 'kid approved' and provide regular 'dialogue' with children.

Its key tool is 'Logistix IQ400', a proprietary UK tracking study that interviews 'a fresh sample' of 400 7-14s and 400 mothers every month. It states:

> *'We regularly ask the kids for favourite TV programmes and characters, and assess overall prompted promotional awareness, involvement and promotional purchase influence. This has been done for the last three years and a rich database has been created to allow detailed trend analysis. The promotional element is a vital tool that allows us to conduct a full promotional evaluation for any of our clients. With the mums, we rotate the subject matter of the questions looking at a wide range of family and social issues that impact on her ever changing motivations and attitudes. We also track promotions with mums so that we can compare results between mum as gatekeeper and kids as influencers'.*

As can be seen, the topics on which they seek young people's views are perhaps the clearest indication of the direction of their research and their interest in children as consumers rather than civic participants (for instance, the interest in media consumption, favourite characters, new crazes, fashion and style, and vocabulary).

[Information here from Dave Lawrence of Logistix Kids, personal communication: see also www.logistix.co.uk]

6.2 Academic research

Samantha Punch describes methods used in a project about how young people, aged 13-14, perceived and coped with their problems. Eighty-six teenagers were interviewed both in groups of three to six and individually, and were recruited from schools and residential care homes. The latter were thanked for giving up their free time with gift tokens, the former were interviewed during the school day, so did not receive tokens. The interviews included both task-based activities and stimulus material. The latter included providing phrases often used by adults (e.g. 'it's just a phase you're going through') to spark off reactions and discussions; examples of problem pages from appropriate popular teenage magazines; and 'visual vignettes' – short video clips culled from soap operas that showed young people trying to deal with problems. This helped young people remember examples from their life and to be specific about their own coping strategies without necessarily being too personal.

The task-based activities included spider diagrams of coping strategies, charts of people they might turn to with a problem, with grouping and ranking exercises, for instance ordering types of problem according to seriousness or how others might see them. Conscious that teenagers might be unlikely to talk about some issues in any context, Samantha developed the idea of the 'secret box' – a sealed and secure box that participants were assured would not be opened until the very end of the research, thus offering anonymity and confidentiality. Teenagers were asked to write down any issues they had not been able to talk about in individual or group interviews and place them into this box. This produced responses on a range of issues, including grief, puberty and sexual abuse. Finally, participants were asked to evaluate the methods and state which they liked best or least. Overall they responded well to the exercises and the structured way the research was carried out.

Punch, S. (2002b) 'Interviewing strategies with young people: the 'secret box', stimulus material and task-based activities' Children & Society 16 (1): 45-56

Pat Thomson and Helen Gunter were invited to write a formative evaluation of a comprehensive school's project to introduce curriculum innovation. They chose to conduct it by working with 'pupil voice', initially with pupil consultants. However, they wanted to go beyond pupils as 'data sources', to help them devise and conduct their own inquiries into schooling, design recommendations for change based on their findings, and even implement change themselves. They were committed to working within a radical, rights-based framework, rather than a more instrumental one of standards and school improvement.

They began with a small group of students, a girl and boy each from four school years, selected by teachers. They asked them to advise them on relevant issues, to comment on draft questions for a whole-school survey, and to pilot it. The discussion with the students also informed their other data collection, which included observation, student focus groups and 'mind mapping', and teacher interviews. This data reinforced the importance of the issues to which students had already alerted them.

They then became an internal research team together with the group of students. This group read and commented on the survey data, voted on the key issue they wished to address through research, discussed methods and decided to use 'trigger photographs' to explore bullying and safety. Nonetheless, despite this egalitarian way of working, when the student voice was too individualistic or insensitive, for instance towards teachers or groups of other 'low-status' students in the school community, the researchers intervened to assert 'a level of adult power/knowledge which represented a counter discourse of communality, mutuality and an "ethic of care"'. In other words, they concluded that 'voice' cannot automatically be linked with emancipatory or democratic outcomes.

