

**The journey of researching on to
researching with –
theoretical and methodological
challenges within educational research**

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Declaration

I declare that all the material which is not my own, has, to the best of my ability, been acknowledged. The material in this thesis has not been submitted previously by the authors for a degree at this or any other University.

Signed

Julie Clark

Date 30/10/2015

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all my colleagues that I have worked with on the many collaborative projects and writing during my career. In particular, colleagues in the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching (too many to mention) for their encouragement, opportunities for discussions, debates and arguments that have shaped my work, and thinking, over the last few years.

I also need to acknowledge the support of family and friends for their encouragement and patience and belief that I would actually complete this at last.

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Doctoral Statement

Section 1: The proposed basis for the award

This thesis focuses on the relationship between participatory research and visual methods. Firstly, I explore how methodology can be participative, investigating the conceptual base, the possibilities, significance and usefulness. Secondly, I explore whether using visual research methods can contribute to participatory research and *how* we can do this better as researchers. As I gained more confidence as a researcher, I started to carve out such space within projects to design and use more creative, innovative and visual research tools as a way of engaging with the participants in my research.

The thesis elaborates on three main themes:

1. **Ideals vs Practice of participatory research:** How I have come to understand the difference between the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of participatory research within the everyday reality (and the affordances and constraints) of educational research when trying to do it well. My early discussion relates to the methodological, practical and ethical challenges faced when, as a researcher, I was keen to be evaluatively formative, inclusive and collaborative (**Publications 1, 2, 3**). I also relate this to the range of knowledge this can produce. In this theme I explore the underlying principles of participatory research – and how these fit well with my own values as a researcher - and the notion of participation, consider linear modelling and question the concept of voice. I explore the mismatch between what I intended (the ideal) and what happened in reality (practice). I consider whether and how participation can be conceptualised in the less-than-ideal situations of real world research.
2. **Quality in practice using visual methods:** How visual methods can help individuals think differently. With reference to the development of particular visual research tools, I explore what visual methods can *add* to the quality of participatory research particularly in terms of ethics, inclusivity and appropriateness (**Publications 4 and 5**). I argue that visual methods enable me to reject a deterministic framework for exploring human behaviour and experiences, but instead position visual methods as facilitative with the aim of creating ‘space’ – ‘*visually-mediated encounters*’ - for meaningful dialogue between the researcher and participant. I critically explore the affordances of using visual methods and the different pieces of knowledge that visual methods can facilitate. I argue that the use of visual methods in a participatory setting can evoke a variety of viewpoints, from a range of participants, leading to a more complete and better research process.
3. **Making connections: Implications for policy and practice:** Revisiting the early concepts in my work, **Publication 6** develops my earlier ideas further and proposes a model for effective participatory research. **Publication 6** is a result of this journey to date, - as I reflect, refine and further develop tools to improve the research process and the experiences of people within it. During this journey so far I have moved from the structural issues of conducting participatory research (section 3), through to

managing the research encounter (section 4) and bringing all that I have learnt through to a policy and practice context (section 5).

This thesis draws upon twenty three years as a researcher at Newcastle University, and my experiences of conducting over 60 research projects in many diverse educational settings. These different environments include community-based settings, prisons, and primary and secondary schools. However, it is not the particular settings in which this research takes place that is important in this thesis. It is to some extent about the participants within the thesis, and these include young offenders in the community, prisoners and children and young people. These participants could be described as unheard, or the have nots in the research process (e.g. Munro et al., 2005; Liamputtong, 2007; Arnstein, 1969) and so this thesis will discuss the particular considerations and sensitivities of being a researcher faced with subject groups who are sometimes placed at the margins of society. It explores the ethical, practical and methodological implications of researching *with* such groups (or for) rather than as objects of research (see Griffiths, 1998). My research experiences and reflections are placed in the wider context of other researchers in the area who advocate an inclusive, and collaborative methodology alongside 'user involvement' and 'participation' (e.g. Cook, 2003; Crozier and Reay, 2004; Nind, 2014). However, such concepts are contested, often overlapping, used interchangeably and are therefore not unproblematic, as will become evident.

Rather than have a single study focus, the thesis charts my journey as an academic across both a series of projects and a timeframe and focuses on the reflection, learning and the thinking which took place within this work over time. This thesis is based on 6 pieces of work published between 2006 and 2012 – five are published in independent, peer-reviewed journals - and the majority of these publications are joint-authored. This reflects the collaborative nature of my work – I have never worked as a lone researcher (nor have I had the desire to) and I have always enjoyed being part of larger research and writing teams. This thesis reflects my own perspectives and therefore my own contribution to this work. Moreover, the publications are not all academic journal articles, one is a report (**Publication 6**), which is soundly based on academic evidence and robust research (funded through the joint Research Councils UK Connected Communities programme), and has been written specifically for a wider audience. This report is primarily aimed at practitioners and policy-makers and reflects my gradual realisation that by broadening the dissemination from academic journals, such publications can be accessed and utilised by different audiences, academics and non-academics, and perhaps have different kinds of impact.

For a full list of the submitted publications for this thesis, please see Table 1. Contextual publications (related to my thesis, but not submitted as part of my thesis) which help to provide the context for my work are referred to in the thesis as [a], [b] etc., and a full reference list is included in Appendix 1.

Table 1: References to published work submitted as part of this thesis¹

No.	Publication	% Contribution
1	Clark, J. (2006) Perspectives of Enhanced Thinking Skills in Prisons in the United Kingdom: A Qualitative Case Study. <i>British Journal of Forensic Practice</i> , 8(1), 12-23.	100%
2	Hall, E. and Clark, J. (2007) Ghosts at the Feast: The role of research centres in supporting innovative practice in local authorities. <i>Studies in Research: Evaluation, Impact and Training</i> , 2, 1-9.	60%
3	Clark, J. and Hall, E. (2008) Will the lessons be learned? Reflections on Local Authority evaluations and the use of research evidence, <i>Evidence and Policy</i> , Vol 4(2), 255-268.	90%
4	Woolner, P., Clark, J., Hall, E., Tiplady, L., Thomas, U. & Wall, K. (2010) Pictures are necessary but not sufficient: using a range of visual methods to engage users about school design <i>Learning Environments Research: An International Journal</i> . 13(1), 1-22	60%
5	Clark, J. (2012) 'Using diamond ranking as visual cues to engage children in the research process', <i>Qualitative Research Journal</i> , Vol. 12,(2), 222-237.	100%
6	Clark, J. and Laing, K. (2012) The involvement of children and young people in research within the criminal justice area. Discussion Paper from the AHRC Connected Communities Programme Scoping Review.	90%
		500%
	Full Publication equivalent	5

¹ Forms detailing the agreed percentage allocation for jointly published work can be found in Appendix 2. Full publications are in Appendix 3.

Section 2: Introduction

I joined Newcastle University in 1992 as a Research Associate on a temporary post which was jointly based in two research centres. This was a traditional research post where I was employed to work on two projects which were designed and led by someone else. Both projects were focused on community-based offender rehabilitation and education, and fitted well with my recent qualifications – a BSc(Hons) in Behavioural Sciences and my MPhil in Criminology from Cambridge University. The first project was an evaluation of an Intensive Probation Programme, funded by the Leverhulme Trust and the second was an evaluation of an Artists in Residence programme funded by Northumbria Probation Service. The research methodology, and my role as the researcher within them was essentially qualitative, and included: participant observation during the programmes; in-depth interviews with young offenders during and after intervention; in-depth interviews with probation staff and magistrates; and offender profiling (for contextual publications see [a][b]).

It was during this work that I realised that I was doing something I really enjoyed and was good at, finding it challenging but worthwhile. I was keen even then that the views and perceptions of these young people who were labelled as offenders were sought and that these views could make a difference. Much more similar work [c][d] followed, during which time my role shifted from being a researcher to a Principal Investigator on projects. Meanwhile I was also part of a programme of research work in the area of community-based punishment and the arts, the evaluation of an Artists in Residence Programme. I was the lead researcher, and the project employed a range of methodologies, from obtaining data from probation-service records to conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with offenders, artists and probation personnel [e][f][g]. A key feature was participant observation in the day centres with myself working alongside the offenders in their artistic endeavours. The research was again primarily a qualitative study, seeking an understanding of the process of interaction between offenders, artists and probation staff, and the ways in which the experience is seen by the participants to provide benefits and create the possibilities for changes in attitudes and behaviour. It was during these early years as a researcher that I began to favour a non-positivist perspective that evidence-based reasoning can be used to incorporate the views and perspectives of those participating in the research.

My work on these projects instilled an interest in both qualitative research and the views and experiences of participants in educational settings. I enjoyed the messiness of the qualitative data and this strongly influenced the development of my personal values which underpin my approach to research. I came to learn that the researcher is important in the research process, and that any of my personal values, beliefs and experiences would influence my research practice. Evaluations are very much the ‘bread and butter’ work of many organisations and indeed paid most of my salary in those early years of my career, and this continued when I moved departments and into educational research. Further evaluation work followed on a range of many projects including a truancy project [h] and a Joseph Rowntree Foundation project exploring the link between housing and schooling [i]. Similarly, my contribution was as a qualitative researcher within larger teams who were working on projects designed by the funders on the basis of what they required, and stipulated. Working to the agenda of funders who commission particular work is not unusual - in fact it is usually expected. However, this leaves little room for negotiation on choices of methodology and research tools.

