



**Developing Creative Methods for Children's Voice
Research: Potential and Pitfalls When Constructing
Verbal and Visual Methods for Research with Children
with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**

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Abstract

‘How does an elephant tell a mouse what it is like to be an elephant?’ replied one young man, when we asked, ‘What is it like to live with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder?’ His observations demonstrate how adult-centred research can hinder children’s ‘voice’. Children’s right to participate in the decision-making process (e.g. education or health care) has received growing recognition. However, little is known about ‘how’ this can be achieved in research or practice, especially when participants have special educational needs. Thus, researchers must develop creative and unconventional approaches. This case example of a method in action explores findings from our research, where methodology and methods were co-constructed in consultation with children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (7-18 years). Drawing on findings from four studies, we examine our three-staged approach to the co-construction of verbal and visual methods, which included child consultations, creativity, trial-and-error, reflexivity and a trans-disciplinary approach. The outcome was an innovative draw-label-dialogue technique, which explores the whole child (circle task), in the context of everyday activities and events (rollercoaster task) and the relationship between the two (emoticon-labelling task).

Learning Outcomes

Once you have read this case example of a ‘Method in Action’ and completed the accompanying exercises, you will be able to

- Appreciate the difference between adult-centred research and child-centred research
- Discuss the need to consult young people when developing methodology and methods
- Identify some of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the use of verbal methods in children’s voice research
- Identify some of the benefits and limitations involved in the development and use of creative visual research methods
- Discuss the benefits of combining multiple verbal and visual methods

Introduction

This case example of a method in action provides an account of the development of creative research methods in a student voice research project, which explored the voices of Children and Young People (CYP) with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in an Irish context. We focus on the different stages involved in the development of verbal and visual tools, which emerged organically (i.e. unintentionally) out of necessity – from a process that included a trans-disciplinary approach, trial-and-error, reflexivity and child consultation. This introduction provides a synopsis of this case and the stages involved in the co-construction process.

‘How does an elephant tell a mouse what it is like to be an elephant?’ replied Sam (14 years), when

we asked, 'What is it like to live with ADHD?' Without knowing it, Sam's insights illustrated some of the challenges of children's voice research. Sam viewed himself as an elephant, that is, a qualitatively different species. Presumably, the views of an elephant would be unfathomable to a mouse, and vice versa. Therefore, engaging in meaningful dialogue with outsiders (mice) seemed impossible. CYP are rarely given the opportunity to 'speak for themselves', and so it is unsurprising that they may find the process confusing. However, Sam's words also betrayed something deeper and more complex, which speaks to the consequences of being seen and treated as 'different'. Experiences of exclusion and different abilities exacerbate the problems already inherent in children's voice. Sam taught us that we (like our predecessors) were asking the wrong questions. His metaphor influenced methodological decision-making and so we use it throughout this case. We (mice) had to find ways to ask elephants (children-insiders) meaningful questions.

Adopting a more participatory child-centred approach to voice, we engaged children with ADHD as expert consultants in the development of research methodology and methods. Three studies were involved in the co-construction of an innovative theory-driven and evidence-based draw-label-dialogue technique, for use in exploratory voice research. This case explores some problems and solutions involved in the development of creative methods. Methods emerged across four studies and can be understood within three stages: (a) the straw-man stage, (b) the reconstruction stage and (c) the draw-label-dialogue stage. First, during the straw-man stage, the first (incomplete) draft of the research strategy was developed and tested. This stage included pre-design consultations (Study 1: S1), where Sam was consulted prior to methodological decision-making. Findings from S1 informed the development of research methods, including the theoretical framework and the three visual tasks, which were used in Study 2 (S2). S2 was intended to be a pilot study. However, findings highlighted some of the problems we encountered during the development of creative methods. Second, the reconstruction phase used feedback from participants in S2, to adapt tools and develop the draw-label-dialogue technique. Third, the draw-label-dialogue stage include a pilot study (Study 3: S3) and the main study (Study 4: S4).

This case begins with a pertinent synopsis of the research methods used during child consultations in S1-S4. Next, drawing on findings from S1-S4, the three stages involved in the research project are explored in terms of their implications for developing creative methods for children's voice research.

Research Methods

This section provides a synopsis of the participants (N = 21) and research methods involved in child consultation in S1-S4. Research methods varied across studies because findings from one study informed subsequent methodological decision-making.

Prior to S1, the only decision we made was to adopt a more participatory approach to voice with a sample of CYP with ADHD. Visual methods (examined below) were only involved in S2, S3 and S4.

S1 included an unstructured interview with one participant. Theory-driven and evidence-based visual and verbal research tools were then developed. The aim of S2 was to pilot these tools. In S2, three young men participated in a series of semi-structured interviews. Evidence from S2 informed a reconstruction of the research tools, and the draw-label-dialogue technique was developed. The aim of S3 was to pilot this technique. In S3, a male and a female took part in a single semi-structured interview. Following minor adjustments, these methods were used in S4. S4 comprised 15 participants (six females), aged between 7 and 17 years (mean = 12.8 years; standard deviation (SD) = 3.09 years).

Stage 1: Straw-Man Stage

This section explores the decision-making journey through the straw-man stage. This first stage in the co-construction process included pre-design consultation (S1), which informed the development of the initial draft of the research strategy.

Voice, Participation and Child-Centredness

We adopted a more participatory child-centred approach to voice. An overview of the key concepts within this approach is provided here because they influenced the development of research methods.

