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# A reflective account of using child-led interviews as a means to promote discussions about reading

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**Title: A reflective account of using child-led interviews as a means to promote discussions about reading**

**ABSTRACT**

This article provides a reflective account of the participatory methodology employed in the Growing up a Reader research study. The aim of the Growing up a Reader study was to explore children's (age 9-11) perceptions of a 'reader' and their reasons for reading different text types. This involved training 12 primary school children as student interviewers. Students were interviewed by the adult research team and then interviewed peers themselves (n = 21). For the purpose of this reflection, a data driven inductive thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted and comparisons were drawn between those led by children and those led by adults. Child-led interviews were more likely to lead to natural discussions about reading as students engaged in the co-creation of knowledge surrounding their shared reading experiences. Child-led interviews also featured creative communication styles and reflexive use of language to understand each other's reading experiences. Reflections upon child-led interviews as a tool for deepening understanding of children's literary experiences are made in order to provide methodological insights relevant for both researchers and practitioners seeking to use participatory methods to collaborate with children. Limitations regarding training and support, and ethical and epistemological considerations regarding adult input are also discussed.

**Introduction**

The literacy habits and experiences of children have undergone significant shifts within the last two decades (Clark & Teravainen-Goff 2020). For example, the emergence and expansion of digital literacy environments characterises the growing diversity of literacy experiences and available text types replete within modern practice. As such, there is considerable interest in understanding children's current literacy activities and experiences (e.g., Clark, 2018; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020).

To date, the study of children's literacy practices and experiences have drawn upon varied methodological approaches. Large scale surveys examining literacy attitudes and practices are common (e.g., Clark, 2018; Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020); however, more novel methods (e.g., Moss and McDonald (2004), who used school library borrowing records to chart children's reading activities) have been less frequently adopted. Furthermore, quantitative approaches are often not suitable for reaching a deep understanding of children's literacy experiences; qualitative methodologies are better suited. Most conventionally, adult (researcher or teacher) led interviews (e.g., Eriksson Barajas & Aronsson, 2009; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Glenn, Ginsberg & King-Watkins 2018) have been used, however discussions among children (Hall, 2012; Levy & Thompson, 2015; Maine, 2014), written reflections (Hall, 2016), observations of classroom, library or community literacy practices (Hall, 2012; Frankel, 2017; Pahl & Allan, 2011), photographs and videos (Pahl & Allan, 2011), scrap books (Pahl & Allan, 2011), the collection of artifacts (e.g., photographs of students' literacy work) (Frankel, 2017; Pahl & Allan, 2011) or

visual mappings of children's reading journeys via rivers/roads to chart their reading histories (Cremin et al., 2014; Sellers, 2019) have also been applied. Indeed, literacy research to date has employed a broad range of innovative methodological approaches, yet it is rare for the methodological knowledge acquired to be shared to improve the use of these methods for other literacy researchers or practitioners (although see Levy & Thompson, 2015; Pahl & Allan, 2011). One purpose of this paper is to extend collective knowledge regarding creative methodological approaches to literacy research so as to inform future work within both education and research contexts.

In general, qualitative research is well positioned to facilitate the collection of deep and detailed insights into how children understand their own literacy experiences. However, qualitative methodologies (i.e., interviews) which reaffirm existing adult-child power imbalances are unlikely to result in the kind of dialogic transaction that can lead to genuine understanding (Fielding, 2004). Through the use of participatory approaches however, it is possible to centre children's voices and engage with them in the co-creation of knowledge about their own literacy experiences. Therefore, in this study, we trialled an approach to promote discussions between children about their reading experiences: child-led interviews. We provide a reflective account of this method to support literacy researchers interested in applying this methodological approach and consider how it might allow us to reach a better understanding of children's literacy experiences. We believe this paper could be of use to (a) reflective classroom professionals who seek to create mutually beneficial spaces for students and staff to learn "with and from each other" (Fielding, 2004; p.307) and (b) researchers seeking to utilise participatory methodology for collaborating with children.