Section 3: Ideals vs Practice of participatory research

My first experience of working on a research project which was not directed by the funders was the Routes project² and this coincided with my own interest in participatory approaches when we attempted to involve young researchers in the project. Routes was part of the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) funded *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change* programme and was concerned with investigating the transitions that young people make from childhood to adulthood. Other publications arose from the project [j][k], but one of my papers [l] was very influential on my own research approach. This represented my commitment to inclusion and a participatory perspective in my subsequent research and publications and how this played out in different contexts. Around that time (2001-2004) there was not much written about involving young people in research in the field of education. In my paper I reviewed the literature on participatory research, with a specific reference to children and young people and education. This was followed by writers now regarded as foundational such as Fielding (2004), Flutter and Ruddock (2004) and Kellett (2005) whose work was later published.

But what do I mean when I refer to participatory research? It is not new – in fact it has a long history and has been described as (amongst others) participatory action research, community research, inclusive, user-led, partnership, emancipatory or democratic research, community-based research, etc. As a concept it has been, and I suspect, always will be widely accepted, but contested and not well understood. Participatory research was initially regarded as an alternative social science research methodology. However, the common aim of these approaches is to change the social reality on the basis of insights into everyday practices that are obtained by means of participatory research (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). The distance between the researcher and the researched, the dichotomy of the subject and object, the reliance on statistical and quantifiable techniques all were subjected to a comprehensive critique (Hall et al. 1982). Participatory methods claim to use flexibility to allow for different groups within a community to articulate complex and cause-and-effect processes, and has a potential and a role that goes beyond simply augmenting and complementing conventional research (Holland and Blackburn 1998). Chambers (1992:57) describes participatory research as if community participants are handed the 'stick of authority', presenting, analysing and interpreting their own reality in the field. Such principles resonate with my values as a researcher.

Participatory research has also been situated (by some) within the action research paradigm. Whilst participatory research may at times appear similar to action research in the use of methodology there are two significant ways in which it is different. First, the ideological stance and emphasis on making the researcher's value-premises explicit are generally not mentioned in the action research approach. Second, there are many definitions of action research and it is often undertaken without the participation and control of the 'actors' in the situation (ie, teachers researching their own practice, with pupils viewed as subjects of the research) or is not viewed as genuinely collaborative (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). In essence, then, action research can become another method in the more or less exclusive

² ESRC Project number L134301001126. *Routes: A comparative and holistic study of youth transitions in the North of England.*

control of the social researcher (Tandon 2005). That is not to say that there is only one kind of action research and Participatory Action Research (PAR) pioneered by Fals-Borda (1987) emphasises social research as a dialectic and transformative encounter and critiqued the domination of knowledge by the powerful. PAR is one approach to research in communities that emphasizes participation and action. It seeks to understand the world by trying to change it, collaboratively and following reflection. PAR embraces the idea that research and action should be done with people and not on or for people (Kindon et al., 2007; Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Chevalier and Buckles, 2013). I shared the underlying Freirian philosophy that a pedagogy which could help oppressed people to regain their humanity 'must be forged with, not for,' them (1972:33). He emphasised the importance of both reflection and action and the necessity for the oppressed actively to participate in the research process through dialogue, rather than be given information by well-meaning outsiders.

I was very interested in the underlying principles of participatory research and how these shaped my own values and therefore the way I conducted research. In relation to my work at the time, I found it intriguing that within participatory research, there seemed to be less emphasis on objectivity. This sat well with the earlier debates in research which had influenced my work, which centred on questioning the objectivity of the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Naples, 1997). This also made me question my own approach as a researcher when conducting evaluations where I was positioned (either by myself or participants) as a detached outsider. Participatory research methods are geared towards planning and conducting the research process *with* those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study. I was also becoming aware of the limitations of 'traditional' research, that it is done by someone in a University (and for academic interest) and for focusing on the theoretical instead of the practical (Fine, 1994).

Other principles of participatory research resonated with my own values and approaches. Rather than regarding participatory research as a concrete research method in itself, I suggest that participatory research can be regarded as a methodology that supports the possibility, the significance, and the effectiveness of involving research partners in the knowledge-production process (Bergold, 2007). A key strength (and challenge) of participatory research is the integration of researchers' theoretical and methodological expertise with non-academic participants' real-world knowledge and experiences. Participants therefore are not situated on the edge of the knowledge production process; instead, the philosophy is that knowledge is culturally constructed (Thomson, 2008) and that knowledge is co-produced and the process is democratised (Israel et al., 2003; Stringer and Dwyer, 2005; Borg, et al., 2012). Such 'insider knowledge' which regards participants as experts, and researchers as facilitators or brokers in the process (Burke and Kirton, 2006) was something I was drawn to. My views were aligned with those of Somekh (2002:90) who states: 'knowledge constructed without the active participation of practitioners can only be partial knowledge'. Participatory research, it has been argued, requires a democratic social and political context. Through a more open and democratic process, new categories of knowledge based on local realities can be framed and given a voice (McCartan, et al., 2012; Bradbury and Reason, 2006). Participatory research can help to open up different types of spaces for communication and facilitate a 'discursive approach' (Cook, 2012) and a communicative space for reflection (Wicks and Reason, 2009). Such conditions can lead to what has been described as *authentic* participation (McTaggart, 1997) where the quality of interaction between the researcher and researched is privileged

alongside a connection between the research and social change. Learning is mutual and knowledge emerges when the traditional roles of 'scientist' and 'subject' are re-aligned, in a process that can be more dynamic.

Participatory approaches are not fundamentally distinct from other empirical social research procedures - there are many links, especially to qualitative methodologies and methods. As a qualitative researcher myself, with a passion for ethnography, I believed that the principles of participatory methods fitted well with my research work in practice. I was relieved to find that other educational researchers believed in the ideal that involving young people as researchers is an effective way of collecting good quality research data. However, historically this has been more accepted in different disciplines such as legal and social work research than in education, although the picture was not entirely bleak within education. Several educationalists spoke out in support of the need to actively involve students in the research process (Cunningham et al., 1999; De Winter et al., 1999; Warren, 2000; Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000; Kirby 2001b; Fielding 2001a, 2001b, 2004; Kerr et al. 2002; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006).

Others were investigating pupils' perceptions and attitudes in education research (Nieto 1994). This idea of pupil consultation and the pupil voice movement (see Fielding 2001b; 2004) in education can offer a different path for the future development of education. Even today, children and young people are increasingly regarded as a group for whom having greater power and knowledge, and consequentially having their views heard more with a view to making a difference is vitally important (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Cook-Sather, 2006; Kellett, 2010b; McCartan et al., 2012; Stern, 2015). However, in contrast, there are arguments that the participation of young people in research is not always positive. Todd (2012) argues that participatory research could be regarded as encouraging young people to step into a consumer role and that it could result in making young people responsible for things over which they actually have no control.

Of course this work could not be considered without reference to other writers who were (and still are) cited authors in the field of participation research, with the key premise that yes, participation is good, but there can be varying levels or degrees of participation. There are many, many examples of models of participation that exist within many disciplines, each attempting to explain and justify the rationale for participation. These include typologies, triangles, wheels, degrees, dimensions, matrices, and most popular of all, ladders. Arnstein in 1969 wrote about citizen participation and developed the seminal eight rung ladder and typology ranging from manipulation up to citizen control (Figure 1). Although dated, this work remains, implicitly and explicitly, at the centre of many approaches to participation. Indeed, for many practitioners it remains the benchmark metaphor for describing and evaluating participatory activities. The simplicity of the ladder metaphor explains much of its appeal to a wide range of audiences.

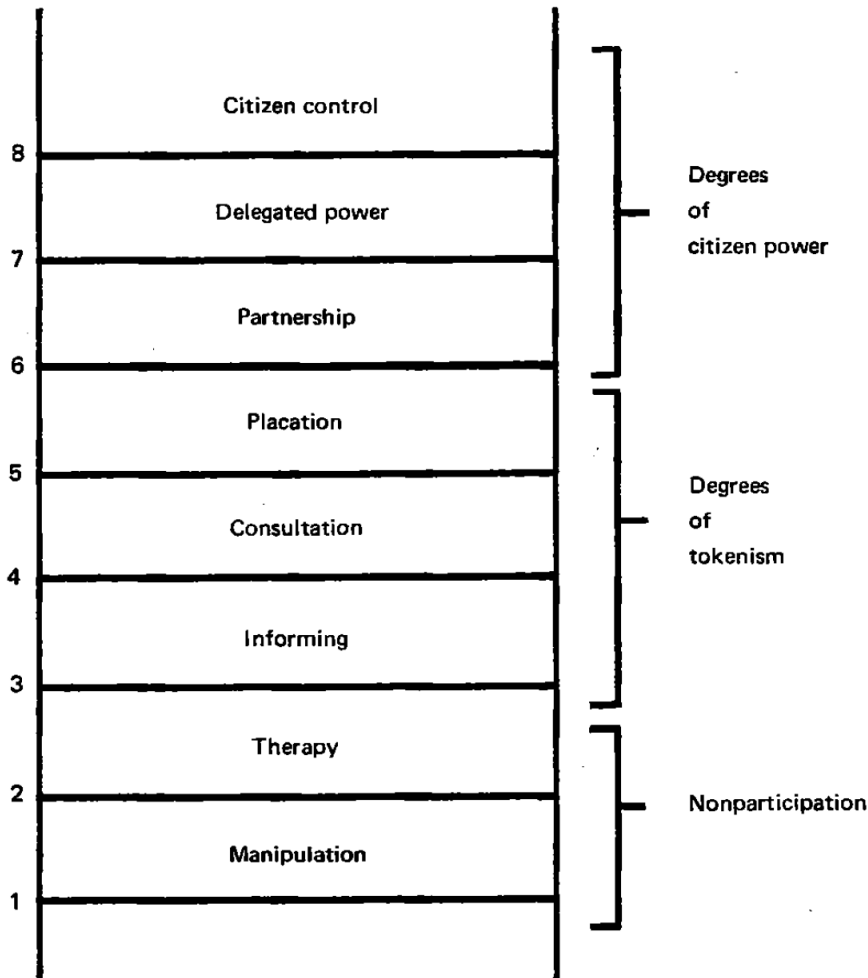


Figure 1: Arnstein's (1969:217) eight rungs of a ladder on citizen participation model