Children's Voice

Children's voice recognizes that CYP with ADHD have the right to participate in research and decision-making about matters affecting them (e.g. education or health care). CYP are recognized as agentic 'beings', that is, they are valued for who they are and not what they will become. So, they are seen as competent participants, with unique and privileged information about what works and what needs to change in practice. However, little is known about how to engage CYP in meaningful dialogue, and less is known about how to research with CYP with SEN/ADHD (Carr-Fanning et al., 2013).

Participatory Child-Centred Research

Principles from participatory child-centred research were also influential in the development of methods. The concept of participation is fundamental when researching with CYP. Indeed, researching 'with' CYP is distinct from research done 'on' or 'about' them, the latter viewing children as subjects (and not participants). Participatory research depends on the degree to which participants are actively engaged in the research process (Kirby, Lanyon, Kronin, & Sinclair, 2003). So, children should be involved in identifying problem areas, designing how research is conducted and interpreting the data.

Historically, children were assumed to be incapable of participation. Their psycho-emotional development may not be equal to that of an adult. However, child-centredness emphasizes the

uniqueness of each individual, in terms of their competencies, preferences and lived experiences. Carl Rogers explained how from infancy children actively explore and try to make sense of their social world. Through experience, the child develops systems of meaning (e.g. self-beliefs and world beliefs), which they use to interpret and respond to events. Hence, children are expert-insiders and adult-outsiders can only ever be visitors into their subjective reality or 'life world'. Therefore, research methods must be embedded within the competencies and preferences of the child, which we achieved using a combination of verbal and visual methods.

Verbal Methods

Qualitative research includes a range of methods, which are intended to explore emotional and interpretive side of human experience. However, research relies on verbal reports. Findings from S1 demonstrated how voice can be silenced by inappropriate adult-world language and meaning.

Labels and Language: What We Learnt

All research methods have limitations. Verbal tools, such as interview questions, will structure the parameters and contents of dialogue. So, if you wanted to know about someone's eating habits, then you would not ask them about their favourite movie. Similarly, our uncritical reliance on the ADHD-label in S1 was a mistake for several reasons. First, we assumed that the meaning of the ADHD-label would be the same for researchers (outsiders) and children with ADHD (insiders). Sam taught us the difference between mice-centric and elephant-centred meaning. Second, we did not consider that, from the child's perspective, ADHD could be associated with negativity and distressing experiences, such as being labelled different or broken. Participants could have responded defensively, assuming we held negative attitudes towards ADHD. The label could potentially have caused participants distress and/or elicited information regarding their beliefs about ADHD and their experiences of being stigmatized. However, our objective was to study the lived experiences of CYP with ADHD.

Adult-Centredness versus Child-Centredness

In theory, when researching with CYP, 'top-down' adult-world knowledge, assumptions and agendas should be discarded because these can influence voice during its elicitation or interpretation. In practice, one cannot remove the researcher from the research process. Researchers interpret the literature, identify problems and devise ways to study the phenomenon, including if, when and how children are consulted. So, research cannot ever be considered completely driven by a 'bottom-up' child-led agenda. Adopting a more participatory approach, we attempted to engage CYP in the methodological decision-making. However, decisions were made prior to S1; otherwise, S1 would not have happened. Ignoring the impact of adult-centred agendas is foolhardy (at best) and negligent (at worst). Researchers can only strive to be 'more' child-centred and 'less' adult-centred (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). This does not discount the value of children's voice. It just emphasizes the

importance of reflexivity, that is, researchers must be self-aware and self-critical about their impact on voice.

Child-Centred Verbal Tools

Constructing verbal tools required a theoretical framework and interview questions which were more child-centred. Prior to S1, we failed to recognize that participants were children first, that is, human beings living beyond an adult-world label. We needed to abandon conventional knowledge and taken-for-granted assumptions. Researchers must be aware of their own systems of meaning and those held by participants. Thus, we endeavoured to find verbal tools which were meaningful to mice and elephants.

Richard Lazarus' theory of stress, emotion and coping was adopted as the theoretical framework. Emotions act as messengers; they inform the person about the meaning of the relationship between the person and their environment (i.e. person-environment). Emotions are meaningless without an understanding of the whole person (e.g. beliefs) interacting within changeable social contexts (e.g. people and objects). So, dialogue is not focused on what is wrong with the child (e.g. ADHD) or some researcher-identified situation or problem. Emotions are explored so that participants self-identify and explain positive (e.g. resources) and negative (e.g. distress) situations in their everyday experiences.

Conclusion

Verbal interviews may hinder voice, especially when inappropriate language is used or the word has multiple meanings and/or negative connotations. The study of stress, emotion and coping provides a more child-centred framework. A combined (verbal and visual) approach contributes to children's voice.

Visual Methods

An overview of visual methods highlights the reason for using a combination of methods. Visual methods are not novel. However, participatory agendas have made them more popular. A range of image-based techniques are available, including

1. drawing and other art-based techniques,
2. draw-and-tell or write-and-tell,
3. photo-voice or photo-elicitation,
4. visual timelines,
5. diaries (e.g. paper, electronic or photographic),
6. spider diagrams or concept mapping,
7. mapping (physical space),
8. found images.

Image-based methods actively engage CYP in the research process and help them to communicate their thoughts and experiences. Understanding of the benefits of visual methods has grown in recent years, thanks to the efforts of child-centred researchers, such as Samantha Punch, Alison Clark and Peter Moss, Pat Thomas and Jon Prosser.