Participatory methods require collaborative action between adults and children, through which knowledge is shared and co-created. The approach is reinforced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; Article 12 (UN, 1989), which supports children's expression of their own views and encourages their contribution towards decisions in matters that concern them. Notably, there is, to some extent, a lack of consensus on what constitutes participatory methodology (Frauenberger et al. 2015). For example, in childhood studies, the definition of a participatory methodology can be as broad as conducting "research *for* and *with*" children rather than "*on* or *about*" them (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2008; Christensen & James, 2008).

The benefits and limitations associated with participatory approaches have been discussed in studies by Levy and Thompson (2015), Shaw et al. (2006), Horgan (2017) and Pahl and Allan (2011) amongst others. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) raise concerns about the "uncritical" (p.499) ways in which participatory approaches involving children are often deployed, noting that participatory methods should not be seen as an infallible means of assuring ethical and epistemological validity. Similarly, Punch (2002) notes that researchers should not assume that participatory research methods are methodologically robust simply because they are 'child-friendly' and that rigorous inquiry into the epistemological assumptions of utilising such an approach be made at the outset.

Some examples of participatory approaches employed toward the aim of reaching a deeper understanding of children's literacy experiences have begun to emerge in literacy research (e.g., Levy & Thompson, 2015; Pahl and Allan, 2011; Maine, 2014). However, there has not, to our knowledge, been any direct comparison of child-led interviews with adult-led ones for this

purpose. Such a comparison is necessary to explore the similarities and differences that exist between each and the extent to which child-led interviews may be a useful tool for deepening understanding of children's perceptions and experiences of their own literacy practices. This article attempts to provide such an exploration and contribute toward the conversation surrounding the ways in which knowledge can be co-created with children, and toward deepening our understanding of their literacy experiences.

It should be noted at the outset that our approach was not wholly co-produced. Research questions and methodology were decided by the adult research team and interview analysis was conducted solely by adult researchers. The implications of this are discussed in more detail in the Discussion, however we do acknowledge this as a limitation of our approach. Despite this, given the lack of literature regarding the implementation of children as interviewers within the field of literacy research, we felt it important to reflect upon this novel methodological approach and to explore the epistemological implications of conducting literacy research with children in this way so as to inform future research and practice.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

In total, 33 children (12 student interviewers, 21 of their peers; 16 female) aged 9-11-years old from a city centre primary school in Scotland participated in this study. The primary school has a school roll of approximately 200 students (across seven school years) and describes itself as 'multicultural'. The majority of students had English as their first language. With regard to the student interviewers, both engaged and disengaged readers were invited to participate in order to capture a more complete range of reading attitudes and experiences than might be present if only avid readers were invited to participate.

### **Research training**

All student interviewers participated in a 'research experience day' at the University of Edinburgh (two weeks prior to data collection). The adult researchers described the collaborative aims of project and emphasised the students' role as co-researchers with equal status to the adult research team. Following this, all student interviewers learnt about the proposed research questions and study design and provided input into the interview schedule (i.e., suggesting new questions and rewording existing ones). Student interviewers also received guidance on interview techniques, experienced being interviewed by both adults and other student interviewers and practiced interviewing a peer themselves, reflecting on this experience afterwards. All standard ethical considerations were also covered.

### **Procedure**

Ethical consent was sought and granted by Moray House School of Education and Sport Ethics Committee, University of Edinburgh. Following parent consent for all participants, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a quiet room within the school. All student interviewers received a copy of the agreed interview schedule in advance of the interviews. The interview

schedules were flexible to allow students the opportunity to add their own questions or follow up on interviewee responses. All interviews were audio recorded using a dictaphone.

