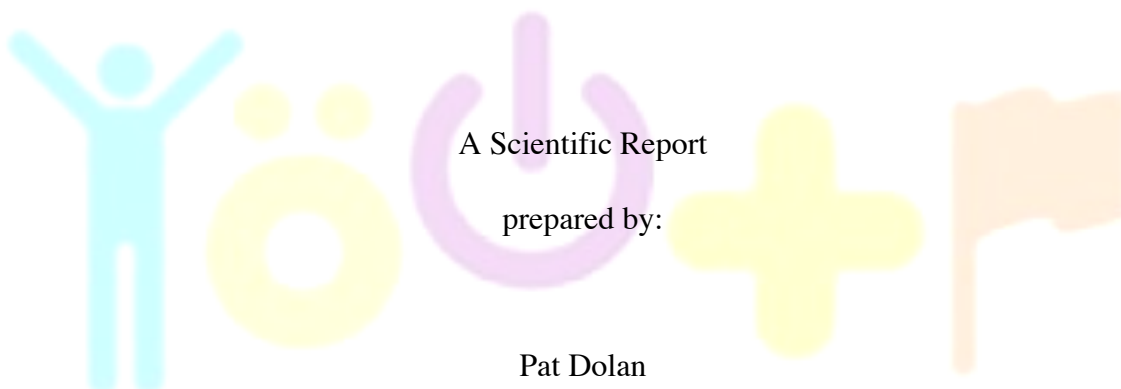




# A SCIENTIFIC UNDERPINNING FOR THE YOUTH AS RESEARCHERS PROGRAMME



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Youth As Researchers (YAR) programme has an established record of successfully fostering positive youth development and helping to ensuring youth voice in programme and policy decisions. The programme is first, and foremost, a youth development programme that results in increases in critical thinking, research skills, problem solving, self-efficacy, empathy, and civic engagement. The programme is not a research agenda or a substitute for large scale funded research initiatives. Nonetheless, the skills imparted by the YAR program allow youth to contribute a research informed voice to programmes and policies impacting their well-being.

The YAR methodology is firmly based in a deep participatory action research body of knowledge. The programme is supported by a range of research and theoretical perspectives that provide a rigorous structure, assessments of the reliability/validity of core concepts, and firm justification for the utility of the programme. Similarly, the YAR programme has been evaluated several times utilizing internal and external researchers. All showed a clear effectiveness to positive youth development and youth voice. As a result of the effectiveness of the programme, the results of individual YAR cohorts and the overall program have been published in peer reviewed academic journals and book chapters.

In 2020 the UNESCO Chairs whom developed the YAR programme offered it to UNESCO to help gauge the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth globally. A massive interest was received from youth worldwide and resulted in a range of cohorts being formed. Such a large scale rollout of the programme required innovation and creativity to implement. Results are forthcoming, but various surveys and evaluations suggest that the impact on participants are consistent with previous offerings of the programme.

This document is designed to provide an overview of the substantial body of knowledge, rigorous evaluations, and tested methods used in the development and delivery of the YAR programme. Based on these, a series of recommendations are also provided to help guide future offerings of the program within UNESCO and other settings.

Finally, this document is under review by a diverse external quality assurance team consisting of participatory action research and positive youth development experts at Oxford University, Strathclyde University, University of Florida, Leeds University, UNICEF, and University of Melbourne. This panel will further evaluate the rigor of the program and this support document.

## STATEMENT OF INTENT

This paper describes and justifies the Youth as Researchers (YAR) programme. It outlines its history, the rationale and case for using YAR as a social research methodology, its strengths, and its limitations. Importantly the paper serves to underpin participation and youth voice through their leading research as validation of their right to explore and examine social issues in their lives and to advocate for social good among their peers, families, school community and wider civic society.

Established in 2010, the Youth As Researchers (YAR) programme was designed to provide a platform for positive youth development and ensuring youth voice in programme and policy development, through the medium of their participation in social research. From its foundation, several key distinctions were made in terms of its aims and clarifications regarding what the YAR programme IS and what it IS NOT:

### Youth As Researchers is:

- First, and foremost, a youth development programme
- Designed to ensure, support, and advance youth voice
- Designed to build specific research/inquiry skills, including critical thinking, strategic thinking, self-efficacy, and accurate reporting/storytelling
- A programme that provides unique insight by youth into the issues, opportunities, and challenges that they face in their home, communities and across civic society.

### Youth As Researchers is not:

- A research agenda or tool to conduct broad, expensive research for free by youth volunteers
- A research agenda designed to accumulate broad, statistically representative data beyond the individual unit/level of analysis
- A mechanism for getting free or deeply discounted research
- A research agenda designed to present the level of academic and peer review scrutiny required for journal and other publications

Apart from any ethical considerations, we believe that these distinctions are important and should be carefully considered by organizations seeking to employ the YAR methodology. For settings where youth voice and insight are needed, the programme has proven exceptional. Similarly, the programme is particularly suitable when seeking to build youth capacities, facilitate positive youth development, and advance efforts for youth driven participatory action research.

Alternately, for organizations focused primarily on the conduct of rigorous scholarly research (widely generalizable statistical findings, randomized control studies, large multilevel samples), the YAR programme should be seen as an only a possible mechanism for gaining additional and supplementary insight that can be provided by youth. The programme should not be confused as a method where youth undertake research that requires very high-level professional research skills typically attained through postgraduate education.

# **PART I – HISTORY AND FOUNDATIONS**

## **Section 1: Foundations and History of the Youth As Researchers Programme**

### **Rationale**

Through the creation of new knowledge, youth-led research, seeks to influence public policy for the betterment of civic society by bringing a more democratic and informed youth perspective into the policy-making arena. Thus, research by youth with youth and for youth, from Ireland (initially) and internationally (more recently) enables them to undertake social research projects with their peers on issues of concern, to collectively inform policy dialogue.

Youth-led research can occur when youth are facilitated to take ownership of the research project, process, and product(s). As Kim indicates (2015, p. 230) It is about facilitating youth to be the “primary investigators” during the research process “from the initial identification of the research topic to the dissemination of the final results”. When viewed as a form of participatory action research, this signifies an added commitment to facilitate the youth to use their research findings as a launching pad to act and generate change. That said, adult facilitation is also a vital component of the programme, thus providing youth with requisite research skills, technical support and safeguarding them from risk of harm. The programme also requires constant counterbalancing between ensuring experienced adults are there to support the youth researchers while also keeping back from taking over or managing the research. The core underpinning philosophy of youth-led research is that apart from the creation of knowledge, it is a forum for enabling meaningful participation leading them to influence policy dialogue with an added value that brings a democratic and informed perspective into the policy-making arena.

### **Establishment of Youth As Researchers**

In 2010 Dolan and Kennan founded the Youth as Researchers (YAR) Programme in Ireland. Through an on ongoing research partnership with Foróige, Ireland’s largest National Youth Organisation, the authors became aware of youth interest in undertaking social research projects on issues of concern to them. Foróige delivers a Youth Leadership Programme to young people (14-18) in youth projects, clubs, and schools nationwide. Many young people partaking in this programme were leading small-scale social research projects within their communities as part of the process of honing their leadership skills (Redmond & Dolan, 2012). Although it has grown in terms of scale and scope, the YAR Programme was initially established to support the young people on the Youth Leadership Programme to develop their research skills and to disseminate their research.

The initial programme was quickly adopted by the UNESCO Chair Programme at Penn State University who worked collaboratively with NUIG to further develop and expand the programme. Beginning in 2015, the programme has now resulted in over 50 cohorts of youth researchers who have been trained in YAR and have completed research in both high school and university settings. It has also been delivered with NGOs to youth in a range of nonformal settings in the United States, Vietnam, and elsewhere globally.

## **Aims of Youth As Researchers**

The aim of the YAR Programme is to build the capacity of youth to carry out research on issues of concern to their lives and their wider community and to enhance the dissemination of their research findings with a view to influencing change. To achieve this aim, the YAR Programme delivers research skills training to youth and supports them to disseminate the key messages from their research, typically by producing short videos depicting their findings. The training, delivered through a series of one-day long workshops, is a step-by-step guide for youth on how to conduct a social research project. The core training involves the young researchers engaging in a seven-step learning programme including:

- selecting a research topic,
- planning for change,
- research design,
- research methods,
- data analysis,
- research ethics,
- report writing and dissemination.

The training workshops which ideally are completed in person but can also occur in an online format are interactive in nature and over the course of the training, the youth working in small groups will identify or refine their ideas in terms of their research topic and design an ethically sound fit for purpose YAR team research project. In the research implementation phase, the presence of an ongoing culturally relevant support person to mentor and support the youth in the implementation of their research is a critical component of the YAR Programme model. It is a pre-requisite to partaking in the training that the youth have access to a support person to provide ongoing guidance and facilitation in the implementation of their research. In our experience, the norm is for the young people's youth worker to take on this supportive and coordinating role. Once the research is complete, the youth document their findings in a research report.

In the final stage of the process, the YAR Programme steps back in to support the youth to produce a short video (or other form of media communication) of their research findings, to maximise dissemination. These videos are produced in partnership with a small film production company and financed by the YAR Programme, with the youth playing a central role in the production process. Taking a storyboard approach, the youth along with the filmmaker map their ideas for a short drama to depict their research findings. Based on the agreed storyboard, the filmmaker drafts a script returning to the youth for sign off. The youth are given the opportunity to be part of the cast or crew, or both, on the day of the film shoot. To complete the process, the filmmaker edits the production adding in the voice over, music and graphics as required, in consultation with the youth. To maximise their reach and as a tool for engaging public interest, acclaimed Irish actor and patron of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway, Cillian Murphy provides the narration for the videos. A story told in the form of a short drama captured on video, interspersed with a voice over and graphics depicting key findings and a concluding set of recommendations has been a powerful tool for communicating the research findings.

