

# Children's agency in communities: A review of literature and the policy and practice context

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## ABSTRACT

Learnings from the sociology of childhood and the children's rights discourse have informed our understanding of children as competent beings who exercise agency in their own lives and in their communities. Starting from this perspective, we explore the literature, policy and practice contexts which explain and shape the Australian approach to supporting children living in disadvantaged communities. We find that these theoretical, policy and practice frameworks seek to support and protect children in communities, but do not acknowledge or work with children's capacity to act in and shape their environments. We then turn to the literature which explores children's agency, and examine the limited body of research which points to the benefits of adults engaging with children's agency. Finally, we draw together key principles and suggested methods from the literature which can assist adults who wish to explore and engage with children's agency in communities. Our hope is that these approaches can contribute to theory, policy and practice which take account of children's agency thereby enriching our understanding of the strengths and potential of children in communities.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times there has been a growing policy emphasis on community-based approaches to tackling disadvantage, especially in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The interventions stemming from these policies often incorporate opportunities for community members to participate in a variety of ways, seeking to develop their individual and collective capacities and build social cohesion through community networks. These practical strategies are supported by a significant body of literature which purports that high stocks of social capital in disadvantaged communities can act as a buffer against the cumulative, entrenched nature of disadvantage.

Children are often a focal point of these community-based initiatives. However, they are generally conceived in policy and much of the theory around social capital as being objects who reflect the outcomes of low or high social capital in communities. Many interventions focus on the parents as participants and use their experiences as proxies for those of the children. This paper explores the policy, theory and practice contexts which are shaping approaches to supporting children living in disadvantaged communities.

The paper then examines the growing body of literature which acknowledges the many ways in which children act on, change and have knowledge of their social environments (James and Prout, 1997). We acknowledge that 'community' is a complex and contested term; for the purposes of this paper we use it to mean a geographical place.

The paper then goes on to explore how adults can engage with children's agency, and the benefits these participatory approaches can have for children, communities and the effectiveness of interventions. We then examine

participatory methods which adults may employ to hear from children about their experiences and roles in communities.

### **1.1 Mapping the concepts: issues and controversies**

Our acknowledgment of children's agency is nuanced by the understanding that it can be constrained by children's gender, culture and socio-economic status. These factors impact on the daily practices and interactions which can constrain children's agency (Morrow, 1999; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). This review is particularly interested in children's agency in disadvantaged communities.

Two developments are relevant here. Firstly, as noted earlier, children's agency has increasingly been recognised within the literature. Moreover, children's human rights have been clearly articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and have had a significant influence on policy and service delivery in a number of countries, including Australia. Secondly and in parallel, governments, especially in Australia, the United Kingdom and United States, have in recent years given greater recognition to the agency of communities (Barnes et al, 2006). This has manifested in the form of place-based initiatives to combat disadvantage. These programs are often articulated as child and family initiatives and take an ecological, community development approach to building the capacity and developing the social networks of individuals in a community. Theories of social capital that emphasise the positive and transformative nature of social networks (see Putnam, 2000) have been influential in shaping such initiatives. The result has been a concerted effort to move towards more holistic, nuanced approaches to disadvantage, recognising social and relational dimensions. Significantly, the language and focus of interventions have shifted from income poverty to social exclusion.

'Social capital', 'social exclusion' and 'social inclusion' are complex and contested concepts. For the purposes of this review, we draw on Putnam's definition of social capital, while recognising the shortcomings and criticisms of his conceptualisation (see Morrow, 1999). Putnam (2000) defines social capital as "social connections and the attendant norms and trust" and views it as being closely related to political participation and civic engagement. Importantly, Putnam does not make prior claims about who benefits from the social connections that define social capital. This, he argues, can only be determined empirically.

While beyond the scope of this review, we recognise an urgent need for empirical research that deepens our understanding of social capital from a child-inclusive perspective. More evidence is needed about the ways in which children contribute to, and benefit from, the social connections that underlie social capital.

While social capital is generally considered to be positive, the literature recognises that it can have a 'dark side', with the potential to exclude some individuals from social connectedness. Social capital can also result in intense group loyalty whereby individuals are isolated from potential resources and support outside the group and are at the mercy of the values within the group (Woolcock and Narayan, (2000). Thus, it will be valuable for future research to explore empirically the complexities of social capital, including the potentially negative impacts on children.

We argue that a recognition of children's agency is largely absent in the policy, theory and practice which aims to tackle social exclusion through building social capital. This is ironic, given that children, their safety, and their life chances as adults are so central to the justification and assessment of success of these initiatives. We find that in the theory, policy and interventions around tackling social exclusion in Australia, children are conceptualised as objects of protection and for future development, whose voices, experiences and agency are largely excluded (McDonald, 2008). There may be an opportunity for this situation to shift with the Rudd Government's focus on the social inclusion of children and families.

Policy-makers can draw on a wealth of theory and practice which acknowledges children's agency. In the last two decades, the children's rights discourse has gained momentum, leading to a growing awareness that "children are not just objects of concern; they are citizens with rights who contribute through their daily activities to the maintenance and continuation of the social order" (Mayall, 2006). Children's right to have their views heard has had some impact, with children's participation being incorporated into some legislation, policies and programs. The sociology of childhood<sup>1</sup> has also had a role in challenging adult views of children and emphasising children's agency. However, in examining the literature we find that the discourse of the sociology of childhood has been either superficially incorporated into the social exclusion and social capital discourses or neglected entirely. Children are largely articulated as being passive recipients of services or sites for the outcomes of increased social capital to unfold. Adults are the actors in, and interpreters of, community in the social exclusion ameliorated by social capital model.

Why do we need to incorporate children's agency into policy, theory and practice? There is a gap in our knowledge about how children experience and create social capital. There are complex dynamics and interactions between children which are going unacknowledged and unexamined. We see merit in looking at the concepts of social capital and social exclusion/ inclusion with a fresh perspective that includes children as agents in the social matrix, giving us a more complete picture of community.

Learnings from the sociology of childhood and the children's rights discourse have much to offer policy, theory and practice around social capital interventions in communities experiencing social exclusion. Children's agency exists whether it is documented in research or acknowledged in practice (Morrow, 1999).

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1. The sociology of childhood emerged in the 1980's and 1990's as "the new sociology of childhood", led by seminal works such as *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (edited by Allison James and Alan Prout) and *Theorising Childhood* (Allison James, Alan Prout and Chris Jenks). This field has now expanded into broader social studies and takes in disciplines such as anthropology and human geography. We refer to this now well-established body of theory as the sociology of childhood.

