Peer Research by Children and Young People and their allies

Answers to Key Questions so far

2021

The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation

This is a summary of key messages from our analysis so far.. But also, this is an invitation to a conversation and to continue to learn from each other. If your questions are not here, do ask more questions, and together we can look for the answers in the literature or in the peer research that we are cocreating.

What is peer research, where is it taking place, who with and on what?

> Peer research is young people's research. Young researchers doing collaborative research, working with different groups to develop an idea and discovering interesting new things about people and experiences in a conversation. It's people powered research.

It is taking place in a wide range of contexts with a wide range of children, young people and adults. Understanding who is involved and the context they are researching is the first step for making any plans to do research and ongoing attention to people and contexts is the only way of making sure it is safe and inclusive. This also increases the potential for social impact.

What is the thinking behind how children, young people and adults do peer research?

To understand the people, contexts, relationships and ambitions that are investigated in peer research it is essential to think critically. This means thinking about what the world is like now, what history can tell us, and how that affects what people experience and speak about. This has implications for how we do research. Working through cycles of planning, acting and reflecting about ourselves and the new understandings we think we are gaining is the best way to cocreate learning and research.

*How do children, young people and adults put peer research into practice?*

There is no single or preferred way of doing peer research, as research has to fit the topic and the context being investigated. A very wide variety of methods are being used.

There are strategies for supporting young people's leadership in each of aspects of research shown below (including on topics related to violence). A rolling process of co-reflection has to be at the heart of this.

How is an ethical approach followed in peer research on violence related topics?

An ethical approach involves following existing guidance and thinking about:
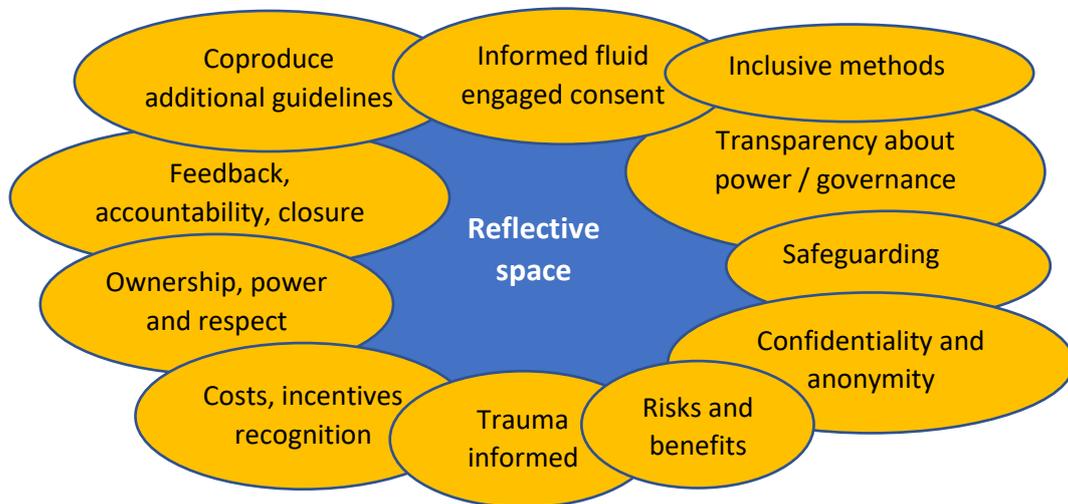
How are benefits, successes, impacts and change in peer research recorded and understood?

Benefits gained by young researchers who have been actively involved in research processes, include helping them to build and enhance personal, social, emotional and psychological skills, resilience and competencies. Informal spaces for young people are key, to discuss, debate and discover solutions to overcome research challenges using strength-based approaches in combination of learning by doing. Young researchers have benefited from inclusive environments, having accessible and timely information and establishing supportive relationships with peers and adults leading to a stable identity and sense of belonging on their individualised research journeys. There is no one standard tool but measurement tools commonly include surveys, interviews, mentoring sessions, observational notes, needs assessments and the blending of creative methods to allow young researchers to reflectively record their own thoughts and experiences using mediums that suit them best.

In terms of impact and change, the greatest areas of change resulting from the studies have been upon raising awareness among peers on social issues as well as partnerships and networks young researchers have forged with adult collaborators and organisations - typically representing the public and third sectors. The forging and maintenance of relationships is evidenced, for example, in panels and advisory groups young researchers have been invited to sit-on resulting from their empirical works. A few measurement tools have been identified such as the 7S Framework, Ecological Evaluation and stakeholder interviews used to assess impact, but these methods have been sparingly applied across all

the illustrated cases provided in this report. What is clearly needed is a systematic way to elicit the views and opinions of end-users and benefactrices on the relevance and significance of young people's research in helping to find solutions to help overcome the societal challenges.

What are key tensions in peer research and how are these dealt with?

Negotiating the commitments and challenges of peer research with children and young people requires the development of approaches based on recognition of power, people and contexts. These should embrace an emancipatory research paradigm and strive to coproduce research that will create change in the lives and contexts of those who take part. Enabling the leadership and control of research agendas by children and young people who experience marginalisation requires a critical engagement with the social relations in which they are embedded. Projects must challenge the normative (and ableist) conventions of research as well as traditional methods and methodologies. Adults who take part must be open minded, flexible, easy-going, compassionate and willing to be equal partners. However, they must not abdicate their responsibilities, must balance protection with protectionism and must codevelop cushions which support young people throughout the different stages of projects.

Projects must focus on team building and creating a sense of community within projects. They must develop and implement different forms, spaces and processes through which to validate the contributions of children and young people who take part. They must also maintain an explicit and open awareness of the ways in which funding, timelines, organisational values and expectations can affect the possibilities and realities of collaboration. They must accept different forms, styles and levels of involvement by children and young people which reflect the different circumstances of their lives as well as different interests in the project. Peer research is not "synchronised swimming" (Tuck et al. 2008).

The potential for change needs to be considered throughout projects allowing children and young people to consider what is desirable and achievable and which organisations and individuals need to be engaged. A lack of relevant change can reinforce existing power structures and risks marginalised children and young people becoming feeling exploited. Developing personal relationships with people like policy makers early on is a good strategy. Careful planning and coplanning of realistic change objectives and of dissemination activities can foster the real involvement and children and young people and can help ensure they are seen and recognised as competent producers of knowledge.

For the full report look here: http://clok.uclan.ac.uk/39353/

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