Child¹-led research from inception to reception: methodological innovation and evolution issues

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Summary: *This article traces the concept of child-led research, as developed in the Children's Research Centre³, from its first inception to ultimate reception by the academic community and advancement of a new paradigm within the study of childhood. It raises a number of issues, not least the fundamental question of whether child-led research is itself a realistic concept, and if so what the underlying philosophical, methodological and ethical issues are that sustain it. The twists and turns of methodological innovation, the confronting of barriers and the overcoming of scepticism are explored in some depth. Before this, an exposition of the historical context and the shifting status of the child in society provide theoretical frameworks in which to situate the discussions that unfold. Pilot work, consolidation and expansion are chronicled alongside the critical issues that both constrained and propelled the innovation. The paper concludes with a consideration of how sustainability can be secured as the model evolves.*

Key words: *child-led research, children as researchers, children and young people, child participation, child voice*

1. Introduction

Although little documented, child-led research has significance in communication studies. Successful communication is about the creation of shared meaning. Children undertaking their own research bridges adult-child worlds, lifting the veil on hitherto opaque interactions and illuminating children's

¹ The terms 'child' and 'children' are used for brevity and include young people.

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insider perspectives. Originating from the discipline of childhood studies, child-led research crosses subject boundaries since it embodies universal communication principles of rhetoric and persuasion in a voice that has a research evidence base.

The purpose of this article is to explore the nature, process and impact of child-led research and examine where this innovation sits within theoretical frameworks of rights, participation and empowerment. The involvement of children in research is nothing new but the mode of their involvement has changed significantly over recent decades. There is not space to rehearse well-worn deliberations around children's participation in research, but the concept of children *designing* and *leading* their own research is much more recent and is pivotal to this paper. The focus is on innovation and the struggles to overcome scepticism in establishing a new methodological approach to the generation of knowledge through child-led research. The article draws tangentially on original research evidence by children and young people to uphold claims being made and concludes by considering sustainability and evolution issues.

2. Inception

2.1 Theoretical underpinnings

Child-led research is situated within rights and participation theoretical frameworks. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) brought about a reconstruction of the status of children in society (Corsaro, 1997), a shift that was encapsulated in a 'new sociology of childhood' (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998) which recognises children as social actors in their own right rather than parts of an 'other' as in a family or a school (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC require that children be informed, involved and consulted about all decisions that affect their lives. This catalysed new ways of thinking about children's voice and participation in society (Lundy, 2007) and led to increased involvement of children as participants and co-researchers (Lansdown, 2002; Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Sinclair, 2004). With the turn of the century, new thinking progressed this further and a body of literature on research *by* children began to materialize (Reddy & Ratna, 2002; Kellett et al., 2004; Alderson, 2008). However, despite the political emphasis given to increased participation and consultation (Hill et al., 2004; Pinkerton, 2004) child-led research is still relatively rare. Adults continue to dominate the design and implementation of research involving children (Kellett, 2005b).

2.2 Understanding the historical context

For the majority of the last century children were considered to be objects of research (Hendrick, 1997) where their role was entirely passive. This positivist era centred on childhood as pre-determined stages of cognitive development. There was a proliferation of scientific testing and measuring based on adult-referenced norms (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). Researchers were positioned as experts on every aspect of children's lives: how children think, reason, communicate, even on the affects accruing from personality and environmental factors. Research was 'done' to children in ways that sometimes violated their human rights (Schein & Bernstein, 2007). The notion of child-led research – where children determine the focus of exploration, choose the methods of investigation and actively disseminate their own findings – was a complete paradigm shift.

Feminist and emancipatory research approaches provide some historical analogies. The emergence of feminism came about in response to women's disempowered status and minority voice. Ideology critique is central to the feminist approach and in particular the critique that research is based on a masculine way of looking at the world and ensuing knowledge generated is grounded in the male experience (Punch, 2005). The element of gender in feminist research shapes the choice of topic, focus and data collection techniques (Cohen et al., 2000). From a similar premise, the element of childhood shapes the constituents of child-led research. This challenges the legitimacy of research about children's worlds and children's lived experiences where the research is conceived wholly from an adult perspective.

