Negotiating the research space between young people and adults in a PAR study exploring school bullying

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Introduction

This chapter will focus on the active involvement of five young researchers and an adult researcher in a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project exploring bullying in their school. The study was conducted in the secondary school of an independent day and boarding school in the East of England. Over the course of the research, a reciprocal relationship developed between the young researchers and an adult researcher (first author). Issues of power and recognising each other's unique contributions to the process were features of this reciprocal relationship. The young researchers were self-selected from year eight (age 12) to year ten (age 14), and they called themselves *Research for You (R4U)* with the caption, '*Researching for Life without Fear'.* These young researchers and the first author formed the research team. The young researchers were involved with the first author in the development of research methods aimed towards the whole school, including parents and teachers; in co-analysing the data and in presenting and disseminating the findings.

During the study, the participatory process was evaluated on three occasions. Each evaluation fed into the next to provide an in-depth appraisal of how participation happened and the relationships that developed as a result. This chapter will explore and critique these evaluations. Findings from the study are discussed elsewhere (O'Brien *et al.* forthcoming). The chapter will begin by exploring the literature on developing relationships with children and young people[1] through the research process.

Developing relationships with children and young people through the research process

In a traditional research context, the adult holds the power as the 'expert' on what to research about children and young people, how data is collected and, indeed, how data is interpreted (Woodhead and Faulkner 2008). Childhood research, therefore, has traditionally been framed around professional, policy or academic agendas but rarely from the agenda of the child. However, this viewpoint is shifting, and more recently, children have been regarded as active researchers conducting their own research into areas relevant to their everyday lives, sometimes as sole researchers (see Kellett *et al*. 2004) or co-researchers (see Stoudt 2009) and even as commissioners of research (see O'Brien and Moules 2013). This shift recognises children as individuals alongside adults, not separate from them. If opportunities for children to be involved in knowledge production rather than recipients of adult-generated knowledge are provided, children can enable adults to theorise and understand the social world that they occupy (James 2007).

This progressed relationship is certainly not without its limitations, and adult researchers need to be transparent about how issues of power between adult and child researchers are explored and understood in the research project (James 2007, Mannion 2009). It has been suggested that one way to redress these power imbalances is for adults and children to negotiate the research space together through 'intergenerational and interpersonal dialogues' (Mannion 2009, p. 338). Sara Bragg and Michael Fielding (2005) suggest in their educational research that if the involvement of students as researchers is to be productive and engaging, systems need to be put in place to enable dialogue and allow adults and children to listen to and learn from each other. The authors suggest that this is more than collaboration – it is about collegiality and changing our understanding of what it is to be a teacher and what it is to be a student. For the children and adults involved, the relationship becomes interdependent and can begin to flourish as they strive to understand and appreciate each other's unique roles (Fielding 2004, Mannion 2009). In their study involving young people as co-researchers, Niamh O'Brien and Tina Moules (2007) found that using cycles of action and reflection at all stages of the project, even in an informal manner, enabled the research team to challenge some underlying power issues between adults and children. Consequently, changes were made as the project progressed, and the young researchers participated in decision-making alongside adults.

Although there is an emphasis on collaborating with children on their terms, Mary Kellett (2010) advocates that listening to the views of children is not the same as involving them in the decision-making process. Greg Mannion (2007) proposes that involving children in decision-making and actively hearing their voices is useful as a starting point. However, traditionally, adults have made decisions about research without input from children. Rachael Fox (2013) discusses how academic institutions are not usually aware of how children can actively participate in research, and constraints are in place, making their participation difficult. Mannion (2007, 2009) and Kellett (2010) propose that listening is dependent on adults' relinquishing some of the control and power over decisions made during the research and suggest that if this is not realised, then children are relying on adults to facilitate their views. Certainly, children have criticised adults for not providing them with feedback about how their opinions influenced decisions (Davey 2010). Fielding (2004) further stipulates that if students are only asked to participate in consultations and/or research where the agenda and questions have been set by teachers using language that they cannot relate to or the results of which do not relate to them, it is likely that they will feel alienated and patronised and therefore not want to participate in the research.

