

Empowering children and young people to make a difference

Empowering children and young people is not just about facilitating their agency in participating in research but also about empowering children to make a difference to their lives and others as a result of their participation. A wide range of children and young people should be empowered as researchers – not just those with the ready confidence to put themselves forward – so that a diverse range of voices are heard.

In theory, research produces knowledge, which is disseminated to policymakers and practitioners, who then improve services and practices, but this is not always the reality. There is relatively little evidence of how research 'with' and 'by' children and young people has made a difference, especially in terms of differences beyond the local level. Children and young people have little access to political spheres. (Wyness, 2012). They are normally reliant upon adults to open these channels of communication for them. A strong commitment and robust plan for dissemination of the findings of research 'with' and 'by' children and young people is an important aspect of empowerment.

It should be borne in mind that adult researchers' work also often fails to achieve desired policy impact and change – but this raises the important issue of whether adults, and the systems they inhabit, are prepared to realise children's UNCRC rights, by acting on findings when children's views are aired.

Examples of health and social policy changes happening in the UK as a result of children and young people's research include

Shannon Davidson's (2008) research about experiences of children living with a thyroid disorder that influenced policy and practice at Great Ormond Street hospital, UK

11 year old Manasa Patil's study (Kellett, 2010) of her experiences of difficulties experienced when travelling with her father, a wheelchair user. In this case, the adult supporting Manasa arranged for her to present her work to the UK government's transport department and changes were made as a result.

Davidson, S. (2008) What children think about having a thyroid disorder, Online.

Kellett, M. (2010) 'Small shoes, big steps! empowering children as active researchers', *American Journal of Community Psychology*. doi: 10.1007/s10464-010-9324-y.

Wyness, M. (2012) 'Children's participation and intergenerational dialogue: Bringing adults back into the analysis', *Childhood*, 20(4), pp. 429–442. doi: 10.1177/0907568212459775.