Thomson, P., and Gunter, H. (2006) 'From 'consulting pupils' to 'pupils as researchers': a situated case narrative' *British Educational Research Journal* 32 (6): 839-856

6.3 Government/voluntary sector research

Priscilla Alderson has shown through her many research projects that children's capacity for consultation varies more according to their experience than their age. Thus, children with severe illnesses have more insight into their medical treatment and choices than children who have not had the same experience. She even gives an example of consulting babies, citing the work of Monika Riihelda, a Finnish researcher who has pioneered 'Storyride', where adults listen to children's stories, write them down and read them back. In Riihelda's view, babies as young as eight months can be 'consulted', describing a baby who clearly wanted to take part in the process he saw others were involved in, and was pleased when a group of adults and children listened to his noises, wrote them down and read them back to him.

Alderson, P. (2000b) *Young Children's Rights: exploring beliefs, principles and practice*, London: Jessica Kingsley

Triangle is an independent organisation providing training and consultancy throughout the UK, and outreach support for children and young people in Sussex. It undertakes independent consultations, using approaches developed with its own consultative group of disabled children and young people (aged 3-24). These consultations may be about specific services or about children's views more generally. In 1999, East Sussex Social Services worked with Triangle to carry out a consultation with learning disabled children and young people, about their use of a residential respite care service. The consultation attempted to give control of the agenda and the process to the young people, and to listen 'on all channels' to their views, which were communicated through speech, sign, symbols, body language, facial expression, gesture, behaviour, art, photographs, objects of reference, games, drawing and playing. As a result of the consultation, some simple changes were made to the service provided, for example a night-time alarm system was changed, and the consultation resources are now used by local staff to gather children's views.

Marchant, R., Jones, M., Julyan, A., and Giles, A. (1999) ***Listening On All Channels. Consulting with Disabled Children and Young People*****, Brighton: Triangle**

The Children's Society runs an initiative called 'Ask Us', to involve children and young people with disabilities, in consultation. In 2000, the Department of Heath commissioned The Children's Society, with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to undertake a national consultation. The use of multi-media helped ensure the inclusion of around 340 disabled children and young people, including some with severe and multiple impairments.

In 2001, six local CDs were produced by groups of disabled children and young people supported by The Children's Society project staff, each focusing on different areas of exclusion, such as access to play, leisure and education and relationships with friends and families. They shared their concerns and ideas through graphics, cartoons, video and songs that they composed and sang. In addition, summary CDs of their key messages were compiled about the young people's understanding and experience of inclusion, consultation and participation. Eight further local consultations with disabled children and young people took place, based on the principles of rights, inclusion, choice and independence that are in Valuing People, the Government's strategy for learning disabled people. A resource pack, 'How to Ask Us' provides ideas for using multi-media methods to enable disabled children and young people to put across their views and ideas.

Disabled young people have worked as researchers for Ask Us. For example, in Solihull, three young people led their own research on the usefulness of helplines in local authority complaints leaflets. They got some training on basic research methods, and led the research at all stages. In the same project, four disabled children and five of their non-disabled friends did an access audit on eight local parks over one weekend. They called it “Can we go to the park, mum?” and used videos, digital cameras and pictures to record the results. The audit highlighted the inequalities experienced by disabled children in accessing everyday opportunities and local facilities, and helped persuade the local parks department to install accessible play equipment.

See: www.the-childrens-society.org.uk and http://valuingpeople.gov.uk/index.jsp See also Morris, J (1998) *Don’t Leave us Out: Involving disabled children and young people with communication impairments*. YPS, York for Joseph Rowntree Foundation

6.4 Young people as researchers

A detailed analysis of activities carried out in 2003-2004 at Brockhill Park School (now a Specialist Performing Arts College) includes an account of work with a student research team (SRT). Two groups of mixed-age students worked with researchers from the International Enquiry Network, initially investigating how language worked within the school, as part of a larger ethnographic study. The SRT then became increasingly interested in exploring the link between certain spaces in the school and particular behaviours – especially vandalism during breaktimes. When the SRT learned that plans were already being developed for a central space for Year 10 students, they persuaded staff that school-wide consultation and agreement on problems and solutions would help ensure successful implementation. The SRT argued that input should represent the whole student body, even including ‘recognised potential trouble-makers’ who could wreck any new facility if they felt excluded from decision-making.

