

Theme

- Innovations in research design and measurement on the focus of the Conference

Subtheme

- Children's participation and voices

Title: Designing youth advisory groups for a large European project: balancing scientific imperatives and children's meaningful participation

Farwa Batool, Manchester Metropolitan University, f.batool@mmu.ac.uk (presenting author), and Jessica Ozan, Manchester Metropolitan University, j.ozan@mmu.ac.uk (presenting author)

Abstract:

Research culture has generally classed children and young people as inadequate in being able to form views and opinions in matters that pertain to them. As a result, child research is dominated by adult centric ideas. Over the years attempts have been made to reduce this disparity with children being more involved in various stages of research. Youth advisory boards are a testament to this attempt. They are a promising participation mechanism to ensure that children are active agents in research projects. However, children are often only allocated a small role with sometimes minimal impact on the project. Drawing on a large European project working towards establishing the first pan-European longitudinal survey measuring child well-being, this paper will explore the various pathways that were identified to ensure that youth advisors' contribution is meaningful. Youth Advisory Boards were set up in four countries (Finland, Croatia, UK, and Portugal), with two advisors from each country forming an International Youth Advisory Board. One of the challenges faced was the delicate balance between identifying clear pathways to impact and giving youth advisors the power to decide the content and structure of the youth advisory groups. This paper will focus on this challenge that is commonly encountered in efforts to increase children's participation in early stages of the research process. The design of the youth advisory boards had to acknowledge that some parts of the project have been set by scientists and bounded by policy priorities. Preliminary work, which was adult-led as youth advisors engagement requires researchers to go through ethics procedures, identified aspects of this complex project where their perspectives could be taken into account, considering rigid timeframes to ensure that their views will be taken forward to the right people at the right time. It accounts for feedback loops to keep advisors updated with project progress and show them how their insights were used. The plan of work does allow for some flexibility, with some sessions being left empty to enable youth advisors to decide the content. Our presentation will consider preliminary findings regarding the approach used to plan the youth advisory groups and reflect on successes and limitations.