The adult researchers interviewed the student interviewers first, then the student interviewers interviewed one (3 students) or two (9 students) peers. Adult researchers stayed in the room but were not visible to the interviewees during the interviews. After the student interviewers had carried out both interviews with peers, the adult researchers asked the students how they thought the session went, and what they felt about the research process in general (this was not recorded).

## **Analysis**

All interviews were transcribed in full by three adult researchers and shared with the adult research team. In this article our analysis focuses on features of the child-led interviews which were similar to, or different from, those led by adults. Our approach to analysis was conducted within a constructivist paradigm, and the corresponding author followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis, using a data driven inductive approach. The data set from the child-led interviews were read twice (Phase 1) and initial codes reflecting features of the interview were generated (e.g., question which quantifies response, unclear question) (Phase 2). Following this, analysis was focused at a broader level, sorting the codes into themes (e.g., question quality) (Phase 3). This process (Phase 1-3) was then repeated for the adult-led interviews. Once completed for both data sets, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure there were clear and meaningful distinctions between them and that they accurately represented both data sets (Phases 4-5) before being written up for publication (Phase 6).

## **Results and discussion**

Features of child-led interviews, the ways in which they differed to those led by adults and how each approach contributed towards the formation of knowledge regarding children's reading experiences are discussed. We also share some of the children's beliefs, thoughts and experiences of reading as described by them which may also offer insights for classroom practitioners, however the main purpose of this paper is to reflect upon child-led interviews as a tool for exploring children's literacy experiences, rather than to explicitly report the themes which emerged from the interviews themselves. For a more descriptive narrative of interview themes, see McGeown, Bonsall, Andries, Howarth, Wilkinson and Sabeti (2020a), and McGeown, Bonsall, Andries, Howarth & Wilkinson (2020b).

Thematic analysis led to five key themes: (1) Natural discussion; (2) Creative communication; (3) Language used; (4) Positive features and (5) Other considerations for interviews led by children.

### *Natural discussion*

One of the original motivations for exploring a child-led interview methodology was to explore whether such an approach could help foster natural discussions about reading that could support the co-creation of knowledge about children's reading experiences. It was hoped that conversations with other children would be more comfortable for participants and allow them to talk about their reading experiences in more depth. Indeed, in the child-led interviews, there were some wonderful

moments between the student interviewers and their peers where they shared memories and experiences of reading. For example:

Interviewee: “[i]t sounds really weird, because you know, we’re ten – but you sort of pick up a book, and you feel like a little kid again!”

Student interviewer: “Yeah! Yeah!”

Interviewee: “...they make me feel quite good and make me feel kinda – like feel like I’m actually one of the characters like – in the book.”

Student interviewer: “Yeah, that’s very nice, I have that feeling”.

Students also discussed shared experiences of books read together in class. For example:

Interviewee: “When you’re reading – Biff, Chip and Kipper, or –

Student Interviewer: “*Kipper - they were so bad! What’s the girl called? Can’t remember...*”

Interviewee: Um – oh, I don’t know.

Student Interviewer: *Was – was Biff the girl? Chip is the boy, and Kipper’s the dog?*

Interviewee: No it’s – oh yeah! Biff is the girl! [Sing-song] ‘Biff, Chip and Kipper!’ [Both laugh].

This reflects similar interactions, described as ‘shared understanding’ (p.7), observed by Levy and Thompson (2015) between their research buddies. Shared understanding appeared to support participants to speak about their experiences honestly and confidently and occurred more frequently when peers spoke to one another, rather than to adult researchers. The contextual knowledge that the students possessed (i.e., knowledge of similar books) was greater than that of the researchers and this may have contributed a more relevant discussion than might have been possible in adult-led interviews. In Levy and Thompson’s (2015) study, children “seemed to naturally create very relaxed and comfortable environments” (p.145), contributing towards more collaborative interactions. In this way, interactions between peers may represent a means by which knowledge about reading experiences can be developed and explored based upon a shared reality. It also indicates how children’s voices may differ between more formal interactions (e.g., being interviewed by an adult researcher or teacher) and informal ones (e.g., conversations between peers); perhaps exercising more linguistic freedom when talking with peers and aligning their voices more with the language of formal instruction when interviewed by adults (Maybin, 2013). Indeed, Maybin (2013) argues that children’s voices are enabled and constrained by social and cultural expectations and reflect the context within which they are heard; students must navigate these contextual complexities when reflecting on and expressing their experiences. The educational context within which interviews took place must therefore be considered for the role it may play in governing children’s responses.