> Students and teachers need each other, need to work as active partners in the process if it is to be either worthwhile or successful.
>
> (Fielding 2004, p. 307)

Accordingly, children need to be invited to join the dialogue with adults and to negotiate how they would like to be involved and how adults can facilitate their participation (Fitzgerald *et al*. 2009, Mannion 2009). Barry Percy-Smith (2015) recognises that participation is more about the process of democracy in which people work together to make decisions and influence change rather than always about having a say. In essence, the quality of the relationships between adults and children

and how they actively collaborate is the main component of children's participation (Fielding 2004, Percy-Smith 2015).

Evaluating children's participation in research

For research dedicated to hearing children's voices to be successful, researchers need to use appropriate techniques that do not exclude or patronise children (Kellett *et al*. 2004). Rachel Hinton (2008) suggests that UK researchers are particularly concerned with issues of reliability and the validity of data collected by and from children. In the case of qualitative research, this quality is assessed through the 'trustworthiness' of the research. One way to ensure that childhood research is truly child-centred and focussed on what children are telling adults from their perspective is through the evaluation of the process. This, in turn, adds to the trustworthiness of the study. Evaluating children's participation is not about testing to see if it was done correctly or if milestones were reached but more about critically reflecting on the process and learning from it (Percy-Smith and Malone 2001, Sinclair 2004, Davey 2010). In this way, children's participation becomes achievable (Percy-Smith and Malone 2001).

PAR and hearing children's voices

Participatory methodologies have been particularly appropriate for the study of childhood, and PAR has proven popular in ascertaining children's views and involving them directly in the research process. Claire O'Kane (2008, p. 151) suggests that social researchers can:

> …play an important role in embracing the challenge to create space for children and young people to be listened to and heard, and I would advocate that the use of participatory techniques would facilitate such a task.

The process of participatory research makes this methodology successful with children and includes a commitment to continuous information sharing, reflection and action (Winter and Munn-Giddings 2001, O'Kane 2008).

This current study followed three PAR cycles, each involving a process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, resulting in a revised plan of action as observed by Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (1988). Each cycle fed into the next. Cycle one was initiated by the first author and explored the bullying definition at the school and how this was understood by the school community. Online questionnaires and a focus group were used to collect data. Decisions around data collection methods, including where and when to collect the data as well as the dissemination process, were decided on by the research team together. Cycle two was initiated by the research team, following analysis of cycle one data. This second cycle explored an issue of importance to the students of the school: that of the 'snitch' and how participants conceptualised 'serious' and 'not serious' bullying. Paper questionnaires and student-led interviews were used to collect data. Cycle three focussed on the tangible 'action' from the project: the development of a draft anti-bullying strategy for the school. R4U members included Taha, Hanik, Patrick, Amy and Hope.[2] At each stage of the project, training was provided to the young researchers as detailed in the following.

As the project evolved, the use of evaluation enabled us to ascertain how R4U interpreted their own participation and to subsequently make changes to enhance this experience as necessary. Percy-Smith and Karen Malone (2001) argue that participatory opportunities should be *inclusive*, meaning that changes are made within the system to accommodate the participation of children, rather than *integrated*, which means, they argue, expecting children to participate in predefined ways and structures (*italics* in original text). The three evaluations started from the premise that participation was already happening (Moules and O'Brien 2012). They took place at 6 months, 18 months and 36 months to assess the perceived level of participation of each research team member and to address any potential issues before progressing with the project. The decision to conduct these evaluations was made by the first author.

Evaluating participation

Evaluation one

Evaluation one was conducted approximately halfway through cycle one. This cycle involved a questionnaire given to all students, parents and school staff and a focus group with students. By this point, the research team had received some training, participated in the ethical approval process, decided the data collection methods and carried out the pilot study. R4U members were asked to plot their own participation along a continuum ranging from full involvement on the left to no involvement on the right. A series of questions on how they viewed their own participation were asked, and reflective dialogue enabled discussion of the participatory process. Questions focussed on the decision-making process around data collection methods and involvement in conducting the research overall up to this point.