For example, visual methods

1. are 'child-friendly' (e.g. fun and familiar);
2. are relaxing and non-intrusive in nature, which reduces defensiveness and facilitates communication about complex experiences and sensitive topics;
3. sustain interest and attention;
4. encourage reflection, because instead of requiring an immediate response to an interview question, participants have the opportunity to stop and think;
5. decrease the impact of the researcher and adult-centred agendas;
6. provide more choice and control;
7. elicit information about non-verbal/unconscious dimensions of psychological and social experiences;
8. support the participation of CYP who have difficulty articulating their experiences (e.g. very young children).

However, the combination of visual and verbal methods may be preferable. Engaging children in dialogue about the images they create makes the child's experience more accessible. In addition, both the adult and child are actively involved in the collection and interpretation of data (Clark & Moss, 2001).

Conclusion

Verbal interviews alone can hinder voice, especially when inappropriate language is used or participants lack competencies and awareness. The study of stress, emotion and coping provides a neutral framework to explore voice. A combination of verbal and visual methods accommodates a range of competencies and preferences and actively engages CYP and adults in the meaning-making process. For that reason, we carefully constructed visual and verbal tools, which were tested in S2.

Stage 2: Reconstruction Stage

The initial draft of the research strategy was developed during the straw-man stage and then unsuccessfully piloted in S2. During the reconstruction stage, we adapted the research methods based on what we learnt during the straw-man stage and findings from S2. An overview of the tools is provided below, before findings are discussed in terms of the problems and pitfalls we experienced when developing creative methods.

Initial Research Strategy

The initial research strategy included three visual tools, which we developed during the straw-man stage. These tools were (a) theory-driven, since they targeted key dimensions to the stress and coping process, and (b) evidence-based, because they were selected and/or adapted from prior research (e.g. Brady, 2004). First, participants were introduced to the 'life-snake' task (see [Figure 1](#)). A visual prop was used to explore lifetime verbal narratives. Second, due to the role of beliefs in the stress and coping process, the 'attribute-identification' task targeted beliefs (see [Figure 2](#)). Participants received a series of four worksheets; each had a pair of person outlines. Using the space provided, they listed the good and bad attributes associated with ADHD, teachers, parents and peers. Third, since negative emotion indicates stress, these were explored using the 'feeling-flag' task (see [Figure 3](#)). Participants received a page divided into sections (or flags) each denoting a negative emotion (e.g. anger). A recent situation characterized by that emotion was self-identified and then discussed.

Figure 1. Life-snake task.

