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What about me?

Children as co-researchers.

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Introduction

This paper explores how adults build relationships and share power and resources with children in research. These relationships are influenced by views adults' hold of children including their capabilities and competencies to be social agents. This affects the type of research that is designed by adults and the role children might play from the initial identification of the research issue through to the research design and the final research outcomes. The aim of this paper is to explore two child-centred research projects. We will illustrate how as adult researchers we have sought to create research designs that support children to take up the role as authentic co-researchers. We will also share some of the key issues and limitations that have arisen from constructing a flexible and child-centred approach to research design.

Children and research

Adults' perceptions or constructs of children and their capabilities inform policies, practices and research. Alderson and Goodey (1996) summarise the commonly viewed position of children in mainstream society:

> Children are marginalised in adult-centred society. They experience unequal
> power relations with adults and much of their lives is controlled and limited
> by adults: The main complications do not arise from children's inabilities
> or misperceptions, but from the positions ascribed to children (p.106).

The ten constructs of childhood, summarised in Table 1 by Sorin and Galloway (2006), identify the power relationship between adults and children within these constructs of childhood. The analysis of these constructs in regards to institutions, research, policies and practices aids in, according to Sorin and Galloway (2006:13), the development of a 'political consciousness of our engagement with children'. This political consciousness theorises childhood in alternative frameworks to those espoused in more traditional psychological or developmental views and has been identified as the new sociology of childhood.

Image of child	Image of adult	Power of child	Power of adult
Child as innocent Carefree, good, incompetent, vulnerable, ignorant, naïve, a blank slate.	**The adult as protector** Loving and caring nurturers of children who act in the 'child's best interest'.	Little power	A lot of power from their (assumed) capacity to guide and protect children and limit the child's environment.
Child as evil Original sin; innate evil 'an untamed threat' (Corsaro 1997). Destructive; threat to the social order; driven by their own needs, desires and pleasures.	**The adult as good/moral** Controllers of children. Adults have gone from an evil stage to a more mature stage – they are 'good' and keepers of moral order.	Children have little power since they are 'driven'.	Adults have power to control the child (as opposed to the environment, above).
The snowballing child Seems to be in charge of the adults around them. Makes inflexible demands of adults for their own short term gratification.	**The deferring adult** Does not set limits therefore opportunity to negotiate power and autonomy is denied.	The child has illegitimate power – they get a little power and it snowballs.	Could have power, but they hand their power, authority and influence over to the child.
The cut-of-control child Uses power in a negative way, for example by being violent, to get the parent to do what they want them to do. Eventually they feel out of control as if no-one is there to help them regain their control.	**The ineffectual adult** Feels defeated by the child. Feels as if they have little power and influence and/or do not know how to regain influence with the child.	Power is used in a negative way by the child. When the child is not sanctioned, they eventually feel out of control.	Their power is ineffectual. They feel defeated by the child.
The noble/saviour child Beautiful and beloved, can save people, look after others, e.g. Jesus, Harry Potter.	**The dependent adult** The adult depends on the child to get their needs/wants met.	Power is assumed through circumstances. The child is neither agentic nor innocent.	Adults absolve themselves of responsibility or literally cannot undertake that which is expected of them (by the child, by society, by themselves).
The miniature adult Children are the same as adults.	**The adult** The mature being.	Power of the child lies in their capacity to learn and participate in a world constructed for them by adults. The child is less knowing.	Power lies in their capacity to harness the abilities of the child to suit adult imperatives. Adults can be tyrannical or loving guides. Adults are knowledgeable.
The adult-in-training Human 'becomings' rather than human 'beings' (Hutchinson & Charlesworth 2000). Have future potential.	**The teacher**		
The commodified child Child is an object to be used and consumed by adults.	**The self-interested adult** Adult exploits the child for economic gain.	The child is powerless although they may have illusionary power as their image is manipulated by adults.	Hold the majority of power.
The child as victim Children of famine, pandemic diseases, war and poverty.	**The absent adult** The child's significant adults lack power. Adults who do have power turn a blind eye to what is happening to children.	Powerless.	Powerless.
The agentic child Capable and competent. An optimistic construct. Rather than 'becoming', the child is a social actor (James, Jenks & Prout 1998)	**Co-constructor of being** Helps the child on their life journey, as the child helps the adult on their journey.	Power is negotiated and shared.	Power is negotiated and shared. The adult lends their power, strength and resources with the child rather than imposing on the child.

Table 1: Constructs of children: constructs of self (Sorin and Galloway, 2006:21)

The new sociology of childhood championed by the work of James, Jenks and Prout 1998; and supported since by a number of theorists (Wyness, 2000; Thomas, 2002; Danby and Farrell, 2004; Cocks, 2006) is a paradigmatic shift whereby children are recognised as being social agents creating as well as being shaped by their circumstances – that is, they are acknowledged in the role of social actors in designing their social world or if utilising Sorin and Galloway's (2006) model they are respected as 'the agentic child'. Danby and Farrell (2004) describe the agentic child as a capable and competent agent who replicates and appropriates aspects of their culture through their talk and interaction with others thereby actively participating in the construction of their own social situations. Children are viewed as being competent, in relation to experience,

whereby they are recognised as being 'experts' in their own lives (Mason and Urquhart, 2001).