Furthermore, children seemed genuinely interested to share and learn about each other's thoughts on different books and texts and engaged in natural discussions to explore each other's perspectives:

Interviewee: "take Harry Potter for instance. It has no pictures. At all."

Student interviewer: "*That's the annoying thing about Harry Potter!*"

Interviewee: "Yeah, that's a really annoying thing! It has no pictures at all!"

Student interviewer: "*Yeah! Just like, you have this newspaper – blah, blah blah blah –*"

*Interviewee:* "Blah blah, politics"

Student interviewer: "*Politics, Brexit, blah blah*".

They also learnt new things about each other's reading interests:

Student interviewer: "*I was just wondering out of curiosity, with the Biff, Chip, and Kipper situation –*"

Interviewee: "Yeah, I did really like them!"

Student interviewer: "*I just think it's interesting to know that someone actually enjoyed Biff, Chip and Kipper*".

Building shared understanding in this way represents a feature which is often missing from positivist epistemological approaches traditionally situated around a relatively powerful (adult) researcher *retrieving* information from a relatively less powerful participant. Student interviewers seemed to adopt a more constructivist approach, collaborating to reach a more complete understanding of each other's experiences in a manner that resembled more natural, equitable discussion.

In the child-led interviews, the nature of the conversations between interviewer and interviewee were clearly different to those typical of a traditional adult-led interview. Indeed, there are points in the child-led interview transcripts where it could be unclear who was interviewer and who was interviewee; it was here that we felt genuine discussion had been achieved. It also suggests a more equal balance of power between interviewer and interviewee than may exist in adult-led interviews. Levy and Thompson (2015) rightly stress the importance of participatory approaches which facilitate conversations between children that are "meaningful and enjoyable experiences for the children themselves" (p138). We found good examples of this in our study, with students expressing genuine interest in each other's opinions and experiences and providing informal feedback that they enjoyed the experience. There were also many examples of student interviewers ensuring that they made their interviewees feel comfortable, by providing positive encouragement, for example: "*That's a really good answer*"; "*Take your time, it's fine!*"; "*Okay great. That was*

*very interesting!*". Perhaps because they themselves had experienced being interviewed, student interviewers understood the importance of helping their peers feel comfortable.

### *Creative communication*

Another salient feature of child-led interviews was that the student interviewers appeared to adopt more creative communication styles than were present in adult-led interviews. To illustrate, some child-led interviews appeared quite playful. For example, there was one instance where an interviewee put on a silly voice (which can be best described as sounding like Dracula) when explaining why they liked reading about history to the student interviewer (their friend):

Interviewee: *"Because I enjoy them, and the history books I read are very funny"*

Student interviewer: "Horrible Histories, right?"

Interviewee: *"Yep!"* [Both laugh]

Student interviewer: "How do you feel when you read history books?"

Interviewee: *"I feel interested and intrigued because most of the stuff that are in it I [dramatic tone] never knew befoooooore"*

In another instance, the student researcher asked a question they already knew the answer to, because they knew the interviewee so well:

Student interviewer: "Do you read outside of school? I already know the answer!"

Interviewee: *"Yes, all the time"*. [Both laugh].

Similarly, some student interviewers used humour to make their interviewee laugh:

Student interviewer: "Okay, so if someone is DYING in your book, would you cry?!"

Interviewee: *"Um, well, I kind of like reading books where that's –"*

Student interviewer: "[Deeply judgmental tone] OH, so you like VIOLENT books! Okay then."