Parallels can also be drawn with emancipatory research and its foregrounding of 'insider perspective'. Children are party to the subculture of childhood which gives them a unique 'insider' perspective that is critical to our understanding of their worlds. Discourse has grown up around white researchers exploring black issues and able-bodied researchers undertaking disability research (Gray & Denicolo, 1998). Research techniques are influenced by theories that reflect the researcher's beliefs, and values towards the social world. Some would argue that the inability of able-bodied researchers to orient their perspective to one of disability compromises validity (Stalker, 1998). Others regard this as an extreme view and, while acknowledging the different roots, maintain that both bodies of knowledge are valuable. Turning to child-led research one would not want to spawn a model that only valued research by children and young people and dismissed adult research about or with children. Equally undesirable is a

hierarchical structure where adult research is valued more highly than child-led research, or vice-versa. There is room for all of these perspectives and each should speak to and inform the other in a transactional dialogue of complementarities as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Transactional flow of childhood research dialogue

A new paradigm supporting child-led research has to accommodate the differences and complexities prompted by age and insider perspective. Children observe with different eyes, ask different questions. They have different concerns and immediate access to a peer culture where adults are outsiders. Thus the research agendas children prioritise, the research questions they frame and the ways in which they collect data are quintessentially different from adults and not to be confused with co-researchers in adult-led studies. Reduced power relations in peer-to-peer interactions contribute to unique data generation and to valuable insights into contemporary childhoods that such intelligence brings. While there are obvious benefits, there are also many challenges and barriers.

3. Encountering barriers

Skills and knowledge

A principal barrier to children undertaking their own research is their perceived lack of competence and, here, age has commonly been used as a delimiting factor. However, this perspective, which has its origins in the dominant developmental psychology era referred to earlier, has been challenged by the tenet of social experience as a more reliable marker of maturity and competence

and the notion that children's competence is 'different' from adults' not 'lesser' (Solberg, 1996; Alderson, 2000).

Others maintain that children do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding to investigate subjects in depth. Of course, adults do have greater knowledge than children in some areas of life but surely it is children who are experts on what it is like to be a child (Mayall, 2000). Adults, however empathetic to the child perspective, cannot bridge the generation divide and become children again. This is not to devalue the many excellent research studies about children's lives that have been carried out by adults nor to suggest that research *by* children should replace or compete with adult studies, rather that the two are complementary as previously stated (see Figure 1). Skills needed to undertake research are not synonymous with being an adult, they are synonymous with being a researcher, and most researchers undergo some kind of formal training. Many, perhaps most, adults would not be able to undertake research without training. Thus, a barrier to empowering children as researchers is not their lack of adult status but their lack of research skills.

In challenging the barrier implied by children's lack of research skills, the Children's Research Centre (CRC) at the Open University, UK, has developed a training programme tailored for children (Kellett, 2005a) which aims to encapsulate the core constituents of empirical research in ways that are accessible. The programme includes training on:

- understanding the nature and power of research
- appreciating the importance of research ethics
- framing a nuanced research question
- learning from others' research
- understanding and practising common data collection techniques
- engaging in simple qualitative and quantitative analysis
- creative modes of dissemination
- honing presentation skills

Once trained, children embark on research studies of their own choosing about aspects of their lives that concern or interest them, with the support of CRC staff. The CRC aims to minimise adult filters by repositioning the balance to *supporting* rather than *managing* children's research. Some children choose to research topics that impact on their daily lives such as their school experiences,

consumerism or family matters. Others undertake social research about issues that overlap with adult worlds such as poverty, crime and social exclusion.