The positioning of children within research has changed almost concurrently with the development of different constructs of childhood. Malone (2006:1) recounts how in the seventies and eighties research was *on* children exposing the miniature adult construct of childhood. In the late eighties and early nineties fuelled by the child's rights movement focus of research was *with* children representing the commodified construct of childhood. In the present day where children are positioned as negotiators who are powerful experts and who through their own self-initiated projects are able to make decisions about all aspects of research have lead to research *by* children promoting the agentic child construct of childhood (refer to Table 1). Punch (2002) describes how this shift in perception and autonomy may impact children in research as noted:

> Children are used to having much of their lives dominated by adults, they tend to expect adults' power over them and they are not used to being treated as equals by adults…Children are not used to expressing their views freely or being taken seriously by adults because of their position in adult-dominated society. The challenge is how best to enable children to express their views to an adult researcher (p 325).

Central to the way that children are asked to participate in research is the underlying construction of childhood encompassed in the research design. As Paul Connelly (cited in James, Jenks et. al 1998:191) states:

> It is not simply a question of choosing the right methods in seeking out the authentic voices of young children but is rather a matter of engaging with the underlying and pre-existing values and assumptions that researchers have about childhood and the influence they may exert within the research process.

Models of Children's Participation summarised in table 2, conceptualises the dynamics of power that can occur when children are involved in research. Specifically employing the Children's Rights Model of participation or the Children's Movement Model is more informative of the complexity of the researcher role of children.

	Adultist	Children's Rights	Children's Movements
Initiation of participation strategy	Agency/external statutory agency	Agency/external statutory agency	Children (eg, children's labour movements)
Ideological framework	Positivist/market forces, consumer involvement	Phenomenological / constructivist	Minority rights, groups struggle
Children viewed as	Passive, incompetent, developmentally incomplete 'becomings'	Actors, competent, 'beings' oppressed	Actors, competent, human beings
Locus of power	Adults through governance and 'best interests', asymmetrical	Questions the generational order, symmetrical	Children, empowered
Needs identification	Normative from psychological literature	Individualised, from listening to children	Asserted both as a group and individually
Method of decision making	Adults structure procedures	Negotiation between stakeholders	Children dominated
Knowledge	Adult authority	Opportunity for children to shape and contribute	Children experts on own lives, recognises and challenges adults' power over children
Professionals	Superiority of expertise used for empowering	Facilitate through alliances	Provide resources
Children's voices	Filtered	Reflexivity by adults and children facilitates children's voices being heard	Challenge and unsettle adults

Table 2: Models of children's participation (Mason and Urquhart, 2001:17)

Using the Children's Rights Movement Model in research means that children are acknowledged as social actors and a balance of power is negotiated whereby adults use skills based on reflexivity to question the language and processes they use in facilitating a shared forum (Mason and Urquhart, 2001). This is consistent and supportive of the new sociology of childhood, the agentic child from Table 1, which is integral in these child-centred research designs. Mason and Urquhart (2001:19) consider the implications of utilising this model in their own research as noted below:

> The major obstacle we have so far faced as we begin to implement the
> project is how do we achieve anything near a framework which balances the
> power of children and researchers when we the adult researchers, are

seeking to involve children in a project for which we, of necessity…have
already had to develop the parameters?

This key question is also one discussed by Malone in regards to her research with
children in the UNESCO *Growing Up In Cities* project. She notes that when
moving to a child-centred approach it is important to move away from one size fits
all approach to children's roles but to create a variety of types and levels of
involvement in the research that children can negotiate:

> The role of the adult researcher is to create the environment that
> stimulates independence by the child researchers who may need initial
> support. While doing this it is important not to be patronising about a
> child's capacity – this can be offensive to children. Allowing children to
> identify what are their own strengths and weaknesses and offering them
> guidance is important for building children's self-esteem and capacity.
> Having different types and levels of participation also supports children
> to feel able to participate in different ways – that there is not one right
> way (all or nothing type scenario). For these reasons, sometimes a
> project might start with more facilitated or supported participation with
> adults helping to build children's skills, but the intention is always to
> move beyond this towards more child-directed decision making and
> project planning (Malone 2006: 19).

The Model of Children's Negotiated Participation, Figure 1, has emerged from this stance and
was devised by Malone after the initial idea was developed at a symposium on "Children's
Participation in Community Settings." This conference was sponsored by Childwatch
International and the MOST Programme of UNESCO at the University of Oslo in June 2000.

The Model, Figure 1, described as types and levels of children's participation in research
focuses on the three key areas; the initial engagement of children in the project; the role
or responsibility they take during the project and the level of involvement they have
throughout the project. Each one of the possibilities within each key area is up to the
child to decide on and can be changed throughout the project. Variations in the type of

project will also limit or enhance the possibilities; some of these will be controlled by outside factors such as time, funds and location.
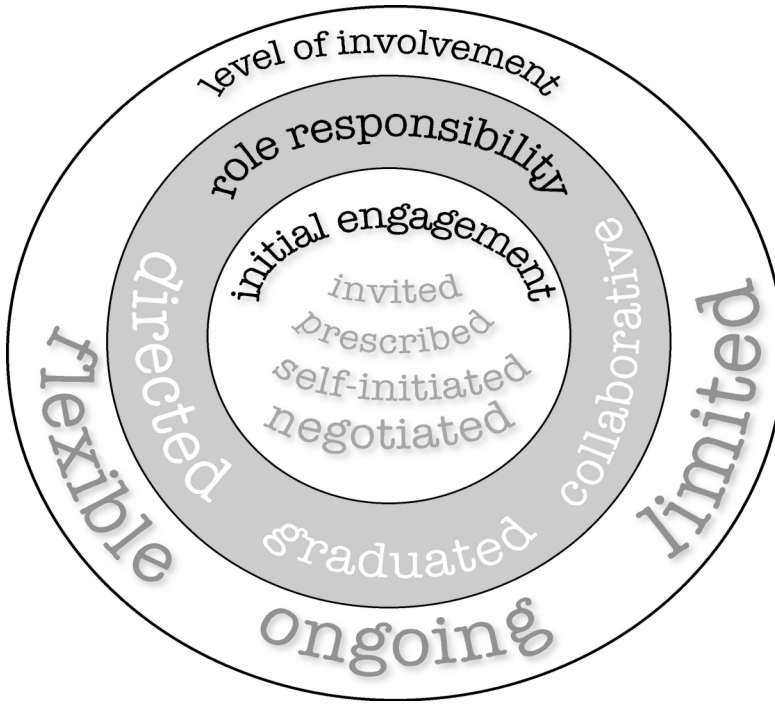
Figure 1: Model of Children's negotiated participation