The students developed a school-wide survey on use of lunch and break time, which they distributed themselves in order to encourage a sense of confidentiality and thus accurate reporting of ‘illicit’ behaviours. Many students in the SRT gained in confidence by having to negotiate access to lessons and introduce the survey to classes, and the high response rate may have reflected other students’ appreciation of their work. A maths teacher then gave up his own time to help the students understand how to analyse and present their data.

Eventually the findings were presented to the student council, to the headteacher and to other teachers (in oral presentations, discussions and in display form). Some of the findings showed that initial plans for the central space would have been unpopular and needed modification to meet students' needs and wishes. Equally importantly, staff were impressed to see students working in creative and committed ways to improve the school environment, in collaboration with other teachers. There was a 'shift in teacher and student role perspectives, as young people came to be acknowledged as experts in representing the views of their fellow students'. Meanwhile the SRT 'developed a strong ownership of their school and their job as student researchers'.

Brice Heath, S., Paul-Boehnck, E., and Wolf, S. (2005), *Made for Each Other*, Kent: Creative Partnerships

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In Ratton School in Eastbourne, teachers working with the University of Sussex selected 18 students (nine boys and nine girls) from Year 8 The school had identified this as a 'lost' year that sometimes failed to reach its full potential. The students worked in three parallel groups of six. Each had a member of staff to support them, with a senior manager as the overall co-ordinator.

The 18 students and the teachers attended a training day off-campus and then met weekly at lunchtimes. Each took a different topic that emerged from their discussions: 'What makes a good lesson?' 'What makes a good teacher?' 'Student views on grouping practices'. The student researchers devised questionnaires, interviewed teachers and students, and observed lessons. They presented their work in progress regularly to the headteacher, staff and students. A presentation at a year assembly showed their commitment and hard work on behalf of others and seemed to help overcome the resentment that some other students had initially felt at not being included.

By the end of two terms, the students had produced three reports and powerpoint presentations. The research into what makes a good lesson, for example, emphasised teachers' and students' shared perspectives, and students' role in successful learning, with the researchers reporting that

> '80-90% of students and 100% of teachers believe that students play an important role in making a lesson a "good" one. "The students ARE the lesson"… We have noticed that both students and staff want similar things from lessons. There IS common ground between both "sides"!!'

Teachers recognised that they had underestimated Year 8 – that 'students as the "receivers" of our teaching are an underused

resource', as the deputy head put it. They became more receptive to student input into curriculum planning. The Key Stage 3 co-ordinator observed a positive impact, particularly on the learning of all Year 8 boys. She commented that the student researchers 'take the skills they've learned back into their lessons. It rubs off on other students, and it rubs out the "boff" thing, so it takes the lid off to allow the development of the whole year'.

Fielding, M., and Bragg, S. (2003) *Students as Researchers: making a difference*, Cambridge: Pearson's Publishing

Image right: 'Creativity Works' event in Leicester where young people played the role of young consultants to help choose creative practitioners to join their school on a 3 year creative journey. Photographer: Alan Fletcher


yes

7 References and further reading

Key journals that generally have relevant articles include *Children and Society* and *Childhood*.

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Image right: 'Creativity Works' event in Leicester where young people played the role of young consultants to help choose creative practitioners to join their school on a 3 year creative journey. Photographer: Alan Fletcher

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Image, left: Children from Shipley CofE School, Yorkshire, with Phil Lowde and a finished string tent as part of the project ‘Playground of the imagination’.
Photographer: Amanda Crowther

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Front cover image: Using the arts, in particular drama, as a stimulus to deliver different curriculum areas to year 7 classes at Kingstone School, Barnsley. Photographer: Gavin Joynt