4. Consolidating methodological innovation

4.1 Pilot work

Pilot work began in 2002 with a group of seven children, aged nine and ten, from a state primary school in England. This work explored different ways of making research process accessible. It was expedient to start with this age group as the task with younger children was likely to prove the more challenging. Once a successful method had been determined with nine and ten year-olds, it would be easier to differentiate the level upwards for older children than the other way round. The pilot training was focused around three key components of good empirical research which became metaphorical coat hangers on which to hang a comprehensive programme. These were concepts of becoming *systematic*, *sceptical* and *ethical*. The early pilot work enabled appropriate activities and games to be developed to help distil these principles so that nine and ten-year-olds could engage with them in meaningful ways (Kellett, 2005a). The pilot work was facilitated as an extra-curricular research club in a state primary school. Working as three pairs and one individual, the child researchers produced four influential research studies (<http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk>) :

- *How are nine-to-eleven year-olds affected by their parents' jobs: A small-scale investigation* by Ruth Forrest and Naomi Dent (2003)
- *Hey, I'm nine not six! A small-scale investigation of looking younger than your age at school* by Anna Carlini and Emma Barry (2003)
- *Gender differences in Year 5's use of computers* by Benjamin Cole and Dominic Graham (2003)
- *The social nature of TV viewing in nine and ten year-olds: A small-scale investigation* by Simon Ward (2003)

These seven child researchers disseminated their work on various prominent presentation platforms including a National Union of Teachers' annual conference (London, 2003) and a *Researching Practice* conference, (Oxford University, 2004) among others. Three of their studies subsequently featured in a jointly

authored article for *Children & Society* (Kellett et al., 2004) – a first, at the time, for child-led research in an academic journal.

A second pilot stage facilitated similar opportunities for nine and tenyear-olds but this time across a cluster group of five primary schools. The outcomes from the cluster initiative proved positive and attracted significant media interest. A series of interviews and reports in national newspapers and radio ensued (The Times Educational Supplement, 31-10-03; BBC Radio 4 'The Learning Curve', 14-11-03; The Guardian 23-03-04 and The Independent 06-07-04). More high profile dissemination by the children followed, including a Top Managers' Forum at the Cabinet Office, UK Government.

Media attention proved to be the catalyst which ultimately led to the establishment of the CRC at The Open UniversityUK in 2004: a centre solely dedicated to the development of research *by* children and young people. Having a designated base was a significant step forward but sustainability was an enduring challenge.

The early years of the CRC were devoted to exploring various models of delivering research training to address different time constraints and barriers in schools. Model 1 is an extra-curricular 'research club' style of delivery where children learn about research process in weekly club sessions and are then supported to undertake their own research. This is the least disruptive in school environments and offers a greater level of child ownership. Drawbacks with this model are the competition with other school clubs and children needing to do all of the research in their own time. Model 2 delivers training to small groups of children as a specialist provision during class time. This has the advantage of enabling children to use some of their allocated school learning time for their research but is more vulnerable to resourcing issues and is dependent on available school staff to support sessions. Model 3 divides the training into three parts which are delivered in whole day off-timetable workshops. Children begin their data collection after the first workshop, focus on their analysis after the second and their dissemination after the third. This has the advantage of impetus and energy being injected from the outset and uses children's own data as part of the training process. Model 4 is an intensive programme that does all of the training and a small-scale research project within a specified time and is only suited to residential-style activity breaks or summer schools. To date, Model 3 has been the most effective with the majority of children.

4.2 Resource and sustainability challenges

Even though children design and lead their own research, they still need an appropriately qualified and experienced adult to teach them the necessary research skills, to mentor them and to assist them with data collection gatekeepers where, and if, adult-child power relations prove too strong. All of this is labour intensive. Small pots of funding can sometimes be accessed but rarely come without strings attached and/or hidden agendas. This point was graphically illustrated at a presentation by CRC child researchers at a UK Cabinet Office Top Mangers' Forum in 2005. Impressed by the quality and rigour of the ten-year-olds' research projects a government official from the Department of Transport asked whether the presenting children would be prepared to do some research for them as they were interested in accessing young people's perspectives about mobility. Child researcher Ben replied that he and his peers did not want to become 'government researchers' because this would mean they would have to research questions that the government identified. However, if the Department of Transport was prepared to fund them to research mobility issues which *they* identified as being important to investigate, then they would happily undertake this work and share their findings with the Government. This was indeed what happened and, using Department of Transport funding, four projects were undertaken:

- *Getting around as the child of a wheelchair user* (Manasa Patil, 2006)
- *Investigating what children think about the way they travel to school* (Ben Ward, 2006)
- *Investigating 9-11-year-olds' views about scooters* (Miranda Nixon, 2006)
- *Safety at bus stops from children's points of view* (Simon Kirby, 2006).

4.3 Global expansion

The CRC has influenced the facilitation of similar initiatives internationally. In 2005, in collaboration with staff in the Education Department at the University of Veszprém, a UK-Hungary collaborative project was launched and inter-country exchanges of child research presentations were facilitated. In the following year, a European project, CARIPSIE (Children as Researchers in Primary Schools in Europe) piloted the CRC model into six European countries: Norway, Sweden, Lithuania, Macedonia, Belgium, and Turkey. In each country a higher education institution acted as a nucleus and worked with satellite

schools to deliver child research training and support child research projects. This was all done within curriculum time (as in Model 2 described above). Individual countries from the CARIPSIE project took the initiative forward in their own way (Springate & Lindridge, 2007), some continuing with in-curricular models, others going on to develop dedicated centres similar to CRC such as the Children's Research Center at Ankara, Turkey (www.aratirmacicocukkonferansi.org).

In 2007, further international alliances were forged through a bi-communal project in Cyprus in which young people from the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot sectors were trained as researchers in order to explore issues of their divided society from young people's perspectives. This work was supported by the United Nations Development Programme and concluded with a bi-communal conference event in Nicosia in September 2007 with a focus on refining the research training programme (Spyrou, 2008). Of interest has been the extension of CRC work into the Middle East which resulted in the development of a research skills programme for Qatari state schools. The CRC training programme had to be sensitively adapted to serve the needs of an Arab nation and Muslim culture. School teachers and Education Institute staff from Doha worked together to produce a resource fit for purpose. An inter-country pupil exchange visit was subsequently organised between primary schools in Milton Keynes, UK, and Doha, Qatar. The initiative was successfully rolled out in 12 Qatari schools over a one-year period and a national conference held to showcase the children's research outputs. This research conference was subsequently adopted as an annual event and the research skills programme is still growing five years on. More recently interest in child-led research has been sparked through collaborative work in Australia (UnitingCare Burnside, 2011).

5. Critical Issues

5.1 Negotiating research relationships

In considering child-led research, there are two kinds of relationship: adult-to-child as in the relationship between child researchers-adult supporters and child-to-child as in the relationship between child researchers-child participants. It is important that the adult role is fashioned as a support role and not in the guise of managing or controlling the children's research. It is best

described as an empowering role that negotiates access with gatekeepers and provides training and resources, not one that imposes adult norms, values and methods on the children's research design. Getting the balance right is not easy (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Balancing research relationships

Support	management
enabling: promoting the idea that children can undertake their own research	influencing: allowing adult interest/agendas to influence what children research
sustaining: training children in research process including data collection and analysis methods	limiting: only teaching children certain skills thereby reducing their ability to make informed choices
supporting: paving the way for children with gatekeepers	judging: suggesting that a child's idea is not worthy enough to research
helping: helping children with some of the leg work rather than the design work e.g. transcribing interviews, number crunching, report writing frameworks	controlling: controlling access to participants e.g. in a school not allowing children to observe or interview certain peer groups or staff
empowering: actively seeking dissemination platforms for child researchers	hijacking: hijacking the content of children's research and/or the ownership of the research

The relationship between child researcher and child participant is relatively new territory and is still evolving. Ideally, power relations in child-child interactions need to be as neutral as possible but this is not always achievable. The power dynamics that are at work in larger society are also present in child-child relations (Holt, 2004) such as:

- popular versus less popular children
- articulate versus less articulate children
- rich children versus poor children
- older children versus younger children
- children deemed to have an 'official status' – e.g. prefect, sports captain, club leader – versus children who have none.
- able-bodied versus disabled children
- typically developing versus children who have learning disabilities.