As Arnstein herself recognised, the ladder is based on a conceptualization that 'participation is a categorical term for power' (Arnstein, 1969:216). Participation is conceived as essentially a power struggle between citizens trying to move up the ladder, and controlling organizations and institutions impeding their rise to the top, thereby limiting citizens' ability to claim control or power for themselves. Despite the widespread adoption (and adaptation) of Arnstein's ladder – there are, understandably, criticisms. There is the obvious assumption that participation is assumed to be hierarchical in nature with citizen control held up as the goal of participation. This assumption may not always align with participants' own reasons for engaging in decision-making processes. *Not* achieving full citizen control implies some automatic failure or delegitimization (Hayward et al., 2004) of the participatory process, even though those involved may be satisfied with whatever level has been achieved. The linear conceptualization of participation does little to emphasize the importance of either the process, any dialogue, the dynamic, iterative and evolutionary nature of user involvement or the existence of feedback loops, which shape understandings of the situation (Tritter and McCallum, 2006). This will be explored further below in relation to **Publication 1**. A linear notion of participation also implies that the problem remains constant: only the approach of the actors vary from level to level and Bishop and Davis (2002) argue that this is incompatible with the uniqueness of many problems, which require different levels and types of participation.

Arnstein's ladder suggests that roles and responsibilities change only in relation to shifting levels of power - ie., citizens taking control and authorities surrendering it. However, it is much more complex than that: individuals do not necessarily define their roles in relation to their sense of power but on the construction of their interest (or stake) in the situation, which can change over time. I align myself to the Foucauldian (1980) view of power in that it is not something that can be owned or displaced but power is an action which individuals can engage *in*, and *with*. In addition, Arnstein's ladder provides few insights into how participation might be progressed as a collective process between all of the stakeholders involved. There is no explicit reference to co-production or the differences that such an approach could bring to research. Co-production is a potentially transformative way of thinking about power, resources, partnerships, risks and outcomes, and a co-productive research process is importantly premised on creating a 'boundary space' which facilitates different social worlds, that is, academic research and community life, together (Durose et al, 2011). Although the ladder was situated in the particular context of planning, this knowledge appears to have been forgotten over the years and one could argue that Arnstein's notion of participation ignores context and, critically, has no means of making sense of the context in which the ladder is applied. It thus conceals from experience the relational nature of a ladder in 'situated use'.

Despite these criticisms, many other writers have used Arnstein's model as a basis for other suggested typologies or models of participation, with different foci and participants. Hart (1992) proposed eight levels of young people's participation in projects (including research projects) again using a ladder metaphor and argues for full participation of children and young people and not tokenism. The models of Arnstein and Hart were picked up and used, developed, expanded and refined universally across many disciplines. Hart (2008) himself, however, reflected on this and sought to dispel some of the mis-understandings and mis-interpretations that have happened over time. Hart later posits that the ladder metaphor is misleading as it implies levels rather than stages and that this has led to it being used as a comprehensive evaluation tool and that it is a stepwise logical progression of superior and inferior rungs. Crucially, Hart makes the point that all young people should not feel that they *have* to be involved in *all* projects at the highest level of participation. Adults should not feel that they must involve all young people in all projects at the highest level either (Hart, 2008; Todd, 2012).

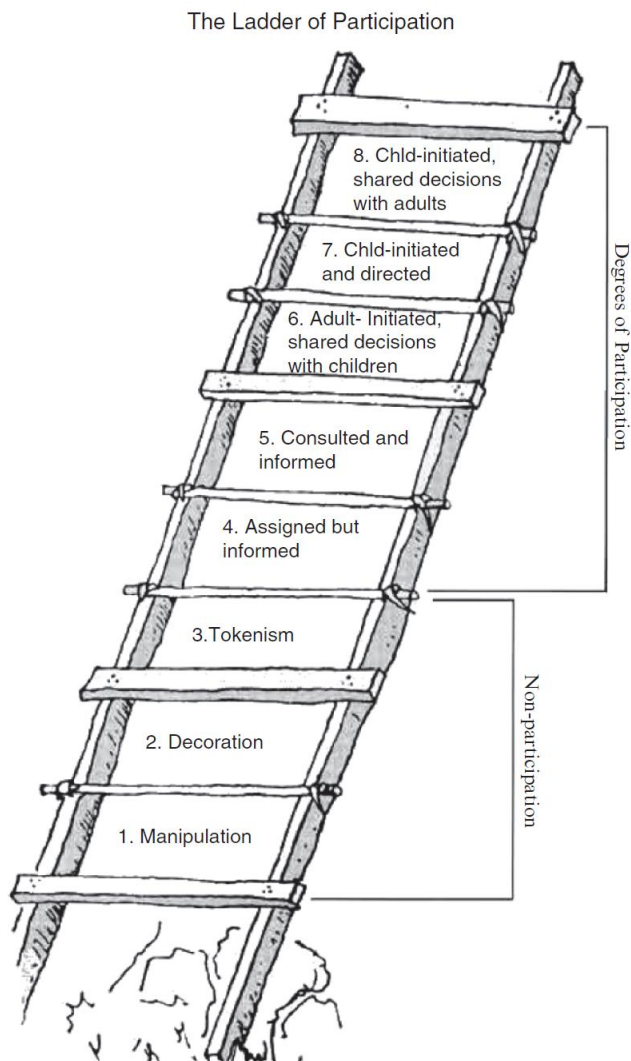


Figure 2: Eight levels of young people’s participation in projects (Hart 1992: 8)

Alongside the development of models of participation, political changes attempted to bring children and young people to the fore and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that children are entitled to have their voice heard regarding situations and contexts that affect them. Voice, however, is another widely contested and problematic concept that has become inextricably linked (in particular) to the participation of children and young people. We must be wary of uncritically engaging with the generic concept of voice which fails to take into account differing experiences of children. The use of the term voice fails to recognise that all voices within a dialogue are not equally powerful, and may make it harder to recognise each individual themselves as multi-voiced (Barrow, 2011). The growth of the children’s voice movement also can be argued to serve a number of interests ie. consumerism, school improvement, a human rights perspective, etc. Young people may give a voice but no action taken as a result, or not the action that the young themselves might have wished for. Including previously silenced voices is not necessarily empowering (Fielding, 2004) and listening to selected voices silences others. Conversely, listening to too many diverse voices can lead to dilution and political impotence (Moore and Muller, 1999). Voice alone, unsurprisingly, has limited transformative potential and in her critique of the UN Article 12, Lundy (2007:933) argues that the concept is much more complex, and inter-related:

- Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views
- Audience: The view must be listened to.
- Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

A growing number of writers have advocated critical departures from traditional roles for students in school, and again this has been conceptualised as voice, such as Fielding (2001b). He offered an interesting description (in dialogic form) on the principles and values of students as researchers. However, we must not assume that power relations between students and teachers can be altered through simply eliciting student views or that children and young people's perspectives are more or less authentic or true than any other group within the educational community (Arnot and Reay, 2007). Like Hart's model, Fielding's typology inadequately shows the link between how one moves from traditional hierarchical relationships to more collaborative ones and the nature of adult-child roles.

Building on Hart's, model 'The ladder of pupil participation' - proposed by Flutter and Rudduck (2004), is based on five rungs 0-4, and describes the various levels a pupil can participate in school ranging from pupils not being consulted to pupils being fully-active and co-researchers. They claim that a system for eliciting pupil views can be transformational in both changing the role of pupils within schools and in initiating change and having an influence within the school structure. The main point of difference separating this ladder from Hart's is that Flutter and Rudduck see the steps on their ladder as being progressive. One can move up the ladder from non-participation to the highest stage of fully active participation (Whitton, 2011) and so it is about change or improvement.

As a researcher, however, I was not just interested in whether we (myself and my fellow HEI researchers) should be involving participants in research as researchers. I was interested in *how* and in particular, how we could do it *well*. Furthermore, I was not just interested in the ideals, the aims, or models for participatory research, but in the *practice*. I was interested in the methods, and the factors that might make for a good method. Like other researchers I acknowledged the valuable contribution that children and young people generally can make to research as a data source (Hood *et al.* 1996, Mahon *et al.* 1996, Morrow and Richards 1996). However, I was keen to take this further and like Alderson (1995), Ward (1997), Kirby (2001a), Flutter and Rudduck (2004) and Kellett (2005) I proposed that young people and children can be much more meaningful *active* participants in the research process. I was aware that there were many issues which could affect whether this could be done well. Like Arnstein, Hart and Flutter and Rudduck, I was concerned about the possible empty ritual or tokenistic gesture of participatory research with children and young people generally.

My practical research experience at the time led me to the conclusion that involving young people in research (particularly as researchers) was easier said (the ideal, or the intention) than done (practice). In the ROUTES project I attempted to put into practice much of what was written about conceptually and theoretically. Like other writers, I decided not to treat the participants as objects of the research but as co-researchers and knowing subjects (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). As reported in other works [j][k][m] this was hardly problem-free. This project was seen as an opportunity to involve young people in the research process – as peer interviewers of disadvantaged young people. In relation to the models discussed we

were ambitious. At the time our ambitions led us to aim for the top rungs of the ladders of Arnstein, Hart and Flutter and Rudduck. However, issues and problems arose which I had identified in the existing literature - such as recruitment problems, training needs of the young people and the quantity and quality of data collected. Our attempts – despite our best efforts – failed and the target identity of peer interviewers was changed from disadvantaged to advantaged young people: social science students were recruited.