A theme evident in this short evaluation was that if R4U members were not attending all meetings and present when decisions were made, they regarded this as non-involvement. It was important, therefore, for the first author and R4U to revisit what participation meant to the team and what was expected from everybody while involved in the project. Alice McIntyre (2008) suggests that quality rather than quantity in terms of the number of meetings attended is what is important in participatory research. The research team took this stance and agreed that it was crucial for the project, and indeed their own satisfaction, that team members participated on their own terms and acknowledged that there would be times when not everybody could attend meetings.

It was clear when unanimous group decisions were made, such as in the development of the questionnaire. The first author provided R4U with a sample questionnaire developed by another group of young people she was working with at this time. R4U did not like this format:

> It's very long.
>
> (Hanik)

A decision was made by the group to keep our questionnaire succinct and to the point:

> We don't want to ask them about things that aren't related to our topic. I think this questionnaire asks way too many things.
>
> (Patrick)

R4U members were clear that they wanted a 'to the point' questionnaire. They were certain that students would not complete the questionnaire if it was long-winded. An assumption from the first author was that R4U would welcome this example because it had been designed by another group of young people and not adults, but this was not the case. This reiterated that a tool designed by one group of young people would not necessarily be chosen by another group of young people. Furthermore, this process showed that R4U felt able to express their concerns about the methods we were using rather than accepting a format because it was presented to them by an adult. The questionnaire used for data collection was designed by the research team together, specifically for this project.

There were also times when some decisions did not suit all group members. For example, Taha was adamant that he did not like asking participants about their ethnic origin on the questionnaire: *'I absolutely hate this question!'* (Taha). Collating demographic data, such as age, gender and ethnicity, is typical of research conducted in the UK. In acknowledging Taha's reluctance to use this question, we discussed reasons why it might be important to the research and decided that as the school had a varied ethnic mix, the data could divulge information about bullying and the specific ethnic groups of participants. The team felt that this information could be useful to our findings while at the same time remaining sensitive to Taha's reluctance to use the question. We talked about the best way to frame this question, and Sarah (an earlier young researcher who left the team) suggested, '*Why don't we use the list the school uses?*' The team agreed. Taha would have preferred if we did not ask the question at all. In fact, our data did not show any findings specifically related to any ethnic group in either of the data collection cycles. Furthermore, a number of participants from cycle two did not answer the question about ethnic origin.

These examples and others highlight what Perpetua Kirby *et al*. (2003) suggest about participation being about having some influence over decisions and actions and not merely about being present or taking part. R4U understanding that their individual roles in the project were valued was of paramount importance. Equally, it was important that they understood that decisions were made to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of the study, despite agreement not being sought by all members of the team. O'Kane (2008) reiterates that when young people are given space to participate on their own terms, they can be more involved in meetings and are further motivated to take an active role in other aspects of the research. Consequently, this short evaluation highlighted the importance of providing meaningful opportunities for R4U to be involved in decision-making and in *aspects* of decision-making.

Evaluation one concluded that participation in decision-making and actions is more than just the end result. Decision-making includes a process of generating ideas, discussing the ideas and reaching a decision on what to do together. It also includes having the freedom to suggest ideas whilst being able to agree or disagree with others in a safe space. The learning taken from evaluation one into evaluation two was used to understand how R4U viewed their contribution to decision-making and how their individual contributions impacted the decisions made.

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Evaluation two

Evaluation two used the Dual Axis Model of Participation (DMP) framework (Moules and O'Brien 2012) to evaluate participation 18 months into the process. By this point, we were preparing to collect data for cycle two. The DMP focusses on two dimensions of participation: '*decision making*' and '*initiation and direction*'. As a project evolves, the balance of each is either with the young researchers or the adult researcher. The model uses these two dimensions of participation and places them along two separate continuums as shown in Figure 10.1 below.