Interviewee: [laughing] *"Yeah!"*.

Similar features (e.g., use of "funny voices") were documented by Levy and Thompson (2015) in their analysis of their buddy partner interactions and illustrate the ability of the student interviewers to use different communication styles to help the interviewees feel more comfortable and engage in a collaborative effort to understand each other's experiences. Playful communication between peers seemed to encourage a relaxed engagement throughout. Such communication strategies are noted by Levy and Thompson (2015) as being important for encouraging depth of dialogue and



the acquisition of “rich data” (p.146). It is these playful and relaxed communication strategies which help to build the strong and meaningful relationships which the authors suggest situate peer conversations as a highly effective method for eliciting children’s voices.

### *Language used*

The length and depth of interviewees' responses appeared to be influenced by differences in the language used by adult and student interviewers when asking follow-up questions. For example, interviewees were generally more likely to provide more detailed and thoughtful responses to more detailed questions. This appeared to occur more when such questions were asked by an adult interviewer. For example:

Adult interviewer: “So, what does the experience of reading those books feel like? How do you feel when you read those?”

*Interviewee: “I don’t think it feels that different [to read different types of books]. I think they’re both kind of different kinds of joy. So, I don’t think there’s just one, you know, happiness. I feel like happiness is like a block, and then you have different bricks in the block.”*

A detailed and reflective account such as this was not found in any of the child-led interviews. This could be due to the fact that the adult researchers had more experience to support the construction of questions that facilitated more detailed answers. Alternatively, it could be that interviewees felt pressure to give more detailed and thoughtful answers to adult researchers because they perceived them as relatively more powerful; they may have adjusted their language and level of reflection based upon this.

As well as the length and depth of interviewees' responses seemingly being influenced by the type of language used by the researcher, student interviewers' language often mirrored those of their interviewees, sometimes intentionally, but often naturally. For example:

Student interviewer: “Okay, and do you think you are a reader?”

*Interviewee: “I think I’m a pretty good reader. Not a full, full, full, full, full reader, but a reader.”*

Student interviewer: “Why do you not think you are a full, full, full, full, full reader?”

*Interviewee: “Because sometimes – or, most of the time I read before I go to bed, and at the beginning of school, and in certain lessons I’m allowed to read, but otherwise, um, I don’t do much reading.”*

This illustrates a sensitivity of student interviewers to their peers' language and demonstrates a willingness to gain a greater understanding of their perspectives in their own words – a feature which was not observed in adult-led interviews in which interviewers tended to stick to the agreed project vocabulary. Perhaps adults could learn from this approach and reflect upon the ways in

which using language which deviates from that which interviewees choose to use themselves may affect our ability to truly understand their reading experiences.

Related to this, within a typical interview setting, the (adult) researcher usually has more knowledge of the subject area and associated vocabulary than the interviewee. However, in child-led interviews this was not always the case. For example, in one child-led interview the interviewee used a term that was unfamiliar to the student interviewer:

Student interviewer: "Do you think of yourself as a reader?"

Interviewee: "*More ... like a bibliophile.*"

Student interviewer: "A what?"

Interviewee: "*A bibliophile.*"

Student interviewer: "What's a bibliophile?"

Interviewee: "*Like, someone who's really into books.*"

While an aim of child-led interviews is to reduce the likelihood of a mismatch in power between interviewer and interviewee, we hadn't anticipated that power imbalances may still exist in child-led interviews—for example where the interviewee had a better language base to draw upon the topic than the interviewer. This observation speaks to Gallacher and Gallagher's (2008) comment that assuming ethical and epistemological validity simply by nature of employing a participatory methodology should be cautioned against; the decision to utilise child-led interviews does not necessarily irradicate the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee.

