MONASH University

Youth Centred Research Brief Report 3

Assent Processes, Group Partnership Building and Visual Ethics

AUTHORS

Dr Christine Grove is a Senior Lecturer, Educational Psychology and researcher at Monash University. She draws on her knowledge from the last decade of working with children and youth in educational settings. Christine has a unique interdisciplinary skill set, with experience in inclusion, sociology and psychology, bridging disciplines of inclusive education, mental wellbeing, and social science. Her most recent work seeks to understand youth experiences of inclusive education using visual participatory research methods.

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Louisa Trainer is a registered psychologist and Master of Educational and Developmental Psychology graduate from Monash University, Melbourne. Her Master's thesis explored the impact of therapy dogs in educational settings on the wellbeing of children, from the perspective of their parents. Louisa enjoys contributing to projects as a research assistant, and her research interests include child wellbeing, youth participation, education and therapy dogs.

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Rashmi Rangarajan is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia. Her doctoral degree research work is on exploring and contextualizing Inclusive Education in remote schools of India. In 2018, she completed her Master's degree in Human Rights & Humanitarian Action from Sciences Po, Paris, France. She has also previously completed a postgraduate degree in Counselling Psychology from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India.

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YOUTH KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Abhi Kariamal (14yo)

Leila Mcmillian (15yo)

Nikith Udayakumar (14yo)

Sahnly Phan Chan (16yo)

Rithvika Senthilkumar (14yo)

Shekiba Fuladi (16yo)

Liz Solly (14yo)

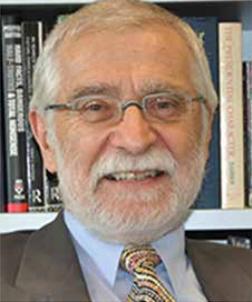**Ishika Thakur** (17yo)

Tamika Nguyen (15yo)

Edison Vong (17yo)

Group photo: Louisa (researcher), youth participants: Liz, Leila, Sahly, Tamika, Edison, Shekiba, Christine (researcher), youth participants: Ishika, Abhi, Rithvika, Nikith.

PROJECT MENTORS AND ADVISORS

Professor Peter Gronn is an Emeritus Professor in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. Prior to that, he was Professor of Education and Dean at the University of Cambridge. During 2011-14, he was Head of Faculty. He was the deputy chair of governors of the University of Cambridge Primary School. He has extensive research experience in government and non-government school systems, and with public sector agencies in Australia and the UK. He is a leading international scholar in the general field of leadership, and in educational and school leadership. In 2005-6 Peter acted as a consultant to the Australian Council for Educational Research on the project 'Standards for School Leadership' and in 2006-7 he co-authored the Country Background Report for Australia which formed part of the OECD international project on school leadership. He has over 150 publications and an Australian Research Council recipient.

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Professor Umesh Sharma is the Academic Head of the Educational Psychology and Inclusive Education Community in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, Australia. His research programs in the area of disability and inclusive education span India, Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Samoa as well as Australia, Canada, USA and New Zealand. He has conducted several award winning national and international projects on topics like Funding of education for students with disability for the Commonwealth of Australia, the Development of Personalised and Support Guidelines for Victorian Government, and the development of the National Policy on Inclusive Education for Solomon Islands. He has authored over 150 academic articles, book chapters and edited books that focus on various aspects of inclusive education. He was recently named as Australia's Research Field Leader in Special Education (a top rating for a researcher in his/her respective field) by the Australian Chief Scientist **specialreports.theaustralian.com.au/1540291/**

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Overview of Brief Research Reports 1-5

Given the scarcity of youth participatory research, and that young people are rarely consulted about the issues that impact on them (Langhout & Thomas, 2010), the following brief research reports hope to share knowledge gained in using collaborative and engaging research methods with young people. The brief research reports are an open-access series offering 5 brief research reports about collaborating with youth as active stakeholders in research.