Section 2: Review of Literature – Justification for the Youth As Researchers approach  
(provided by Dr. Erica Odera and Dr. Kaila Thorn)

***Youth Participatory Through Action Research as Better Scholarship***

The YAR programme represents an advancement of the long-utilized youth participatory action research (YPAR) frameworks which proponents argue is both good scholarship and good practice when working with young people (Ozer, 2017; Cook & Krueger-Henney, 2017). As scholarship, it brings in new concepts and ways of examining youth studies. Several scholars have discussed concepts to explain or describe the ways in which YPAR brings about the “critical consciousness” as described by Paulo Freire. Schensul & Berg (2004) highlight how youth as researchers helps youth see things from an eco-critical structural perspective and to realize that power differences exist not just between individual people, but between groups and structures at larger levels. This type of perspective has been used to challenge youth’s thinking about topics such as ethnic conflict (Dutta, 2017) and parental corporal punishment (Wartenweiler & Mansukhani, 2016). Others have discussed the idea of “critical youth engagement” which is the space in which youth leadership, organizing, and research participation meet (Fox et al., 2010).

Watts & Guessous (2006) discuss the sociopolitical development which can occur when youth are involved as creators of research, rather than just as study respondents. This development establishes why injustices that occur are not just functions of individual actions but include broader systems and institutions. They argue that to understand how sociopolitical development occurs researchers must understand authority and power, the level of agency youth have, the opportunity structures they are exposed to, and their level of commitment to actual actions which challenge the status quo of their environment. This view has been recently reinforced within a socio-ecological framework for understanding the lives and participation of youth and their families by McGregor and Dolan (2021).

Furthermore, Roholt and colleagues (2009) have constructed a concept called civic youth work which focuses on considering youth as citizens doing citizenship work now, and not some day in the future. This approach emphasizes the lived experiences of youth and encourages youth workers and programmes to “work with young people in democratic ways to bring about their experience of themselves as lived-citizen and to enhance the likelihood that they will continue to be involved as active citizens over their lifetime” (p. 12). Therefore, youth as researchers as a form of scholarship can bring an understanding of power, a critique of power, and an appreciation of the lived experiences of youth into discussions about research while challenging the individualistic bend of many youth development studies (Thorn, 2021).

YAR also challenges notions of validity by arguing that those closest to a social reality have the right to be involved in the research (Cook & Krueger-Henney, 2017) for both moral and practical reasons. By involving youth in their own research, the salience of the topics and the quality of the data will be higher than in traditional, adult-driven research, increasing the external validity of the research (Quijada Cerecer, Cahill, & Bradley, 2013; Abo-Zena & Pavalow, 2016). Morsillo & Prilleltensky (2007) discuss the concept of psychopolitical validity, which they describe as “the extent to which research and action take into account power dynamics in psychological and political domains affecting oppression, liberation, and wellness at the personal, group, and



community levels” (p. 726). They distinguish epistemic psychopolitical validity (acknowledging power in research) from transformational psychopolitical validity (challenging and changing power through research). Apart any acknowledging, challenging, and changing functions, even at a more basic level, young people conducting the research are more likely to identify and understand ‘peer nuances’ than adult researchers.

### ***YAR as a Model of Better Practice***

The YAR approach has also been strongly argued to be good practice. It provides a counter-discourse (Fals- Borda, 1987) and can be considered a way to democratize research. It also links programme goals to wider goals, such as knowledge building and social outcomes. Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy (1993) state that, “participatory action research is always an emergent process that can often be intensified and that works effectively to link participation, social action, and knowledge generation” (p. 175). Youth as researchers also directly challenges the individualistic tendency of traditional youth development studies by engaging young people in groups, often with adults, to carry out research at a community level. For instance, Watts & Guessous (2006), in their defence of sociopolitical development as a key skill for youth, argue that “the qualities young people need to develop and improve themselves are related to the qualities they need to develop and improve their society; these two domains of development are synergistic” (p. 72). This reaffirms the social-ecological way of viewing youth as embedded within their context and having influence over their context (McGregor & Dolan 2021).

The concept of affording youth to become social researchers also supports and strengthens much of the ideology of youth organizations and programmes, including school-based settings where it is sometimes viewed as a type of social pedagogy (Conrad, 2015; Morales, Bettenourt, Green, & Mwangi, 2017; Tukudane & Zeelen, 2015). Because it rests on the foundation of youth agency and ability, this creates space for young people to stretch and explore their own limits by raising questions and critiques they may not often have the chance to in other settings which can improve the relevancy of youth programming (Abo-Zena & Pavalow, 2016). As stated by Schensul & Berg (2004), the rationale for youth led research is not a new one and it is now 25 years since Penuel & Freeman (1997) made the case that youth as researchers sits comfortably and complements youth programmes:

“The aim of participatory action research is also consistent with the goal of giving youth opportunities to practice responsibility. Indeed, it may be interpreted as calling for youth to be involved in the research process. Given that young people are a critical part of youth organizations- in fact, their very reason for being- why not include them in making decisions about both programme implementation *and* research and evaluation?” (p. 178)

Youth as Researchers, while a messier, less predictable process than many other forms of youth engagement, has some unique benefits for young people. Its bottom-up nature allows youth to take leadership roles in the research process. Also, because it is typically nested inside of community settings and mobilizing for change of some sort, it is both research and a form a civic engagement. So many of the same benefits that might occur from youth being involved in their communities are also true during their engagement as social researchers. Furthermore, and in a good way, this challenges and expands the notion of young people as individuals by nesting them within their environments. Thus, the approach not only has impact on individuals, but also on the

relationships youth have with family and school and the organizations which serve youth, and communities more broadly.

### ***Organizational and Community Benefits of Youth As Researchers***

Benefits to organizations or programmes of YAR, include an increase in the use of evaluation results, increased evaluation capacity for youth workers, (Lau et al., 2003) improvement in the accuracy of data collected (Gomez & Ryan, 2016), and a fostering of an environment for open dialogue between youth organizations and funders (Gildin, 2003) and in some cases with youth acting as ‘honest brokers. Organizations which serve youth benefit as they can hear more clearly the voices and opinions of the young people they are trying to serve (Ucar, Planas, Novella, & Moriche, 2017; Kennan & Dolan, 2017). Discussing methods and results from a youth led research project can provide the platform for increased dialogue between policymakers, organizational or programme workers and youth (Gildin, 2003). It can also alter the overall culture of an organization and embed an appreciation of evaluation into the organization itself (Lau et al., 2003) and increase organizational learning (Cooper, 2014).

However, YAR is far more than simply a way to engage youth and organizations which serve them. Many would argue that it is a method to help capture more accurate, valid data since it allows for the perspectives and interpretation of youth to drive the evaluation process (Powers & Tiffany, 2006; Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2004; Gomez & Ryan, 2016; Ucar et al., 2017). Youth can help evaluators ask the most relevant questions, perhaps those not even on programme documents because they are living the experience of being part of the programme. Additionally, youth can gather data from one another in ways that adults may not be able to give the inherent power and age disparity often present in youth-adult relationships (Gomez & Ryan, 2016).

Finally, YAR can benefit community more broadly. As youth become involved in an arena traditionally reserved for adults, adults may see their hard work and action and develop new respect for youth capabilities and agency (London et al., 2003; Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003; Powers & Tiffany, 2006; Ozer & Wright, 2012). When YAR results are shared in a community setting, youth can showcase their efforts and work to a wider audience and a real forum to have their voice heard. Also, as youth conduct evaluation they may reach out to adults (willing to engage and share) who have the skillset, experience, or knowledge that youth may need to be able to carry out aspects of the evaluation or research project. These adult-youth alliances can lead to bonds that can strengthen community interactions more broadly (Arnold, et al., 2008; Powers & Tiffany, 2006; Krischner et al., 2012).



Table 1: Summary of YAR Benefits

Context	YPAR Benefit	References
<b>Individuals</b>	Exploration of self-identity and integration of personal identity to larger social reality	Torre, 2009; Torre et al., 2008; Strobel et al., 2006; Tuck et al., 2008; Dutta, 2017; Abo-Zena & Pavalow, 2016
	Sociopolitical development	Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts et al., 1999; Watts et al., 2003; Bautista et al., 2013
	Academic and school achievement	Cabrera et al., 2014; Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Romero et al., 2009; Dolan, et al., 2015; Rogers et al., 2017
	Critical thinking	Foster-Fishman et al., 2010; Ozer, 2017; Kirshner et al., 2011
	Social and professional networks	Flores, 2008; Mitra 2005; London et al., 2003; Rubin & Jones, 2007; Dolan et al., 2015
	Self-expression, assertiveness, confidence	Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007; Wartenweiler & Mansukhani, 2016
<b>Youth-Youth Relationships</b>	Psychological safe space with other youth	Price & Mencke, 2013; Vaughan, 2014
	Changes in youth's peer group	Strobel et al., 2006
	Avenues for communication among youth with similar experiences	Quijada Cerecer et al., 2013
<b>Youth-Adult Relationships</b>	Being "taken seriously" by adults	Ozer & Wright, 2012; Livingstone et al., 2014
	Changes in adult perception of youth	Strobel et al., 2006; Ozer & Wright, 2012
	Collegial relationships between youth and adults	Ozer & Wright, 2012
<b>Organizations/Schools</b>	Strengthening of youth organizing efforts	Dolan et al., 2015; Powers & Allaman, 2012
	Increased data driven dialogue within organizations	Ozer & Wright, 2012
	Enhanced youth voice in organizational decision making	Chen et al., 2010; Zeldin et al., 2008; Shamrova & Cummings, 2017
<b>Community</b>	Increased space for novel social interaction among groups	Ozer & Wright, 2012; Tuck et al., 2008; Vaughan, 2014
	Stronger youth voice in community	Dolan et al., 2015; Bautista et al., 2013; Shamrova & Cummings, 2017
	Challenge to existing systems of privilege and power	Cammarota & Fine, 2008
	Increased youth involvement in community	Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007

Odera, E. (2019). *Examining The Impacts of Youth Participatory Evaluation Methods on A Youth Participatory Action Research Setting.*

### Section 3: Understanding the Methodology and Reliability/Validity of the Youth As Researchers Programme

#### Reliability and Validity

In a relatively short time, the YAR programme has made a significant impact, in terms of its youth advocacy, policy and practice influence, but also from an academic perspective, in respect of underpinning empirical research with outputs including postgraduate Master's degree and PhD doctoral studies as well as peer reviewed publications. In terms of establishing YAR as a robust research methodology, given that all postgraduate students who advanced YAR as part of postdoctoral studies, had their theses subjected to external examination coupled with all publications being processed through a rigorous independent peer review process, one can now assume that the methodology has full reliability and validity to the level of any similar research instrument in the applied social sciences.