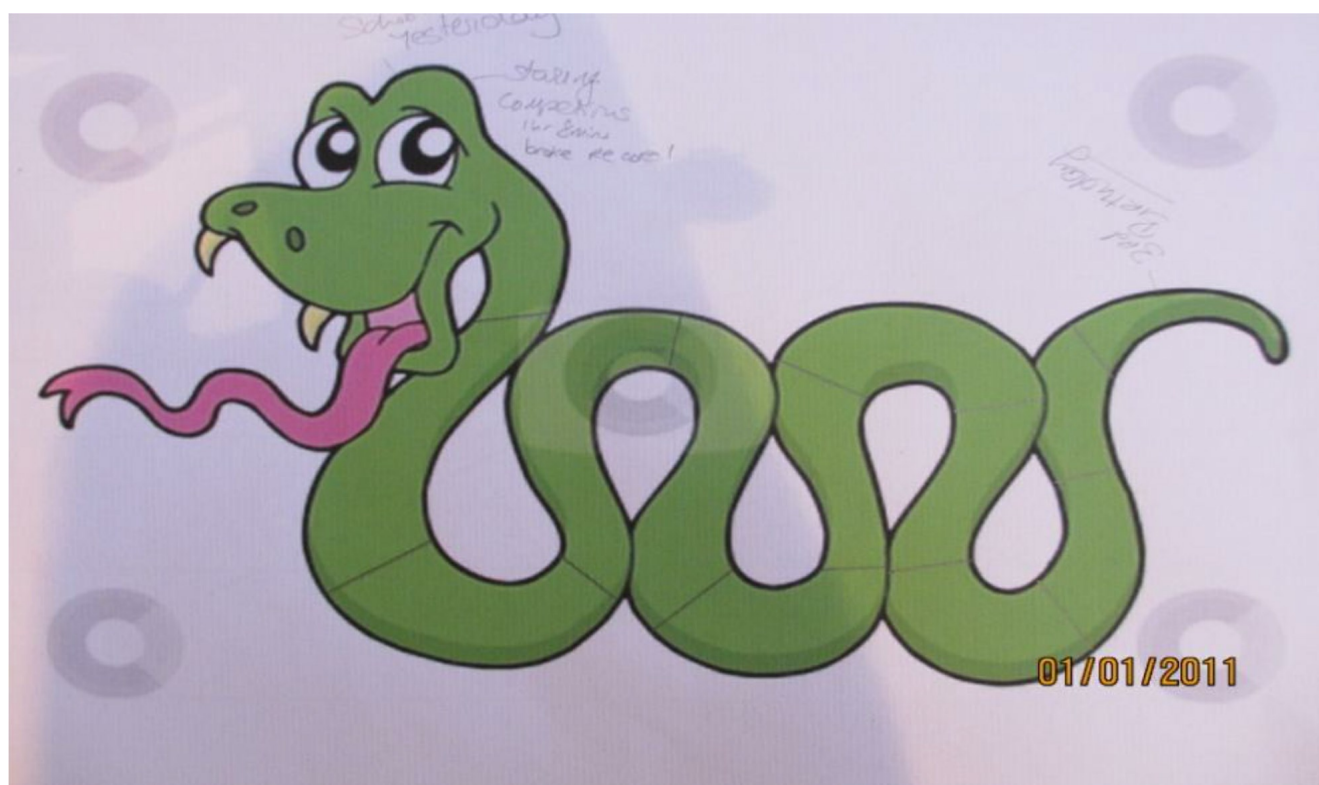
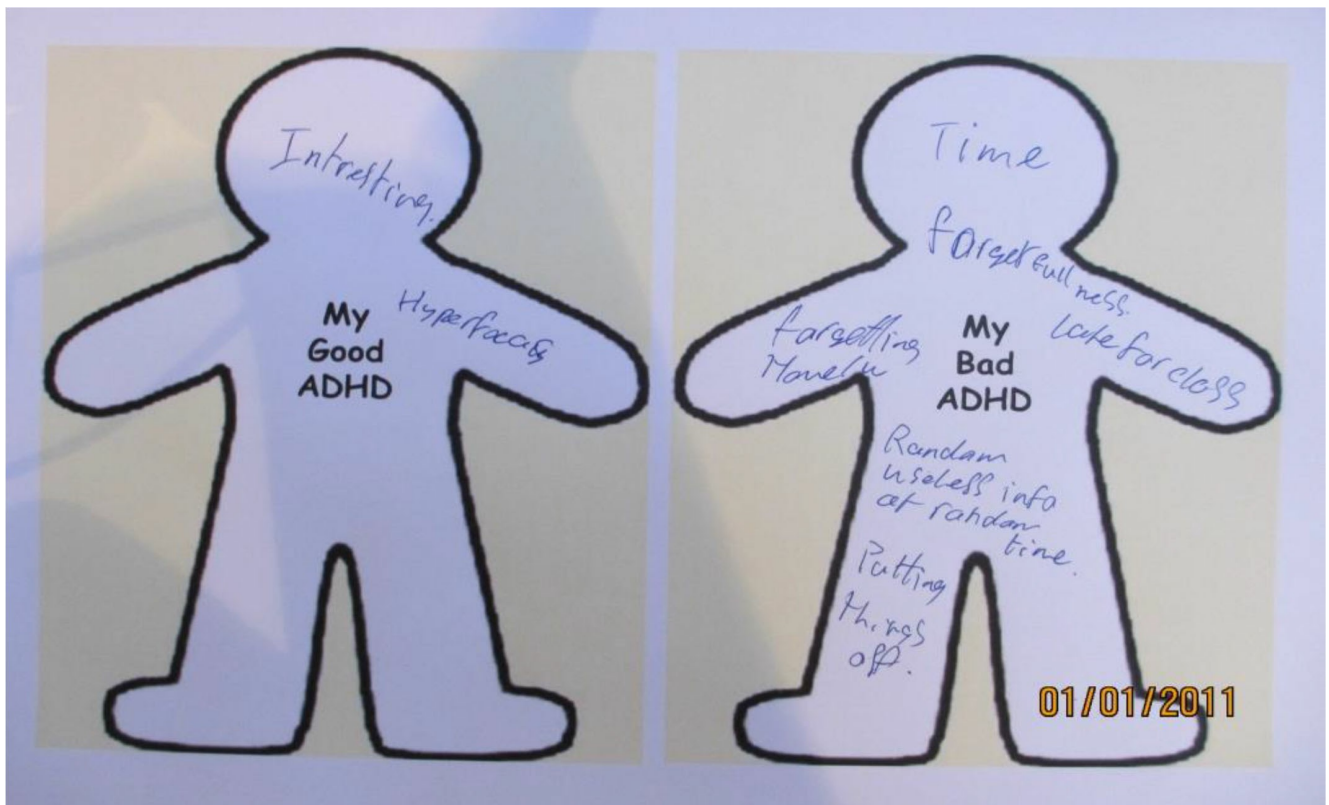
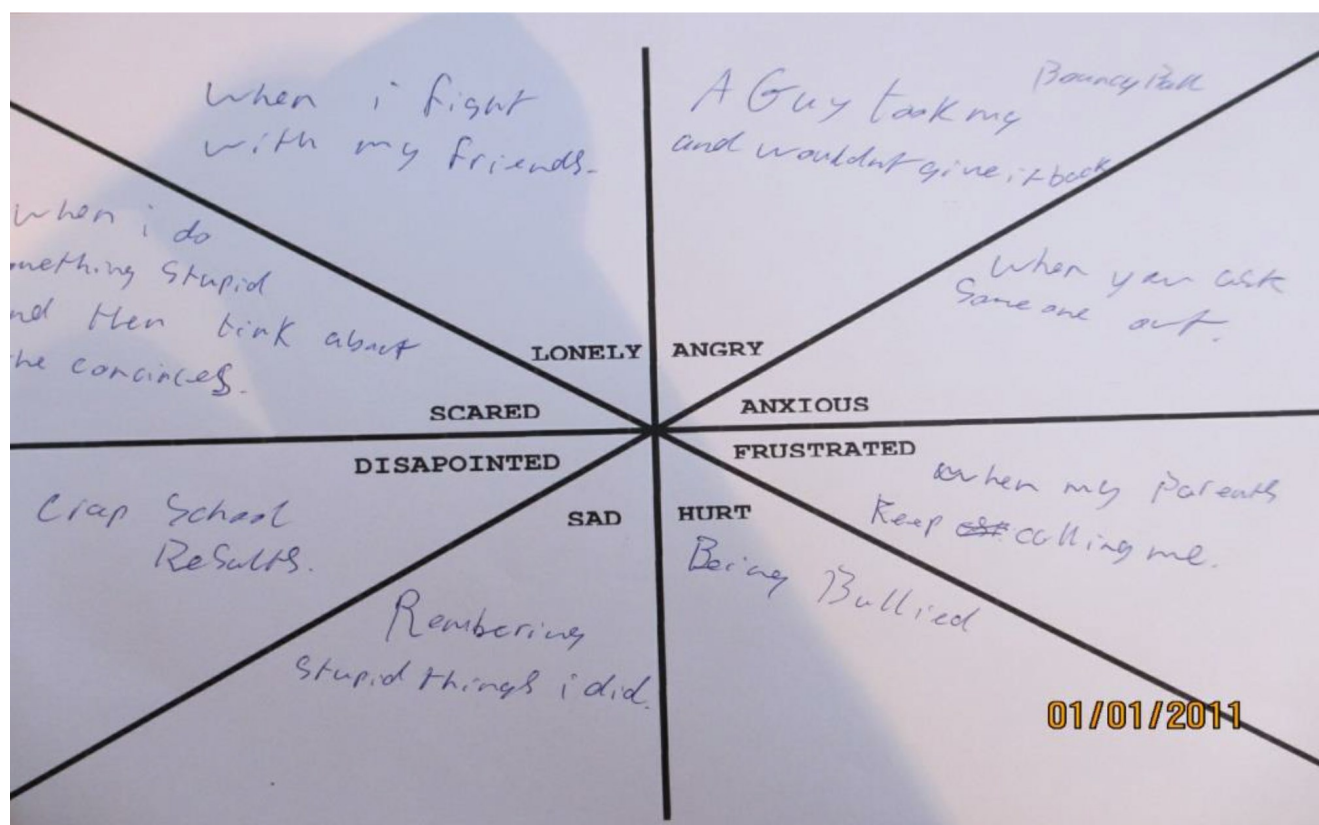