However, adults as researchers, practitioners and policy makers are positioned to engage with that agency and encourage its development. The literature clearly demonstrates that the benefits of children's participation (Every Child Matters, 2001) – or adult facilitation of children's agency – are significant. There are benefits for children, for communities, and for the success of social capital interventions in communities experiencing social exclusion.

Finally, this review explores the methods that adults can use in research and community development activities with children to engage with their agency and knowledge. This will enable us to gain an understanding of how children experience and understand social capital, acknowledge and respect children's agency and knowledge, and also develop their capacity.

## 2. THE ABSENCE OF CHILDREN'S AGENCY IN THEORY, POLICY AND PRACTICE

### 2.1 Children as objects in social capital theory

Based on his work on civic associations and their relationship to governance and prosperity in Italy and his later work in the United States, Putnam argues that social networks are instrumental in creating and expanding social capital. Putnam's construction of social capital as a public good rather than a private good (Coleman, 1988 and Bourdieu, 1986 in Morrow, 1999) has been adopted by community development researchers and has come to dominate discussions about ameliorating place-based poverty (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). It is Putnam's definition of social capital which is used in this review.

Social capital theory states that social networks have value and that an individual is more productive when connected to others through relationships characterised by trust, reciprocity and exchange (Putnam, 2000). The social capital literature often refers to bonding, bridging and linking capital which differentiates between the relationships an individual has with their close family and friends, the people and services in his/her community, and the infrastructure of institutions which impact on communities. The participation of individuals in their community is seen as a process which develops and sustains social capital. The value of community participation – babysitting for a neighbour or volunteering at a community festival – goes beyond the observable effects (such as the construction of a new local park) to enhance social capital and positively impact on the health and wellbeing of communities (Considine, 2005).

Vinson (2007) demonstrates the positive effect that social capital has in communities experiencing social exclusion. High levels of social cohesion were found to weaken the connections between unemployment, limited education, low income and limited work skills. The effect of this is that in two equally disadvantaged communities, the community with strong, supportive networks characterised by relationships of trust and reciprocity, is less likely to be stuck in a cycle of cumulative disadvantage which endures through generations.

High social capital in communities is credited with improving individuals' health and wellbeing (OECD, 2001). Communities with high rates of unemployment or low family income which also have high social cohesion are less likely than communities with low social cohesion to have reports of child mistreatment, domestic violence and low birth weights (Vinson, 2007; Garbarino and Sherman, 1980 in Jack and Jordan, 1999). The positive outcomes of social capital for children are generally attributed to the quality of their bonding capital with their parents, and the proxy benefits of their parents' bridging and linking capital with other adults. Putnam states that "even in the preschool years the parents' social capital... confers benefits on their off-spring, just as children benefit from their parents' financial and human capital" (2000).

Children are central to the social capital literature. However, the literature tends to exclude the voices and experiences of children in communities and their agency in social capital, and treat them as objects of protection or sites for developing functional adults. This is consistent with findings from a 16-nation macro-analysis of the condition of childhood where researchers found that childhood in western

industrialised societies is characterised by social exclusion (Thomson, 2007) and protection (Englebert, 1994 in Mayall, 2006).

Historically, the construction of children as objects of protection can be traced to the discourse of innocence (James, Meyer 2007) which frames children as pure, innocent and potential victims, and focuses on children's needs and what needs to be *done for* children by adults. When Putnam states "social capital keeps bad things from happening to good kids" (2000), this discourse of innocence is apparent. There is evidence that social capital is a protective force in the lives of children. However, this model excludes their agency in creating social capital and their experiences of social capital. It also ignores the 'dark side' of social capital, whereby group loyalty may prevent children from speaking out when they confront situations that are abusive or damaging to their well-being.

Children's agency in the generation and experience of social capital has been largely neglected (Morrow, 1999). For instance, Coleman emphasises the role of parents and teachers in children's social capital. Putnam focuses on children's improved outcomes as being a result of social capital rather than as a result of their role as agents of social capital. Studies of children's social capital tend to focus on the school and nuclear family and don't take account of unconventional family structures friends, networks, out of school activities and activities in communities (Morrow, 1999). However, an understanding of these elements of children's lives is essential. Without this understanding, we have incomplete knowledge which can perpetuate cycles of exclusion. For instance, if studies only acknowledge and value the social capital generated in nuclear families, the support children draw on from extended family and peers is either ignored or seen as deficient. To understand children's agency in and experience of social capital, networks outside the school or family need to be recognised and included in any framework of children's social capital. These studies are also problematic in that they do not attend to differences in ethnicity or gender, and can not be imported into Australia's contemporary context uncritically.

Most social capital studies have focused on adults, and those that have focused on younger people focus on adolescents (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). Studies with children tend to neglect their perception of relationships and environment, and use parental reports instead (Dorsey and Forehand in Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). Researching children's role and experience of social capital without speaking to children gives us less valid data (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004; Qvortrup, 1997).

Not only are children's networks missing from social capital theory, but their voices are absent as well. As Morrow comments, "overall, the social capital research has not yet moved beyond adult-centred perspectives and preoccupations and explored how children as social actors shape and influence their own environments" (1999). Mayall articulates how the majority of adult professionals who impact on children's lives are still influenced by developmental psychology which tends to plot human life cycles along a linear pathway from child to adult (2006). This leads to the conclusion that adults understand children and their needs and know what is best for them (Ataov and Haider, 2006) and children are viewed as not yet part of society but as preparing for adulthood (Mayall, 2006).

This is manifest in the social capital literature where the outcomes of social capital for children are measures of their future educational attainment, employment status and incarceration rates. This trend is not confined to the social capital literature. For example, in the area of poverty research, Ridge's (2003) study into children's lived experiences of poverty reveals that despite "a large body of quantitative research that focuses on the outcomes of poverty for children when they reach adulthood, we have considerably less understanding of the impact that poverty can have in childhood itself".

There are some exceptions and some researchers and community development facilitators have engaged with children's agency in communities. For instance, Schaefer-McDaniel has formulated a model of the dimensions of young people's social capital which includes social networks and sociability, trust and reciprocity and sense of belonging/ place attachment. Research (Guralnick and Groom 1988, Cairns et al 1988 and 1995 in Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004) has shown that children of primary school age have stable social networks they can readily draw on. Morrow's research with children "explore(s) how children themselves actively generate, draw on, or negotiate their own social capital, or indeed make links for their own parents, or even provide active support for parents" (1999).