The series includes the following reports, each building on the previous:

- **Brief Report 1:** Co-collaborating with youth as active stakeholders in research

- **Brief Report 2:** Establishing an active Youth Reference Group

- **Brief Report 3:** Assent process, group partnership building and visual ethics

- **Brief Report 4:** Participatory workshops in action

- **Brief Report 5:** Joint Dissemination and Communication: Youth informed stakeholder exhibition

The research briefs include the strengths, challenges and lessons learned about co-collaborating and engaging with youth participation in this research project. The research briefs provide an overview on the theoretical underpinnings, ethical considerations, ways to establish a Youth Reference Group, implementing participatory workshops themselves and dissemination and communication of key research findings.

The overall aim of the report series is to share the steps taken in the youth centred pilot research project. We used a qualitative, visual methodology of participatory video, art (drawing, painting) and photovoice to explore youth educational experiences. Methods that originated and used widely in humanitarian situations and with vulnerable communities due to their 'bottom-up' approach. Key themes were co-constructed from conversations triggered by the visual data and disseminated through a youth-led exhibition.

The pilot project and the creation of Youth Reference Group took place at Monash University, Faculty of Education, Educational Psychology and Inclusive Education Academic Community in Victoria, Australia.

Brief Research Report 3:

Assent Processes, Group Partnership Building and Visual Ethics

Youth Assent

As the participants recruited for the YRG were between the ages of 14-17, parental consent was required. Once participants provided their EOI via the survey online they were invited to join the project, a consent form and an explanatory statement were emailed to the participant, to have signed by a parent or guardian in order to attend the four workshops. The explanatory statement was designed to give parents detailed information about what exactly would be covered by their child's participation in the group, and included information regarding privacy and confidentiality, with the researchers' email addresses and contact numbers included, should they require more information.

In order to encourage youth to be included regarding decisions made about their participation, an assent process was also conducted. An assent form was developed, which was given to each participant at the beginning of the first workshop. This asked youth whether they agree to their participation, as well as whether they consent to be in any photographs, audio recordings, or videos of the workshop. Youth were also informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they were entitled to stop participation in the project at any stage, with no explanation required. See Appendix for Assent forms used.

Additional assent was obtained during the final workshop regarding the images, films, and for dissemination of the research findings to their immediate community (family, friends and school) and the wider public (councillors, politicians, other researchers). Assent as attained for all the final themes that were generated, the title of the exhibition, its location during joint decision making in workshop 4. Assent was confirmed verbally in the workshop and also via email post workshop once the booklets and website had been finalised before public release. This research is informed by 'The Ethics Handbook in Researching with Children' developed by the Murdoch Children Research Institute (https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/research/pdfs/ethics-children-handbook.pdf).

Despite the proliferation of international policies and frameworks to achieve Education for All, by the end of 2015 there were more than 264 million children and youth estimated to be out of school globally (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015). With the advent of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 (UN SDG), there has been a renewed thrust towards achieving not only Education for All but also lifelong learning and equitable access to education. International developmental agencies (IDAs) such as the United Nations, UNESCO, and the World Bank have been instrumental in advocating

'inclusion' as one of the core principles of schooling and education (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010). The pursuit of inclusion in schools is not only a political goal with measurable outcomes but, more importantly, it is also about putting youth at the centre where they are valued and their school agency is encouraged (Grove, 2020; Reindal, 2016).

Visual Ethics

Visual research is gaining more and more attention, particularly as a method of participatory research with young people. However, it is intertwined with issues of ethics as it involves the probing of perceptions and experiences bringing with it greater as well as unique ethical responsibilities (Warr, Cox, Guillemin & Waycott, 2016). Visual research methods pose certain risks pertaining to the 'descriptive and explicatory potential of images' (Warr et al., 2016). The complexity of doing visual research also increases since there are no fixed set of instructions or checklist of how it should be conducted. Contexts, research questions, theoretical orientations are some of the important factors that greatly influence the designing, planning and execution of visual research. There are certain key ethical issues that must be seriously engaged with before embarking