Although work on the ROUTES project had not followed my ideal vision at the time of participatory research, I had at least tried. Further evaluative work followed and I was involved in a large research project that linked my criminological interests with my educational research experience. The research was an LSDA (Learning and Skills Development Agency) funded project which was focused on educational provision in prisons, particularly Thinking Skills offending behaviour programmes and an unusual programme which was targeted at improving the speaking and communication skills of offenders. The research was predominantly quantitative (as was required by the commissioners) with phases that included a survey of educational provision and prospective and retrospective studies of recidivism rates [n] [o]. This very much fitted with the quantitative orientation of prison research at the time (Waldram, 2009). However, my particular responsibility was for several qualitatively-rich case studies. Each case incorporated: an observation of a Thinking Skills session; a follow up focus group interview with prisoners to explore their lived experiences of the interventions in which they were taking part; and interviews with key prison staff. Working in such restricted and high security environments was a first for me, and a somewhat frustrating experience. Gaining ethical approval for the research alone took over 18 months. I was also somewhat limited in what I could do as a researcher and how I could do this – the usual researcher tools such as tape recorders and equipment were banned and ethical approval for our research protocols were so rigid that I could not (officially) veer away from set, structured questions during the interviews which had to be completed in a group rather than on a one-to-one basis. Both myself and the inmates were under constant observation (and it was video recorded) and staff members were present at all times. Of course, prison hypersurveillance is the norm and prisons are highly regulated environments. Such conditions can be argued to constrain rather than enable participatory research.

Fundamentally, the regulated nature of the prison research environment led to me taking an approach that was more like researching *on* rather than *with*, arguably a more positivist way of researching (Griffiths, 1998). Simple research techniques and practices which might help establish ethnographic relationships and elicit the views of participants were not an option. Approaches such as spending time (Morris 1998) or ‘joining in their activities’ (Bearison 1991, cited in Beresford 1997:29) played a very positive part in my community-based research with young offenders, but was not possible in prison. I am not alone in finding prison research difficult (Liebling, 1999; Waldram, 2009; James, 2013). Prison research literature tends to ignore prisoner’s experiences and is written for academics or penal administrators (Bosworth et al., 2005). Historically prisoner research has reduced inmates to numbers and statistics related to reconviction or re-offending rates and has not reflected diverse perspectives and individual experiences. Despite this, the important point to make here is that I actively sought the views of inmates when I engaged with them in dialogue, making my interaction one that aimed to listen fully to their responses. This is presented in **Publication 1**. I did not, in this paper, discuss the ideological, methodological and practical challenges, those now being

mentioned, I faced when conducting the research. I did not report (like Curtis, et al, 2004) on the inclusion criterion for access to the research process, with participation in research seen as a reward and exclusion as a punishment. This was the case in my research and it was clear that the gate keepers did not just guard gates.

I argue that it is the rarity of the inclusion of inmate views in research generally that made my approach, despite its limitations, able to be conceptualised as participative. The views of inmates were extremely valuable to the research project – this was after all an exploration of interventions designed to improve, change and impact on the lives of individuals. Other aspects of the research study focused on the quantitative measures such as re-conviction rates and disciplinary incidences. It was noted by the inmates I spoke with (and some prison staff) that the perspectives of inmates are normally not asked for, or if they are, subsequently ignored. This fits, sadly, with the dominant public discourse of offenders as evil, unhuman or unworthy of being given a voice (Waldram, 2009). Prison inmates could be regarded as being the most extreme of the hard to reach or as Arnstein (1969:216) describes, the ‘have-nots’. Their views can also be limited or disregarded because of lack of resources or personal autonomy (Bartlett and Canvin, 2003). This can mean that important questions about how offenders are understood or how they perceive their situation can become neglected.

In relation to Arnstein’s ladder, the research project might be understood as sitting pretty low in the non-participation rungs. I would argue that manipulation was not a key feature of my research and inmates spoke afterwards about finding their research experience therapeutic. Being asked for their views – being given an opportunity to express their views and being listened to was, they said, an unusual but a refreshing experience. Other researchers have reported similar findings (Waldram, 2009). Inmates self-reported that they had learnt more about what Thinking Skills courses were supposed to be through their involvement in the research. I would suggest that, as a result of the usual lack of opportunity to be heard, the reporting of perspectives (in **Publication 1**) and the usefulness of the research process for the inmates, my work be seen to have reached the fourth rung of Arnstein’s ladder. This once again suggests the difficulties in a purely linear understanding of participation. *Not* including the perspectives of the inmates could only, perhaps, add to their vulnerability and lead to the omission of data that in turn could help us understand the impact of interventions in prisons. This could also lead to the mis-representation of perspectives as our knowledge and understanding of prisoner education would be less complete without the views of prisoners themselves.

An understanding of the relationship between *ideal* and *practice* was further explored through my involvement in an evaluation funded by a Local Authority. I led a team working on a three year evaluation of a local Sure Start project. Sure Start was a huge national programme (over £760 million in investment just up to 2004) and is an example of a Complex Community Initiative (CCI) (**Publications 2; 3**). The difficulties of evaluating CCIs have been well documented (Allen and Black, 2006; Kelly, 2010; Lloyd and Harrington, 2012) - there is no single theory or model of the project, no simple causal relationships that can be tested with experimental designs. Traditional evaluation approaches including the objective view of the evaluator and random assignment or control versus treatment are not realistic (Kelly, 2010) and nor would these approaches sit well with my own values. At the same time, a discourse of scientific objectivity had emerged in academic and policy research that was

linked to the increasing priority placed on evidence-based policy, usually meaning the provision of quantitative outcome measures, by the UK government (Taylor, 2005). This sat beside New Labour imperatives of local-level empowerment alongside a desire to centrally manage and control performance and measure outcomes (Lloyd and Harrington, 2012). Like quantitative and quantifiable data in prisoner research this discourse favours a more positivist approach rather than one that is participatory and qualitative. What was also interesting – and particularly relevant to myself as a researcher – was that evaluation of the Sure Start Programme was at two levels – the national and the local – known as dual level evaluation (Allen and Black, 2006). However, the relationship between the two levels was not always clear. Although guidelines stated that the national level aimed to answer the questions: ‘What difference did Sure Start make to the children in it, and which activities made the most difference’... local evaluations on the other hand, aimed to deal with questions such as ‘what are we doing and how well are we doing it?’ (Sure Start Unit, 2002, Annexe 6:2). In reality there was little guidance or integration between the local and national levels of evaluation. Similar discussions can be found in Lawless (2013) in his discussion of community-based initiatives in relation to ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ responses.

Local programmes had a great deal of autonomy regarding what they evaluated and when. Most adopted varied approaches including internal, external and mixed evaluations (Lloyd and Harrington, 2012). My work was as an external evaluator and my involvement with the local programme began with an invitation to tender and the process began very positively. I set our aims to be as collaborative and formatively evaluative as possible: in line with the limited national guidance to local programmes (and like most other local evaluations) my focus was on evaluating process. I was keen to capture what Burke and Kirton (2006:2) describe as the insider, local perspectives that could lead to more ‘nuanced and complex understandings’. Formative evaluation is especially important in community programmes and complex interventions such as Sure Start and therefore require careful monitoring of *processes* in order to respond to emergent properties and any unexpected outcomes. Formative evaluation often lends itself to qualitative methods of inquiry. The questions asked in formative evaluation are generally more open and lead to exploration of processes, both from the viewpoint of participants, but also from that of project staff and other stakeholders. This focus was explicit throughout the research proposal, which included participative elements and suggestions of involving parents as researchers. On reflection, I was trying adopt one of the underlying principles of participatory research: to move away from being the ‘expert’ evaluator and be more democratic as an evaluator. I was keen to encourage stakeholder participation in the evaluation and to represent a wide array of views and interests in the project. All such aims fit well with the concept of democratic evaluation proposed by several authors (MacDonald, 1976; House and Howe, 1999; House and Howe, 2000). My concern at the time, however, was to be as collaborative as possible. The bidding process for the Sure Start project was (refreshingly) participative and the interview and selection panel had on it local parents and users of the Sure Start facilities, to whom the whole team were asked to present. I presented myself, and my team, as active agents of change working collaboratively with our commissioners and improving services as we went along rather than providing a brief summative evaluation report at the end of the three years.