### *Positive features*

In terms of features usually associated with epistemological validity, there were many examples of good interview practice displayed by both student and adult interviewers. For example, in almost every interview, interviewers asked all the questions they had planned to. Furthermore, thematic analysis of the transcripts for the child-led and adult-led interviews were initially carried out separately as differences were anticipated in content, however, there were surprisingly no differences in the themes emerging from the child- or adult-led interviews; transcripts were combined for the final analysis (see McGeown et al., 2020a; 2020b). This point is crucial, as genuine concerns about how methodologically robust participatory research approaches are have been raised previously (Punch, 2002).

Another display of good interview practice was that of the student interviewers following up on interviewees' answers, particularly in their second interview when they were more confident. This facilitated greater depth of discussion. This suggests that interview practice to build confidence could lead to more detailed insights into interviewees' perspectives. This links with findings by Kellett (2005) that conducting their own research supported the development of students' critical thinking, communication and management skills and illustrates how a research experience such as

this can have a positive impact on developmental outcomes outwith those associated with the specific project.

### *Other Considerations*

Although there were many positive outcomes of child-led interviews in this project, it is important to consider the limitations and potential challenges in order to provide a complete picture of what might be expected from adopting such an approach either within a research or classroom setting.

Firstly, the child-led interviews were, on average, shorter than those led by the adults. Full transcription of the interviews showed that those led by children were, on average, 816 words in length compared with 1382 words in those led by adults. While interview length is not an indicator of interview quality (Thorsteinsen, 2018), extended conversations can yield more in-depth and nuanced understandings of the topic. It could be argued however, that student interviewers were able to achieve thoughtful, in-depth discussions (often thematically indistinguishable from adult-led interviews) in a more nuanced way than adult interviewers were. Perhaps this was a product of shared experience, more equitable power relationships or the utilisation of more playful communication styles. Regardless, a consideration that child-led and adult-led interviews may differ not only on a quantitative basis (e.g., length), but also on a qualitative one, is necessary for those seeking to utilise this approach.

A further consideration is the quality of the interview questions student interviewers created themselves. Our first interpretation of the student-designed questions was that the quality was generally lower than that of those created by adults. For example, we noted that student interviewers often tried to quantify interviewees' responses, rather than seek in-depth elaboration e.g., *"So one out of ten, how much do you enjoy reading"*; *"How difficult would you find reading, one to ten – zero to ten?"*. It is necessary however to reflect upon the epistemological assumptions that prompted us to consider this type of questioning to be of a lesser quality than that which may have been executed by adults. The inclination towards in-depth, qualitative data in this project was guided by an aim to more fully understand children's experiences of reading in their own words; elaborative responses were assumed to be a more valuable means of doing so. However, perhaps the ways in which student interviewers chose to explore these experiences with their peers tells us something about how they establish knowledge and create criteria for validating it. Indeed, some questions created by student interviewers did not appear to offer much to the original research questions, although they were perhaps perceived to be relevant to students. For example:

Student interviewer: *"Do you have any favourite book characters? And when I say characters, you can choose absolutely any characters – you could choose hundreds, you could choose ten –"* [Interviewee begins listing characters; SR interrupts] *"And also, um, if you can just name what books they're from."* [Interviewee lists ~15 characters from different books.] *"Oh. Any more characters?"*

Again, questioning in this way may have seemed valuable to student interviewers in understanding the reading experiences of their peers and although such responses were not necessarily efficacious for answering the (researcher-developed) research questions, they allow an insight into the ways in which the student interviewers aimed to construct knowledge. This is not to say that student-led

interviews may not have benefitted from more training or practice in interview techniques. For example the point of student interviewers' questions was often a little unclear, and this potentially led to confusion on the part of the interviewee, who sometimes required clarification on certain questions:

*Student interviewer: "So would you prefer reading a comic or a book? So if you had half an hour to read every- in a day, and you could choose any book in the history of books to read, would it be a comic or a book? And which comic or book?"*

*Interviewee: "Uhhmm...is it okay if I say both or do I have to choose one?"*

This illustrates the importance of appropriate discussion between adults and children at the outset of a project regarding the construction of interview questions so that they are developed in such a way to allow the interviewee to fully express their experiences.