Table 2 below illustrates the range of peer reviewed publications including Master's and PhD doctoral theses, peer reviewed journal papers and selected book chapters in relation to YAR.

Table 2 Suite of Publications on the Youth As Researchers Programme

Publication Title	Author(s)	Type
Self-Determination Theory, Empathy, and A Global Audience: Understanding the Personal Motivations of Youth As Researchers To Apply To The Program	Thorn, K.	PhD Dissertation
Examining The Impacts of Youth Participatory Evaluation Methods on A Youth Participatory Action Research Setting	Odera, E.	PhD Dissertation
Beyond Participation: No Research About Us Without Us.	Malcolm, J.	MS Thesis
Youth As Researchers: Program Design, deliver, and Evaluation.	Keenan, D.	PhD Dissertation
Activated Social Empathy for Child Welfare and Youth Development: A Case for Consideration'	Kenny, J	MA Thesis
(2017) 'Justifying children and young people's involvement in social research: Assessing harm and benefit'. <i>Social Studies-Irish Journal of Sociology</i> , 0 (0):1-18.	Kennan, D. & Dolan, P.	Peer reviewed journal article
(2017) 'Activated Social Empathy for Child Welfare and Youth Development: A Case for Consideration" In: <i>Routledge Handbook of Global Child Welfare</i> . London: Routledge	Dolan, P., Kenny, J. & Kennan, D.	Peer reviewed journal article
(2020) 'Working with Young People through the Arts, Music and Technology: Emancipating New Youth Civic Engagement' In: <i>Culture, Community, and Development</i> . UK: Routledge.	Dolan, P. Dolan, E. & Hesnan, J.	Peer reviewed journal article
(2021) Beyond Participation: A Case Study of Youth As Researchers and Community Development in North Philadelphia. <i>Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society</i> .	Malcolm, J. Brennan, M. Webster, N. & Dolan, P.	Peer reviewed journal article

Furthermore, to understand more fully the ‘fit and robustness’ of YAR as a methodology in its own right, various actors and experts provide support literature. Alkin (2004) has described the theoretical history of research and programme evaluation as a metaphorical tree with three branches. Within the trunk of the tree lies two key pillars of evaluation’s foundation- accountability and social inquiry. The three branches include values, methods, and use. Alkin’s delineation was chosen to illustrate these distinctions due to its thoroughness and simplicity.

The first branch on Alkin’s tree is the methods branch. These are scholars whose key contribution to the evaluation field have been through introducing new methods to use during evaluation or improving our understanding of existing methods. There have been debates and developments within this methodological branch over whether the right focus of evaluation should be on strong internal validity (confidence that results of a programme/study are true) or external validity (confidence that lessons learned from a programme/study can be true in other settings).

Campbell & Stanley (1966) first pushed this discussion by recognizing that for many settings, randomization of participation in a treatment group is simply not an option and called for quasi-experiments as a legitimate alternative for evaluation research. Some have pushed back and reasserted the importance of randomization at the treatment level to increase internal validity (Boruch, 1997; Boruch, Synder, & DeMoya, 2000). Others have pushed for a focus on external validity so that programmes and evaluation findings can be generalized to other settings rather than focusing too much on the internal precision of evaluation results (Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1999; Cronbach, 1982; Cronbach & Associates, 1980).

Two other methodological points have been common within the methods branch- the focus on the development of evaluation and programme theory as well as the focus on contextual elements in which evaluations take place. Scholars focused on the need for evaluation and programme theory have argued that by focusing on social science theory during evaluations, evaluation can contribute to wider social science knowledge (Suchman, 1967). This focus on theory can help us deepen our understanding of why some programmes lead to certain outcomes and others lead to other outcomes (Chen & Rossi, 1983; Chen & Rossi, 1987).

Theory-driven evaluation, therefore, moves evaluation beyond descriptive reports and into a substantial knowledge-building enterprise. Finally, focusing on the contextual elements in which research programme evaluation takes place is important since each evaluation takes place within a specific political environment which may or may not lead to immediate programme change, but may shift the contextual environment over time (Weiss, 1973). Relatedly, methods and data collection procedures should be tailored to the context in which the evaluation takes place, and multiple methods of data collection should be employed (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

The second branch on Alkin’s tree is one he calls “valuing.” These are scholars who pay special attention to whose value is represented in the evaluation process and how the process of casting value or judgment on a programme unfolds. Some see the role of an evaluator in an important moral light. For these, it is critical that an evaluator use his or her expertise and qualifications to pass explicit judgment on a programme (Scriven, 1983; Eisner, 1994). Others believe that stakeholders must be involved in deciding the value of a programme and that the evaluator cannot do this work alone. Stakeholder perspectives are important since knowledge is

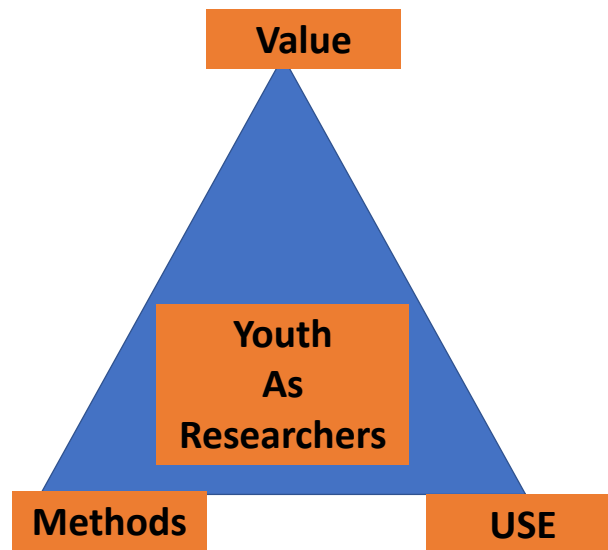
contextually dependent (Stake, 1975) and differs depending on the audience in question (MacDonald, 1979). According to this argument, without close involvement of stakeholders, true understanding of the programme would never occur (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The final branch of the evaluation theory tree is “use.” This branch holds scholars who have advanced techniques to enhance the use of evaluation findings. Some evaluation scholars focus on how to tailor evaluation procedures in ways to help improve management decisions to foster easy adaptation of findings to programme use (Stufflebeam, 1983; Provus, 1971; Wholey, 1983; Patton, 1997). Others have found evaluation can foster learning outcomes for people and organizations, which can increase appreciation for and use of evaluation results (Preskill & Torres, 2001; Cousins & Earl, 1995). Still others consider evaluation a chance to empower, engage, and equip organizations and stakeholders more broadly by involving them in discussing their own values (Alkin, 1991), through engagement in dialogue and reflective thought (King & Stevahn, 2013), and through conducting evaluations on their own (Fetterman, 2001; Cousins & Earl, 1995).

In all, these three branches of evaluation theories are either focused on very specific practice (theories of use), broad philosophical considerations (theories of value), or the meaning and measurement of knowledge (theories of methodology). In simplistic terms, these theories can be thought of as overly broad or overly specific. Yet, there is one developing theory of evaluation which is emerging as a mid-level theory, useful for empirical study, practice, and reflective knowledge-building. This developing theory is that of participatory evaluation.

When one then considers these three core components of 'Use, Value and Methodology' as supporting participatory research with by and for youth, a simple underpinning conceptual framework for YAR emerges. In the first instance by giving real and true authority to youth to be lead actors on research they are being afforded value; by supporting them with the skill set and quality assurance to complete their research they are being equipped in terms of methodology and while finally by supporting them with the conditions, opportunities, and financial/professional supports to be researchers they are being provided with use, all contained within the YAR programme. This underpinning triad for YAR is illustrated in Figure 1 below

**Figure 1: A YAR Value Use and Methodology**



**Adapted from Alkin 2004**

Realistically, given the nature of the programme and what is and what it is not as indicated at the outset of this paper, most of the evidence created by YAR projects relating to the effectiveness of their interventions will at best be evidence-informed and not evidence-based. To bridge the gap between these two forms of evidence, Veerman and Van Yperen (2007) present a model in which evidence generated from youth could be categorised on a 4-point scale, ranging from minimum level evidence to the higher-end RCT 'gold standard' level of evidence. They argue that it is not as simple as providing a 'Yes/No' approach to all YAR type interventions regarding their effectiveness. Instead, four different levels of evidence can be gathered and utilised. These are discussed briefly below. This helps to understand and frame the evidence generation capacity of YAR.

#### Level 1 – Descriptive evidence

This type of evidence would involve a clear description of the core elements of an intervention, such as the goals, activities, and target groups. The types of research that can generate this level of evidence range from analysis of documents to descriptive studies. When this descriptive evidence is generated, it can be very relevant to for example youthwork practitioners or for service design. Descriptive evidence can also provide information on the 'potential' effectiveness of interventions.