Once we began the research, the promise of participation of the local authority and of the Sure Start individuals themselves was found lacking. As discussed in **Publication 2**, the

tensions between myself (and my team) as an evaluator, the project workers and programme manager became insurmountable. Unlike the previous LSDA research, in this project I aimed to be formatively evaluative. In relation to my journey as a researcher, I felt I had taken several steps backwards but it is important to consider why it went wrong. During this project there were barriers to my sense of control of the research process, and it was difficult on many levels. Primarily, we did not formalise the evaluation protocols in between bidding and starting the research – and such an experience has also been documented by others (Owen et al., 2005; Lloyd and Harrington, 2012; Cook, 2012; McCartan et al, 2012). This was due to a number of reasons, including the quality of internal programme management, the delays (of over a year) that added to project costs, the loss of the Sure Start coordinator. Despite our intentions of working collaboratively, the research team were excluded from strategic and relevant meetings and kept out of the loop on a day-to day basis. Data was continually promised but never materialised. My concern at the time was that if we, as researchers, were excluded, then so were the participants (those using Sure Start). Consequently there was very little or no engagement with participants nor with those responsible for local or national policy. We were not able to achieve a ‘consensus’ on the part of all the participants as described by Borg et al. (2012) where there are multiple actors and agendas. This was a great pity as I had and indeed have a profound interest in, and commitment to, any innovative work carried out by Local Authorities. At this point in my career I had been involved in over a dozen evaluations of projects and initiatives funded by Local Authorities. The lessons learned and insights about the kinds of work that has been done with local authorities, the strengths and pitfalls, are many and complex. Work documenting these issues are not often in the public domain as they may not feature in evaluation reports or make their way into professional publications. **Publication 2**, therefore was a first attempt at this, and the insights are reflected in the comparison of two projects (successful and unsuccessful) with the aim to share the lessons learned and perhaps help other researchers and Local Authority professionals. These comparisons relate to the measurable outcomes of University priorities: timely completion, esteem indicators, publications and importantly, influence on practice – all of which were presented as unsuccessful in **Publication 2**. This paper prompted more thoughts and reflections on the same project (as I felt there was still a lot to say), and **Publication 3** developed my ideas further with the intention of making it explicit how professionals can work in this difficult area of complex evaluations. **Publication 3** outlines the tensions between what I aimed to do and then what I was able to do, but unlike **Publication 2**, this paper explores how the information gleaned through the evaluation was used by certain actors. Sure Start seemed from its aims and many descriptions of projects to be innovative and experimental. The value of local evaluations should not be underestimated. Returning to the concept of the dual level evaluation, I proposed a model of where I thought that an evaluator of a local programme (in this case, myself within a HEI) should sit (Figure 3)

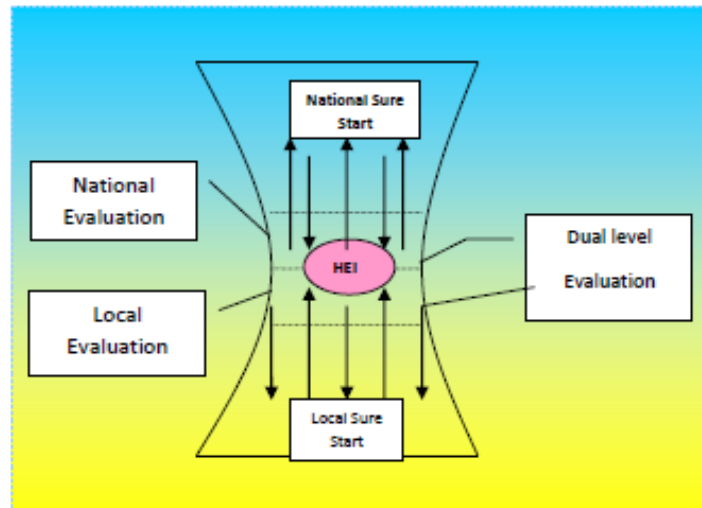


Figure 3: Dual-level evaluation: a theoretical model

As I have already said, my approach was formative, and by adopting this approach I acknowledged that not only was Sure Start a developing programme but that programme staff would also be constantly doing their own (informally maybe) formative evaluation and reflection as they went along. I shared Schön's (1983) perspective that competent practitioners usually know more than they say. The reality, however, was that the parameters of the project were set up long before I and my team got involved and the best we could do was a post-hoc reflection. The ups and downs of the evaluation are well-documented in **Publication 3**. The national guidance assumed that the evaluator would be consistently feeding back findings, which are then taken on board by the programmes and fed into project design and delivery. This certainly fitted well with my concept of what we were supposed to be doing. The reality, however, was very different and in **Publication 3** I presented a second model of where I felt I was positioned as a researcher (Figure 4)

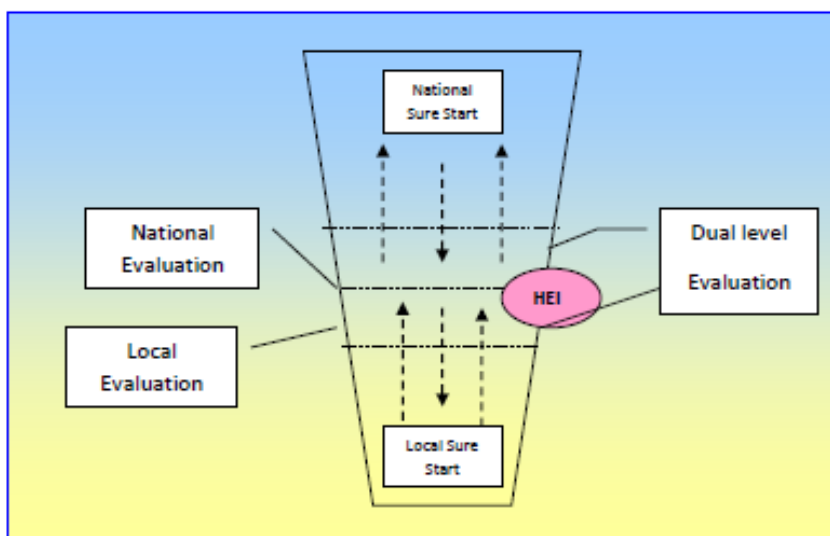


Figure 4: Dual-level evaluation: a realistic model

At one stage the overt involvement of the Local Authority strategic managers came to the fore and a period of negotiation over the content and the presentation of the final report began. The main concern of the managers was the formative nature of the case studies, which raised problems and areas for development as well as good practice. From their perspective, Sure Start had to be presented as an example of good local management and as a springboard to the development of Children's Centres across the borough. From my perspective, leaving out comments that were not wholly positive amounted to an unethical use of research evidence. I was not alone in my experience, and other researchers at the time reported similar experiences. Allen and Black (2006) reported that many local Sure Start projects carried out minimal evaluation and evaluators struggled to support them. Although **Publication 3** is a case study of one Sure Start programme, it is a focused study that raises many issues which can act as both a theoretical and practical resource for evaluators, policy makers and practitioners.

Publications 2 and 3 were, on reflection, somewhat therapeutic writings. They were also a result of a process of personal reflexivity and my epistemological reflexivity (Borg et al, 2012). My experiences had led me to reflect not only on my own beliefs and how these had shaped my approach to the research but also the methodological approach I had taken based on such values. The perspectives of both the users and practitioners were not present in either the project itself or the dissemination from it. Sure Start evaluation research was disseminated in a highly politicized and media sensitive environment such that 'evidence' (namely quantifiable outcomes) was contested and carefully re-presented (**Publication 3**). My work became, as Cook (2008:16) feared, merely a 'static reporting procedure'. In contrast, though, I concur with Fielding and Rudduck (2002:2) that an important issue is who gets heard and I would argue that the voices of the strategic managers were perhaps too loud. My desire for a collaborative approach was ideal and intended in **Publications 1, 2 and 3** and was shaped by the philosophy behind participatory research generally, and the models of participation proposed by Arnstein and colleagues. But the practice was starkly different and resonated with Jones and Stanley (2010) who document the tensions (including censorship) they faced when trying to be critically collaborative. My structural reflections (Bergold and Thomas, 2012) on the possibilities and limits of the research and the potential of the projects to exist as collective knowing were somewhat disappointing.

I came to realise that like Collins and Ison (2009), simplistic linear models of participation do not adequately represent the different stakeholders in a research project (local authority, practitioners, users, etc.) with whom relationships are likely to be very varied. We found that one or more of these might prevent the participation in research of others. One cannot be collaborative on one's own. Participation cannot be forced. The ladder models do not easily seem able to assume or indicate *reciprocity*. The ideal may include research conceptualised as a continuing process from design through data collection to interpretation with different stakeholders taking different (and not necessarily equal) roles in each of the process. Linear, ladder, models may not easily include such conceptualisations. In some forms of evaluation, the group(s) forming the focus of the evaluation will act in an advisory capacity; in others they may be involved at different stages, including design, planning, fieldwork, analysis and dissemination. The advantages of this form of research resonates with the alleged advantages of participatory research and include the insights and 'expert' knowledge that practitioners and peer groups can provide which may be lacking from the evaluator perspective. It is also

likely to lead to an increased sense of ownership of the process and capacity-building for participants (Pitcher, 2006). Sadly, in the Sure Start research there was no dialogue between myself, the local programme or the national programme about a specific evaluation framework and who or what the evaluation was for and the involvement of practitioners and service-users was what McTaggart (1997) described as mere involvement rather than authentic participation. My evaluation was 'tagged on' as described by Kelly (2010:20) and was knowledge-driven (Weiss, 1979) rather than focused on knowledge generation or creation. I became an autocratic evaluator according to MacDonald's (1976) ideas instead of what I was wanting to be – a democratic evaluator. As a researcher, I was positioned, or caught in an evaluation in which the main aim of the project was the collection of evidence for the purpose of and performance management rather than for project development and knowledge-building (Owen *et al.* 2005). My work essentially became an exercise in accountability evaluation (Patton, 2012) with an audit and financial preoccupation. Ultimately, key components of participatory research, such as the integrating partnership of researchers' theoretical and methodological expertise with non-academic participants' real-world knowledge was missing.

In summary, this section has explored the value (and theory) of including/engaging people within the research process – in particular certain people who may ordinarily may not be involved (or even asked) such as disadvantaged young people and prisoners. It also explores the challenges (in practice) that can exist due to the surrounding situation and context.