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This second evaluation used this framework but focussed on '*decision-making*' and '*control and direction*' (rather than initiation and direction), and in taking evaluation one's conclusions into account, it recognised who has the '*ideas*' as a further dimension. Six questions about the process were asked to date, and R4U members were instructed to plot their perceived levels of participation along the three continuums for each question. All questions asked R4U to consider where they saw the balance of power as 'adult-led', 'young person-led' or 'shared' in relation to aspects of the process, such as data collection activities, data analysis and others.

Once all R4U members had plotted their individual perceptions of participation, a dialogical exchange took place. It was clear that participation was construed differently for each person. Taha, for example, was consistent in his interpretation. For the most part, he believed that *decisions* and *ideas* rested with R4U, while the adult *controlled* and *directed* the activities:

> I felt I had an equal influence throughout all parts.
>
> (Taha)

Hanik, on the other hand, suggested that most activities were shared between R4U and the adult or led by R4U:

> Since I've been at every meeting, I understand nearly all the aspects.
>
> (Hanik)

Amy and Hope felt more involved at various stages of the project:

> …how data was arranged and the focus groups and expressing my opinions.
>
> (Hope)

> The focus group and the analysis.
>
> (Amy)

Patrick proposed that '*decision-making*', '*ideas*' and '*control/direction*' changed, depending on the context of the activity:

> It depended on what we were doing and who was there.

> (Patrick)

The ethics and value base of this study recognised the co-construction of knowledge through human relationships and collaboration; consequently, no perception, was wrong and each viewpoint was valid. For the most part, R4U perceived that *ideas* were generated by the young researchers, while the adult took *control/direction*, and *decision-making* was shared. The *ideas* generated by R4U were crucial for data collection and analysis in terms of their insider knowledge as well as for team building and developing collegiality between themselves and the adult researcher (enjoyment through games). The first author was perceived, by R4U, as taking the lead when it was necessary, but through these dynamics, a partnership developed in which power and participation levels varied and changed all the time. This perception of participation as changing and moving from task to task has been identified previously by others, such as in Jonathan Quetzal Tritter and Alison McCallum's (2006) 'mosaic' and Shirley White *et al*.'s (1994) 'kaleidoscope'.

A power shift was observed in deciding the research topic for cycle two, not only between the adult and the young researchers but also *between* the young researchers themselves. Patrick, for example, observed Hanik and Taha as being the *decision-makers* as opposed to either the adult or the young people as a collective. Ruth Sinclair (2004) acknowledges the power imbalances between children and adults in any participatory activity, while Moules and O'Brien (2012) propose that power can be shared. Evaluation two shows that not all of the power rested with adults, nor did it rest with R4U, but power was shared between adults and children. Similar to Moules and O'Brien (2012), this evaluation recognised participation as fluid, a situation in which a partnership can develop between adults and children as they move through the participatory process. This is a contrast to the linear models of participation, which suggest that participation is fully achieved once children are leading the projects.

It was imperative for this project that attention be afforded to what the students of the school were telling us through the research. However, it was also important to understand how R4U perceived their own participation and being afforded opportunities to vocalise any concerns or changes they would like to make. Of particular interest to R4U was using more games in their training:

> Sometimes it's boring just doing loads of school stuff, we need more activities.

> (Hope)

This request led to games' being reintroduced as learning tools for cycle two, which empowered R4U to learn through fun and participate on their own terms, not an adult-led agenda (Randall 2012, Raffety 2015, Percy-Smith 2015). The use of games or arts-based approaches, argues Duncan Randall (2012), encourages adults to join children in play rather than consider methodological advantages. These approaches can add to the development of relationships and trust between adults and children (Randall 2012).

Evaluations one and two focussed on the participation of the young researchers and, in line with a PAR framework, allowed for planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Consequently, changes were

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made to the research to enhance the experiences for R4U. However, it was important that the role of the adult researcher was not overlooked as Mannion (2007, p. 414) proposes,

> …a research agenda dedicated to listening to children's voices alone will not suffice to help us understand these processes which are as much about adults as they are about children.