#### Level 2 – Theoretical evidence

Theoretical evidence provides a more sophisticated and higher level of research than purely descriptive evidence. With theoretical evidence, a sound theory is identified which underpins the intervention, as well as an identification of how and why this intervention will lead to specific outcomes. Reviews, meta-analyses and expert knowledge studies are the main types of research used in generating this level of evidence. Theoretical evidence provides a plausible explanation for the potential emerging research results.

### Level 3 – Indicative evidence

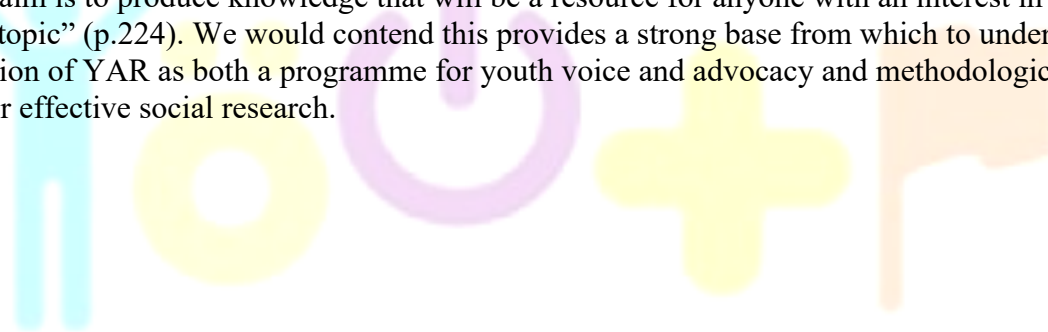
Indicative evidence refers to a situation where a systematic evaluation shows desired changes have occurred with the clients engaged with the intervention. The types of research that can generate this level of evidence range from client-based satisfaction studies and monitoring studies to more macro benchmark studies and quasi-experimental studies.

### Level 4 – Causal evidence

With causal evidence, it is possible to judge if a particular intervention is efficacious or not. The core question that this level of evidence can answer is whether the intervention itself has caused the outcome. An RCT or repeated case studies research approaches can reveal the elements of the intervention that are responsible for certain outcomes being achieved.

### **YAR as Scientific Inquiry**

Finally in terms of understanding the utility of YAR Hammersley's varieties of social research model typologies is particularly helpful (Hammersley, 2000). He highlights that in the context of social research such as the case of YAR the importance of differentiating between basic and applied research and scientific and practice research. He concludes by suggesting a move to understanding social research as needing to be relevant and usable through what he terms scientific inquiry and where where "the immediate audience is fellow researchers—though the ultimate aim is to produce knowledge that will be a resource for anyone with an interest in the relevant topic" (p.224). We would contend this provides a strong base from which to understand the function of YAR as both a programme for youth voice and advocacy and methodological model for effective social research.





## Section 4: Implementation of Youth As Researchers

Apart from validating YAR as a method of social inquiry in more practical terms understanding its mechanism and its actual implementation on the ground is key. Each year, the Youth as Researchers Programme in Ireland supports on average four youth led-research projects involving youth aged between 14-18. The research projects in Ireland are typically completed in collaboration with Ireland's largest youthwork NGO Foroige. Since joining as a partner in 2015, the UNESCO Chair in Community, Leadership and Youth Development in Penn State University supports similar youth-led research projects in the United States. In addition, other countries for example Vietnam and Myanmar have adopted and tailored the YAR programme. The focus of these research projects has been diverse. And as well as ensuring they are youth initiated and led, the topics must be ones that are of interest/concern to the youth involved. The research topics can range from social, human rights, educational and or health issues. Importantly, the chosen topic must be seen by participating young people as needing research and an area of concern to them. Thus far, YAR projects have been on a range of themes such as:

- Gender inequality
- Youth Homelessness
- Crime and Policing Relationships
- Youth protection in the community
- LGBTQI+
- Rural isolation
- Mental health and mindfulness
- Poverty
- Issues of disability discrimination
- Youth risk of offending and
- Climate justice

Like any research methodology and/or advocacy programme YAR is not without its limitations and has inherent challenges. The initial obstacle is to move from just adultism in listening to young people's views, to engaging with them in genuine policy dialogue. The extent to which the views of youth are successfully influencing policymaking is not always evident (Shier, 2014; Perry-Hazan, 2016; Horgan, 2017). Arguably, the YAR Programme model places youth in a better and more robust position to influence change and the programme is beginning to build an evidence base in this regard. Shier (2014, p.12) draws several conclusions regarding the optimum conditions required to ensure children and young people are best placed to influence public policy. He concludes that children and young people need to be "well-prepared, trained and organised". They also need the belief that they are capable of effecting change and have the drive and commitment to advocate for the desired change. The support of committed adults who "understand the importance of promoting autonomy rather than dependency and are careful to avoid manipulation" is equally important (Shier 2014, p.12).

Despite the 'merits of the model' being included, listened to and heard as youth actors in social research is an ongoing challenge for YAR and similar youth led initiatives. However, that said and to mitigate this concern, the programme is robust and offers youth training from professional

researchers to provide them with the required skill set to ultimately have their voice heard and their research 'actioned on'. Youth approach the programme seeking and receiving guaranteed research support. This is a clear indicator of their commitment to effect change and their belief that if provided with the requisite support and opportunity they can do so. To build this momentum, a core component of the training is on 'planning for change' with a focus on influencing and making a difference in the policy and practice context. We have found young participants on the programme eager to use their research to inform a set of recommended actions to influence change and to bring those recommendations to the attention of decision-makers with the power to action that change. Lastly, for youth to engage with the programme it is a prerequisite that they have the support of a committed adult or adults. In the youth-led-research projects completed in Ireland and the USA, this has been their youth worker in addition to an academic staff member from the research unit at the host University. In the more recent UNESCO projects, each research group is paired with a research coordinator.

YAR projects are resource intensive from both a human and monetary perspective. Youth-led research requires the presence of a professional researcher to provide research skills training and a supportive adult to provide ongoing guidance and facilitation in the implementation and dissemination phase. As noted elsewhere (Kellet, 2011; Shier, 2015) suggest these supports are critical components of any youth-led research initiative, and they are important considerations in sourcing funding to support youth-led research. The production of short videos, to maximise the dissemination of the research findings from the YAR Programme, adds significant cost.

It is noteworthy also that the issue of whether child and youth researchers should be remunerated is also debated (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015). The need to provide payment to youth researchers can arise when youth are asked to conduct the research on behalf of an organisation, rather than self-selecting to conduct research of their own volition on issues of importance to them. Similarly, all research tends to incur costs, even if minor (travel, phone/data card payments, incentives/gifts to community gatekeepers, etc.). Passing these along to youth researchers is unacceptable and should be accounted for in research planning and initiation.

### **Ethical Challenges**

The ethical complexities inherent in youth-led research are a very important consideration. The adult facilitators have an ethical responsibility to protect the youth from harm. When the youth are under 18, informed parental consent is required for the youth to lead the research, as well as obtaining informed rather than passive consent from the research participants and their parents. Ensuring confidentiality protocols are adhered to is also fundamental, particularly when the researcher and the researched are part of the same social network (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015). The use of anonymous questionnaires is a methodological approach preferred by many of the research teams the YAR Programme has worked with, as a means of safeguarding against some of these concerns. Importantly, a session on research ethics is a core component of the training and provides a space for the youth to engage with the trainer on the ethical issues and dilemmas arising in their research.

## **PART II – THE GLOBAL STUDY IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

### Section 5: History of the Global Study

#### **The Global Study in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak to be a “public health emergency of international concern,” reportedly the highest level of alarm from the international organization (World Health Organization, 2020). Since then, the management of the pandemic has been met with confusion, distrust, lack of motivation, increased levels of stress among other distressing outcomes (Franke & Elliott, 2021). As very frankly reported, “Young people are experiencing negative impacts in their social well-being (Saladino, et al., 2020), and are disproportionately impacted in the areas of employment and disruptions in education (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Social Inclusion, 2021). However, young people have also been called on as a source of tremendous potential within their communities to “(youth are critical to) limiting the virus’s spread and its impact on public health, society, and the economy at large.” (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Social Inclusion, 2021). Furthermore, youth voices are at the forefront of addressing systematic challenges exemplified from the pandemic (Women Deliver, 2021). Thus, it is imperative to support young people in this time of uncertainty.

In response to this emergency and recognising the value of the YAR Programme in bringing youth voice to the fore to inform policy and service provision responses, the Social and Human Sciences Division in UNESCO, in collaboration with the Irish UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement and the USA UNESCO Chair in Community, Leadership and Youth Development, adopted the Programme model to establish the UNESCO Youth as Researchers global initiative on COVID-19

This initiative was designed to connect and engage with youth, aged 18-35, globally on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth. Launched in October 2020, over 6,000 youth from more than 100 countries applied to be part of the programme. From the 300-youth selected to be part of the initiative, seven global teams, comprising youth from countries around the world, six regional research teams and several sub-regional and national teams were formed. Each team comprises on average five to ten members. Every team is mentored by a research coordinator and supported by the wider UNESCO Global Coordination Team and the UNESCO Youth as Researchers Ethics Committee.

The research skills training was adapted and delivered online in English and French. UNESCO assigned the youth to their teams, based on their research interests identified at the point of application and, for the regional, sub-regional and national teams, also based on their geographic location. Once the youth researchers completed the online training and met with their team, they selected a team research topic of their choosing. While the focus of the research must be on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth, the teams are examining this from a wide range of perspectives, including its impact from an education, human rights, well-being and civic engagement. Online communication enabled teams with geographically diverse memberships to plan and coordinate their research projects, underway at the time of writing. UNESCO is committed to publishing the research produced as a series of podcasts; policy briefs and research

reports to be widely circulated within the United Nations and among governments, academia and other actors, as well as their dissemination via social and mainstream media.

This study is centred around youth who answered a call to action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To understand this study population, it is important to understand the events that created the call to action and to understand what the call to action was. These events include the COVID-19 pandemic as it stood in the year 2020, as this was the time of data collection. Additionally, understanding the Youth as Researchers initiative is paramount to understanding the population of the study.