In the following section we will now discuss two projects we have individually been working on as a means of illustrating the thinking behind their child-centred research design. The first project is a doctoral project and is currently at the fieldwork implementation stage. The second was a project conducted in conjunction with a team of children services officers at the City of Bendigo in western regional Victoria. The project was a pilot study with the focus on helping to develop the capacity of the children's services team to conduct research and also trial a negotiated model of research as a blueprint for an extensive city wide project which is being conducted in city throughout 2007.

Project One: Children Talking on Schooling

Education or schooling is a powerful means to change human conditioning or to ensure the continuation of oppression. Rogers (cited in Woodhead and Montgomery, 2003:29) asserts that children do not have to accept the identities given to them by adults, however, it is recognised that children are generally in a 'relatively powerless position in relation to adults and often have limited choices.'

As a teacher with 17 years teaching experience I have seen first–hand the tokenistic 'voice' that children have in the organisation, structure and learning in schools and within my own classes. This research design aims to celebrate the silenced minority in schools and assist them in being heard - not just listened to - but heard. Boler (2002) describes the benefits of consulting children:

> Allowing young people the dignity of speaking for themselves offers a place from which to begin transforming the often disempowering experience of childhood (p 12).

The Study

Critical Social Theory (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1994; Apple, 1990; Giroux, 1994; Calhoun, 1995; McLaren, 2003) is concerned with understanding our human conditioning whilst positioning people as 'capable of solving their own problems through an enlightened re-ordering of their collective arrangements' (Fay, 1987:3).

To be consistent with a critical social theory and to support the new sociology of childhood, this research aims to engage children directly in research about schooling. The Children's Right Model of participation (refer to table 2) has been used in the design where the children are positioned as competent and capable people who can actively engage in research about their lifeworlds and its relationships to schools whilst exploring alternatives to schools for the future. Decision-making will be negotiated between the researcher and the co-researchers within the parameters of the thesis design. To stimulate and support shared power the research will be conducted outside of a school thereby reducing the traditional power roles commonly found in schools between adults and children whilst fostering an atmosphere of collaboration and co-researching. The research

question informing the project is; *what impact do schools have on the lifeworlds of children in the 21st century from a child's perspective?*

Methodology

This research is a critical ethnographic study of a participatory research project (Hart, 1997; Christensen & James, 2000; Driskell, 2001; Punch, 2002; Hart, R. and J. Rajbhandary, 2003; Danby & Farrell, 2004). Throughout the study there will be two concurrently operating research designs interlinked yet independent – the researcher as a critical ethnographer and the researcher as co-researcher working collaboratively with 10 child researchers to conduct critical social theoretical research (refer to Figure 2 for a diagrammatic representation).
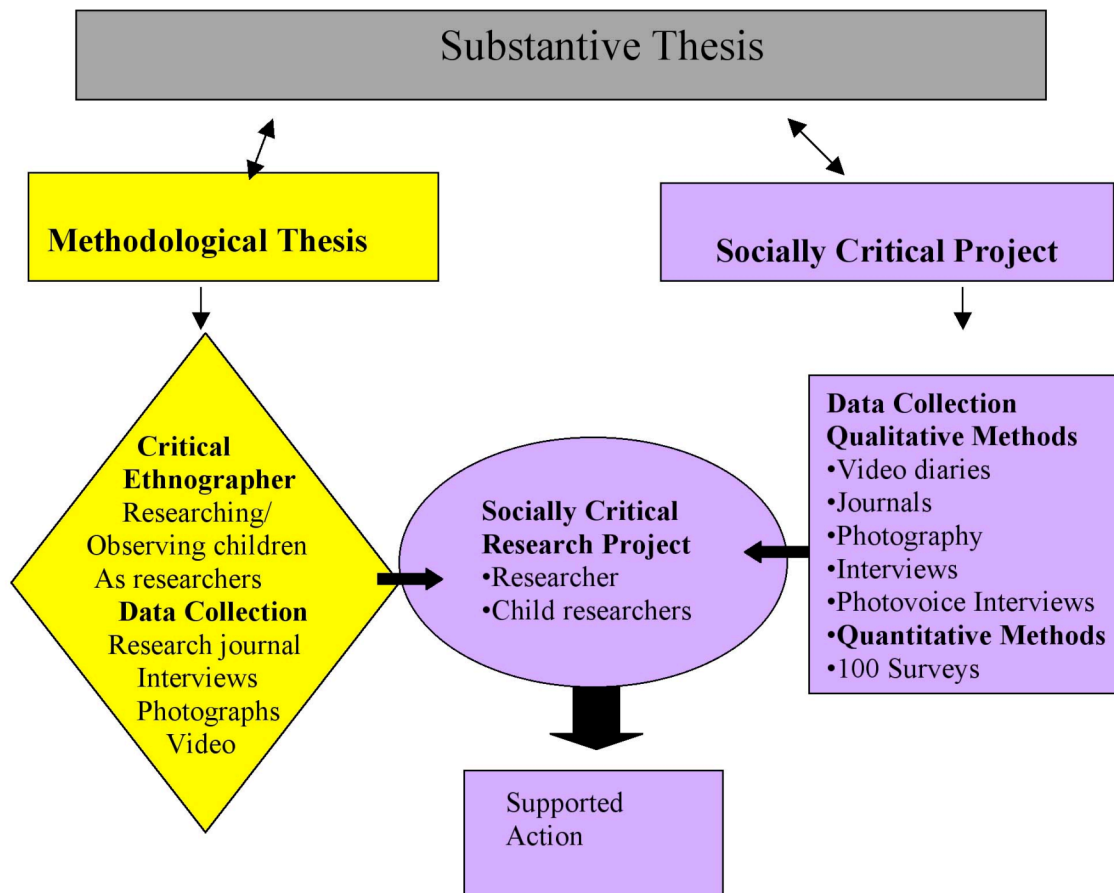