Despite some notable exceptions, such as Morrow's work, social capital theory has tended to perpetuate the conceptualisation of children only as objects of protection and future investment, whose voices are excluded and agency is largely unrecognised in our understandings about the experience and creation of social capital. Some theorists have begun to correct this trend and we explore this in section three.

## **2.2 Children as objects of policy**

Focus on the importance of communities has seen a resurgence in social policy in recent years. The United Kingdom's focus on community regeneration as a means to combat entrenched disadvantage has been highly influential in Australia, reflected in policy initiatives such as the Australian Government's Communities for Children initiative. More recently, the discourse of social exclusion and inclusion is of growing importance in Australia since the Rudd Labor Government came to power in late 2007. These policy frameworks have been supported in large part by social capital theory which explains disadvantage and how to ameliorate it through supportive social networks and relationships.

Vinson's (2007) research has been influential in drawing attention to communities experiencing entrenched, intergenerational disadvantage. This is often referred to as social exclusion, a term which recognises the social and relational aspects of poverty. In some communities contained within discrete geographical areas, unemployment, poor health, limited educational attainment and lack of access to services can compound each others' effects, resulting in a cycle of cumulative disadvantage.

These policy and theoretical frameworks have manifested in a number of place-based, community development projects which seek to build the capacity of communities through participation in order to break the cycle of disadvantage

and promote the inclusion of community members. However, groups which are traditionally marginalised in society often continue to be marginalised in these processes. Children are often depicted as the objects of community-based approaches to combating disadvantage, however their voices are rarely heard and their agency rarely recognised (Evans and Spicer, 2008; Ridge, 2003). Children can also be framed in policy as a 'problem' which the community needs to be protected from (Franklin in Johns, 1996). Children most often appear as objects for protection and development into productive adults, exemplified by the emphasis on children's early development in the 2020 Productivity Agenda report (2008).

McDonald (2007) explains this as resulting from the construction of children's identities in policies combating poverty. She discusses three approaches to conceptualising child poverty: material deprivation, social exclusion and inclusion, and wellbeing. Income poverty and material deprivation approaches have generally led to policies which focus on taxation or employment – both adult domains. Social exclusion and inclusion approaches have incorporated a greater complexity through the recognition of the social, cultural and political aspects of poverty. This approach to disadvantage recognises the importance of communities and relationships in people's lives, and has tended to lead to interventions which take a more holistic or ecological approach to individuals living in poverty, addressing all family members rather than the breadwinner/s alone.

Policies generated from this framework, like Sure Start in the United Kingdom, tend to focus on promoting social inclusion and participation in communities. However, while these programs do emphasise participation and inclusion, children's voices are still side-lined. The social inclusion/ exclusion discourse perpetuates children's status as "objects of intervention by the state and family" (Mayall, 2006). Children are framed as the passive recipients of the benefits of the policy, with active agency remaining the domain of adults.

While children are objects of policy, their views are rarely considered in the design, delivery and evaluation of social inclusion initiatives (Evans and Spicer, 2008), so these initiatives can reinforce the exclusion which they seek to combat (Mayall, 2006). The social exclusion agenda does improve on the material disadvantage framework by broadening the focus of policies beyond adult welfare and work (McDonald, 2008), however children's status remains that of "adults-to-be, as future investments" (Ridge, 2003; Evans and Spicer, 2008).

In particular, these policies are "interested in the future of children" (Mayall, 2006), a future in which they, as adult citizens, will be part of the paid workforce and be socially responsible. The reduction of child poverty is seen as a means for generating better adult lives rather than focussing on "the better lives that children will lead as children" (Prout in Ridge, 2003).

Children can experience a dual form of exclusion. As a minority social group, they are excluded, or at least marginalised, from the mainstream of society (Mayall, 2006; Mason, 2004). This is compounded when age-based exclusion is coupled with social exclusion resulting from material disadvantage. This dual exclusion of childhood and disadvantage is well understood by children experiencing it. Children

who participated in the Community Partners Programme in the United Kingdom commented: "it's hard enough for adults to get heard. Nobody listens to kids" (boy, aged 10 in Mathur and Morrison, 2005).

Policies aimed at tackling the social exclusion of families focus primarily on the participation of adults (Hoffmann-Ekstein, 2008) while children's voices and actions remain obscured. Strategies which seek to be inclusive of children will be those which recognise that "children are in relations with adults characterised by reciprocity and interdependence" and respond to children as citizens with contributions to make (Mason in Leonard, 2004).

### **2.3 Children as objects of community interventions**

Neighbourhood renewal schemes have proliferated in the United Kingdom and United States. Similar projects, such as Communities for Children and Neighbourhood Renewal, Victoria, have sprung up in Australia in recent years, many of which articulate a focus on the wellbeing of children and families. There is good evidence in the literature supporting neighbourhood level interventions, emphasising the strength of a bottom-up approach to identifying problems and delivering solutions, as well as the development of confidence and capacity to participate for local community members (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000 in Barnes et al, 2006).

Many of these schemes share two focal points: an early intervention or prevention approach to children's welfare, and a focus on developing supportive networks and community capacity to make communities more resilient through strengthening social capital. Central to many of these community interventions is a focus on promoting social inclusion. Like social exclusion, the term encompasses the social and relational aspects of individual and community wellbeing. Social inclusion implies participation of community members in family, neighbourhood and civic life, as well as the capacity to access services and resources.

For many community interventions participation of community members is central, making participation in the intervention an opportunity to build skills and confidence which then, it is hoped, flow on to participation beyond the intervention. Those facilitating the community intervention must make an effort to encourage the participation of the whole community so that the process of community development doesn't itself perpetuate patterns of exclusion of certain community members or groups. Community members can be excluded on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, age and many other factors. Children, like adults, can participate in both the community intervention itself and also in research and evaluation which is part of the intervention. However, children are often excluded from these processes, a situation which would seem contrary to the purpose of the intervention and research.

While children's agency in their communities often goes unacknowledged, they are by no means absent from community interventions. In fact, children's wellbeing is often front and centre in community development initiatives. The wellbeing of children is generally an uncontroversial aim, and therefore a non-threatening entry point into communities and in mobilising adults for a common cause (Egil Wam, 1994 in Barnes et al, 2006). Children can be a powerful rallying point as "children's welfare is

an objective that calls together the participation of all the different social actors in a community and strengthens the social fabric” (Linares Ponton et al, 2007).