### **The Youth As Researchers COVID-19 Initiative**

In March 2020, a group of UNESCO Youth as Researchers (YAR) leaders began conversations around having a global YAR initiative centered around understanding the youth perspective of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world. Leaders in this conversation were based in the U.S., Ireland, France, South Africa, Thailand, and Viet Nam, see Appendix A for details on who was a part of the YAR leadership team. From this initial conversation, weekly meetings ensued, and the following steps were taken in creating this programme (see Table 3).

United Nations organizations, including UNESCO, operate in two of the six official languages of English and French, thus all YAR materials are presented in English and French. To ensure that the Feedback Survey used in this study was also available in French multiple steps were involved. During the creation of the survey questions themselves, individuals who served on the panel of experts consisted of French natives and those fluent in the language. Once the survey itself was created in English, it was then translated into French by a native speaker (from Haiti) and fluent non-native speaker (trained in the U.S. and Senegal). This final version of the French Feedback Survey was reviewed by a third expert who was a native speaker (from France). The final check to ensure that the survey was suitable to French speakers was conducted once the survey had been inputted into the survey system, Qualtrics and was reviewed a final time to ensure the transitions and ‘real-life’ view of the survey was appropriate in the second language.

Table 3. demonstrates the different steps that were involved in creating both the English and French versions of the Feedback Survey. These steps include early stage brainstorming amongst partners, and the initial scoping assessment that was administered to a broad youth population based on UNESCO contacts. Following this, the call for applicants was administered in the Summer of 2020, followed by an extensive amount of effort to ensure the programme was both fair and equitably distributed. The first wave of the global version of the YAR programme began in the Fall of 2020. While the second wave was being prepared, UNESCO contact remained with all applicants through the sharing of bi-weekly newsletters containing programmatic updates. In the Winter of 2020, the Feedback Survey used in this study was collected. More details on the populations of the scoping assessment, those who responded to the call for applicants, and the Feedback Survey can be found in the sample and population section of this chapter. The process of the development the programme is relevant to understanding more about the composition of the unique population that this study is comprised of.

## Results of the Global Survey

The emerging results of the global study will be organized and presented by UNESCO management within the UNESCO Social and Human Sciences sector in January 2022. Their plans tentatively include factsheets, policy briefs, a comprehensive monograph, and a conference in late January 2022.

Table 3: Youth as Researchers Programme Initiatives

### *Youth as Researchers Program Initiatives*

Topic	Time Period	Activity
Initial programmatic ideas	March 2020	Emails and virtual brainstorming discussions
Project approval from the Director General of UNESCO	Early May, 2020	This approval was needed to ensure support from the international organization
Scoping survey gathering data from youth to aid in creating the program to be tailored to a global audience specific to the COVID-19 pandemic	Late May – early June 2020	The scoping assessment was sent out through UNESCO and partner organizations gathering youth feedback on their concerns from the pandemic. In total 762 eligible individuals responded to this survey
Call for YAR applicants	June 28th – July 12th 2020	A call for applicants to the YAR COVID-19 program was sent out, see Appendix B Over 6,000 forms completed in response to the call After screening for appropriate criteria, there were 5,581 young people who applied from 91 countries to participate in the program
Applicants from Asia, Europe, and North America were organized into teams	September 2020 – Summer 2021	27 programs in 56 countries are currently under operation; these groups were mobilized quickly due to the response in leadership in those areas
Feedback Survey used in this research was administered	November – December 2020	The Feedback Survey used in this study was sent out through UNESCO to all YAR applicants, details are found in the data collection section.
Applicants from Latin American, the Caribbean, and Africa were organized into teams	December 2020 – Summer 2021	In total 35 programs in over 65 countries are currently under operation; these groups were mobilized in a second wave due to challenges in leadership coordination in those regions.
Additional opportunities are developed and provided to YAR applicants who were not selected	November 2020 – Summer 2021	Due to space, many YAR applicants were not selected to participate in the program. Therefore, it was important to program developers to identify and offer additional opportunities such as assisting in translations, enumerating, and joining new adjacent program teams such as <i>communications</i> .



## **PART III - RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Section 6: Understanding the Importance of Advocacy Research**

1. The engagement of youth as researchers should be expanded and included in a wide range of programme and policy formation. Youth have access to data and populations that adults may not. They also may be aware of the nuances of social problems and opportunities that other might not, due to their proximity to these conditions.

### **Section 7: Specific Recommendations for UNESCO and other NGOS to Guide their Use of Youth As Researchers**

#### **Recommendations FOR Utilising the Youth As Researchers Method**

1. Organisations should first understand what they want to accomplish with YAR. Do they want a research project or a youth development programme?
2. Organisations should carefully consider what their data needs are. They should determine the scope, generalizability, rigor (randomized control trials or other frameworks), and be clear on the intended use of YAR and related data. Is the research to inform and offer insight for policy or do the organisations want complex scientific data needed for global programming/policy?
3. Organisations using YAR must ensure that youth have full autonomy in designing, conducting, and reporting on the findings of their research.
4. YAR can be used in a global context, as shown with the UNESCO YAR COVID-19 initiative. That said, we have found that training cohorts at the local community level or regional level within a specific country, can have the best results. These settings allow for increased interaction among youth cohorts and enhances the ability to apply the YAR findings locally through various practice and outreach settings.

#### **Recommendations IN Utilising the Youth As Researchers Method**

1. YAR is a positive youth development programme that includes a youth led research component. It is easy for the research to take centre state. Organisations utilizing YAR need to constantly remain cognizant that this is not a research agenda. It is a youth development programme.



## **Recommendations From Utilising the Youth As Researchers Method**

1. The programme is severely limited when youth ownership and voice are hindered. The programme is youth driven. Efforts by adults to determine the research topic, micromanage, and in general dictate the research process is counterproductive and will likely lead to the failure of the initiative.
2. When given the opportunity for youth to own the research process, research and practice evidence indicates significant growth and positive youth development. These are particularly strong in the areas of critical thinking, empathy, informed decision making, strategic thinking, and other positive development outcomes.



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## APPENDIX A

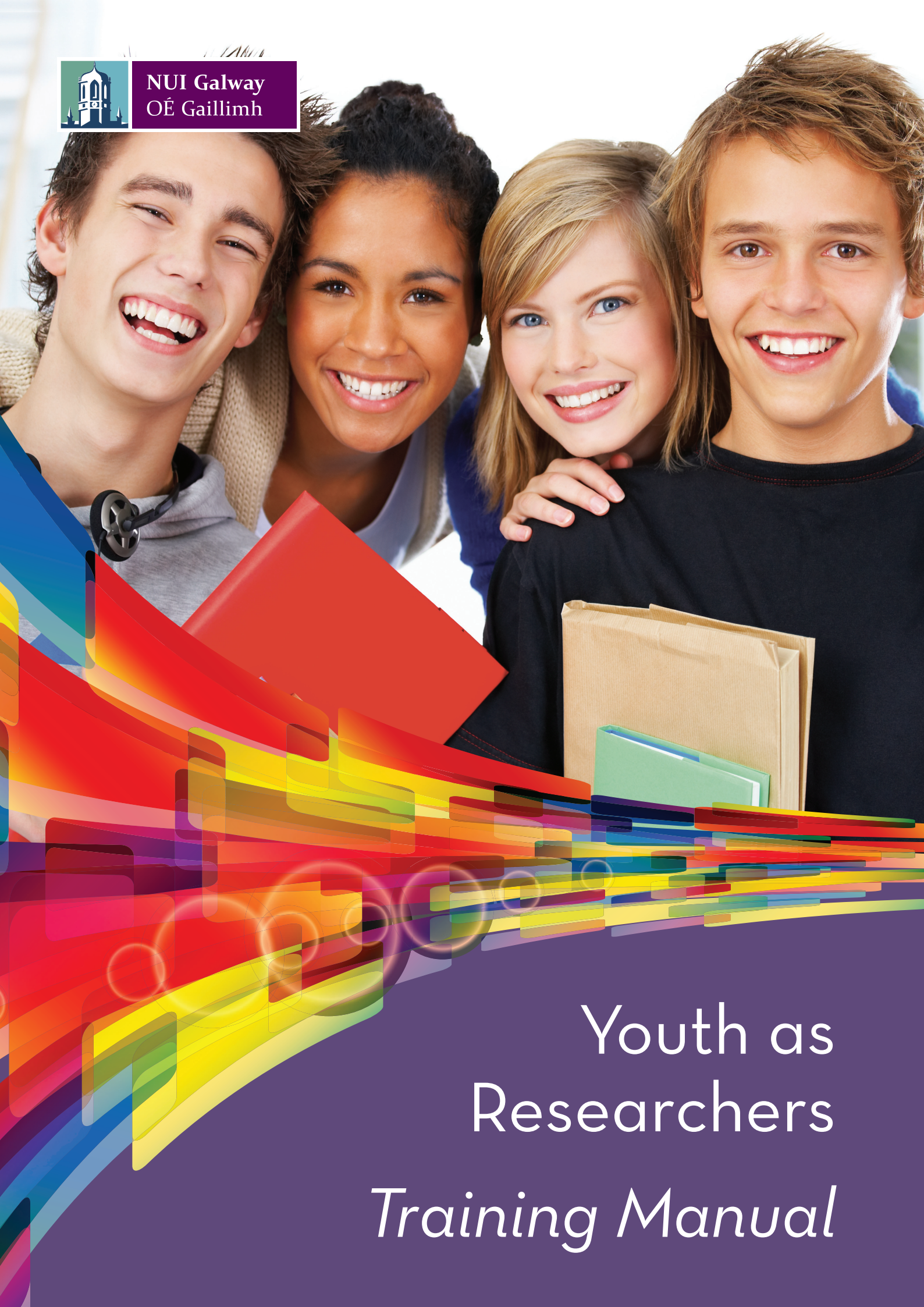
### Youth As Researchers Programme Handbook







NUI Galway  
OÉ Gaillimh



Youth as  
Researchers  
*Training Manual*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Youth as Researchers Training Manual and accompanying workbook have been adapted from the National Youth Agency (NYA) Young Researcher Network Toolkit. It was also informed by the Foróige (2013) Leadership for Life Programme Workbook, the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology (2012) Making Sense of Social Research: Programme Manual and Kellet (2005) How to Develop Children as Researchers, London: Sage Publications.