The process enabled the first author to consider the various dimensions of participation in this project. Based on evaluation two, three conclusions were drawn:

1. Different perceptions of participation for all team members were observed;

2. An obvious power shift occurred, not only from adult to young person but between young people;

3. The use of the continuums enabled dialogue about how participation was happening.

Evaluation three

The third and final evaluation rested on the adult interpretation of the participatory process. The first author used the continuum concept from evaluation two and plotted her own interpretation of participation across the lifespan of the project.

It was the interpretation of the first author that there were times when she led with *ideas, decision-making* and *direction*, while at other times R4U, took the lead, and equally, there were times when these activities were shared. The first author discussed her interpretations with R4U; for the most part, they agreed, but in some cases, they disagreed:

> I think it's perfect – with the ethics though, I think that was more you telling us. More related to you than with us in terms of what you had to do [an application to university ethics committee].

> (Taha)

Hanik proposed that the first author had more input than she suggested:

> I think the interviews weren't entirely us but you as well.

> (Hanik)

Meanwhile, Amy noticed a situation in which R4U had had more input than the first author suggested:

> I agree with that but I also think the first focus group was half and half not just you.

> (Amy)

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R4U felt able to disagree with the first author about her interpretations. Indeed, knowledge contribution from R4U and the first author moved back and forth along the continuum from adult-led, young person-led and shared, depending on the context of the activity. Adult-led knowledge was particularly evident at the beginning of the project, when training was delivered, and in the first author's leading the decision on which methods to use for data collection and analysis. For example, in the early months of this project, the first author perceived that much of the *control* and the *ideas* rested with her in providing training and ensuring that all team members were happy with the process. Nonetheless, from the outset, R4U were actively involved in making decisions. We made early decisions together about times and number of meetings as well as how we would begin to collect data.

There were times when it was necessary for the first author to take control of the decision-making processes; an example can be seen in the following of university procedures when seeking ethical approval. Fox (2013) critiques the process of ethical approval when engaging in participatory research. She argues that ethical guidelines are usually unfamiliar with the theoretical underpinnings of children being viewed as social actors and therefore rarely allow topic guides to be developed in conjunction with young researchers as the process develops. Typically, ethics panels prefer topic guides and other tools to be developed by adults prior to the research commencing (Fox 2013). This was not the experience during this project. At the beginning of each cycle, an ethics application was submitted to the university ethics panel, but as our tools were not fully developed, we were granted permission to submit them once they had been finalised, and ethics approval was then granted on chair's action. In cycle one, R4U were informed about the ethics process, but they were equally happy for the first author to take the lead. In cycle two, this changed somewhat as R4U had a greater understanding of the ethical approval process and therefore contributed to the application.

The first author perceived that the *ideas* about data analysis in cycle one were adult-led. Her role in interpreting and analysing the data was in enabling the team to capture what participants were saying as a collective but also to ensure that individual stories were not lost. The data analysis activities in cycle one acted as training exercises for R4U, with the intention that they would be further involved in analysing the data in cycle two. R4U, on the other hand, viewed the data analysis activities in cycles one and two as predominantly shared. It is interesting that R4U viewed the power imbalances differently than the first author, but this may be a result of the reciprocal relationship between young people and adults' not being viewed as the norm for this group of young researchers. In fact, in an unpublished paper written by the research team, R4U stated,

> We hope that researchers in the future will take Niamh's example and provide students with their own opportunity to carry out their own research.

The shift from conducting the research from an adult standpoint at the outset and moving towards a collegial partnership with R4U, based on what the data and dialogue in the research team was showing, moved the power dimensions in this project. Martin Woodhead and Dorothy Faulkner (2008) remind us that all too often, data, such as interview transcripts, are analysed based on adult assumptions and ideologies. In this project, however, the voice of the child was central, not only to collecting the data but also in the analysis. The use of insider knowledge enabled R4U to interpret the data in a different way to the first author as they understood the contextual environment and

the bullying situation in the school. Through the process of PAR the research team were able to construct meaning together, based not entirely on our own assumptions and ideologies but also from the viewpoint of the research participants (Thomson and Gunter 2009).