Community initiatives often centre around children's health and safety. Children's agency in communities – hearing their ideas about what makes a good community, or exploring their role in generating and utilising social networks – is largely ignored. The clearest manifestation of this is that most activities which are part of these community-based initiatives focus on the participation of parents.

In a review of nine community-based interventions (in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States) which sought to improve the lives of disadvantaged children and families, only two small projects considered the agency and experiences of children (Hoffmann-Ekstein, 2008). The other interventions, some of which were large government funded projects, all focused on the participation of parents in volunteering, parents' groups, community events and so on. These activities have positive impacts on children. Research by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in the United States has found that there is a positive association between parental involvement with neighbourhood institutions and effective parenting and early childhood development (Jordan, 2006). The concern is that like the social capital theory and social inclusion policies which support them, these interventions seek to protect but not include children.

This is problematic for several reasons. Our understanding (as adults who develop social theory, make government policy and implement interventions) of children's opinions, experiences, and agency in communities is incomplete. Given that theory, policy and practice in this area seeks to improve the wellbeing of children, families and communities, the omission of children could result in less effective interventions. Excluding children perpetuates social exclusion, a point clearly articulated by a participant in the Community Partners Programme: “we're treated like we don't care... the more they say it, it becomes kind of true” (Boy, aged 9 in Mathur and Morrison, 2005). As Barnes et al comment, “children have historically been left out of community development altogether. Indeed they are often viewed by the community as ‘the problem’” (2006). It could be that excluding children from community development is reinforcing ‘the problem’ of disengaged children who are “treated like they don't care”.

Kesby discusses how the insights from studies of and with children can offer a broader critique of society. Certainly the exclusion of children from interventions which purport to be inclusive of all stakeholders is a shortcoming that needs to be corrected (2007).

There is good evidence that these interventions produce positive outcomes for children and communities. However, the exclusion of children as agents in communities can be problematic because policies may not meet children's needs, theory may not reflect children's experiences and interventions may not achieve the desired outcomes. As the following section explores, the recognition of children's agency enriches our understanding of childhood and the community more generally, respects children's rights and can result in better outcomes for children and communities.

## 3. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, AGENCY AND PARTICIPATION

### 3.1 Children's agency in theory

The theory, policy and practice frameworks discussed above have significant potential to improve the lives of children and adults living in communities experiencing social exclusion. However, the very children they seek to help are constructed as passive objects, lacking agency in, and knowledge about, their communities.

Several bodies of thought have emerged over the last few decades to correct this exclusion of children. Discourses around children's rights, citizenship and agency seek to locate children in a space where they are protected from adult abuse, while their role and agency in society is respected and nurtured. These discussions act as important correctives to a trend of excluding and protecting children from domains designated as "adult". Despite their "segregation" from the adult world (Aries in Qvortrup, 1999), children have not stopped observing and participating in communities, and the following discourses attempt to reconcile children's agency and knowledge in and of their worlds.

The discussion of children's rights has come to prominence in recent times. In large part this was prompted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which came into force in 1990 and was subsequently ratified by all but two nation states. The Convention enshrined children's right to participate, a right which has been interpreted and implemented in various ways around the world. The children's rights discourse has had a significant impact on policies for children (Bessell, 2006).

An emerging discourse which challenges and complements the children's rights discourse is that of children's citizenship (Soysal 1994; Kulynych 2001; Bessell 2008). This is based around the idea that "children may develop a more collective sense of empowerment, support each other and help to bring about change for other children" (Evans and Spicer, 2008). Children's citizenship emphasises children's individual and collective agency, a theme central to the sociology of childhood.

The sociology of childhood has challenged the paradigm of developmental psychology which treated children as "adults in waiting" whose value lay in their future selves. Rather, sociological approaches to childhood see children as "'social actors' and as creative and inventive users of the world around them" (Barnes et al, 2006), "human beings" rather than "human becomings".

The sociology of childhood (James and Prout, 1997) "suggests we need to move beyond psychologically based models which construct childhood as a period of socialisation, and emphasise that children are active social agents who shape the structures and processes around them... and whose social relationships are worthy of study in their own right" (Morrow, 2001). Kesby (2007) further refines this perspective by reminding us that no humans, children or adults, are static, immutable entities. He argues that adults can recognise children's agency and competency, while simultaneously acknowledging that they are constantly evolving and adapting to their context as all humans do.

Accordingly, discussion of children's agency must be contextualised in the day to day lives and experiences of children. There is a danger when discussing children's

agency to essentialise it, and to forget the constraints of class, gender and disadvantage which similarly constrain the agency of adults (Buhler-Niederberger and van Kireiken, 2008). The sociology of childhood challenges the notion that children's competencies and characteristics are natural and inherent, suggesting they are instead historically and culturally determined (Qvortrup, 2004; Christensen and James, 2000).

However, the sociology of childhood has yet to enter mainstream academic discourse (Qvortrup, 2003; Mayall, 2006), a situation exemplified by the absence of children in social capital theory, with some notable exceptions. Learnings from the sociology of childhood have also made little impact on Australian social policy directed at children.

### **3.2 Children's participation and agency in practice and policy**

By contrast, the children's rights discourse has had a significant impact on policies directed at children. This is may be because it also emphasises children's rights to non-discrimination, their best interests and the right to life, survival and development, rights which were already being recognised in the aims of policies directed at children (Bessell, 2006).

The rights discourse intersects with the sociology of childhood when it addresses the rights of children to have their views respected. While the sociology of childhood asserts children's agency, the children's rights discourse asserts children's right to have that agency recognised by adults. This is generally framed as "children's participation". Children's right to express their views has given rise to the formal incorporation of "children's participation" into a variety of social policy interventions. Appropriate consultation with children is required by legislation in NSW (*Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998 NSW s13*) and other Australian states. In many contexts, however, the gap between policy that is influenced by new conceptualisations of childhood and children's human rights, and practice is marked (Bolzan, Mason and Michail, 2005).