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on a research using visual methods: potential harms and benefits associated with participation in visual research, protection of participants' anonymity and confidentiality, informed consent and assent, authorship and ownership of data, how the data will be represented and presented, among others (Warr et al., 2016). Fortunately, there are a range of resources available to researchers from which we can draw on practical suggestions to manage ethical issues (Wiles et al., 2008). Tools such as ethical frameworks, ethics guidelines and ethics review bodies developed nationally and internationally can help to ensure researchers engage in ethical decision making while planning, designing and executing visual research. Additionally, there exists a range of literature in which researchers offer an insight into their journeys of doing visual research and how they engaged with and/or overcame important ethical dilemmas and challenges (e.g., Pink, 2007, 2013; Wiles et al., 2008; Mitchell, 2011; Rose, 2012; Moss & Pini, 2016; Warr et al., 2016).

Importance and value of rapport building

Critical to the success of the project is building a strong rapport among group members.

However, collaborative research with students who have a history of vulnerability is possible only on the basis of trust (Rath, 2012). This trust needs to be created; it building on professional collaboration that is marked by respects, empathy, and emotional contribution. The balance between connection and distance in (co)research or development work is key in participatory approaches. The skills of Educational Psychologists would be used in rapport building activities and creating a safe and supportive environment, sharing of boundaries and establishing ground rules. All youth are seen as experts and treated with respect. Given the focus of inclusivity whereby all youth are equally invited and supported to participate regardless of 'at-risk' status. However ethical care should always be taken to ensure confidentiality and do no harm in the research gathering processes. The researchers together with the youth and primary caregiver should give consideration of how best a student with vulnerability takes part to express their views.

Critical to the success of the project is building a strong rapport among group members. In order to experience positive outcomes from participating on programs, youth need to not only join programs but become psychologically engaged in the programs' activities, which means motivated to a degree that their attention is absorbed in the tasks and challenges (Dawes & Larson, 2011). Researchers should understand the processes through which youth's engagement can develop. Research suggests that what is most likely to increase youth's psychological engagement is when a program successfully connects with them, and that motivation develops through young people's internal conversations about what they want to achieve and what personal goals can be served by participating in the program (Dawes & Larson, 2011). Program leaders should engage with youth's personal values and goals, to help them explore opportunities to find and develop authentic personal connections to activity choices (Dawes & Larson, 2011).

Psychology literature highlights the importance of building rapport with young people, and the importance of the people you are working with feeling safe, supported, respected, cared for, valued, listened to, and accepted as individuals (Hill, 2009). In order to build rapport, it is important to provide people with the facilitative conditions of empathy (understanding another person's feelings), unconditional positive regard (accepting and appreciating another person without judgment), and genuineness (being genuinely available to young people) (Hill, 2009). Youth Affairs Council Victoria's Yerp Toolkit (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2013) provides guidelines for engaging and building relationships with young people, and suggests that using simple, appropriate language, and humour can be beneficial for building trust and rapport with young people. The Yerp Toolkit also provide guidelines for appropriate body language, suggesting that crouching down or sitting with participants is beneficial for facilitating rapport, smiling, as well as demonstrating active listening through nodding, repeating points, and asking questions, engaging everyone rather than just the most vocal young people (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2013).

Shared planning and decision-making responsibilities between young people and adults is suggested to provide optimal conditions for youth empowerment and positive youth development.

Building an authentic partnership

The TYPE pyramid of youth participation suggested by Wong, Zimmerman and Parker (2010) highlights the importance of young people and adults working together in partnership (also see report 1). Shared planning and decision-making responsibilities between young people and adults is suggested to provide optimal conditions for youth empowerment and positive youth development (Wong, Zimmerman & Parker, 2010). By voicing their perspectives, young people have the opportunity to practice critical thinking by formulating opinions about problems and solutions, which encourages the development of competence, self-efficacy and mastery (Wong, Zimmerman & Parker, 2010). The researchers suggest that adults possess the authority to create safe environments and youth-centred conditions where young people feel welcomed, and are therefore willing to share their views.