Section 4: Quality in practice using visual methods

In this section (focused on **Publications 4 and 5**) I reflect on the notion of quality of participation and how this might be achieved. This continues from the assumption that participatory research is desirable (but not easy) and that participation provides a positive ethical framework for approaching research. It is important that we as researchers do it well, even though it is hard for us to know what quality is. This section, therefore, explores my interest in taking the participatory element further and thinking about how we can do this differently. With reference to the development and application of particular visual research tools, I explore what visual methods can add to participatory research. In order to consider what such methods might bring to quality in participatory research, I explore the following questions: Can visual methods help increase inclusivity, and be the 'right thing to do' (Holland et al., 2008)? Can the use of visual methods be ethically advantageous? Finally, by using visual methods in a participatory setting, by the nature of the data produced, can this help us to do research that produces better knowledge?

After working on several other projects over the years, my enthusiasm for research returned when I began working with colleagues on projects that included consultative and participatory approaches as a central philosophy to the research. What was also new to me was an exciting development in the use of visual methods. This was a progressive step forward from my previous attempts at participatory research (as discussed in section 3) and I was keen to try gathering data in a different way.

As described in **Publications 4 and 5**, visual methods work is not new (see for example, Margolis and Pauwels, 2011; Rose, 2012; Pink, 2013; Banks and Zeitlin, 2015, etc.), but is a recent emergence within educational research, with a growth of interest (Wiles et al, 2008). Data can be created by the researcher (Prosser, 2007), the participants, can be found or be representations (Prosser and Loxley, 2008). Visual methods produce and use a range of data including drawings, photographs, maps, cartoons, sketches, video, graffiti, models and graphical representations, and it is this breadth of choice which inspired me to apply such methods in the research. Much of this involves enhancing the traditional interview and focus groups through using visual items, such as photographs, pictures or diagrams to mediate interviews and discussions (e.g. Thomson, 2008; Varga-Atkins and O'Brien, 2009; Woolner et al., 2009).

The starting point in my project work was very much a response to the project brief and the objectives of the research (as Pink, 2013 states) rather than the visual methods themselves. I was a (good) researcher, on reflection, but working as McGuigan (1997) suggested as one who made up the methods as I went along. I had the view that the methods should 'serve the aims of the research, not the research serve the aims of the method' (p.2). I was also aware that using visual methods should not be regarded as a 'quick fix' (Mitchell, 2011:12). This fits well with Pink's (2013) assertion that specific uses of visual images in fieldwork should be creatively developed within individual projects, only when it is 'appropriate, opportune or enlightening to do so' (p.10). I was keen to build on ideas generated by Banks (2001) and Harper (2002) that I was not merely using visual methods as an end in themselves and in the case of **Publication 4**, I argue that the context in which we are researching is important and

that choices of research tools used should be based on methodology rather than convenience or convention.

Publication 4 reported on a consultation undertaken in a UK secondary school as part of a participatory design process centred on the rebuilding of the school, with participants completing a carousel of several different visual activities. There were two particular facets to the project that appealed to me as a researcher: being inclusive and participatory and secondly, being creative in the methods that we used to achieve this. In relation to the first point, my intent was to be as inclusive as possible. There were many diverse users of the school and it seemed relevant and important to consult with them all as far as possible: students, technical and teaching support staff, cleaners, caretakers, teachers, caterers. Some staff lived locally and were parents of the students. I was able to use a range of visual methods as tools (based on photographs and maps) to investigate and explore the views of the school users.

In relation to the question of what visual methods might bring to quality in participatory research, particularly in relation to inclusivity, the methods used within this project did seem to facilitate the engagement of a broad range of people from the school community. The use of photographs and maps, together with verbal discussion, arguably lessened the reliance on literacy skills (to read text) or confidence in speaking, which could be expected to vary across a wide range of participants. In **Publication 4** I questioned whether the range of activities used were necessary, and reported that the various activities enabled triangulation of perceptions, producing different emphases and generating slightly different information. This concurs with the 'Mosaic' approach (Clark, 2005) to investigating responses of young children to their environment, and supports the tendency of practitioners and researchers to use a range of visual and other activities (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Bragg and Buckingham, 2008).

There were certain conditions operating in the school rebuilding research that were very different to other research reported in this thesis. Within my LSDA prison research, for example, I was restricted by the context and the funder demands for a quantitative approach. Thus the potential for participatory and/or visual research was limited. My Sure Start research was equally as restrictive, despite my intentions. However, the conditions that were in place for the work that underpins **Publication 4** and (and **5**) were remarkably different. The schools were open to (and facilitated) the idea of participatory consultation and were keen to be as inclusive as possible. The funders were equally on board with the idea of participation, and were supportive of the use of a range of visual tools as part of the research. All the members of the research team were keen to explore the use of visual methods. This meant that as a researcher, I was able to work on projects that fitted better with my own sense of what is ethical in research. For me, ethics is strongly related to participation. However, this relationship may not always be clear. Being more ethical included having less emphasis on increasing the numbers of subjects or finding quantitative data, but more on achieving participation and rich data. There were additional ethical challenges which I was not able to discuss in **Publication 4** that raise questions about the relationship between ethics and participation.

As researchers we were (legally) obliged to conform to ethical regulation procedures by our own institution, which included designing information sheets to gather informed consent

from participants, which were then distributed through the school as the gatekeepers. However, such ethical compliance is fairly standard and is based on a regulatory (and I would argue, a somewhat litigious) framework rather than a moral or ethical framework. I was keen that as researchers we aimed to do what Mitchell (2011) describes as “most-good” and not just to do “least harm” (p.22). We were also aware that our ethical approach should be visible and was theoretically informed and grounded in the methods we were using (Lomax et al., 2011).

The use of visual methods can add a further layer of ethical complexity in that visual data can include drawings or photographs generated by the participants (Prosser and Loxley, 2008), and the issue of ownership or copyright is contentious (Wiles et al, 2008; Rose, 2012). The resulting potential for identifying people or places from images or photographs, thereby compromising anonymity, is high. The difficulties of protecting the anonymity of places within visual research has been widely written about (see, for example, Prosser, 2007; Clark, 2008; Crow and Wiles, 2008; Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011) and raised interesting dilemmas for the research.

Within the project we used photographs of places and spaces of which some did include people. These images were taken by the research team rather than participants. This might be seen as a challenge to participation. The brief of the project was to consult with participants about the spaces they used within the school and so using images of these existing spaces was effective – the very point of the activities was that the spaces were identifiable and had some kind of meaning to the participants. This research was situated and contextual, and such dilemmas were unique to the context in which it was conducted (Wiles et al, 2008) and can change over time. However, as a researcher I was somewhat placed in what Tilley and Woodthorpe (2011:200) describe as an ‘ethical and methodological tightspot’. Given the participatory approach I was keen for voices and perspectives to be visible, but by using visual images there was a real risk that anonymity of people or place could not be wholly guaranteed.

It is at the dissemination stage where we found ourselves, like other researchers, grappling with the ‘promise’ of anonymity and the reality of ‘practice’ collide (Snyder, 2002). At the time of the research we presented the school and funder with a report which (at their request) named the school. Indeed the report was used to push for the re-build when funding was pulled and it was cancelled. In subsequent journal writing, however, we consciously did not name the school explicitly. Those images that were reproduced in subsequent publications (**4** and **5**) included images that represented the data analysis process and were so small that faces were not identifiable, or contained the backs of heads rather than faces. However, as other writers have pointed out (Karlsson, 2007; Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011), it is very easy nowadays to use the internet to join the dots and make the links to identify sites of research.

A major aim of the research was to gain representative perspectives and views of everyone in the school – hopefully resulting in a variety of views - whatever their role. Despite my intention for inclusiveness, there were, as I reported briefly in **Publication 4**, a small number of participants who explicitly refused to engage with particular aspects of the visual activities. It seemed that their ideas about the school were so clear, and they felt so confident of their ability to put these into words, that they considered the visual activities to be distractions. Of

interest to reflect here is that we made a deliberate decision to conduct the research with homogenous groups – our view was that the participants had already ‘gelled’ as a group and would not be distracted by discussing the differences that a non-homogenous group would perhaps do. However, with the refusal to engage, this could have meant that the perspective of a whole group could have been omitted. As with any research, this is always a risk. The participants were quite within their rights to refuse to complete any activity they did not want to, and certainly it would be highly unethical to coerce anyone to do so. What is interesting to reflect, however, is that their perspectives and views were not missing, as these were voiced, and were certainly recorded and taken into account in the analysis and subsequent reporting. Due to the nature of the carousel of research activities offered, these participants also contributed their views in different aspects of the consultation through the variety of visual methods and activities available. This fits well with other researchers who maintain that visual methods should not be reduced to one practice or particular tool (Mitchell, 2011; Clark, 2005). Methodologically, their reluctance to take part in a specific activity had implications as it was less easy (but not impossible) to feed these ideas into later consideration of information, as the opinions given did not relate to the ideas produced by the other participants through the activities. However, ethically, it was important to me that, like my prison research, their views and perspectives were taken into account rather than excluded on methodological grounds because the data simply did not fit with our design.

The central theme of **Publication 5** takes my work with visual methods further and offers a detailed, in-depth, understanding of the use and application of one such tool - the diamond ranking (DR) activity. This is a research technique that elicits both qualitative and quantitative data and the paper focuses on trying to understand the one method across several projects. DR is a research tool that is under-developed – and issues discussed include inclusivity, active discussions and applicability to a wide range of people. In **Publication 5** I further develop the idea of DR as more of a research tool as I used it as a ‘before and after’ tool rather than as a consultative tool as in **Publication 4**. **Publication 5** also enabled me to address the epistemological issues of visual methods, with my claim of creating different types of data, which collectively lead to better knowledge. My experience suggests that DR is a tool which can support inclusivity as it can be used in a variety of settings, with participants of any age and, in particular, with visual images and pictures.