Hart, Westhorp, Shier and Rocha (Howard et al, 2002) have variously framed participation as a ladder, continuum or pathway, reflecting the capacity of participation, a highly contested term, to describe a wide spectrum of activities with vastly divergent capacities to genuinely engage with individual agency. At the heart of the participation issue is power, and the degree to which it is shared or even transferred to the child participant (Thomas, 2007). John (1996) conceptualises children's participation as a bridge between adults and children, and she effectively navigates the issues of power and agency suggesting that participation should be based on an "emotional democracy".

Critiques of children's participation centre around the tendency towards tokenism, a danger when children's participation becomes a "tick a box" requirement for program compliance and adult agendas (Mayall, 2006; Evans and Spicer, 2008) rather than a genuine attempt to share decision-making power with children. Kjørholt (2002), in her study into discourses on children and participation in Norway, found that in 50% of participatory projects the overall aim was formulated as being

different from children's right to participate and rather framed children as a resource for achieving some other aim.

This is borne out in research which identified six reasons cited for adults to seek young people's participation: technical, pragmatic, educational, human rights, democratic and transformative (Howard et al, 2002). Technical and pragmatic reasons for facilitating children's participation are unlikely to engage with children's agency. When people are genuinely participating, they are involved in identifying and defining problems, not simply aiding in the advancement of a predetermined agenda (Hart, 1994).

Children's participation which engages with children's agency has the potential to develop children's knowledge and skills, protect their rights, and build their capacity to engage with the community. Save the Children (2000) advocate children's participation in research as a way for them to become actively engaged in their communities and begin to expect and demand change. In this way participation becomes "consciousness raising – empowering people through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge" (Tupuola, 2006). However, as Kesby (2007) comments there can be a conflict between acknowledging children's agency and developing their agency, a process which can re-introduce the old power relationship of all-knowing adult and incomplete child.

Kesby's concerns reflect the considerable body of writing on the tensions and complexities related to children's participation. Mayall and others (Wyness 1999; James and James, 2000; Prout, 2000) discuss the simultaneous devaluing of childhood alongside increasing government control over childhood. In this context, participatory activities for children can be viewed as disciplinary, repressive tools, which seek to entrench self-discipline and social control through a strategy of normalisation (Knorth et al, 2002). Similar criticisms have been directed at the use of the children's citizenship discourse, arguing that it has been used by governments, especially in the United Kingdom through citizenship curricula in schools and the Every Child Matters green paper, to place children's responsibilities rather than children's rights front and centre (Hendrick in Mayall, 2006).

Children's participation is a fraught issue, and a term which is hotly contested. Having touched on these controversies, this paper seeks to move beyond the debate about defining and categorising children's participation. Instead, we wish to learn from the children's rights and sociology of childhood discourses and move towards recognising children as community members who have a right to be heard by their community. Adults are socially positioned to hold the power in determining whether and how they engage with children's agency and knowledge. It is adults who, for pragmatic and philosophical reasons, have the ability to engage with and incorporate children's agency into the theory, policy and services which impact on children's lives. The following section explores how adults engaging with children's agency – which we call participation – can benefit children, communities and interventions in disadvantaged communities.

## 4. ADULTS CONNECTING WITH CHILDREN'S AGENCY THROUGH RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN, COMMUNITIES AND INTERVENTIONS

Engaging children in research *“helps challenge social exclusion, democratise the research process, and build the capacity of (children) to analyse and transform their own lives and communities”* (Cahill, 2007).

As discussed above, there is considerable literature seeking to understand children's knowledge and agency in a society where children are generally protected and excluded from “adult” domains. If we as adults accept that children have knowledge of and agency in the world inhabited by both adults and children, it is desirable that the policies which impact on children and the community interventions which flow from these also take account of children's competence. If children's agency and knowledge is ignored, we face incomplete understandings of social dynamics and ineffective or counterproductive policies and interventions. Ataov and Haider (2006) consider children's participation to be essential because the “conception of inclusiveness ideally demands that conceptualisation, design and development of public space include all stakeholders – including children and youth”.

The challenge then is to incorporate children's knowledge and actions in domains inhabited by adults: the theory, policy and practice which explain and act on disadvantaged communities. Children's agency exists and operates in our society (with or without the involvement and observation of adults) and can be enhanced or constrained through adult action. This paper is specifically interested in the nexus between adults' and children's agency, the idea of adults facilitating children's participation as a bridge between adults and children (John, 1996). Children's right to participate has been acknowledged. What is less clear is how that participation should happen and what impact participation has.

Children's participation in adult-initiated processes such as action research and community development can span the spectrum from manipulation to shared-power with adults (Hart, 1992). As Chawla comments, “participation is authentic when children understand clearly what they are doing and voluntarily choose to contribute” (2002). Clearly, any participatory process which seeks to understand and work with children's agency must respect children's right to choose and give informed consent. Where children's participation results in the observation and integration of children's knowledge and agency in their communities, we argue that it can be of great benefit to children, communities and interventions seeking to combat social exclusion in communities.

The research tells us that many children want to participate in conversations and activities in their communities. A 2003 study by Weller found that “few (children) had ever been asked their opinion about any issue relating to the community, although almost three quarters of those surveyed wanted to give their opinions” (Weller in Barnes et al, 2006). As Barnes et al comment, there is a “lack of clear attributable evidence for any beneficial impact of children's participation either on themselves as individuals, on neighbourhood characteristics, or specific children's services”. There is, however, a wealth of rich, descriptive case studies which reflect on the process of participation and occasionally communicate children's experiences of participating.

## **4.1 The benefits of children's participation: impacts on children, communities and interventions**

### **4.1.1 Children**

Community development interventions which seek to combat disadvantage and social exclusion usually work to include individuals, and develop individual and community networks and capacities. As with adults, when children are included in these initiatives they can develop skills and form networks. The evidence in the literature for the benefits of participation for children tends to focus on individual benefits, like skills development and enhanced self-esteem; and community benefits, where children develop awareness of and engagement with others in their community, and civic and political processes. For instance, children's participation in a community-led environmental care project was linked to increased social development including improved self-esteem, efficacy and decision-making (Chawla and Heft. 2002 in Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004).

However, Save the Children's Community Partners Programme for 9 to 15 year olds set out to "explore if active community participation was an effective means of countering children and young people's social exclusion and assisting them in securing their place as full citizens alongside others" (Mathur and Morrison, 2005). The observed benefits for the children included increased awareness of their rights, an increase in transferable skills and confidence ("when you know you have a right to be listened to it makes you feel stronger" Girl, 10), the development of political awareness and skills and the chance to work with others and actively contribution to change (Mathur and Morrison, 2005).