To facilitate this partnership between young people and adults in the YRG, and assist in encouraging group members to feel comfortable to share their ideas and interact with the group, a number of "ice breaker activities" were conducted in the initial workshop. Group members were encouraged to recognise similarities between themselves and other members of the group as well as the adult facilitators. Conversation were encouraged through set questions such as "If you could have any superpower, what would it be?". The group was split into 2 smaller groups of 5 individuals, which remained for the four workshops. Each group had one adult facilitator, to support discussion and ideas.

According to Morton et al. (2012), adults should have a strong belief that all children are learners and should find ways to explore

the meaning youth are expressing. The key of listening to youth voices is a belief in youth capabilities, developing relationships of respect and trust. Trust is not one-sided, youth need to trust the adult researcher as well. Youth voice has influence to co-construct new knowledge and build an interdependent relationship between teachers and students, and the education system. In this project participants were seen as co-learners and co-researchers wherein, expertise of the participants was and is recognised and valued (Lawrence, 2017). Youth are authoritative commentators on their own experiences and can be engaged as active partners in research (Grové, Reupert & Mayberry, 2016; Grove, 2019). In contrast to the view of looking 'in towards' to the individual youth (often a traditional perspective), we chose to look 'with the young person' or from the youth's point of view towards their social and educational life.

In order for youth to express their voice, "authentic collaborative partnerships" (Saggers, Macartney, & Guerin, 2012, p. 215) is critical in building rapport and trust between adults and youth. For example, in a study by MacArthur and Kelly (2004) children with disabilities "want educators to view them as children and young people first" (p. 47). However, if facilitators were to view participation as beyond speaking up in group, they most likely would identify a range of

ways to engage with youth in conversations or expression of ideas. By offering students a range of ways to express voice, youth school identity may be better validated (Morton, Rietveld, Guerin, McIlroy, & Duke, 2012), potentially increasing self-efficacy. This type of this collaborative approach engaged youths voice through multiple means of representation whereby communication tools are used for all youths regardless of ability express their experiences and have them heard (Lawrence, 2017; Mitchell, 2011). Australia is still a relatively young country and there are many initiatives that can have profound impacts on students with disabilities (Sharma, 2014). By using multiple ways of knowing and expression (Lawrence, 2017; Mitchell, 2011) there is potentially greater flexibility in the use of different tools such as visual note taking, drawings, writing, talking, paintings, photographs, and videos.

The researchers brought genuinely open minds to workshops. We were seeking the views of young people on their own terms. We used interviewing techniques to clarify our shared understandings, where appropriate, such as repeating back to participants what we have understood them to express, to provide additional opportunities to clarify any misunderstandings, and/or to expand upon points they would like to further explain.

Responding to Peer Group Dynamics

The following points were considered during the workshops to respond to peer group dynamics as overarching moderators (researchers) of the groups, such as domination of conversation by some, lack of participation by others, and moving through topics for discussion by the group:

- A trusting atmosphere between the participants themselves and between the researchers was established by beginning with warm-up questions or an entry scenario. For example, an activity where they each create their own name tag and share something about themselves was useful to establish a warm atmosphere and a sense of trust of the researcher and of the rest of the group knowing who is who in the group. Further activities used to build rapport are shared in report 4;

- Once the discussion has started, the researchers will hold back as far as possible, to allow the participants to talk freely.

- The researchers have extensive experience in interviewing and managing group dynamics from previous experience in interviewing children and youth during research, as well as extensive experience in working in classrooms where managing group dynamics is an essential part of a educators/school psychology role.

- We built a culture of respectful questioning, listening and responding in our implementation of the focus group.

- We established the group values at the beginning of the workshops by having shared understandings and expectations of respect and confidentiality.

- Moderation was not needed in the case of particular individuals dominating the discussion or in refraining from responding. The researchers worked hard to support the voices of all in the group by using a mix of traditional and modern techniques for workshop engagement such as thanking

participants for their contributions and then reposing the question to the remainder of the group and inviting alternative responses. For example, "Thank you for outlining that valuable experience. Has anybody got a similar or a different story to tell about this topic?" Ideally the participants will start a real conversation and discuss the topics amongst themselves.