Figure 2: Diagrammatic Representation of Research Design

The multi-method data collection techniques in the socially critical project engage children in the research process allowing their own creativity, experience and knowledge to be accessed without an adult filter. The variety of collection techniques gives children scope and breadth to discover a comfortable method for expressing themselves. The child researchers will be situated as 'experts' in their own life when they are asked to provide data on the impact of schooling on their lifeworlds using familiar technology like videos and cameras (refer to Figure 3).
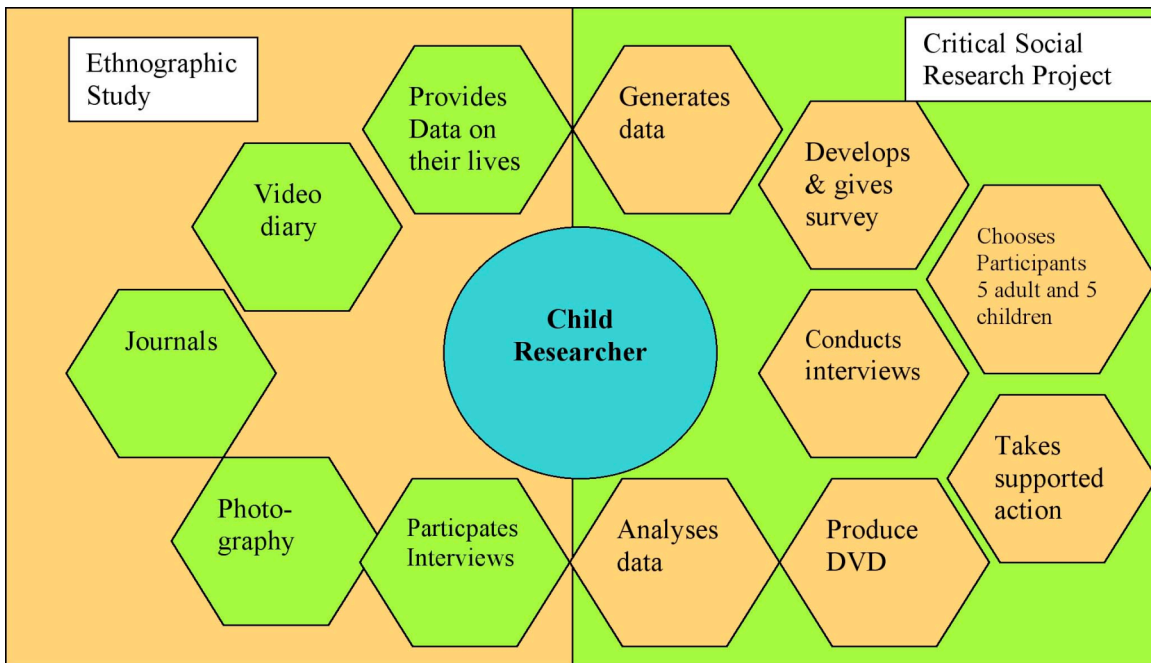

Figure 3: Role of Child Researchers

Fielding (2001) describes students as co-researchers when they work as partners in collecting the material, analysing the material and identifying possible action. The child researchers will also have a collaborative role in conducting research within the socially critical project.   Together as co-researchers we will develop a questionnaire. The child researchers will invite 5 child secondary participants and 5 adult secondary participants to complete the survey. The child researchers will also invite 1 child secondary participant and 1 adult secondary participant to an interview. The interviews provide stories and by having the child researchers in charge interviewing secondary adults the traditional balance of power has shifted to incorporate the 'agentic' child (refer to Table 1). The

child researchers will jointly analyse all data and present the combined findings in a DVD
format. One anticipated transformative outcome is that the co-researchers will share
these research findings with adults in the educational sector in a supported context,
however, the children may have different action plans (refer to Figure 3).

Participants

To maximise the level of children's negotiated participation (refer to Figure 1)
participation is self-initiated in response to an invitation from the researcher or from
advertisements placed at three local youth centres. The child researchers in this 6 month
study will be 10 volunteer children aged between 10-14 years from within the Illawarra
Region. It is not legally required to get child consent to participate in a study once a
parent has given permission, however, as children in this research are not subjects and are
co-researchers a participant consent form was designed to maintain the dignity that
respects the child's individual decision to participate. The child researchers will each
select 5 adults and 5 children to voluntarily complete a confidential survey. Selection of
these secondary participants will be at the discretion of each child, however, it will be
recommended that at least one adult be a teacher. Each child researcher will invite one
adult secondary participant and one child secondary participant to participate in an
interview.