Evans and Spicer (2008) and others discuss the likelihood that children's participation in the development of preventative initiatives can be preventative in itself, although evidence of outcomes is very limited. However, the impact of adults respecting children through valuing their knowledge and their agency through participatory research and community development should not be underestimated.

### **4.1.2 Community networks**

Central to the benefits of participation for children are the opportunities and knowledge generated by interacting with the community. For instance, Sime (2008) found that "children who have developed social networks and information about available services are less likely to see themselves as excluded or 'poor'". A 10 year old boy who participated in the Community Partners Programme articulated the process of developing networks and competence in his community: "before we just went to adults nearest to us to try to get heard... like our mum or teacher. Then we went to other people like (community workers). We learnt about other stuff and now we know who our councillor is and what he does... at meetings I told him what I thought but he didn't think the same as me" (Mathur and Morrison, 2005).

These examples echo the processes which develop and sustain social capital. Community participation and the development of networks are central to social

capital. It could therefore be extrapolated that some of the beneficial individual and community outcomes of social capital could be generated by children's participation as well. For instance, self-esteem, self-control, self-efficacy and self-concept of ability are, as we explored above, all positively influenced by children's participation and social capital (Stevens et al, Chawla and Heft, 2002 in Schaefer-McDaniel). The outcomes and impacts of children's participation on social capital and individual and community outcomes is an area which merits further research.

The literature also emphasises the importance of children's participation in the process of sustaining a democratic society of engaged citizens (Cahill, 2007; Linares Ponton, 2007; Chawla, 2002). Chawla (2002) comments "children learn active and responsible citizenship through opportunities to practise it: it is not something they magically attain when they reach the legal voting age".

The literature suggests children learn to be citizens through participation by learning to work in groups, collectively deciding rules and processes, learning to be consulted and consulting others, and becoming familiar with civic processes. As Linares Ponton (2007) suggests, children "require opportunities to participate in collective actions in order to acquire the necessary competencies to become involved in an active and autonomous manner in collective processes that benefit their community". This can have an impact in children's future adult lives as well as developing their present capacity as the following quote from a 10 year-old community development participant expresses: "I'm better at working with other people now cos there are rules but ones we've agreed on so it's not like school" (Mathur and Morrison, 2005).

There is also evidence that children's participation can develop a sense of collective identity and empathy with other children and their community generally. Children participating in Children's Fund projects in England "saw their participation as helping to bring about change for others", with one child commenting "I like doing the interviews and stuff because you know you are going to make a change for loads of different people... it is like giving people a chance to change" (Evans and Spicer, 2008). In a photo-voice project conducted by Foster-Fishman and colleagues (2005), participants reported "increased self-competence, emergent critical awareness of their environment, and the cultivation of resources for social and political action as a result of their participation in the project" (Rudkin, 2007).

There are gaps in our knowledge about the impact of children's participation in research and community development activities, both for children as individuals and for the communities they live in. However, the anecdotal evidence is that participation develops children's skills and confidence and assists in raising their awareness and capacity to engage with and contribute to their communities. A logical progression then is that policies and interventions which seek to ameliorate disadvantage in communities would benefit from the participation of children.

### 4.1.3 Interventions

Children are experts in their own lives and when their input is heard and considered in planning processes, services are more likely to be used. There are many local and international examples of very young children being consulted in the development of early childhood programs, parks, playgrounds, schools and policies, leading to improved service use and effectiveness (Alderson, 2000; Lansdowne, 2005).

For example, the World Bank and local authorities funded the building of a new primary school in an Indian village. However, time went on and the children didn't attend the school. When they were asked why, the children explained there was an "invisible boundary" around the village which marked the limit of safe travel on foot from their homes and the school was outside this boundary" (Save the Children in Lansdowne, 3, 1995). This is an example of where the participation of children in planning the location of a service built for their own welfare would have saved time, resources, and most importantly resulted in the children benefiting from having a new school.

The Indian school illustrates a situation where adults are acting to improve children's wellbeing but failing because they did not include children as participants in their community. Another example of this disjunct between adult priorities and children's is a study which revealed the mismatch between adults' and children's perceptions of the dangers facing children (Bessell, 2008). While adults were generally most concerned about the threat of strangers and accidents (Valentine in Bessell, 2008), bullying was the issue which most children cited as a concern. While this was traditionally a concern dismissed by parents and schools, listening to children resulted in the development of anti-bullying strategies at school and in the community.

In some cases children know more about a subject than adults. For example research has shown that children are the heaviest users of outdoor space (Cooper-Markus, Sarkissian in Chawla, 2002) so environmental planning can benefit from children's knowledge.

These examples from the literature demonstrate that researchers, policy-makers and community workers seeking to improve the wellbeing of children and communities would do well to acknowledge children's agency and knowledge, to speak to children and listen to what they have to say. However, as the previous section explored, genuine adult engagement with children's agency requires attention to power dynamics and thoughtful selection and use of methods.

## 5. ADULTS CONNECTING WITH CHILDREN'S AGENCY IN COMMUNITIES: SOME PRINCIPLES

Given the insights from the sociology of childhood and the widely acknowledged right of children to participate in matters which impact on them, we now need to consider how best to connect with children's agency. We must find approaches and methods which acknowledge children's agency, respect their knowledge and go some way towards equalising the power imbalance between child participants and adult facilitators of research or community development. Simply "giving someone a seat at the table does not automatically provide them with the power or resources to speak or be listened to" (Thomson, 2007). By asking children questions, adults set the scene and are in control. Asking children to describe their experience in a way they enjoy increases their skills and empowers them by making their opinions count (Save the Children, 2000).

As researchers have turned their attention to socially excluded and minority voices, many have employed participatory research techniques which explicitly acknowledge and transform power relations (Thomson, 2007). The theory and methods which support participatory action research can shed light on the process of doing research and community development with children in a way which acknowledges and engages with their agency. Participatory action research is a natural partner of community development because it has an "emphasis on process, a commitment to research contributing and 'giving back' to community collaborators, and a recognition of the power of knowledge produced in collaboration and action" (Cahill, 2007). In this way, the techniques employed in participatory action research could be readily adapted to community development activities.