There were also examples of student interviewers appearing nervous during their interviews, and this seemed to influence both how relaxed the interviewee felt and the ease with which the interview was conducted. This may be a result of student interviewers lacking confidence and/or experience with interviews, or it may reflect a level of embarrassment associated with interviewing their peers. Although one of our reasons for selecting child-led interviews was because it was assumed the interviewee would feel more comfortable talking to a peer, we did not expect that the process might make the student interviewer themselves feel uncomfortable. While all student interviewers later reported positive (often very positive) experiences if the project, researchers and practitioners should be aware of the needs of all actors when seeking to utilise participatory methods such as this.

Finally, child-led interviews featured some elements that were not present in adult-led interviews and which may violate the traditional ethical and epistemological assumptions we hold about best interview practise. For example, correcting the interviewee on their language:

*Interviewee: "Generally, because if you're in P1, you're more likely to read picturebooks without much words, 'cause you can't really read."*

*Student interviewer: "Many words, not much words."*

*Interviewee: "Many words!" [Both laugh].*

There were also instances of children interrupting the interviewee or prompting their response:

*Interviewee: "Teenagers don't read as much because they're always hanging out, with friends, and always attending clubs. But I think younger kids have a bit - "*

*Student interviewer: "More free time?"*

*Interviewee: "More time. Yeah."*

Furthermore, in one case, a student disclosed what another student had said during their interview:

Interviewee: *“I read a bit of non-fiction, like about animals and stuff. Mostly about rats. They’re cool. Um, but –”*

*Student interviewer: “You and [a classmate] seem to really like rats!!”.*

While the implications of this specific disclosure are unlikely to be damaging, it is important to consider that children may possess different ethical assumptions than adult researchers, and that care should be taken to reflect upon how best to integrate these when using participatory approaches.

### **Limitations and implications**

This article serves to provide insights and suggestions for researchers and practitioners interested in working collaboratively with children to gain a greater understanding of their literacy experiences. Despite its contribution to knowledge regarding methodological approaches for working collaboratively with children, there were some limitations of the approach in its current instantiation, including (1) duration and intensity of training for student interviewers; (2) constraints related to recruitment from a single site; (3) extent of feedback gathered; (4) level of student involvement in research decisions; and (5) school as a context for the interviews. Each of these are summarised below.

First, reflecting on our research training, while we covered the basic practical and ethical knowledge that we considered necessary for conducting interviews, the duration of research training and opportunities to practice interviewing were limited. Student interviewers received three hours of research training and only had the opportunity to practice interviewing one peer. Inviting student interviewers to interview more peers could have built confidence, helping them feel more comfortable during the data collection stage. Furthermore, from our own perspective, seeking out more opportunities to explore and reflect upon the techniques that student interviewers used when building up a picture of their peers’ reading experiences would have allowed us opportunities for greater learning from their approaches. Future projects could work alongside children to co-design research training programmes which respect the knowledge of both children and adults in terms of re-imagining research methodologies.

A second limitation is that students were recruited from a single school, and that the overall sample size was relatively small ( $n = 33$ ). However, our student interviewer sample size was akin to those of earlier studies which have utilised participatory approaches for understanding children’s reading experiences (Levy & Thompson, 2015; Pahl & Allen, 2011; Maine, 2013). Furthermore, while we did consider training fewer student interviewers, we wanted as many students as possible to be included in the project if they wished and sought to offer equal access to all students. There were also benefits to having a larger number of student interviewers, as we were able to observe and document more variation in child-led interview techniques than would have been possible with fewer students. However, it is notable that the interview techniques used by student researchers and the responses provided by participants pertain specifically to these particular students situated within their own institutional context. Future research should the compare approaches used by

different students in different contexts in order to capture a broader range of experiences and perspectives.