The NYA Toolkit is available at:

[http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/820654/young\\_researcher\\_network\\_toolkit\\_dec\\_2010.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/820654/young_researcher_network_toolkit_dec_2010.pdf)

### **What is the Youth as Researchers Training Manual and accompanying Workbook?**

The training manual and workbook were developed by a team of researchers and youth researchers at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre in the Institute for Lifecourse and Society under the guidance of Professor Pat Dolan. The team comprised Maria Campbell, Danielle Kennan, Chloe Greene, Ailish Gowran and Keith Egan. The manual provides a step-by-step guide to carrying out a research project and the workbook is designed to complement the training by suggesting practical tasks to support the research process. The manual draws on examples of research previously undertaken by students of the Foróige Leadership for Life Programme. This youth programme is accredited by National University of Ireland, Galway under the academic directorship of Professor Pat Dolan and is delivered by the youth organisation Foróige in projects and clubs nationally. Module 2 of the programme requires the students to work on a team research project investigating local, community or global issues.

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## FOREWORD

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As patron of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this Youth as Researchers Training Manual. Providing support and training to youth researchers is part of the Centre's broader agenda to promote positive youth development and to empower youth to actively engage in the communities and wider civic society to which they belong.

Ensuring the voice of young people is present in matters directly affecting them is an issue close to my heart. Research driven by youth can build their capacity and enable them to add their voices and influence change on issues that matter to them.

This training manual is designed to support youth researchers to undertake an ethical and scientifically grounded social research project and to encourage youth to use their research as a tool to advocate for change.

I wish all users of this manual well with their research projects!



Cillian Murphy

Actor and Patron of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre



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## INTRODUCTION

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Research is a process by which we ‘find out’ about something. You have probably been involved in research at some point. In school you might have been asked by a teacher to look up facts about the history of your local community or to fill out a survey for classmates who are trying to set up a mini-company as part of their enterprise education in Transition Year. TV news reports and newspapers are always filled with articles that include things like ‘new research has shown that...’

The great thing about carrying out your own research is that you can ‘find out’ about something that affects young people or a problem in your community that needs to be addressed. Your research can then be used to influence change in an area or to address a particular issue. However, in order for our research to be valuable we must ensure that it follows a certain set of rules. This manual and accompanying workbook will offer a step-by-step guide to carrying out a research project that adheres to good research standards. In the end, you will have produced a valuable source of information on issues that affect your life and your community.


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## (1) DECIDING ON A RESEARCH TOPIC

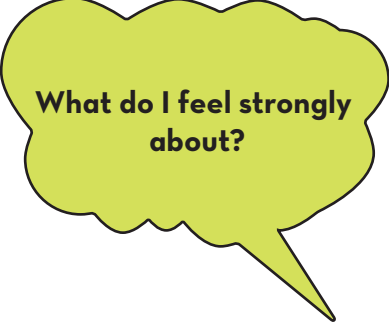
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### What am I going to research?


#### Step 1: Chose an idea




What am I interested in?



What do I feel strongly about?




What am I curious about?




What would I like to change?

- Brainstorm ideas;
- Consider interests that you, or if you are working as part of a team your fellow researchers share, such as common hobbies, living in the same area etc.;
- Think about things that affect your lives, such as lack of facilities, relationships with your friends, parents, siblings etc.


#### Step 2: Narrow the topic by asking questions



What are the different parts of this topic?



What aspects of this topic especially interest me?



Where and how could I find out about this?

Adapted from Kellet (2005) How to Develop Children as Researchers. London: Sage.

## Youth as Researchers Training Manual

At this early stage you don't need to be too specific; that will come later. For now just try and come up with a 'big idea' for your research. Here are some topics that have previously been covered by the students of the Foróige Leadership for Life Programme. This will give you an idea of where to start:

Homelessness	Obesity	Politics	World Hunger
Nutrition	Mental Health	Drugs/ Alcohol	Recession
Education System	Global Warming	Peer Pressure	Sex Education
Voting Age	Eating Disorders	Happiness	HIV/ AIDS
Bullying	Disability	Gay Marriage	Older People
Self Esteem	Internet Benefits/ Drawbacks	Asylum Seekers	Animal Welfare

### Do

Choose a topic that you have an **interest in** and that is **relevant** to you and/or your research team. Remember this is your chance to have a voice on issues that affect your life!

### Don't

**Don't start off with anything too specific.** Keep your early stages of research broad so that you can narrow in on an aspect of your 'big idea' later on in the process.

### EXAMPLE:

Alice comes from a town in county Mayo that is home to a large population of asylum seekers, especially young people around her age who are housed in a Direct Provision Centre on the outskirts of the town. Despite this large population of young asylum seekers living in the town, Alice noticed that she very rarely saw any of these young people outside of school. They did not seem to be involved in community activities. She explained this to her research team and they all agreed that it was something they would like to research.

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## (2) FINDING OUT ABOUT THE TOPIC

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### What information is already out there?

In this next stage you will find out information that is already available on your 'big idea'. This will allow you to narrow down your topic to a more specific area by identifying gaps or problems that need to be addressed. It will also ensure that you are not carrying out research that has already been done. In research language this is called carrying out a *literature review*.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This means finding out what information and research is already out there about the topic you have chosen.

Three things to remember when carrying out your Literature Review:

### Find it → Judge it → Record it

#### Find it:

- The Internet is always a good place to start but make sure to look at other sources as well, such as books or articles.
- Try your local library for these books or old newspaper articles. A librarian might be able to guide you in the right direction.

#### Judge it:

- You will probably be able to find loads of information on your topic pretty quickly. However, not all the information you will find will be useful to you. Make sure to ask yourself a few questions about the information. The guide below is a useful checklist for judging your sources.



- **Think about who has written the information:**
  - » Are they an expert? What makes them an expert?  
(For example: has the author good qualifications / experience? Is it a university or government published document? Is it in a well-known and respected website or newspaper?)
  - » What is their opinion? Are they writing a neutral report or trying to convince people that their opinion is correct.
  
- **Check the facts:**
  - » Where have the facts come from?
  - » Can you check they are accurate?  
(If the facts come from a reliable source, for example, it is written by an expert, it is a university or government published document, it is in a well-known and respected newspaper then you can generally assume the facts are accurate. (See also the section on websites below).
  - » When was it written - are the facts out of date?
  
- **Think about who runs a website:**
  - » An online encyclopedia like Wikipedia can be a great starting point, but the information is created by a variety of users and should be checked with a different source too.
  - » A charity may have reports and information on their website and it is in their interest that the information is accurate, up-to-date and professionally presented.
  
- **Don't just copy big sections from websites or reports:**
  - » Pick the sections you need carefully.
  - » As much as possible, summarise the information in your own words.
  - » You should say where you found the information.  
(If it is a website, name the owner of the website, the address and the date you accessed it. If a report, book or newspaper article, give the author, title and date it was published).



Adapted from the Foróige (2013) Leadership for Life Programme Workbook Module 2.

- Most importantly, you must ask yourself **‘is it relevant to my topic?’** This can be the hardest step, as you will have lots of information that might be interesting but not necessarily related to your research. For example, if you are researching crime rates in Donegal and the report focuses on Dublin it won't be useful for your research.
- Use a highlighter to go through all your information and pick out important points you want to discuss with your group.

### Record it:

- Once you have found your information it is important to organise it in a way you can find easily later on.
- A good tip is to write up an index card for each source, which includes:

**Type of Source:** Internet, book, newspaper article, interview etc.

**Author's Name:**

**Year of Publication:**

**Title:**

**Brief Summary:** A couple of sentences to sum up what the source tells us.

**Key Pages:** Page numbers for quotes, interesting points, etc.

### Do

When working as a group it is important that you don't end up reading the same things. It is a good idea to **divide up into sub-groups** and each take a different aspect of the project to research.

### Don't

**Don't forget to keep a record** of where you found your information. You don't want to spend valuable time later on going through all your research trying to find a specific statistic.

### EXAMPLE:

Alice and her research team divided into smaller sub-groups to carry out their literature review.

- The first group researched asylum seekers in Ireland. They gathered information from websites such as the Refugee Council of Ireland, a locally established project SOLAS (Support, Orientation and Learning for Asylum seekers) and from government reports.
- The second group concentrated their research on asylum seekers specifically in their local area. They found newspaper articles on the issue with the help of their local librarian.

Each group wrote up an index card on each of the sources they used. Then they came together and used all the information they had gathered to narrow the focus of their 'big idea' and decide what their project was going to do.