Interestingly, it is not always the child researcher who is framed in the more powerful position. Some child researchers feel overawed when interviewing older children, others fear being ridiculed as 'geeky' and some are nervous at becoming subjects of jealousy if they are perceived by peers to have been favoured with 'research privileges'. It is important that research relationships are addressed as part of the child research training so that potential power relations can be minimised early on and child-child research benefits optimised. This maximises opportunities for outputs to transcend power dynamics in the propagation of authentic insider perspectives.

5.2 Funding and resources

A critical issue in consolidating the methodological innovation of child-led research is the gritty subject of funding. Supporting child-led research is labour intensive and adult support necessarily needs funding otherwise the initiative will languish in the foothills of small volunteer-resourced projects. Moreover, without adequate funding the initiative risks becoming elitist (Reay, 2006) with accessibility limited to middle class schools and community groups that can self-fund.

An obvious source of funding is research councils. However, information required by research councils invariably includes a detailed proposal of the research design and methods. A fundamental CRC philosophy is the imperative of children leading and designing their own research and being free to choose their own research topics. Thus it precludes provision of methodological detail at grant proposal stage because the child-researchers have not yet undergone training nor made informed choices about their research topics. More successful funding outcomes have been secured through charitable organisations and trusts although the amounts are generally smaller. Modest pots of government funding can sometimes be accessed but rarely come without strings attached or hidden political agendas.

5.3 Marginalisation and social inclusion

As child-led research evolves, the risks of marginalisation are very real (Devine, 2003; Kellett, 2009). The ethos of the CRC is the empowerment of all children irrespective of race, creed class or disability. Indeed, some child groups may have specific concerns to investigate such as some minority ethnic children, children with learning disabilities, traveller children and others. This

effectively gives them a 'double' insider perspective rendering them particularly well-positioned to research issues pertinent to their lived experiences. An Aboriginal child, for example, has a perspective as a child and also as a member of a minority, marginalised group. To this end the CRC works with community groups and charities to support marginalised children as researchers. An example is the WeCan2 project funded by Mencap (Kellett, 2010). Here a group of young people with learning disabilities were supported to research meaningful participation for young people with learning disabilities in youth forums and youth decision-making bodies. In an 18-month project, in north and south west regions of England, they investigated the barriers faced and what could be done to overcome them. Their research findings led to the construction of a WeCan2 Tool Kit to facilitate full and meaningful participation. Examples of other research by marginalised groups include Looked-After children (Bradwell et al., 2009) and Asian young people (Ahmad et al., 2009) among others.

5.4 Child safeguarding and ethical considerations

As with all initiatives that involve children, safeguarding and protecting them has to be a priority. There are potential risks to children embarking on data collection in certain circumstances. If data are being collected outside of school environments, then some children may need to be accompanied by an adult. Here, again, there is another fine line to be negotiated between supporting and managing. The adult is present in a safeguarding capacity and not there to control the research. For example, an adult might accompany a child to a location where the child wants to interview other children (such as a neighbouring school or scout group) but would respect the privacy of the actual interviews. The well being of the child researchers might also be affected by excessive or unreasonable time demands of a research project, distressing or harrowing disclosures or situations where children could be exposed to ridicule or diminishment of their self-esteem. Rigorous attention to ethics in the training programme safeguards children who are participants of child-led research such as interviewees and supports child researchers in understanding that they, just as adult researchers, must disclose any information pointing to another child being harmed, or at serious risk of harm. Ethics training for child researchers includes:

- informed consent
- confidentiality and anonymity

- absence of deception
- safe storage of data
- avoidance of harm
- disclosure of abuse.