Outcomes from Research

To be passed through the Ethics Committee at the university some constraints were
imposed that limited the freedom of children. On Participant Information Sheets I had to
add that only joint findings will be on the DVD ensuring that any identifying data
particular to one child will not be included. It was also stipulated on all forms that an
adult would accompany the child researchers when taking photos and video data. Parents
are also to be involved in the editing of the DVD.

The data gathered by the child researchers on the affects of schooling in their lives will be
presented as narratives. It is hoped that by expressing their lives as a story the 'faceless
voice of children' may be replaced with a reality of experiences that is true, real, honest

yet familiar. It is anticipated that by the child researchers presenting their data and analysis it will challenge many educators, administrators and politicians who doubt the legitimacy of consulting with children before and during any collaborations on changes in schooling. By collecting and interpreting data on children as competent researchers it is anticipated that this thesis will donate information on the capabilities and potential of children as researchers if given freedom and guidance.

Discussion

What about me, the child's voice in schools? This 'student voice' movement is being validated by research (Wyness, 1999; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Flutter, 2006; Cook-Sather, 2007) resulting in growing recognition that young people have something valuable to say and have a right to be consulted about their school experiences, however, adults are still trying to fit these perspectives into their 'adult world'. Many adults still position children in schools as innocent, evil or adult-in-training (Table 1). Fullan (1991:170) questioned, 'What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?' If schools positioned children as competent and included them on all matters concerning their education, what would schools look like? This child-centred research aims to help build strong school communities where all contributions are valued and acted upon even if they challenge the existing culture and construct of children embedded in the present schooling system. John Maynard Keynes describes this situation:

> The real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise lies not in developing new ideas but in escaping from the old ones (cited in Yero, 2002:1).

The co-researchers collaboratively designed two questionnaires – one for children and a mirror questionnaire for adults that asked the same questions but from the perspective of what the adult thought children would respond. The co-researchers gave out 55 surveys to adults with a return rate of 76% and received 46 surveys out of 66 from children a return rate of 70%. The co-researchers have had a lot of practice analysing data and in particular converting pie graph data into percentages.

We have collaboratively compared the data from the adult and child surveys and already
we have found some interesting discrepancies between what adults think children want
and what children actually want in terms of utilising their time and in their decision
making capacity in schools. I have included 2 graphs below (Graphs 1 and 2) that
illustrate this discrepancy between how children wish they could spend their time and
how adults think children wish they could spend their time.
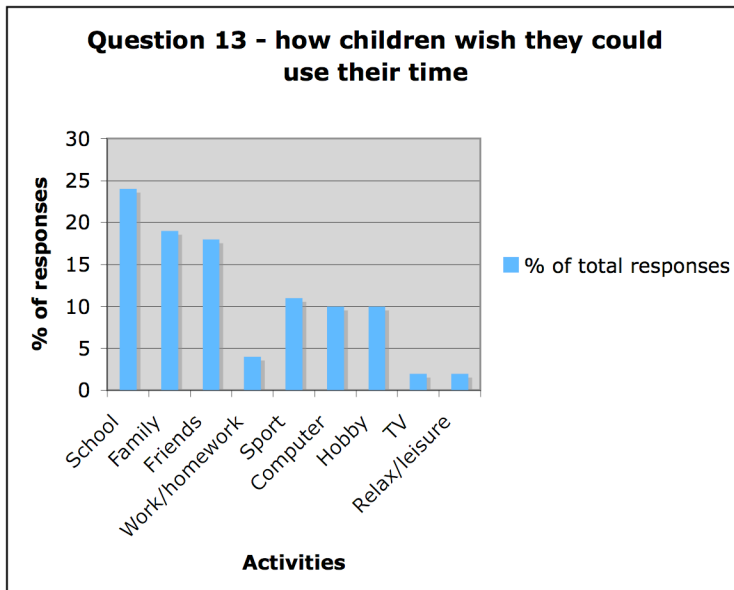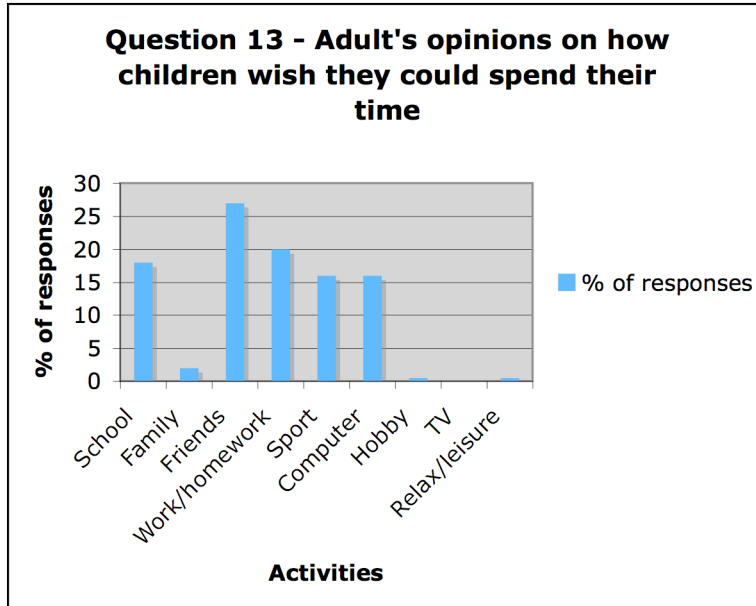
Graphs 1 and 2 – Question 13 Data

There are some promising results too with adults and children having similar perspectives on some issues such as big decisions children get to make in their life – both agreed selecting a high school to be the most important. These results will be creatively presented in a DVD that we are currently planning to produce together.