An important element of the participatory process is providing multiple opportunities for young researchers to be actively involved in decision-making. Furthermore, relationship-building and realising the role played by adults in the process are equally important. Evaluation three allowed for reflection on the adult role in the participatory process and, through our dialogical exchanges, enabled the young researchers to revisit how participation happened for them during the project as a whole. It became apparent to the first author that providing opportunities for R4U to make decisions without adults was not the aim of this project – the aim was to develop collegial relationships with these young people so that together, we could generate knowledge that was paramount. This meant that the adult role needed to be acknowledged in the process as equally important. Mannion (2007) discusses the relationships between adults and children in which the adult cannot be 'cut out' in terms of how young people participate.

Discussion

The three evaluations showed participation to be varied and complex. Within the confines of this project, participation was observed as being characteristic of the following:

1. Decision-making is more than the end result;

2. The adult plays an active role in the process;

3. Young people have an active and valid contribution to make as researchers.

Decision-making is more than the end result

Evaluation one concluded that R4U did not perceive their role in decision-making as active if they were not present when a decision was made. As the project evolved, R4U were able to recognise how their ideas, views and opinions fed into the decision-making process alongside the first author's. Furthermore, they were forthcoming with their opinions and views about how changes could be made to the research process. Due to the first author actively listening to what R4U said and providing feedback on how their input contributed to decisions, the young researchers viewed adults as willing to relinquish some of their power and work with them in a collegial way, as is evidenced in other studies (Kirby *et al*. 2003, Bragg and Fielding 2005). Furthermore, honesty with R4U and the participating students about how views, opinions and research findings were likely to impact the overall decisions made were demonstrated (Sinclair 2004). The evaluations showed how adults and children can negotiate the research space and generate knowledge through an equal working relationship whilst acknowledging the potential power issues. This was important because Fielding (2004) and Randall (2012) propose that children could decide not to participate in research if they perceive that their views will not be taken seriously or acted upon. Mannion (2009) and Randall (2012) thus suggest that the way that adults communicate to children that they value their

input will have an impact on how the findings from participatory research are understood. This also has an impact on the quality of the relationships between adults and young researchers.

The adult plays an active role in the process

Research recommends that adults should consider how research spaces, and spaces for children more generally, are co-constructed by the actions of the adults who work with children and young people (Fielding 2004, Mannion 2007). These relationships are key for determining which children get heard, what ideas children can talk about and what differences this process will make to the adult-child relationship (Mannion 2007, Fitzgerald *et al*. 2009). In this project, the research team relied on adults in many ways. First, R4U relied on the first author to initially facilitate the participatory process and guide the research. Second, the full team were reliant on other adults, in the form of parents and staff, to participate in data collection and on adult gatekeepers, in the form of school authorities. Relationships between adults and young people were tested on numerous occasions. In cycle one, the questionnaire was sent to parents and teachers, but many adults chose not to complete it. This left team members despondent as gaps were evident in our data. We wanted to ensure that we captured the viewpoints of all stakeholders because the research team wanted to hear adult views too, recognising these as important alongside students' views. This recognition enabled the research team to encourage adult participation in cycle two whilst respecting the wishes of adults who chose not to participate. In essence, a role reversal was noted as young people were implementing measures, so adults could participate on their own terms.

Mannion (2007) and Erin L. Raffety (2015) consider children researching children. They propose that just because children are involved in conducting their own research, the process might not necessarily expand children's participation and autonomy nor might this process address power differentials between adults and children. Raffety (2015) discusses researchers' acknowledgements of the social differences between adult researchers and children in the research field. These differences were acknowledged from the outset: The first author was an adult working with young people and therefore was perceived as an authority figure. In the beginning, R4U insisted on calling her 'Mrs O'Brien' rather than 'Niamh'. She explained to them that she was not there in a teaching capacity but to conduct this research in partnership with them. Calling her 'Mrs O'Brien' put her in charge, so they reluctantly agreed to call her 'Niamh'. It was obvious that some members were initially uncomfortable with this as Hanik stated when referring to the school authorities:

> They won't be happy here with us not addressing you as Mrs.