Figure 2. Attribute-identification task (ADHD version).



Description: ADHD: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Figure 3. Feeling-flag task.



Problems and Pitfalls

This section provides a synopsis of the research findings from S2. Particular attention is given to the problems and pitfalls we experienced when developing creative methods.

Demands Exceed Competencies

CYP's ability and desire to engage in the research process were negatively affected when the research tool was not embedded within their competencies (i.e. actual skills and abilities). As predicted, participants were, at least initially, engaged by the visual cues. However, despite prompting, they appeared to have difficulty sustaining focus and also organizing, remembering and sequencing narratives in the life-snake task. Problems with attention, memory and organization are associated with ADHD. Our failure to accommodate them represented a lack of forethought and highlighted the need to work closely with alternative evidence bases. When developing tools to work with a specific sample, researchers need to ensure that those tools accommodate the competencies associated with the group (e.g. age or SEN). That said, competencies vary considerably across and within certain cohorts of young people. Child-centredness recognizes the uniqueness of the individual.

Preferences versus Prescription

Participation depends upon 'meaningfulness', that is, the process must be relevant and worthwhile to the young person. When research failed to accommodate the participant's preferences, children's voice was obscured.

A child's preference is interconnected with cognition and emotions, including beliefs and feeling towards events and activities. Preferences are intimately connected with one's experiences in their life world. So, trying to explore lived experiences, especially emotional experiences, without engaging the participant's preferences is absurd. Instead of adopting the necessary experience-focused approach, we developed the attribute-identification task, which required participants to list the good and bad traits associated with parents, teachers, peers and ADHD. What makes this our most spectacular failure was that the construct under investigation was beliefs, which are based on affective-based semi-unconscious cognition and one's global systems of meaning (Lazarus, 1999).

Consider Tom's (14 years) reaction. Tom was hesitant and disinterested while listing the good and bad traits of a teacher. However, when teachers emerged later during discussion, Tom explained,

There's one teacher on my mind that can get people lost in the school and she doesn't give a damn ... she'd be there shoutin' at ya tryin' to wind you up on purpose tryin' tryin' ta make a fool outa in fronta everyone ...

Teacher's traits were not as important as how they made him feel and also the context. Constructing a more child-centric theoretical framework was supposed to enable the participant to self-identify situations and events which were personally significant. But somewhere during the development of research tools, the process had eclipsed purpose. Upon reflection, this tool was developed based more on researcher-centric desires to systemically collect data, which could be interpreted with greater objectivity. As a result, the tool was overly perspective, adult-centred and obscured voice. Therefore, inasmuch as is possible and practical, tools must avoid pre-identifying any relationship or situations. Metaphorically speaking, mice must discover what an elephant desires, instead of assuming they are similarly motivated by cheese.

Evaluating Impact and Engagement

Evaluating a participant's level of engagement or the impact of the tool was challenging and at times impossible. During the reconstruction stage, we relied heavily on reflexivity when trying to figure out why the tools were not working, which was lengthy and often frustrating because often there were multiple (even contradictory) explanations.

For example, participants' response (e.g. inattention and forgetfulness) to the life-snake task could have been associated with deficits (e.g. competencies), boredom (e.g. preferences) or something else entirely. Including an in-depth review of the entire research process at the end of interviews in S2-S4 allowed us to probe for insights about the impact of research methods. It also provided

participants in S2-S3 with opportunities to be directly involved in the development of the research methods. However, participants can only provide a certain amount of information. They will readily tell you what they did not like, but are often unable to explain why. Preferences are (somewhat) unconscious, so participants may have limited awareness about why they dislike a task.