The final step in their role as co-researchers is to share these findings and DVD with both adults and children in schools and in Education Departments. This aims to build cooperative efforts to transform adult friendly school structures and practices into child-friendly structures and practices that validate and celebrate our children's unique experience of being experts at being children in the 21st Century.

Project two: Building a Child-Friendly city

Cities and urban communities can be positive or negative places for children depending on whether they are the wealthy few or the impoverished many. Ideally neighbourhoods, towns and cities should be the place where children can socialise, observe and learn about how society functions and contribute to the cultural fabric of their community. They should also be sites where they find refuge, discover nature and find tolerant and caring adults who support them. For cities to be supportive of children's needs and to fulfil their obligations in terms of the principles contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to achieve these desired outcomes for children requires sustainable systems and increased local capacity. This will only be possible by creating environments that are based on cooperation and partnerships at a variety of different levels across national and local borders, across social domains and groups. UNICEF's *Child-Friendly Cities* initiative and its companion project UNESCO *Growing Up in Cities* project provide a global framework for mobilising policy to action – both were utilised symbiotically within this project at the City of Bendigo to design a child as researcher model for participatory research and action to build a child friendly Bendigo.

The *Building a child-friendly community* strategy research by children workshops were implemented collaboratively by the City of Bendigo and the author as a research program that sought to ensure children were *seen* and *heard* through authentic participatory processes. The

workshops were based on UNICEF's *Child- Friendly Cities* framework for action and the
UNESCO *Growing Up In Cities* international project. UNICEF *Child-Friendly Cities* is a
global initiative that encourages city councils to develop their own baseline data on the ways
in which they are or aren't addressing children's needs in their local areas and then develop a
plan of action through which they can audit their own progress over time. UNESCO *Growing
Up In Cities* is an international action research initiative to create child friendly cities with
children and youth. It engages children, youth and adults as co-researchers in evaluating local
environments to plan and implement change. That is, it provides the tools for adults to
develop data about cities by children and with children.

The research by children pilot workshops sought to create a model of participation that would
support children to be active citizens who had a right, the opportunity, choice and capacity to
contribute to decisions that would affect their lives now and in the future. Through the
workshops children have had the opportunity to describe and comment on, through drawings
and photography their community including all the places they like and those they dislike.
They also had an opportunity to explore, investigate and share with others how they used the
local community spaces and their dreams and visions for their community – including those
activities they would like to be able to do and may not have the opportunity to.

There were three key goals to the children as researchers workshops as outlined below.

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KEY WORKSHOP GOALS

GOAL 1
The first goal of the workshops was to implement a participatory process that acknowledged
that all children and young people should have the opportunity to be listened to and involved
in decisions about the quality of their lives growing up in Bendigo. The model of participation
positions children as knowledgeable and competent.   Developing a child-friendly 'method'
for children's authentic participation was an important element of the pilot project as the long-
term plan is that the workshops will be replicated in variety of settings and with diverse
children's abilities and needs throughout the city over the next 12 months (and possibly
beyond as part of the CFC auditing process)

GOAL 2
The second goal of the workshops was to ensure that people who make decisions impacting
on the quality of children lives know what it's like growing up in Bendigo from the
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perspective of a child. Generating knowledge by children and documenting it in ways that is consistent with children's experiences was and is essential for those who will be utilising the information when representing children in key decision-making forums and for developing baseline data on the state of the city reporting.

GOAL 3
The final and key goal of the workshops is to encourage all children to get the most out of life and help them to develop the necessary skills so they can now and in the future be active informed citizens. Valuing children's participation and providing, over time, choices and opportunities to encourage a variety of levels and types of participation for children to have a voice in the community, is key to the ongoing commitment to a child-friendly community and a statutory obligation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Box 1: Key Workshop Goals

Methodology

If you want to consider and provide opportunities for children to design, plan and conduct research with adults, then adults must acknowledge children as active and competent agents and be willing to position children as the 'expert' (refer to table 1). This is a very powerful experience for a child who may not have ever been in a position where adults realised their potential and have taken them seriously. An important personal attribute to participate and represent your own views and the views of others through participatory research is a feeling of self-worth and competence. Realising this, it is important that the type and level of participation is varied and diverse enough to maximise the individual children's ability and competence (see figure 1). This means providing a wide diversity of roles and methods of research participation and by using a diversity of different mediums of expression; a multi-method approach fits well with this. Fostering competency by scaffolding participation is also important particularly with children who may have never been given the opportunity to make decisions or even be asked about what they may like if they were asked! The role of the adult researcher is to create the environment that stimulates independence by the child researchers who may need initial support. While doing this it is important not to be patronising about a child's capacity – this can be offensive to children. Allowing children to identify what their own strengths and weaknesses are and offering them guidance is important for building children's self-esteem and capacity. Having different types and levels of participation also supports children to feel able to participate in different ways – that there is not one right way

(all or nothing type scenario). For these reasons, sometimes a project might start with more facilitation or supported participation with adults helping to build children's skills, but the intention is always to move beyond this towards more child-directed decision making and project planning. The following figure provides the general research model for negotiated research with children used to frame the project.
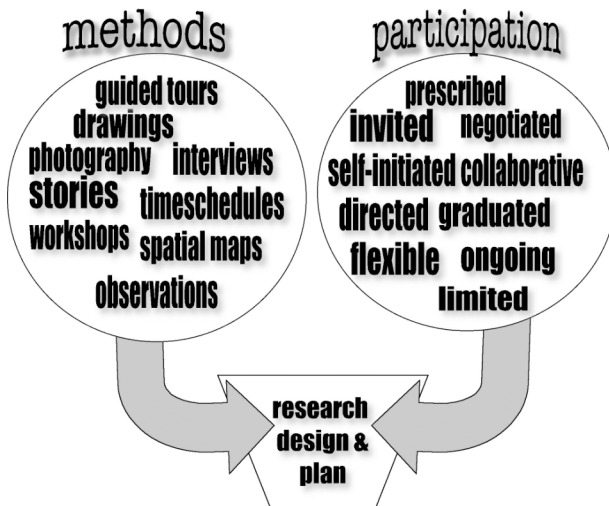

