Children's empowerment to participate in research

The Children's Research Centre has pioneered approaches for supporting child-led research, which has grown considerably in the last ten years, spurred by extensive research evidencing a range of benefits, including:

- Raised self-esteem and confidence
- Development of transferable skills
- Enhanced critical thinking skills
- Heightened ethical awareness
- Enhanced problem-solving ability
- More effective communication
- Development of independent learning

Source: http://wels.open.ac.uk/research/childrens-research-centre/children-and-young-peoples-voices/child-and-student-led-0

Participatory approaches to research recognises:

- Children and young people's competence to express accurate and relevant views about the world and phenomena that matter to them
- The potential to elicit new insights by carrying out research '*with*' and *'by'* rather than *'on'* children
- The adult researcher's responsibility to facilitate and support children and young people to express themselves in research

More recently concern has been expressed about claims that enabling children and young people as researchers is in itself empowering. This is potentially an over simplification without sufficient conceptualisation of what such empowerment involves and how it happens (Kim, 2016). The tendency to show different participatory approaches on continuum has perhaps led to an unhelpful view that child-led research in which children and young people have greatest independence and power over the choice of topic and way in which research is carried out is a 'gold standard' to which all adults researching with children and young people should aspire (Hammersley, 2014). A more helpful approach is posited by Thomas and O'Kane (1998) who suggests the strongest research is

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that which takes into account both the views of the children or young people and those of the adults participating.

Adult researchers in particular should continually consider increased power sharing over research processes to secure the benefits of participatory research. Furthermore, Michael Wyness (2012) argues that there is no such thing as an unme(Thomas and O'Kane, 1998)diated child voice, just as there is no unmediated adult voice; adults, children and young people all rely on each other to express their understandings of the world.

Nonetheless, there are different ways in which adult researchers can proceed as shown in the *Spectrum of research approaches.* The nature of power sharing will depend upon such issues as:

- The role children and young people want to take in research
- The nature of the research question

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