A further limitation is that feedback was not formally sought from students' teachers following data collection. Conducting interviews with the student's teachers would have provided greater insight into their experiences of the project. Understanding students' experiences of interviewing and being interviewed is crucial in gaining insights into how we can collaborate with children to develop research and teaching practices which are relevant to them. We would therefore recommend seeking direct feedback from students themselves, and from others with whom they have meaningful relationships (e.g., teachers), to gain a greater understanding of their perspectives on the process and to inform ongoing use of such methods.

Furthermore, decisions regarding the research questions, methodology (interviews), interview schedule and analysis were led by the adult research team, with children's main input being additions to the interview questions and conducting interviews. This decision was taken as it allowed the research team to ensure the interview questions aligned with the (adult defined) research aims. It also afforded us an opportunity to learn considerably about the methodology of utilising child-led interviews. However, it is notable that this decision speaks to our own assumptions about research efficacy, and to the conflict between positivist assumptions regarding 'scientific' approaches and our efforts to make the research truly participatory. For example, by not conducting analysis with students, we acknowledge that there is a danger of reaffirming our own assumptions about their reading experiences, rather than truly understanding their perspectives (Fielding, 2004). Therefore, we would seek to involve students in the interpretation of data in the future. We propose that those seeking to utilise similar methods should creatively consider how children can be involved throughout the project pipeline, rather than just at the data-gathering stage. Of course, greater levels of involvement may place more responsibility and time demands on children and need to be considered carefully; those interested in participatory research should take gradual steps towards collaborating with children at different stages of the process, reflecting on and reviewing the role of both student and adult actors at each stage.

Finally, in the present study, the research team had quite a broad remit for the interview content; the project was designed to understand children's perceptions of what it means to be 'a reader', the breadth of their reading habits, the reasons why they read different text types, and their perceptions of the similarities and differences in the reading habits of children and adolescents. It is noteworthy that, as interviews were conducted within an institutional setting, students might have been restricting their conceptualisation of what it means to be 'a reader' purely to those reading activities which they deemed to be expected or accepted forms of 'academic literacy' (Moje et al. 2004; e.g., literary texts, physical books). This means that discussion of the role that other forms of text engagement (e.g., digital texts, audiobooks) take in children's lives may have been (intentionally or unintentionally) omitted by students. Indeed, Moje et al. (2004) note how students in their study "rarely volunteered everyday (or out-of-school) knowledges in the classroom" (p.64), especially where classroom discussion was not relevant to their out-of-school experience; they had to be invited to discuss these. Therefore, it is important for future researchers to acknowledge which 'funds of knowledge' (Moje et al. 2004) are being drawn upon within school contexts and to consider how a 'third space' – where academic and multiple everyday literacies

intersect and overlap – can be actively developed in order for students to integrate make sense of their multiple literary experiences.

Although our focus was solely on understanding reading, this participatory approach could be methodologically important to extend literacy researchers' and teachers' knowledge and understanding of children's broader literacy experiences (e.g., learning to read, engagement with digital texts, writing practices) in the classroom, and using these insights to tailor teaching and intervention accordingly. Indeed, we believe there is considerable scope for literacy researchers working across different contexts to use this methodological approach across different topics of inquiry so as to centre the needs and experiences of children throughout and to favour of more equitable ways of working which are relevant to the context within which each child experiences their own literacy.

## Conclusion

Participatory approaches support collaboration between children and adults and can be beneficial for developing a more complete picture of children's literacy experiences in their own words and for enabling reflection on the ways in which, without their collaboration, we risk reinforcing pre-existing assumptions about their literacy experiences and attitudes. The level and type of involvement children have within the inquiry process can vary considerably, and it is important for researchers to share their knowledge and experience with participatory methods to ensure future work with children – both in research and classroom settings – fully captures children's voices and allows them to guide the knowledge which is constructed about them and their literacy practices and experiences.

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