Child researchers do seem to have strong ethical compasses and only the lightest of adult hands has been needed to ensure research designs do not stray into unethical territory. Encouraging their peers to act as ethical sounding boards has proved very effective in avoiding any potential distress, embarrassment or loss of self-esteem that a research design might occasion to participants. There are two sets of ethical responsibilities to consider, those that emanate from the child researcher and those that emanate from the adult supporter. Figure 3 provides a summary of these obligations.

Figure 3: Ethical responsibilities

child researcher's ethical responsibilities	adult supporter's ethical responsibilities
to frame an ethical research question	help child researchers arrive at ethical research questions
to gain informed and ongoing consent	withdraw support from unethical projects
to cause no harm or distress	do not make any promises that cannot be kept
not to engage in any deception of participants	protect self-esteem by helping child researchers to keep projects feasible, manageable and achievable
to ensure all data is stored securely	ensure wellbeing of child researchers at all times
to be respectful of, and sensitive towards, participants at all times	help child researchers with adult gatekeepers
to share findings with participants	help child researchers with secure data storage
	check that child researchers know what to do in the event of any disclosures of abuse

6. Impact and Influence

Research outcomes

Arguably, the biggest impact of research by children is the contribution it makes to our knowledge and understanding of childhood and children's worlds. Data generated can be used to raise awareness, increase our knowledge and understanding or provide evidence about critical issues. Sometimes data might relate to matters of political governance, environmental significance or jurisprudence and can influence the formation of policy. There is still much debate about whether research by children can and should inform policy. If there is concurrence with a rights-based platform for child-led research then the justification for their research findings to influence policy is palpable. The caveat to this is that due consideration must be given to the small scale and size of child-led studies.

Earlier in this article we encountered the example of young people with learning difficulties influencing policy and practice with regard to meaningful participation in youth democracy groups. Another example of children's research influencing change includes a study about the treatment of chronic medical conditions (Davidson, 2008) that led to changes in policy and practice at Great Ormond Street Hospital, UK. But it is important to acknowledge that not all child-led research is going to have this kind of impact and to avoid raising expectations unrealistically. Managing child researchers' outcome expectations is one of the responsibilities of adults who support them. Nonetheless, the targeted dissemination of valid research by children can certainly raise awareness about issues and, in best circumstances, influence change. This underlines the notion of child researchers as advocates and protagonists and establishes a link to political literacy (Kirby et al., 2003; Kellett & Ward, 2008). This materializes from the two conceptual arenas of power and emancipation (John, 2003; Hartas, 2008) discussed earlier in the paper which question whose interest research serves.

7. Evolution Issues

7.1 Moving on

Ten years on from the first pilot work, the rationale for and justification of child-led research is now acknowledged and it is time to move on from defending the innovation to addressing evolution issues. Central here, is the question of how we, in our adult world, receive research by children and young people. Children have their schooling to attend to and cannot be full-time researchers so child-led research is often an exploratory snapshot of a particular issue. But when several children produce similar 'research snapshots' around a theme it can build into a powerful montage and generate sufficient evidence to prompt larger investigations. Child-led research is not lamb dressed up as mutton nor is it expected to simulate adult research either in its methodology or dissemination. Peer-friendly participatory methods are one of the strengths of its orientation to authentic perspective. Dissemination of child-led research is just as likely to feature song, drama, photo diary, video documentaries as the more traditional adult-style research reports.

No matter how small scale or differently conceived, child-led research has still to meet standards of reliability and validity, be ethical and open to critical scrutiny. The task of evaluating child-led research is still the subject of much debate. Should it be the object of peer evaluation or adult evaluation? – or both? As the concept evolves, ethical committees for child-led research are mushrooming in schools and youth organisation. Sets of guidelines are beginning to materialise on the global stage such as The International Charter and Guidelines for Ethical Research Involving Children (Graham et al., 2012) commissioned by Childwatch.