> (Hanik)

By the end of the project, the perception that R4U had of the first author in a teacher role had changed. At one meeting towards the end of the project, we discussed how the role she had in the research team might be considered alongside that of a teacher:

> It's not like you're a teacher because you're learning from us and we're learning from you. With teachers it's just one way.

<div align="right">(Hanik)</div>

Furthermore, R4U reflected on their role as active researchers in the project and considered the value of peer-led interviews without adults present:

> There were some things they [student participants] would tell us and not adults because we are closer in age.

<div align="right">(Amy)</div>

> They feel more comfortable like they're not getting anyone else into trouble.

<div align="right">(Patrick)</div>

Through this process of ongoing reflection and evaluation, the team were able to see how their viewpoints and ideas were feeding into the whole research process, and they were participating on their own terms, not those decided by adults (Randall 2012, Raffety 2015, Percy-Smith 2015). Indeed, R4U began to understand the unique role that all team members had in the project. Fielding (2004) and Mannion (2009) acknowledge that the relationship between adult and young researchers are interdependent and can blossom as both adults and young people understand each other's unique roles. Taha recognised this notion and likened the team to a cricket team:

> It's like we're a cricket team with 11 players and the coach. The coach helps and supports the team but the team plays the game. Everyone has to work together if you want to win the game. You're like the coach and we're like the team.

<div align="right">(Taha)</div>

Indeed, the literature recognises that a limitation of childhood research is the reliance that young people have on adults to work with them and facilitate change (Kellett 2010However, as the project progressed, R4U perceived the role of the adult in a different way – not as a facilitator or teacher but as a team member with an equal contribution to make – thus minimising the social differences between adult and young people (Randall 2012, Raffety 2015).

Young people have an active and valid contribution to make as researchers

Although the benefits of involving children in participatory activities are recognised in the literature (Kellett 2010), Percy-Smith (2015, p. 3) suggests that these changes have had limited impact 'on the position of children and young people in society'. A key aspect of this project was the development of an action that would continue the work of the project once the research had ended, and this was seen in the development of a draft anti-bullying strategy that was accepted by the school. Such initiatives show how the work continues after the research has ended (O'Brien 2014).

The training provided to R4U was tailored to the needs of this project, and Kellett (2010) suggests that generic in-depth research training provided to children, which they can draw upon to initiate their own projects, shifts the power imbalance towards children. In this case, children are leading

their own projects with support from adults, but adults are not managing the research. This shift in power was evident in evaluation two in the process of decision-making and again in evaluation three, when R4U members disagreed with the first author about her interpretation of where the participation happened. The contribution made by R4U in terms of their unique insider knowledge added to the depth of the findings, in which we captured a collective picture of the bullying issues in the school but at the same time encapsulated individual unique stories from each of our participants.

Conclusion

Combining findings from the three evaluations highlighted that decision-making and participation is more than the end result but is a process of generating ideas, discussing these ideas and having the freedom to agree and disagree with others in a safe space. An initial aim of the project was ultimately for the decision-making to be led by R4U, with the adult facilitating the process. However, a process of reciprocity ensued that saw the development of a relationship between the adult and R4U in conducting the research together and developing a tangible 'action' in the form of an anti-bullying strategy for the school. It was evident that R4U had a wealth of knowledge to contribute as 'insiders', and without this knowledge, the findings and action generated would not have been the same.

Throughout this study, every effort was made to share control and power over the process, including over data interpretation. That power can be shared was evident across the evaluations, but there were times when the power was in favour of the adult and times when power was in favour of the young researchers, depending on the context of the research activity. The use of constant evaluation encouraged a redress of power and enabled both adult and young researchers to critically reflect on the process as the project evolved.

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Figure 10.1*: Two dimensions of participation (Moules and O'Brien 2012, p. 20)*

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[1] The term 'children and young people', 'child' and 'young person' will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter. These terms are understood as referring to any person under 18 years of age.

[2] These are the real names of the young researchers as they requested I use them rather than pseudonyms.