Participants did not favour the write-and-tell approach, but they communicated this in different ways. Sometimes feedback could be taken at face value. For example, John (8 years) became frustrated mid-task and exclaimed, '... I 'hate' writing, ugh, that's why I hate school ...'; whereas Charlie (18 years) completed all tasks without protest, but during the review, he reported,

... I didn't like the writin' ones, where you'd to write the things down. Prefer to just talk, asking questions I'm get confused when you asked me to write things down ...

'Doing' the activity was not the same as meaningful engagement. Charlie's disengagement may be attributed to the demands of the task (i.e. writing) and his co-morbid diagnosis of dyslexia (i.e. competencies).

Directly Targeting Emotions

Problems with the feeling-flag task were more obvious. Directly targeting emotionally provocative events was the most problematic. Participants either refused to discuss emotions or were evidently distressed and embarrassed. Thus, the activity was abandoned quickly, following only minimal prompting, with all participants. ADHD is not associated with an inability to recognize and understand emotional experiences; thus, participants' responses were attributed to a failure to accommodate participants' preferences and experiences, rather than competencies.

Conclusion

As can be seen from this review of findings from S2, developing creative methods is complex and challenging. Findings highlighted several problems with the initial research strategy, including a failure to accommodate participants' competencies and preferences and directly targeting emotions. Findings from S2 informed the development of the draw-label-dialogue technique.

Stage 3: Draw-Label-Dialogue Stage

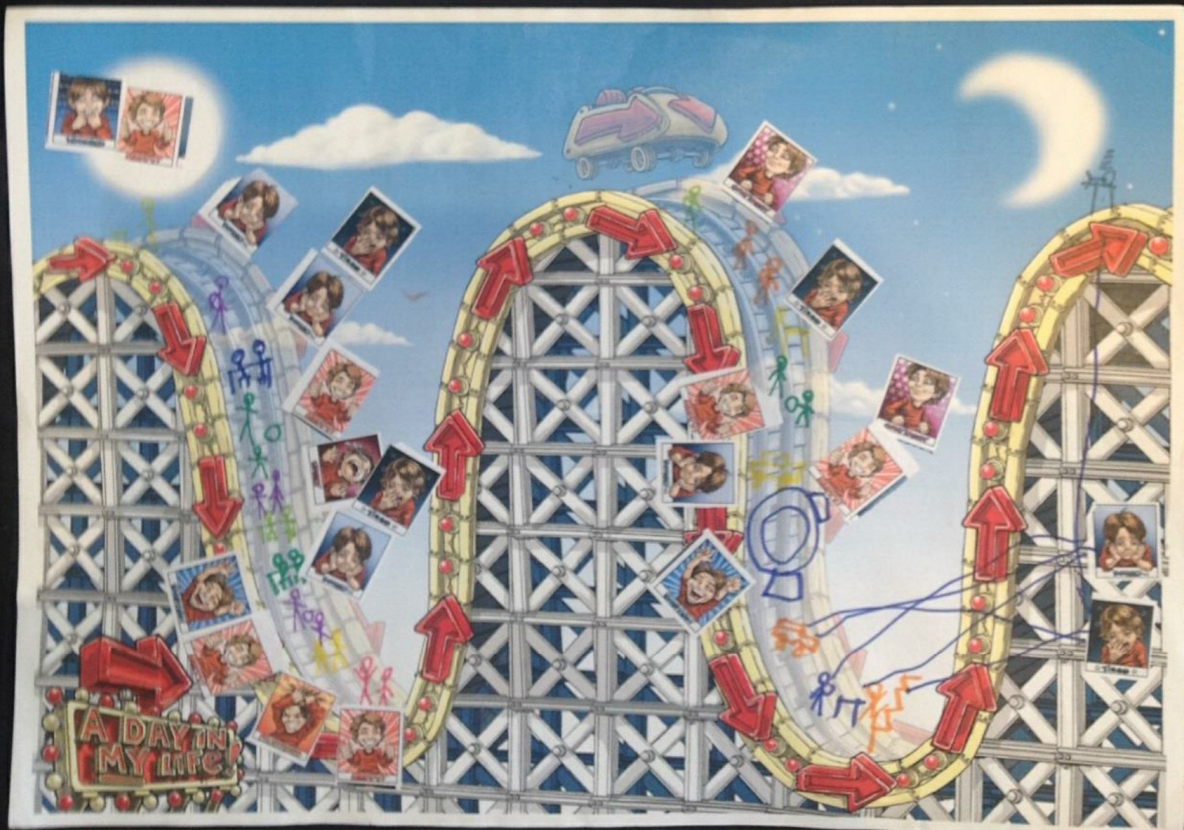
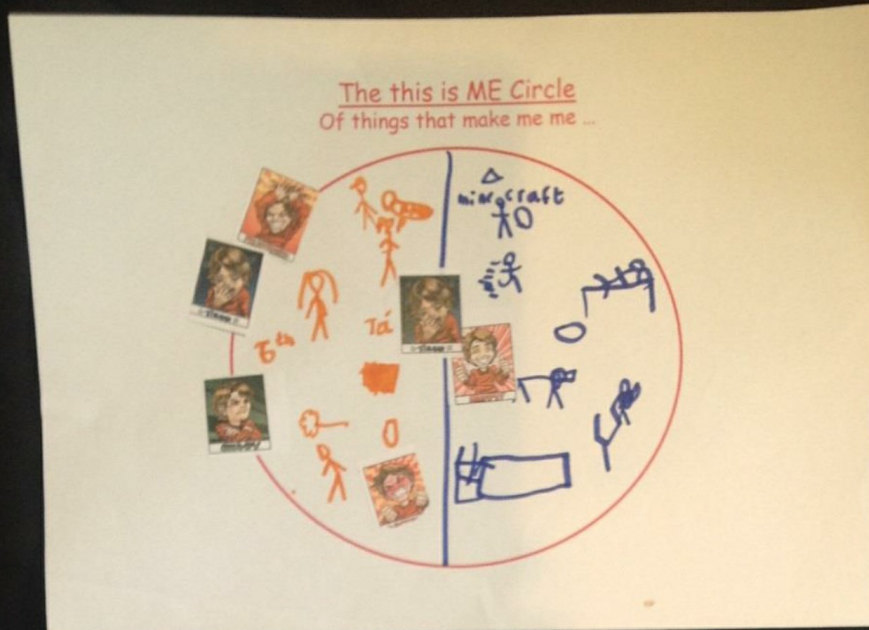
As a result of the problems observed in S2, the draw-label-dialogue technique was developed post-S2, tested in S3 and then used in the main study (S4). This section provides an overview of this technique. Findings from S3 and S4 demonstrate the potential contributions of creative methods.