• Providing participants with a range of way to express themselves and their perspectives through talking, drawing, note-taking, painting or digitally throughout the workshops.

Group values and dynamics: Using a visual note taker

A set of group values were created in the first workshop by our YRG group members. The YRG group members were encouraged to think about what they believe is important when working in a group setting, and brainstormed their ideas together in their small groups. Once each table decided on values that they believe working in groups should embody we shared as a larger group. Once the group agreed on the group values the YRG, a live visual note-taker created an engaging image of the values as they were suggested by group members. In order to have every voice heard, the live note-taker, who attended the workshop over FaceTime, was shared around the room to check in with each participant. Young people were encouraged to contribute even if they were repeating something already said, however were ensured that there was no pressure to contribute if they could not think of anything and that all responses and views were welcome.

We provided youth with a range of ways to express themselves and their perspectives through talking, drawing, notetaking, painting or digitally throughout the workshops.

Once the group members had all contributed, our live note-taker presented the finished visual of the group values, with larger words for those deemed most important by the group (see the below figure for the final version). This visual was referred to throughout preceding workshops, to remind each individual of the values they chose to be important for the success of the group.

The visual note taker provided Figure 1 as the final outcome of the note taking in the session.

Figure 1: Youth Reference Group values by visual note taker

To see the video of the visual note taking in action please here:
https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/Establishing_group_values_and_dynamics_ Visual_note_taking/12381758

Management of Data

The Primary Chief Investigator of the Youth Reference Group project, has a strong understanding of the importance of data security and the need for assent processes of information due to the nature of the topic and confidentiality/privacy obligations to the participants. Data was collected and stored in accordance with the ethics approval obtained from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. Digital data was stored on Monash's central research data storage. Stored data was only accessible by the Primary Chief Investigator and any other staff directly involved in the project. All data online was password protected. At the conclusion of the project, aggregated data and visual data will be made available on a regulated, online website for use by the community, provided participant consent/assent from both youth and parent has been provided. Data collected will be retained for a minimum of 5 years and then destroyed in line with Monash University ethical processes.

Additional resources about youth assent process and group rapport building

- Mobedji, S., & Mannay, D. 2018. **'Just listen': Care-experienced young people's views of the child protection system in Wales.** Project Report. Cardiff: The Fostering Network.

- Youth Development: Applying a Positive Approach. **https://officeforyouth.sa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/15772/Youth-Development-Applying-a-Positive-Approach.pdf**

- Taking young people seriously – Young People on Boards and Committes. Handbook for organisations working with young people. **https://www.yacvic.org.au/assets/Documents/2.-Young-People-on-Boards-and-Committees.pdf**

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Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2013) Website: https://yerp.yacvic.org.au/build-relationships/involve-young-people/communicating-with-young-people

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Young people's Assent Form for the Youth Reference Group

Hello, it's so nice to meet you!

We Christine and Louisa.

We would like your help making sure our research projects are relevant to young people and their families. We would like your participation in our workshops, to let us know how we can make our processes, policies and services more youth-friendly.

Would it be ok for you to take part in our Youth Reference Group workshops?
(Please circle)

Parts of these workshops may be filmed, audio-recorded and photographed. This will be used to present our Youth Reference Group to other researchers and organisations, to help us show others how they can engage young people in their research. Is it ok for us to film, audio-record and photograph you participating in our workshops?

We will not use or show any photos without your agreement. You will not be identifiable by the audio-recordings. You are welcome to stop these activities at any time if you want to, just let us know.

Your Signature: _____

Your name: _____

Date: _____

Thank you!
Christine Grove & Louisa Trainer
Monash University

MONASH University

For more information go to:

**bridges.monash.edu/collections/_The_Youth_Booth_
Youth_Strengths_and_Challenges_in_Education/4903950**