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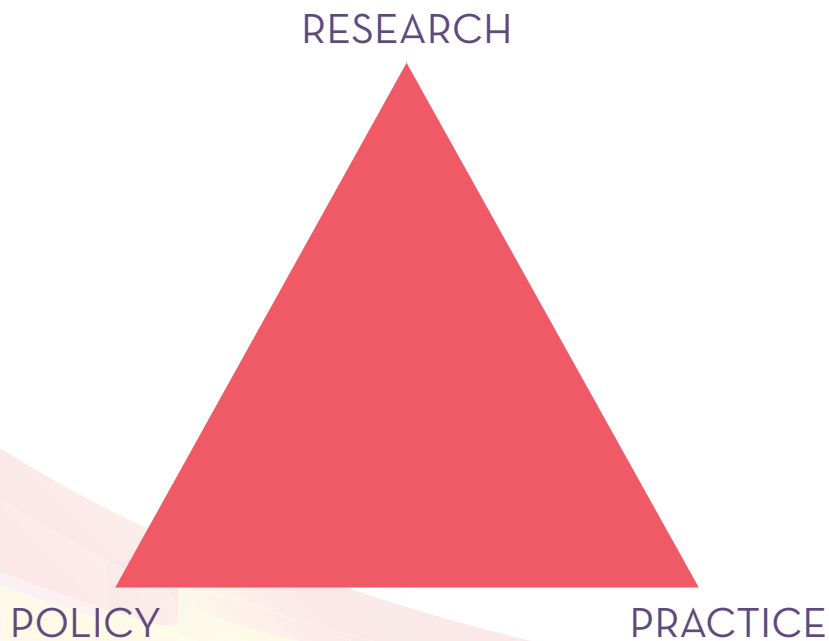
### (3) PLAN FOR CHANGE

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#### What will our research do?

Your research is an important tool. It can be used to influence change in an area or to address a particular issue. It is important to always keep this in mind.

Take a look at this triangle, which is a reminder of the relationship between research, policy and practice:



**Research:** A way of gathering evidence that can be used to support changes to policy and practice.

**Policy:** A plan or course of action, which is taken by governments or other organisations to determine their decisions and actions.

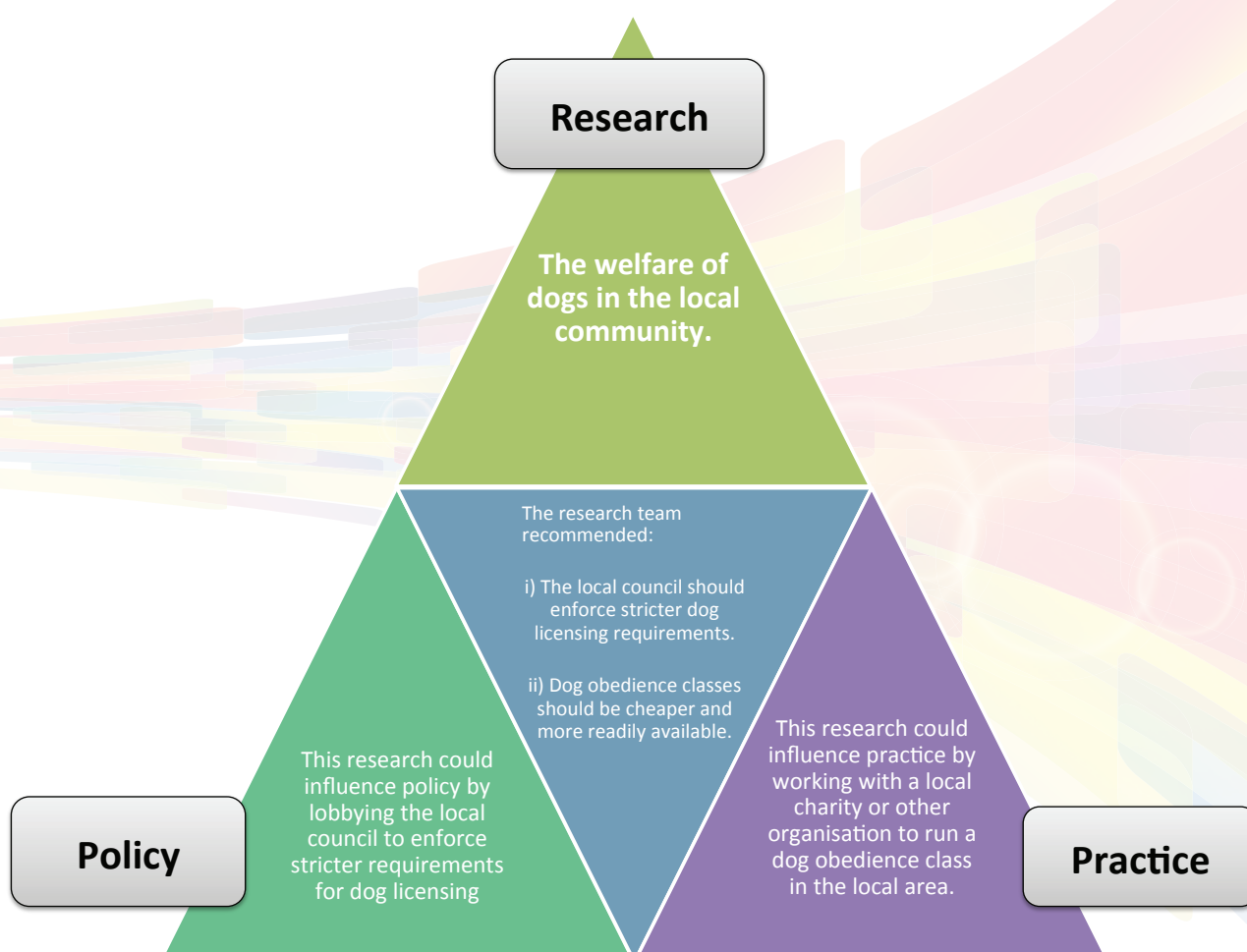
**Practice:** How we actually do something.

In order for your research to influence change, it is important to know whom your research should target. For example, if you want to influence national policy change you need your research to target local members of government or members of the local county council. On the other hand if you want to influence practice you want your research to target organisations working in the area, such as charities.

Ask yourself:

- What do you want to change, and why?
- Do you want to influence change in policy, practice or both?

Take a look at this example. It comes from a research project completed as part of the Foróige Leadership for Life Programme in 2013. It illustrates how the research could have been developed into an action project to influence policy and practice.



Do	Don't
Keep an <b>action project</b> in mind. Your research portfolio could only be the beginning.	<b>Don't underestimate your capability.</b> Your project has the ability to make a real change, so think big!!

EXAMPLE:

Alice and her group planned to find out why young asylum seekers were not more involved in the local community. By examining the reasons that prevented them from being more involved, the group hoped to be able to influence both policy and practice.

- Their research could influence policy by highlighting ways in which the government could improve policies to promote the integration of young asylum seekers.
- 
- Their research could influence practice by making recommendations on how programmes run in the community could include young asylum seekers.



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## (4) WRITING A RESEARCH QUESTION

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### What are we trying to find out?

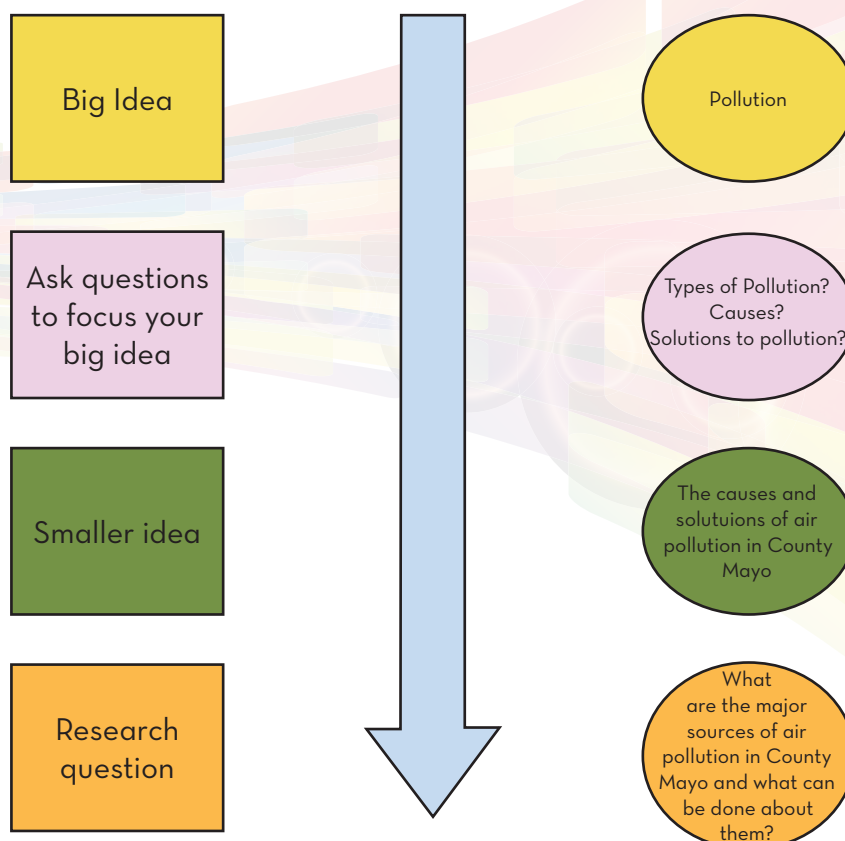
A research question is another way of framing what is the aim of your research.

#### A research question will help:

- **Narrow your focus and define the limits of your research:** Instead of asking ‘what do young people want?’ ask ‘what afterschool facilities do young people want in North Dublin?’
- **Manage time:** Is it possible to research all this in your timeframe? Maybe you should narrow the focus. You could do this by adding an age bracket to your research. For example, ‘what afterschool facilities do young people aged 12-15 want in North Dublin?’
- **Remain Motivated:** You can use your research question to make sure you don’t get sidetracked with information that isn’t useful to your research.

#### Framing a research question

Framing a research question means going from a ‘big idea’ to a smaller, more focused question that you can answer by doing a research project.



<b>Do</b>	<b>Don't</b>
<p><b>Answer</b> this question.... <i>After reading my research project, the reader should know....</i></p>	<p><b>Don't leave your research question vague.</b> Make sure you are as specific as possible so that your research is focused and manageable in the timeframe</p>

EXAMPLE:

Alice and her research team brainstorm to decide what they want their research question to be. They decide on two questions:

1. What are the major barriers in their town for young asylum seekers to be more involved in the local community?
2. What can be done to break these barriers down?