Figure 4: Model of negotiated research design

The research workshops conducted with the children in the pilot study provided the opportunity for children to engage in a number of activities where they were supported by adult helpers who provided the necessary scaffolding. The majority of children participated in all key aspects of the project methods including completing a verbal survey; drawing a picture of their place and a vision for a child-friendly place; focus groups discussions; photovoice activities and interviews. Three different sites were included in the pilot sample; this provided the opportunity for diversity in social contexts and age in children's representation. The aim was to work with 50 children from a diversity of early childhood settings between the ages of 3 and 6 years old. The settings included private and public childcare centres, kindergartens, primary school and community groups. The Table below provides an overview of the gender and age of the participants in the 50 children included in pilot study.

Age	Male	Female	Total
3	3	2	5
4	5	12	17
5	10	7	17
6	6	2	8
8	1	0	1
9	1	0	1
11	0	1	1
Totals	**26**	**24**	**50**

Table 3: Children's participation in workshops

As you can see form the table children older then 6 years participated. These were the siblings of the younger children and highlights that even though we had set an age it was important to acknowledge that children would have an interest and if they showed an interest it was important to also include their voice. This requires a flexibility in the design and also a commitment to inclusivity and social justice – that is all children who wanted to be represented had a right to participate at whatever level or capacity that felt right for them. As a participant in the workshops children were invited to participate in a variety of activities. They could choose to participate in them all or just those they were interested in. This idea of flexibility in the way the research is conducted and the methods used is critical in a model of participatory research that is child-centred and supportive of authentic participation of children. Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller (2005: 428) also found this with their study of young children using multi-methods approaches when they wrote:

> Research demands flexibility and creativity both on the part of the researchers and the their 'data collection' approaches. Such flexibility is, we contend, not methodology sloppy, but an important element of a research relationship with children. We had to modify and adapt elements of the study as it progressed in light of the children's responses.

For the most part all children wanted to be involved in all elements of the research, particularly the photographic components. The activities they could participate in included:

1. Engage in an interview with the adult researchers in order to complete a survey which asked them to identify their favourite, least favourite places, child specific and adult specific places, identify their favourite activities and who they did these activities with, to

discuss their roaming range, and put together a wish list for themselves (see survey copy in resources).

2. Describe their place and this was documented by the adult

3. Draw two pictures, one of their place as it is now and one as an imaginary place just for children.

4. Participate in focus groups discussions and have this information recorded

5. Take photographs over a period of four days documenting what they do and where they go in Bendigo and then be interviewed about the content of those photographs.

Figure 4 below provides a model of the project design including the pilot study (which is reported on here) and the extended study that will follow throughout 2007.
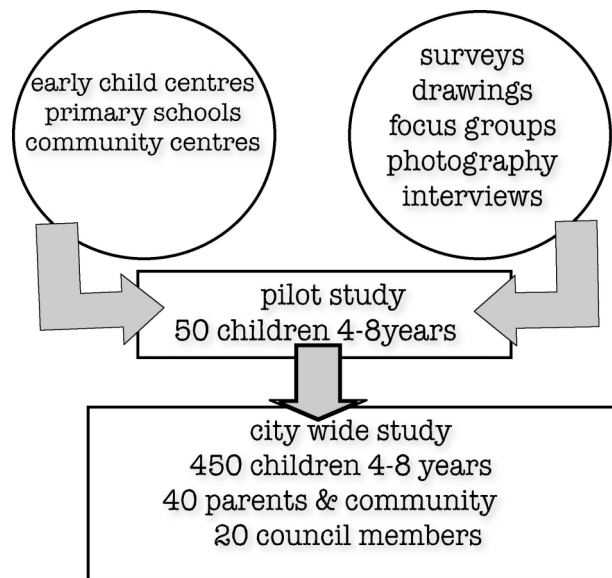

Figure 5: Design for *Building Child-Friendly Communities* research workshops

Outcomes from research

The drawings and photographic activities were by far the most popular method selected by the children and produced the most interesting data. Children took their cameras home for a week to document their lives in any way they wished. The following is an extract from an

information sheet we gave to the children to illustrate how we endeavoured to engage the parents in the process while encouraging them allow the child to take up the role of researcher.

While it is important that children take their own pictures of places important to them – we realise that as a significant adult in their lives you will also have some input into this process by reminding them of the purpose of the photographs, by supporting them to take the photo's and also to take them places where they might like to take photographs.

When explaining the purpose of the photographs we would ask that you explain that they should take photos of:

1. Places that they go as part of their everyday activities
2. Activities that they engage in at those places (you might like to take this for them so they are in the photograph)
3. Places that they think ARE good places for children (if they go there or not)
4. Places they think ARE NOT good places for children (if they go there or not)

While it would be great for the child to take the photograph this is not as important as them having control of what is in the photograph.

Box 2: Insert from the parents information sheet on photographic exercise.

The following are some examples of the photographs taken by the children and the explanations give to them during the interview given after the exercise.

This picture taken by April (age 6) and identified as one of her favourites shows her at McDonalds. Commenting on the photograph she said she doesn't go often but just happen to the day she had her camera.

Me at McDonalds. Don't go often. We were going there to get McDonalds. McDonalds is a good place for kids – it has a big playground for kids. You get toys with your happy meal and you get different toys –
April, female age 6.