The concept and theories underpinning the use of Diamond Ranking is discussed at length in **Publication 5**, where I draw on two empirical projects (full findings are reported elsewhere and **Publication 4**). A key aspect discussed in the paper is the use of the photographs, with particular reference to photo-elicitation. What is distinctive about **Publication 5**, however, is the discussion about the intention of the research team behind the use of the images. I did not intend to use the photographs to conduct formal interviews alongside a traditional structured or semi-structured schedule. Nor was it my intention to use the photographs taken as data, but to provide a visual stimulus that would promote more direct involvement in the research process and in turn help sharpen respondents’ abilities to reflect upon and explain their experiences and perspectives (Van Auken, *et al.*, 2010). So in other words, my discussion in **Publication 5** is about more than inclusion, and is more about epistemology. What is original in this paper is that the photographs used in the Diamond Ranking activities were not just data per se but were also used as a means to not only *create* data, but to create *different* data. The DR activity is a visual methods tool that generates both researcher-generated and

participant-generated data. This takes Prosser's (2007) work further and collapses the two categories together.

What has been interesting is my reflection on the use of such research tools in *visually-mediated encounters* (see Clark et al., 2013; Woolner et al., 2009). The use of photographs in the activity facilitated this work with a large range of participants with variable literacy. This resulted in lots of different knowledge from a variety of viewpoints. Sorting phrases or written sentences would have limited participation for some – and indeed this was reported by the participants. I believe the use of images facilitated engagement and broadened inclusion, a view held by other researchers (Lodge, 2007; Prosser, 2007; Lee and Tan, 2013). Our range of visual methods, therefore, were used across a wide range of participants, which in addition to being inclusive, afforded us a sense of increased completeness in terms of our data collection. I demonstrated in **Publication 5** that by using photographs as visual cues instead of written statements, I was able to create an opportunity for qualitative data generating through active discussion and reflection. I liked the idea that such methods require participants to actively do something; they should be 'handling things' rather than 'just talking' (O'Kane, 2000:140). It was also well-suited to the range of research participants, as the research teams were able to use the activity successfully with young people across a range of ages, different genders, teaching staff and non-teaching staff and across different levels of both verbal and literacy ability, therefore suggesting inclusivity.

I do not claim that visual methods are the panacea for all participatory research. Certainly within my research there are several reflections to make, for example, the inclusivity advantage of the visual mediation in **Publication 4** seemed to be related to confidence rather than skills in literacy. This lack of confidence could still cause gaps in participation though, through people asking not to take part or only offering minimal involvement, and one could certainly claim that this is a very real risk in any research project. That said, to accurately reflect the dynamics of inclusive research and fully contextualise the research process it is important to be aware and recognise such issues. It is important, however, not to let this awareness and reflexivity get in the way of further development or experimentation.

My research experience tells me that using visual methods in a *visually mediated encounter* can open up a shared space for dialogue between the researcher(s) and participant(s), and this is illustrated in my model presented below (Figure 5). As I have discussed earlier, the opportunity for dialogue between the researched and researchers is not always recognised or facilitated. The 'traditional' alternative of passive question answering during interviews is often a default position in much qualitative research. I share my views with O'Donoghue (2011:641) who states that visual research is more about 'generating new insights that are not easily available through verbal modes'.

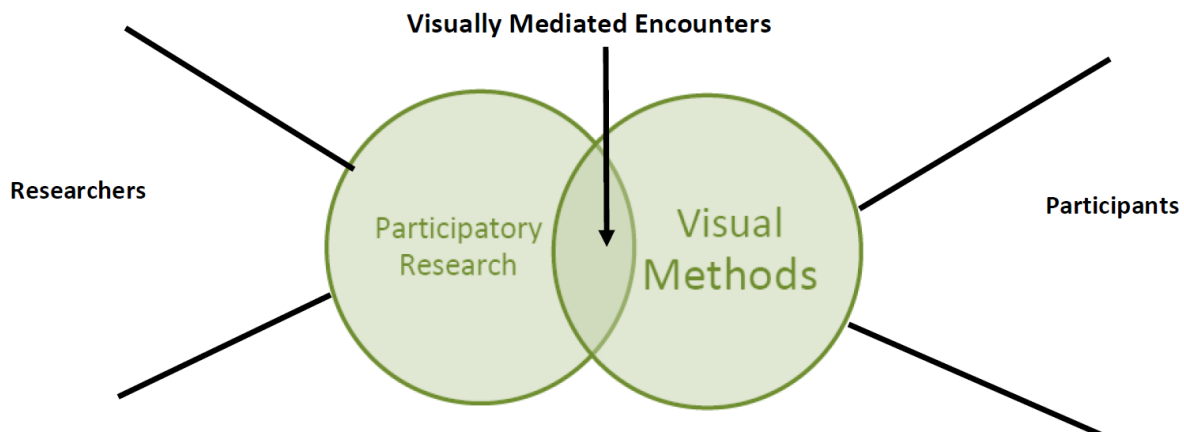


Figure 5 – An illustration of visually mediated encounters in situated use

Within such space created during the encounters there is a potential for the research to be more inclusive and ensuring as full involvement as possible. What matters is that the methods can really *engage* the participants, and my research experience tells me that adding in visual methods and mediating the space for dialogue – and therefore reflective conversations - helps us think differently and brings something *additional* to participatory research. Epistemologically, therefore, I argue that the use of visual methods is more than just inclusion, but is about evoking different kinds of knowledge from participants (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Niemi et al., 2015) and gaining a better understanding of their responses and reflections.

Importantly, I argue that the *visually mediated encounter* goes beyond mere participation, it can – given the right conditions – facilitate and evoke lots of different kinds of knowledge with the participants. Such conditions include a commitment to participatory research, alongside an openness to the use of visual methods. An encounter can facilitate a situation where understandings are created with rather than being revealed (as described by Leitch, 2008) and it can be a process of knowledge generation rather than extraction. This fits with the ideas presented in **Publications 4** and **5** that there is value in being inclusive within the research and that we should endeavour to include a wide a range of participants as possible. By using visual methods we can facilitate different views from a range of people – and my experience tells me that visual methods do get people talking. Pink (2013) states that images are our routes to knowledge, and I would argue that a visually mediated encounter is an effective way of exploring such routes and sharing the knowledge elicited. Hryniewicz et al (2014) when using living graphs, give an example of where the visual and the verbal processes – as I would describe a visually mediated encounter- tapped into the emotional and generated a very rich source of data and a different type of knowledge.

The *visually-mediated encounter*, I argue, is where there is the potential for opening up a space where visual methods enable access to lots of different ideas and where they facilitate the combining of these ideas. This fits conceptually with what other authors within participatory and visual research have also been writing about. Wagner (2011) posits that participation and visual studies challenge the traditional roles of knowledge production. Rose (2012) claims that using visual methods can create a social space that makes the visual visible.

Kramer (1975) describes the space where visual methods happens as a 'safe container' that can open up conversations and Mitchell (2011:xiii) similarly describes this area as a generative space for 'looking around'. I claim that the *visually mediated encounter* can open up an alternative space, a 'messy area' of shared learning (Cook, 2012) and where the 'unknown unknowns' become visible (Noyes, 2008:132). Within the space, I argue, there is the potential for an encounter that is dynamic, where co-creation is desirable and possible. This would fit with what Pink (2013) describes as co-creating visual interventions and Banks (2001) structuring interactions. Collaboration can also be facilitated through the visually-mediated encounter – by enabling the engagement of the researcher and researched in spatial performances (Moss, 2008).

I conclude that we present visually mediated encounters as an opportunity rather than a challenge to existing approaches. There is the potential for opening up spaces, such as those produced by visually mediated encounters where the relationship between researchers and the researched may be different. The visual methods also produced knowledge that could be combined across the different groups we worked with, thus resulting in the research being more complete. I believe, therefore, that if we are creative in the way we ask participants about things in our research, and we ask more people and elicit their different views, then we will generate a range of different knowledge. This enhanced research process will lead to more complete, therefore better, knowledge and understanding.

Section 5: Making connections: Implications for policy and practice?

In this section, building on my earlier ideas, I propose a model for effective participatory research in the context of the criminal justice system. **Publications 6** charts this journey to date, which I acknowledge is a journey that will continue – as Cook (2008:16) describes it ‘concluding not finishing’ - as I reflect, refine and further develop tools to improve the research process and the experiences of people within it.

Publication 6 is a discussion paper which arose as a response to a call for funding through the cross-council (AHRC-led) funded Connected Communities competitive programme. This was one of a number of scoping reviews commissioned and mine focused on the evidence of children and young people in, and with, criminal justice research. In relation to my journey as an academic researcher, this publication represents a joining of my commitment to the participation of young people in research and my background in criminal justice. The review is a best-evidence synthesis which focuses on particular themes which are pertinent to young people: fear, perception and fear of crime (as both victim and perpetrator); views (and experiences) of sentencing and punishment; fighting crime and prevention and offender re-entry and resettlement.

The findings are presented in **Publication 6**, but the nature of the publication did not allow for a full discussion of the research design, process or methodology applied. The review was not systematic, and I took a more investigative approach to examining the evidence instead of pre-specifying every feature of the review. Despite the broadness and scoping aspect of the review, however, I set out parameters and exclusion criteria at the outset, including UK-only literature from the year 2000 onwards and with reference to children and young people aged under 18. I did not exclude grey literature, or reports, or confine the review to academic literature. Instead, my definition of what could be included for review was broad and the term ‘resources’ is used which encompassed websites, academic papers, books, reports and organisations.