Ataov and Haider (2006) speak about participatory action research as "an effective way to enhance people's ability to control their own destinies and to help them increase their capacity to do so". They emphasise the importance of the process rather than an "ideal outcome". The authors are influenced by the writing of Freire who emphasises the "experience of participants in an educational process as a tool to empower them". Freire is concerned with the empowerment of those who do not traditionally have a voice and, as is clear from the above evidence, children are generally marginalised in the community development process.

John (1996) talks about children as a minority rights group, and suggests that children's participation needs to be radically reframed to acknowledge and transform the power relations between children and adults. She envisages children's participation as a bridge between the world of children and the world of adults, across which children can negotiate and collaborate with adults.

Critiques of participation and learnings from participatory action research can assist us in identifying challenges inherent in the process of adults engaging with children, and principles which can help to overcome these challenges.

### 5.1 Power dynamics between adults and children

There are many examples of community development initiatives which have been conceived of and executed by children (Lansdowne, 2005). These instances illustrate how children have chosen to engage with their communities. However,

this review is particularly interested in how adults initiating research and community development interventions have worked with children.

Given that we acknowledge children's agency, the next challenge is how adults, as initiators of research and community development activities, can acknowledge this agency. Researchers and community workers tend to be adults, which instantly establishes an unequal power relationship. Children lack experience in interacting with adults as equals (Punch, 2002). Adults must be mindful of acknowledging children's agency and competence in the present and not taking on the role of experts.

Many of the methods in the following appendix attempt to overcome and transform these power imbalances. Briefly, the literature emphasises: children choosing where and when they participate (Sime, 2008), facilitating opportunities for children to express themselves in their own terms, giving children feedback so they know their views are valued, and using reflective practice to ensure adult interpretations are correct (Lansdowne, 2005). Cahill (2007), in participatory action research with young people, explicitly addressed the power imbalance and facilitated a discussion about this with the group, an approach which could be used sensitively with a younger age group.

## **5.2 Children's methods?**

Methods to be used when doing research or community development activities with children are generally seen as being very different to those which would be used with adults. It is assumed that children will prefer fun activities like drawing or role-plays to filling in surveys or doing one-on-one interviews because they will be more competent at these activities (Punch, 2002).

Children may be fully capable of responding to methods which are traditionally used with adults. However, using a diverse array of creative, oral and visual methods can have several advantages: the activity can be more enjoyable for the children, it can be an activity which taps into and builds on their competencies, and they can all help to redress power imbalances between children and adults. For instance, using visual and written methods can lessen the pressure a child may feel to respond quickly in the "correct" manner (Punch, 2002).

It is likely that the methods outlined in the appendix could have a broader application than for use with children. Some participatory researchers are pushing for a shift to thinking of these techniques as being "research participant-centred" rather than child centred, as these methods respond to participants' preferred means of communicating, respect participants' individuality and their diversity of experience and expression (Punch, 2002; Thomson, 2007).

## **5.3 Triangulation of methods to check meaning**

Punch (2007) emphasises the importance of using a variety of techniques to help sustain children's interest, prevent bias from reliance on one method by enabling

the researcher to cross-check data, as well as evaluate the usefulness of different methods used.

The literature illustrates that using several methods and a variety of social settings can provide opportunities for children to express themselves in a way that makes them feel empowered and capable. Like adults, children have different ways and preferences for expressing their opinions, so providing opportunities for them to do so through writing, speaking and drawing for instance, can connect with the skills and preferences of different children. As well as accommodating differences between children, it also allows a reflection of the different experiences, roles and identities within children which may change according to the context they are operating within. For instance, one child may be a youngest sibling, a high achiever at school and have difficulty with his/her peer group. The dynamic nature of how he/she interacts with the world and views him/herself may not be captured in a classroom setting with classmates present. For instance, Thilde Langevang used mixed methods for studying movements of Ghanaian youths including observation, interviews, diaries, photo diaries, life histories and projections to reflect the complexity and mutability of the youths' identities (Kesby, 2007).

Providing opportunities for children to interact with a peer group, within the family context or individually, as well as providing options about the physical space in which the research takes place is crucial. Kesby (2007) discusses the impact of socio-spatial dynamics on children's responses to research, and how the "behaviour and accounts of children may change radically depending on the presence of parents, teachers, peers or... siblings". Kesby outlines how providing opportunities for children to respond in different environments can help to crystallise and explain these effects. Punch dealt with this by providing an opportunity for participants to reflect privately after engaging in a group activity (Punch in Kesby, 2007).

The appendix at the conclusion of this paper gives examples of how these principles can be given life in research and community development methods, which deepen adults' understandings of children's experiences, acknowledge children's agency and contribute to a process of empowerment and transformation.

## 6. CONCLUSION

*Childhood has to be valued as a social experience in and of itself, with its own norms and customs, where the demands of participation and inclusion may be considerable – and likewise the costs of exclusion*

(Ridge and Millar in Ridge, 2003)

The dominant theory, policy and practice frameworks which shape our approaches to supporting children living in disadvantaged communities tend to frame children as objects who are impacted by adult actions. While children's worlds are certainly constrained and impacted by adults, children are competent actors in their own lives and in their communities. By considering the principles outlined in section five and employing methods and methodologies like those described in the appendix, adults can begin to understand how children act in and interpret their communities.

We can hear from children about how they see their community, their social networks and supports, and how they have been and would like to be involved in their community. This data would make a considerable contribution to the social capital literature and enrich our understanding of how children's networks and relationships operate in communities. With this deeper understanding of children's agency, those undertaking action research and working with children in communities would have a framework from which to approach their work which recognises and incorporates the views and experiences of children.

This review of the literature and policy and practice contexts has identified avenues for future study. Firstly, we need a deeper understanding of the ways children participate in communities and how they contribute to social capital. Secondly, we need empirical evidence that children's participation in their communities, and their engagement with appropriate research and community-building activities, has positive outcomes for children, communities and interventions.

This will enable us to reconfigure social capital theory to incorporate children's roles in creating and sustaining networks and relationships of trust and reciprocity. A recognition of children as agents in communities can broaden and strengthen the social inclusion agenda to be truly inclusive, and underpin policy-making which supports and enables children in the present.

