Paper presentation

Abstract title: How Participatory when Researching with Children?

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How Participatory when Researching with Children?

Researchers and children and young people share interests regarding participation in research. Studies have shown, understandably, that children are only interested in giving their views to those who genuinely want to hear them. They wish that their recommendations will be put in action. Although it is trustful to express oneself in a small group children consider questionnaires favourable. According to children, surveys can be "boring" and as some words difficult to understand. Participatory research involving children intends to maximise autonomy and influence of subjects in favour of child-centred knowledge production. It is important to continue to explore implementation of this kind of research. How much of the discussion is lip-service? To what extent is autonomous action among children and young people dependent on research design? Are children and young people in school-based surveys "prisoners of conditions “as some scholars have
argued? Finally, what does active participation mean?

The paper explores research participation of children and young people in the context of different research designs. It is based on case examples and related to field of studies, settings, time and level of flexibility in stages of data collection. Results are based on experiences of carrying through surveys, interview studies and action research with children and young people ranging from 10 – 20 year of age in studies of domestic violence, foster care and child protection. A study of domestic violence included survey and interviews; both as one point of time studies. In foster care research semi structured interviews were applied. In an action research project young people were consulted in a workshop model running over a one year period of time. In all studies main objectives were achieved. Settings and contextual aspects influence dynamics and designs are interestingly contrasting. In the paper it is argued that despite ethical precautions and participatory intentions children and young people were situated on different steps of the ladder of participation ranging from invitation, to consultation to joint decision.