In the early pilot days, sceptics had to be convinced that children were capable of undertaking their own research. In this evolution phase, there are othersceptics who now need to be convinced that child-led research is not going to supplant adult research or open the flood gates to subversive investigations by dysfunctional youth.

7.2 Social inclusion

The goal of social inclusion, already alluded to earlier, is even more vital in an evolution phase. Extending opportunities to engage in research so that the

authentic research voice of children in all the diversity of childhoods can be heard remains a constant challenge. There are rich veins of insider perspective to be mined through the empowerment of marginalised groups of young people such as those with disabilities, those of minority ethnic status and refugees among others. This is entirely possible and desirable, but invariably costs more because of the increased levels of support required. Ideologically, cost should not be a barrier to socially inclusive child-led research. Sadly the reality is often very different. Promoting social inclusion in child-led research requires more than deep funding pockets, it necessitates adjustments to research designs and data collection methods that are appropriate to the needs of different minority groups and an even greater willingness to engage in methods that are not adult-referenced or too heavily reliant on literacy and numeracy skills.

7.3 Building capacity

Rhetoric alone will not secure the future of child-led research. We have to move beyond simple recognition of a child's right to undertake research and his or her right to share the research arena with adults. The importance of comprehensive training and quality support as part of the paradigm methodology has been persistently underlined in this paper. This has to translate into capacity building and resourcing otherwise the innovation risks imploding. A further threat is that inadequate funding will lead to a dilution of the research training. Erosion of this kind does not give children sufficient knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their research designs, neglecting the child-led dimension and exposing the process to adult manipulation and management. The jeopardy of exploitation lurks in many guises such as funding strings, marketing ploys and the manipulation of child data and child research agendas for political ends. Child peer educators and child research ambassadors have an important part to play in capacity building.

With various child-led research initiatives now getting underway in different parts of the globe at different times, the power of their cumulative messages is easily lost without a strong hub to hold them together. Banking the evidence is an evolutionary imperative. This can be progressed through repositories that host child-led research, increasingly found on the websites of youth advocacy organisations. Upholding theoretical and methodological discourse is equally important and the latest webargumentation technology may offer a solution in the form of 'evidence hubs'. An Evidence Hub connects a community of inquiry and reflective practice to map what the critical issues are, who is working

on them, where there is consensus/disagreement, and hosts the evidence that underpins proposed solutions and research claims. Starting with key debates and challenges it enables exploration, sharing and contesting of evidence in countless forms, from traditional articles, to practitioners' field experiences, to policies and multimedia (De Liddo et al., 2012). An Evidence Hub could draw together myriad pieces of the child-led research jigsaw, what De Liddo et al. refer to as the 'DNA building blocks' of a concept. People, organisations and projects are mapped geographically and by theme. In evolutionary terms, it represents a significant step towards securing the sustainability of child-led research.

8. Conclusion

Where an innovation is robust, scepticism will eventually give way to acceptance as the evidence base gradually catches up with ideology. This has been the case with child-led research. The journey from research *on*, through research *with* to research *by* children has taken several decades: from the prominence of listening and consulting in the 1990s through the participation agendas that dominated the 2000s to the new age of child-led research that will feature strongly in the 2010s. In moving from inception to reception the focus has been on consolidating the new paradigm and developing the underpinning methodology. As we look ahead, it is timely to turn our attention to evolution issues and securing sustainability.

Research *by* children is fundamentally different from adult research *about* children. The present generation of children are growing up in an era of radical doubt where the certainties of tradition are rejected and knowledge is more contested than ever. The expression of uncertainty is more challenging than the acceptance of objective truths based on universal laws. In embracing uncertainty we demonstrate a willingness to grapple with different perspectives and discourses – and take responsibility for them. The insider perspectives of children and young people, as voiced through their own research, is integral to that process and will enrich collective outcomes and understandings.

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