## **7. APPENDIX: PARTICIPATORY METHODS WHICH ENGAGE WITH CHILDREN'S AGENCY**

What follows is a selection of methods employed by researchers working with children. These are only a sample of the many tools available and we provide them to give a sense of how methods can engage with children's agency and build their capacity. For each method we are interested in: how it enables adults to learn more about how children view themselves and their community; how the method acknowledges and connects with children's agency; and how the method can develop children's capacity and empower them. It should be noted that, like all methods, these tools have the capacity to be destructive as well as constructive. For instance, the methods could be detrimental to children's wellbeing if they were used negatively or without consideration of issues like those discussed in section five. What is most important is the methodology which underpins methods used with children. A rights-based, child friendly approach which recognises children's agency is an essential platform to make these methods respectful, enjoyable and worthwhile for children (Beazley et al, 2005).

<b>Method</b>	<b>Enhancing adults' understanding</b>	<b>Children's agency</b>	<b>Capacity building and empowerment</b>	<b>Illustrative examples</b>
<p><b>Drawing and mapping</b></p>	<p>Pictures and visual media can be used to inspire children's interest in research and community activities. Used in combination with participant observation they can be very powerful. They mediate conversation between the children and the adult. Mapping provides an opportunity for adult researchers or community workers to explore children's relationships with, and their perceptions of the relationships between people and places.</p>	<p>Methods like drawing and mapping can help people with limited literacy or verbal skills express themselves, and provide an empowering medium through which to 'speak'. The drawings can then initiate a conversation where children interpret and give meaning to their own representations. They can comment on differences and similarities between their works, so that the task becomes "something through which they express their idiosyncrasies, personal skills and their varied social experiences" (Christensen and James, 2000).</p>	<p>The literature suggests that these methods have "the potential for increasing children's own awareness about the shared and the diverse aspects of children's social experiences" (Christensen and James, 2000).</p>	<p>Christensen and James used drawing to explore how 10 year olds spend their weeks. The children filled in a circle in any way they chose: they wrote, drew, listed, numbered, shaded, coloured, compartmentalised, or ignored the circle and talked about their week. The children were asked to reflect on how they completed the chart (Christensen and James, 2000).</p> <p>A study into children's clubs in Nepal involved children mapping their household and village. They also did role plays to find out which activities children valued. The findings were presented at a four-day workshop and the children workshopped the researchers' recommendations (Rajbhandary, Hart et al in Save the Children, 2000)</p> <p>The "Who Matters" activity mapped young people's social networks and the quality of key relationships. They made a chart with the young person at the centre and other important people around it, which was then used as a basis for discussion (Save the Children, 2000).</p>

<b>Method</b>	<b>Enhancing adults' understanding</b>	<b>Children's agency</b>	<b>Capacity building and empowerment</b>	<b>Illustrative examples</b>
<p><b>Photography</b></p>	<p>Photographs can communicate children's perspectives in a way that more traditional methods do not. Because photographs are not mediated by language, they offer the opportunity to represent experience and perspectives in a relatively immediate way. Photographs simultaneously depict actual persons, places, and things, and also the photographer's relationship to them (Rudkin, 2007).</p>	<p>Using photography as a research or community development method hands control to children and acknowledges their agency as "see-ers" and "knowers" in their community. Using photography can also build children's capacity and confidence as they learn how to use a camera, develop film, and exercise control over the use and interpretation of photographs.</p>	<p>Through photographing the people, places and events of their everyday lives, community and identity can become objects that are worthy of observation and... "a source of pride" (Rudkin, 2007), which can be an empowering and transforming process in a community.</p>	<p>Children participated in a photography activity. They could choose when, where and how to take photos, how many photos to take, or choose not to take photos. They could remove photos they didn't want the researchers to see, and could choose which ones to talk about, and in how much detail (Sime, 2008). It was important that the children then had the opportunity to discuss and review the photographs, rather than adults assuming the photos spoke for themselves.</p>
<p><b>Role play</b></p>	<p>Creative methods can inspire children's interest in adult-initiated research and community development activities.</p>	<p>Role plays can be a powerful way to engage with children's agency. They can be an excellent means for children to interpret a situation or experience and then represent this interpretation back to each other and adults.</p>	<p>"Narrative and artistic methods of inquiry can allow people to discover, share, and build representations of their community, thereby reinforcing a sense of connection and providing a basis for envisioning change" (Rappaport in Rudkin, 2007).</p>	<p>80 students performed readings, plays, singing and dancing, video and slide shows on violations of human rights. It was an "opportunity for children to think, conceive and manage the programme for the first time, giving them a feeling of ownership from the outset" (Ali in Save the Children, 2000).</p>

<p><b>Interaction with the environment and Participatory Rural Appraisal</b></p>	<p>Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques and others which seek to understand the interaction of people with their physical environment can lend themselves to use with children. Children are often very aware of their physical environment and can draw adults' attention to challenges and solutions.</p>	<p>Participatory methods can hand control to the participants and allow children to define the relevant elements of an issue (Punch, 2002), and effectively set the boundaries for the scope and focus of the research.</p>	<p>Methods used in Participatory Rural Appraisal and some environmental projects build children's capacity to care for their community and physical environment.</p>	<p>A project in Peru sought to address environmental problems especially deforestation. All children over six years were supported to have their own garden at home and learn about crops. Children took on the role of community educators by talking to their parents and school teachers about good practices (Hart, 1994).</p> <p>The Growing up in Cities action research project engaged young people in evaluating their communities, and planning and implementing positive changes. Methods included drawing, mapping, interviews, time schedules, photographs, model-building, child-led tours, focus groups, role play, visioning and ranking (Chawla, 2002).</p>
<p><b>Children as researchers and disseminating research</b></p>	<p>When children are involved in planning, conducting and disseminating research, adults can gain a far deeper insight into what children think is important.</p>	<p>Children can take very active roles in research at all stages of the process. In one project, children decided who should know about the research findings, they wrote letters and press releases, distributed leaflets and posters, did media interviews, presented in public on the findings, and developed innovative and accessible ways to present the findings like drama video, plays, poetry and photography (Save the Children, 2000).</p>	<p>"A process of participatory feedback could significantly facilitate children's empowerment within communities" (Kesby, 2007). However great care must be taken with how children are prepared and supported during and after the research.</p>	<p>In response to the Aral Sea crisis, a three day workshop was planned where children were trained in research methods, and on consensus and compromise to overcome the difficulties of researching with children from different social groups (Save the Children, 2000).</p> <p>Research aimed to explore children and young people' understandings of the impact of poverty, and used a large range of participatory techniques to promote active involvement in research process. Children aged 10–14 formed a young person's advisory group which met to discuss methods of data collection, recruitment, payment, research questions, analysis and dissemination strategies (Sime, 2008).</p>

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