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## (5) RESEARCH DESIGN

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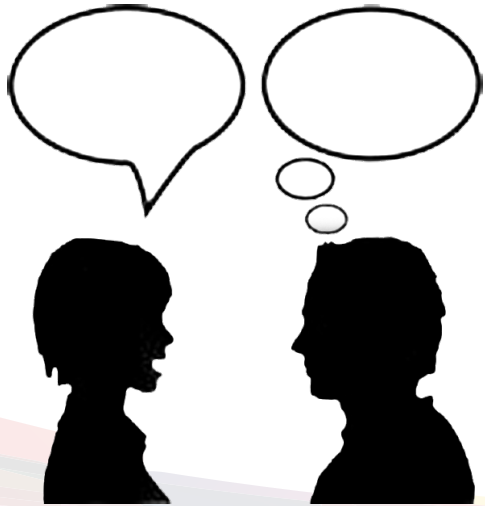
### How will I answer the research question?

There are many different types of research and it will be up to you to decide what research methods will best answer your research question. Some of the main types of research and methods are described below.

### DATA

This means any information you gather as part of your research.

Primary	Secondary
Primary research involves collection of data that does not already exist. Data can be collected by: • <b>Questionnaires</b> • <b>Interviews</b> • <b>Focus Groups</b> • <b>Observation</b>	Secondary research involves analysing existing data i.e. information that exists already, such as that collected by the national census office.
<b>For example, if you were assessing the transport needs of older people in your area:</b>	
Conducting primary research could involve interviewing members of the active retirement group in your local community to find out how many times a week they go into town and what mode of transport they use.	Conducting secondary research could involve summarising a report that the local council produced on the transport needs of older people living in rural communities.

Quantitative	Qualitative
<p>Quantitative research is used to <b>measure</b> how <b>many</b> people feel, think or act in a particular way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It answers questions that begin with “how many” or “how much”.</li> <li>• It allows the researcher to gather the views of a large number of people (aim for at least 20).</li> <li>• Common methods include telephone interviews and closed-question surveys.</li> </ul> 	<p>Qualitative research is used to provide the researcher with <b>in-depth understanding</b> of an issue and the reasons behind it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It answers questions that begin with “why” or “how” something happens.</li> <li>• It involves a small number of people (minimum three).</li> <li>• Common methods include face-to-face interviews, group discussions (focus groups) and open-question surveys.</li> </ul> 
<p><b>For example, if you were doing research on the local youth club?</b></p>	
<p>Carrying out quantitative research using a questionnaire could help you to establish that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are 15 females and 7 males attending the club.</li> <li>• 12 are transition year students.</li> <li>• 18 thought that the facilities at the club are excellent.</li> </ul>	<p>Carrying out qualitative research may involve conducting in-depth interviews with the young people in the club to understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reasons they joined the club.</li> <li>• Why they thought the facilities at the club were excellent.</li> <li>• What the club could do to attract more young people.</li> </ul>

Using questions that have a limited number of answers for people to select from (closed questions) can make it easier to compare results.

Using open questions means that people can answer however they choose. This may make it harder to compare results, but allows for more freedom and variety in the answers. These types of questions are better for interviews.

### **Closed Questions (best for questionnaires)**

Do you exercise regularly? (Select one)

 Yes Sometimes No

What qualities do you think are important for leadership? (Tick all that apply)

 A good listener Patient A loud voice Bossy Good communicator

### **Open Questions (best for interviews)**

What exercise do you do?

What qualities do you think are important for leadership?

Adapted from the Foróige (2013) Leadership for Life Programme Workbook Module 2.

Do	Don't
Give plenty of <b>notice</b> when requesting an interview with someone. Be as <b>flexible</b> as possible.	<b>Don't limit your research to only one source.</b> While the internet might be the easiest option, make sure to look for newspaper articles, official reports, and books as well. You can also gather some of your own information through interviews or questionnaires.

EXAMPLE:

In order to answer their research question, Alice and her research team have decided to conduct different types of research.

They will:

- Gather information from a report produced by the Irish Refugee Council and the Government Working Group on Direct Provision (Literature Review).
- Conduct an interview with a staff member from the local youth club (Qualitative).
- Invite young asylum seekers to answer an anonymous closed questionnaire about their involvement in community activities (Quantitative).



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## (6) RESEARCH ETHICS

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**How will I ensure the research won't cause any harm to other people?**

### **RESEARCH ETHICS:**

These are the correct rules of conduct to follow when carrying out your research. Following these guidelines ensures that we uphold our moral responsibility to protect research participants.

In order to ensure your research has no adverse effects (causes any harm) to those who participate, you must consider the ethical issues involved.

Avoid situations such as these:

- A research topic that is particularly sensitive or personal, such as interviewing someone about bullying who may have been bullied in the past. This could cause them to get upset
- Collecting data from research participants who may be vulnerable or 'at risk', for example people who are homeless or suffer from addiction or mental health issues. You as the researcher may not be equipped to deal with issues that arise during your interactions with such research participants. For example, a young person might disclose that they are self-harming, and you as the interviewer do not know what to say or do.

## Framework for ethical research



Think about how your project might affect those involved.

Know how to keep yourself and others safe.

Provide clear and honest information about the research to all participants.

Get permission from participants.

Respect other people's privacy.

Keep things confidential. You may need to use made-up names in your report.

Protect your data.

### EXAMPLE:

Alice and her research team are aware that they are dealing with a topic that is potentially sensitive. In order to ensure that their research follows the correct ethical codes of conduct they spend time talking about how the project might affect those involved. They agree to ensure that:

- All the research participants are fully informed about what the research team are researching, why they are undertaking the research, what is involved in partaking in the research, what they will do with the findings and how they will protect individuals' anonymity etc.
- They are discreet with the data collected and keep it in a safe place where only those in the research group can access it.
- They do not share the identity of the youth club staff member in the write-up of their report.
- They won't ask personal questions that are not necessary for their research.

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## (7) REPORT YOUR RESEARCH FINDINGS

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### How will I report the research?

#### Analysing your Results

When analysing data (from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups etc.), you must look back at your research question i.e., the reason you undertook the research in the first place. This will help you to organise and categorise your data and it will help you to focus on answering the question.

#### Basic analysis of quantitative information

(Responses to closed-question questionnaires)

1. Organise the information, i.e., add up the number of 'yes' responses, 'no' responses for each question etc.
2. Once you have completed your calculations you can create a table in excel to show the responses.



#### Basic analysis of qualitative information

(Responses in interviews, focus groups or open-questions in a questionnaire)

1. Read through all the data.
2. Organise similar answers or comments into themes, e.g., concerns, strengths, weaknesses, similar experiences, suggestions for change etc.
3. Label the themes and write up the findings under each theme.
4. Identify any patterns in the themes, e.g., most people were aware of..., some of the people had concerns about...etc.

#### Interpreting the data you have collected

1. Put the information in perspective, e.g., compare what you found to what you expected or to previous research in the area.
2. Consider recommendations to help improve the situation.
3. Record conclusions and recommendations.

## Writing up your research

### Include the Following:

**Aim:** What you hoped to achieve (research question).

**Introduction:** Background to the project.

**Methods:** How you went about looking into the issue e.g. interviews, internet search, focus group etc.

**Results/Findings:** What you found out.

**Conclusion:** What conclusions you came to.

**Recommendations:** Key recommendations to solve the problem. These should be creative and practical.

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### To write-up your findings in an interesting way, think about using:

- pictures or images
- diagrams or bar charts
- and quotations  
“there isn’t enough to do in the evening” (Girl, 16)



### EXAMPLE

Alice and her research team gather all their information. From the responses they received during the interview and the completed questionnaires, they identify three major barriers to the involvement of young asylum seekers in the community. They organise all the data under each barrier identified. They write up their findings and produce a report. In their recommendation, they include five recommendations that the Government, the local community and organisations can take to overcome these barriers. Having no transport was identified as a major barrier for the young asylum seekers to become involved in community activities. One of the recommendations was to develop a carpool system to provide a mode of transport for the young asylum seekers to travel to the local youth club.

#### Do

**Organise** your research in a clear and concise way. Use photographs, images or diagrams to present your findings in an interesting way and if you carried out primary research include some quotations. Use bullet points to make your recommendations clear.

#### Don't

**Don't forget your research question.**  
The write up should be directed towards answering this question.



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## (8) DISSEMINATION

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### How will I share the research?


Now that all the work is done it's time to put your energy into getting the message out. Telling the right people about your research means that it may be used as evidence as part of a larger campaign to implement change.

#### **DISSEMINATION:**

Developing the key messages from your research and ensuring that it is shared with people who can bring about change.



**BE CLEAR ABOUT THE  
MAIN MESSAGE OF YOUR  
RESEARCH.**



**HAVE A LIST OF  
PEOPLE WHO YOU  
WANT TO 'TARGET' TO  
SHARE YOUR RESEARCH  
WITH.**

#### **Ideas for dissemination**

- Send your research report to local members of government, county councils, charities, schools or anyone who might be interested. Make sure to include a personalised letter highlighting the key message of your research to ensure that they read it.
- Put it on a website.
- Hold a public launch event.
- Contact the local press.
- Share information on the research in existing newsletters.

Do	Don't
<p><b>Pay attention to dissemination.</b> This is the most important step in ensuring that your research impacts the issue it is addressing.</p>	<p><b>Don't simply send copies of your research to a lot of different sources.</b> Make sure to think about ways to make it <b>accessible</b> to the person who is reading it. This could be with an accompanying letter, a YouTube video or a colourful leaflet.</p>

EXAMPLE:

After they have completed their research project, Alice and her team hold a launch night. They invite key people such as a local Government representative, representatives from community groups and members of the community. At the event they present the key message of their research and encourage everyone in the community to join in the carpool system in order to ensure that the young asylum seekers can attend community activities.