One aspect that emerged that is directly relevant to me as an academic researcher is the findings about the *process* of the participation of young people in research and the role of the academic to justify and facilitate this. In the studies we reviewed, researchers rarely discuss their justifications for involving young people, at whatever level, in their research. Commonly they cite the United Nations (1989) convention as a starting point for justifying the involvement of young people, but do not reflect further on their own rationale and commitment to participatory approaches. This encouraged me to reflect specifically about my own work and my role as an academic and how I try to justify participation. I also argue that there is a need to think carefully, and collect evidence from YP about *when* it is appropriate to involve young people in research, and *which* young people. Although young people are sometimes seen as ‘experts’ in their lives, there are times when they are aware that their voice should not be the only one taken into account. Just as adults, there are also times when it may be inappropriate for them to take part in research, or speak on behalf of others (see Section 3 and the references to who is heard). Researchers should not be afraid to tackle these thorny issues but think about participation in a different way. It should not be hierarchical, with full participation in designing, planning, executing and disseminating research the ultimate aim on all occasions. Other researchers agree – Gallagher (2008:137) is

concerned that by insisting on full participation, we may unwittingly ‘reproduce the regulation of children.... in the belief that this constitutes ‘empowerment’’. Mannay (2013) also points out that when the intrusive presence of the researcher steps out, this leaves a space that is often filled by the intrusive presence of significant others: siblings, partners, parents and friends.

Based on the studies reviewed in **Publication 6**, a model emerged based on the background of those conducting the research (Figure 6). Studies written by academic researchers tended to emphasise the importance of better understanding of complex social phenomena and were inherently *knowledge* driven. Reflecting on the model, this aspect of *knowledge* fits somewhat closely to the epistemological reasons described as a ‘right thing to do’ by Holland et al (2008). Young people tended to be involved in the research in order to provide information that could help academics to make sense of issues such as why young people offend. Returning to the ladder models (Section 2) – this work would be placed in the lower rungs or levels, with participants as a data source.

In contrast, recent research in the criminal justice area has been conducted by national charities working either to enhance the wellbeing of young people or to provide services for young people involved in, or at risk or, offending. These charities tend to be very explicit about why they involved young people in research. Their justifications were *ethos* driven and based on ensuring that marginalised voices are heard, enabling effective systems change, and enhancing outcomes for young people themselves. Again, this maps onto the idea of the ‘right on’ argument made by Holland et al. (2008) – suggesting ethical and moral superiority. In relation to the ladder models, there was specific work that would be placed on the upper rungs of the participation ladder (**Publication 6:5**), although this was rare. The third dimension of the model is a *policy* driven approach. Studies with young people that took this approach were usually commissioned by governmental organisations and based (mostly) on the appreciation of the development and implementation of the UNCRC. This dimension fits with the ‘rights’ argument (Holland et al, 2008) which refers to work that is set within the political and legal agenda. Such work within **Publication 6** tended to be situated within the lower rungs of the ladders and were very much consultation focused. Figure 6 illustrates the model in simple terms.

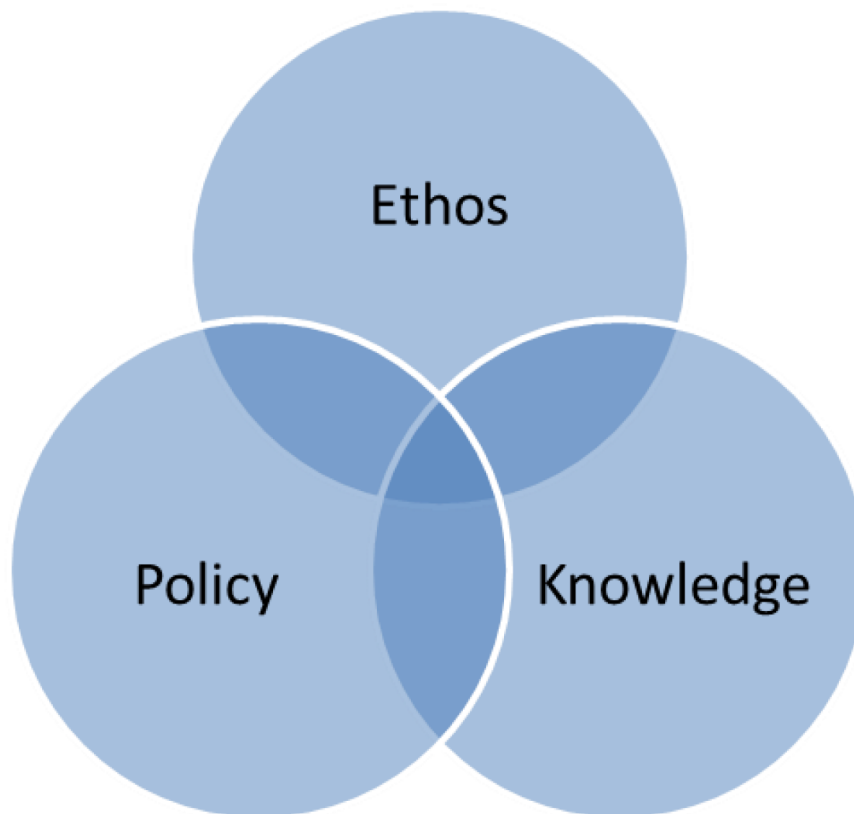


Figure 6: Justification model for the participation of young people in research.

Related to this model, in **Publication 6** I conclude that researchers should form partnerships in order to learn from each other in terms of approach, rationale and methodology, and to ensure that research is accessible to a broad audience, including young people. Both could be achieved through publishing as a report and not an academic article. Importantly, **Publications 6** represents a focus towards policy-makers and practitioners too, as the work is aimed at these audiences in contrast to speaking to researchers and academics only. Underlying this later work is the hope that policy ideals of better engagement by participants get enacted at least some of the time and result in social change. However, the context and aims of the research, the institution conducting the research and the commissioners or sponsors may impact significantly on the extent to which participants may be involved in data analysis. Projects involving young people as researchers can address political issues, speak directly to policy-makers, command a high level of academic credibility and secure external funding. However, there are concerns among proponents of traditional research methodologies about the validity, reliability and rigour of the research. One of the challenges we may face is in persuading decision-makers to take participatory research findings seriously.

Section 6: Conclusions

This thesis represents my journey of moving from researching on to researching with. I have taken some aspect of reflection and learning from every research project to the next, exemplified through my writing and the selected publications in this thesis. Section 3 discussed the structural (and challenging) issues of arranging participatory research whilst recognising the value of it. Hindsight is useful but in practice, as researchers, we are constrained (to a greater or lesser extent) by the needs of funders, and commissioners. It would have been interesting to have used visual research tools and techniques in the prisons project (**Publication 1**), and it would have been exciting to have involved parents as researchers in the Sure Start project (**Publications 2 and 3**). The reality is that research is often not funded or designed to facilitate suitable methodologies for conducting research in a participatory way (**Publication 6**).

My early work offered quite a naive view that children and young people should be involved at all times at all levels, and like other researchers, relied on the simplistic ladder-type models of participation which were prevalent at that time. This may be compared with recent work (**Publication 6**) where I offer a more refined view that it is not always appropriate to involve participants at all levels and at all times. Throughout my other publications, I have been developing ideas on how visual methods in particular can be participatory and *why* visual research methods work based on the ideas of participation (**Publications 4 and 5**).

Section 4 discusses managing the research encounter with reference to visual methods and the added value that this can bring to participatory research. It is in **Publication 4** where I first raise the question of whether certain methods are more appropriate to particular groups of participants and whether there is a benefit to using a range of methods over attempting to identify one successful method. What I have learnt is that participatory research it is not simply a matter of grafting a few new techniques onto a 'traditional' research process. Technique is not enough (Boyden and Ennew, 1997) but I would argue that the methods do matter, and can make a difference. No research is inherently participatory: it is largely through its *application* that research becomes participatory. Within education, student voice is understood as being central to this debate and the implication of the term that students are a homogenous group can take us down the wrong path and focus on 'how to do it' rather than a reflective review of 'why we might want to do it' (**Publication 6**); (Rudduck and Fielding 2006:219).

I have articulated the benefits that visual methods in addition to participatory research can bring. The argument is based on the premise that by being participatory and inclusive we can seek the views of as wide a range of participants as possible. I agree with other researchers that participatory methods can produce 'better' knowledge than other techniques (Cahill 2004:283). By using visual methods then we are able to ask things in a different way, thus generating a combination of views from many different people. This in turn can generate different types of knowledge, leading to a more complete research process and therefore the research as a whole is better.

My theoretical perspective throughout this journey has evolved. My early works were grounded in social constructionism but I now feel my theoretical perspective is more aligned

to pragmatism and the views of Biesta and Burbeles (2003). We are not spectators in the world, but are active participants in the evolution of reality and much of my work on participation is about the relationship between the way we interact in and with the physical world. How we do this is challenging, and my work suggests that visual methods with participatory research can offer exciting places – and spaces - for knowledge creation and exchange. Participatory research with visual methods, I conclude, is a good vehicle for us to creatively explore lived experiences – and a wide range of subjective viewpoints - in a more collaborative environment than traditional research encounters.

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Appendix 1

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- [c] Clark, J. and Walker, J. (1996) *Opening the GATE for Persistent Young Offenders: An Evaluation of the Gate Intensive Probation Programme*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Relate Centre for Family Studies, University of Newcastle upon Tyne.
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