But what is even more revealing then this photograph April took of her at McDonalds was the picture she snapped on the way. As you can see from her explanation of why she took the photograph – it is clear children are very aware of the physical space and particularly this photograph reveals to the adult what it means to be child height when walking along the street.

I don't like this bridge because it very low down and I don't like heights. It's on the way to McDonalds we drive across there and walk across the street.
April Female, age 6

In this series of photographs from Maxie, female aged 4, we can see the diversity in play activities her and her sister engage in the community and home. Girls seemed were more likely to take photographs of themselves socialising with other children at home or in particular formal children's play spaces

These are my photographs. The first one is me and my sister at my house. We have 2 prams, play trucks and also I got a sandpit. The second one is the park. It is safe cause its got gates. The next one is us riding on

The final one is me at crèche. "cos my mum takes me there 'cos she has to go to the gym. The gym is there too.
- Maxie, female , age 4

| our bikes | | |

In this series of photographs from Sonic, male aged 6, we can see the diversity in play activities that illustrate the focus on physical activity and formal sport which came out more predominantly in the photographs taken by the males.

The first photograph is my lounge room and my pets. I have a dog and a cat. I sit here and watch TV. The second one is me playing soccer, I play for the Derby's		The next one is me at the reserve I like to go bike riding at the reserve with my Nan – the reserve is fun but you have to have a grown-up. The final one is the pool at my Nans. - Sonic, male, age 6.

Discussion

For children, using a means of communication other than verbal or written texts such as drawing and photography allows them to draw on important skills they already use as part of their everyday life. The photographs in particular illustrate the very keen expert knowledge they have to view the world from the standpoint of a child. We see things for the first time at kid level. Children from an early age in the home and other early childhood settings are accustomed to drawing and looking at images as an active way to express themselves. Being a photographer, while a new experience for most, provided a tool that embraced enthusiastically by the children who showed that even as young as three year they were able to take clear thoughtful photographs and articulate the subjective meanings of those photographs with explicate detail. The photograph as Clark –Ibanez explains allows the interviewer particularly rich insights into children's lives because; "they improve the interview experience with children by providing a clear,

tangible prompt" (2004:1512) and because the photographs children take "capture and introduce content area that otherwise (from an adult viewpoint) might be poorly understood (or even overlooked)". She also noted that when working with photographic techniques with children that the photographs children took were " polysemic- capable of generating multiple meanings in eth viewing process" (2004: 1515). This was also clear from my experience that children could develop a number of stories from one photograph – stories of the social context but also the physical spaces, past events and often even triggers to past experiences which seem quite unrelated to the photograph content. The task for us now is to work out better ways to analyse and use this information in the reporting of children's experiences of the social world.

Conclusions

Moving from a dominant framework where children were positioned as incompetent and unknowledgeable and research was done *on* them as part of a process of measuring and normalising childhood (particularly within a developmental lens)- we now find a broad trend towards reconceptualizing the adult/child relationship in research. Rudduck and Flutter (2000) identify three main roles for children in research; students as sources of data; students as active respondents and students as co-researchers which also align with the participation roles as developed by Sorin and Galloway (2006). This shift from research *on* children to research *with* children and positioning children as participants rather than 'objects' of the research recognises a new epistemological interest in children as knowledge brokers and active social agents. The subjective world of children now becomes the centre of our research and through the development of making visible the child as a partner in the knowledge production we can begin to realise the important independent role children have as full members of our society.

With both our projects as the researchers we have emphasised the importance of negotiating participation from the entry and exit points for children within the project and what happened throughout the designing and implementation process. In Marr's project although she has had to use a structured methodological framework (with a doctoral research project she has less flexibility with time and resources) she has endeavoured to

set the scene for collaboration and at every opportunity allowed the young researchers to take up key roles in decision making about such things as the survey questions and design, who they chose as participants and the way the data will eventually be presented in the DVD of the results.

For Malone, the project although more flexible with time and funding, the age of the children presents a number of constraints on the level of negotiation around activities. The younger researchers with less life experience to draw on needed more structure to allow them to begin the process of being a co-researcher. For this reason the design began more structured and then became more flexible as children started to take up power in the research process. The photographic exercise was the start of the shift in power as was the opportunity to participate in a reference group that allowed ongoing negotiated roles and responsibilities beyond the initial project beginnings.

In this expanding field of research *with* children has also been the introduction of new ways of working with children and new research tools that replicate more closely children's natural ways of investigating their world and the worlds of those around them. The next step is to recognise research projects where children self-initiate and utilise their own cultural frameworks to develop data that would then be provided to adults for translation into 'adult' meanings. Only then could we consider the research to be totally *by* the children and not dominated by adults ways of constructing research. The examples given in this paper are starting points for illustrating new directions in research moving from research *with* children to research *by* children.

Questions about how to re-theorise research and children is critical at a time when we are reconstructing children as social actors and initiating research that seeks to position them as the participants rather than the objects of our respective research projects. The question of children's authentic voices in research is clouded by an overriding dominance of the adult's role in designing research and nominating what particular role we construct for children within the research design. While authentic participatory research with children may not initiate a new set of exotic child-centred methods- drawing, photography,

interviews, focus groups are old well tested data collection strategies, what it does do is question the theoretical viewpoint of the adult researcher and how this plays out in the research process. We believe one clear way of judging how these questions might be answered is to look for evidence in the flexibility in allowing children to negotiate the level and type of participation throughout the life of the project – with the initiation always by the adult to develop a co-constructed project that asks as many questions about the nature of the research as it does about the outcomes of the research enterprise.

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