Draw-Label-Dialogue

The draw-label-dialogue technique comprises three image-based activities. First, the 'rollercoaster' tasks required participants to create a verbal and/or visual timeline of a typical school day. This

replaced the life-snake task (from S2) and reduced demands on memory and organizing a lifetime of events. Second, participants constructed a pie-chart representing their self-concept (e.g. self-belief and world beliefs) during the 'circle' task. Finally, the 'emoticon-labelling' task was introduced using a poster depicting 16 gender-specific positive and negative facial expressions constructed for the purposes of our research. Participants attached one or more emoticon-label(s), or pre-made stickers, to the items on the previous two tasks. A completed (male) version of the technique is included in [Figure 4](#).

Figure 4. Draw-label-dialogue approach (completed male version).



The combination of these three tasks, followed by dialogue, provided information about the whole child (circle task) in the context of everyday activities and events (rollercoaster task) and the relationship between the two (emoticon-labelling task). The technique provided a flexible and accommodating space to represent their experiences. The approach targets emotions indirectly. Once the participant applied the emoticon-labels, dialogue non-intrusively explored participants' perception of the situational context. The child self-identified important situations and relationships. Next, using collaborative enquiry, between researcher and participant, problems and (current or potential) solutions were identified and explored. Any visual technique (like any verbal tools) has limitations; it produces one (restricted and) incomplete version of experiences. So, rather than relying on a single method targeting one pre-defined variable, the draw-label-dialogue approach uses multiple visual methods, followed by dialogue, which provided triangulation and richer more in-depth information about experiences.

Solutions and Contributions

Drawing on findings from S3 and S4, we will demonstrate the contributions of the draw-label-dialogue technique and explore the solutions to some of the challenges involved in developing creative methods.

Accommodating Competencies and Preferences

Findings from S3 and S4 indicated that the draw-label-dialogue technique flexibly adapted to a diverse range of competencies and preferences. Participants' engagement varied significantly. On the one hand, Mary (16 years) demonstrated a clear preference for the circle task and explored her relationships with other people. Jack (10 years), on the other hand, favoured the rollercoaster task, spending more time and using more colour and artwork depicting everyday activities and events. Both participants identified several problems and coping resources at home and in school. Furthermore, the focus on personal significance provided greater access to the participant's experiential world. For example, Mary's relationship with her brother was a source of distress. This relationship was identified using the circle task. However, the attribution-identification task would have ignored this important relationship because it only considered traits of teachers, parents and peers. Generic sibling attributes would have been less important than other issues (e.g. feeling rejected).

Drawing, Choice and Control

Another beneficial component to the draw-label-dialogue technique was the use of drawing and also providing additional choice and control. Drawing may be more child-centred than other visual techniques (e.g. photo-voice) which rely on machine-made pictures. The researcher provides a structure for impromptu drawings. However, participants decide how to use space, symbolic representations and colour, and also identify the important places, people, activities and so forth.

Participants in S2 did not favour the write-and-tell approach, but that says nothing about a preference for drawing. Some participants in S4 felt inhibited by their lack of drawing skills. Consequently, the two draw-tasks could be completed using any symbolic representation (e.g. writing or drawing) and different writing implements (e.g. markers or pencils). The provision of additional choice and control probably reduced the impact of the researcher and alleviated participants' resistance and distress. The perception of control (real or imagined) has a significant impact on one's experience of distress (Rice, 1999). Indeed, when it was their choice, the participants in S3-S4 happily adopted the write-and-tell approach.

Familiarity

Using tools which participants were familiar with contributed to participation and meaningful dialogue. If a child has experience with a task, it is likely to be embedded within their competencies and preferences. When Jack was introduced to the emoticon-labelling task, he became noticeably more attentive and alert. He told the researcher about his experiences with similar activities during resource hours; '... when I coming into Mrs [] she'll always ask me to point to what if you're feeling sad you point to that face ...' Jack demonstrated confidence when explaining his choice and events would influence them. For example, he was 'happy' when his peers (infrequently) allowed him to join their game during lunchtime, but he felt 'sad' when he was left out. This differed from participants in S2, who either refused to discuss emotions or were distressed during the feeling-flag task, which targeted emotions directly.

Safety and Efficacy

Researching with CYP requires researchers to develop creative methods, which are safe and effective. In S4, emoticon-labels (e.g. sad) were applied to school- and home-based activities, events and relationships. The draw-label-dialogue technique not only provided a safe space where participants readily identified and discussed the problems and challenges they experienced but also provided information about their personal strengths and environmental resources.

Conclusion

Evidence from S3 and S4 suggests the draw-label-dialogue technique represents a more child-centred approach. The technique accommodated a range of competencies and preferences and was effective for research purposes. Participants self-identified important situations and contexts, which were then explored collaboratively between researcher and participant. This contributed to an understanding of problems, personal strengths and socio-environmental resources in the contexts of participants' everyday lives. We conclude by reflecting on the development process.

Conclusion

An innovative theory-driven and evidence-based draw-label-dialogue technique was developed using

creativity, trial-and-error, child consultation, reflexivity and a combination of verbal and visual methods. We critically reflect on the co-construction process and the key learning experiences.

From Theory to Practice

There are an abundance of theories and ideologies associated with children's voice and creative methods, including participatory agendas, child-centredness, human rights, citizenship, consumerism and many more. However, there is a dearth of information about how to construct practical data collection tools. Translating theory into practical applications is hampered by a multiplicity of demands and agendas, such as different contexts (e.g. education or health) and stakeholders. Furthermore, developing tools must accommodate the competencies and preferences of the participating CYP, which vary considerable across and within target samples. Researchers need to realize the limitations involved and understand that one can only strive to be more child-centred (and less adult-centred). Findings from S1 and S2 demonstrate how adult-centred agendas can obscure voice despite our awareness, good intentions and carefully constructed tools. Hence, the competency and integrity of researchers is critical.

One-Size Never Fits-All

Child-centred researchers must realize that one-size never fits-all. Indeed, while the draw-label-dialogue may accommodate a range of competencies and preferences, it is not universally applicable. Four participants in S4 had dyspraxia, and the demands on fine motor skills, especially attaching the emoticon-labels (pre-made stickers), hindered their engagement with the process. The tools used in S2 were drawn from other research, where they had been successful for research purposes. However, they were not effective for our study because of the participants' particularities and the research project itself. Therefore, the stages outlined in this case example of a method in action may provide a guideline for how you could engage participants in the co-construction of tools. When developing creative methods, you must use reflexivity, trans-disciplinary literature-bases, while working within the confines of the research project. For example, understanding the psycho-biological characteristics of ADHD (e.g. inattention) was as important as knowledge about child-centred methods. Nevertheless, participants and tools were only relevant insofar as they were needed to answer the research questions and achieve aims.

Child Consultation

The most important contributions came from the children themselves; without their insights, the factors which were hindering participation would have gone unrecognized. Therefore, researching with CYP (with and without SEN) requires more than post hoc, tokenistic or once-off approaches to consultation. Adopting a stage-like approach, which includes child consultations at key points throughout the decision-making process, can contribute to child-centred methods that demonstrate creativity and rigour.

Creativity and Failure

Developing creative methods for researching with CYP requires creativity. However, the process also requires reflexivity and researchers' willingness to accept that something does not work, but also persist in the knowledge that there are multiple means to the same ends. Targeting emotions was appropriate in theory, but prohibitive using a direct approach (feeling-flag task). We could have (reasonably) concluded that exploring emotional events was not possible with this sample. Nevertheless, by reconstructing the tools, so that emotions were indirectly targeted, we were able to explore emotionally provocative events. Failure proved to be the mother of innovation. Thus, you must be willing to take calculated risks, admit or better still embrace failure and 'carry on regardless'.

Final Thoughts

What we learnt from the co-construction process is that the success or failure of creative methods actually had more to do with our competencies than anything else. The inefficacy of the tools used in S1-S2 versus the efficacy of the draw-label-dialogue technique in S3-S4 suggests that young people have the capacity and expertise; but they must be provided with meaningful opportunities, which accommodate their competencies and preferences. Therefore, mice are responsible for finding ways to ask elephants meaningful questions. However, while researchers set out alone, it is children who must guide the way.

Exercises and Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on the difference between child-centred research methods and adult-centred research methods.
2. What are some of the benefits associated with visual methods?
3. What do researchers need to avoid when developing creative methods?
4. What are some of the key features that creative methods need to have?
5. Developing research methods was informed by trial-and-error learning because we made mistakes. Do you think a trial-and-error approach is appropriate and ethical when researching with CYP? What could we have done differently?
6. The study of stress, emotions and coping provides a more child-centred and self-directed theoretical framework. Can you think of another theoretical framework or interview questions which would be more child-centred (and less adult-centred)?
7. This is a three-part exercise:
 - a. Identify two different SEN/disabilities.
 - b. Identify one or more research method(s)/tool(s) which would not accommodate the specific competencies associated with the SEN/disabilities you have selected. For example, verbal interviews would not accommodate the competencies of a non-speaking person.
 - c. Identify one or more research method(s)/tool(s) which might be more appropriate and help to accommodate the specific competencies associated with the SEN/disabilities you have

selected. For example, a non-speaking person could create a visual narrative using photographs.

Further Readings

Clark, A., & Moss, P. (2001). *Listening to young children: The mosaic approach*. London, England: National Children's Bureau for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

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