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Book chapter :

Miles, G. (2003). *Ethical Issues of `Listening to Children.*

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– Questions to Consider –

- 1 Child participation is often described as a political expedient in the same way as integrating children with special needs into the mainstream. How can you make participation an integral part of your practice, rather than a token gesture?
- 2 Describe how you have applied the principles of participation in practice, both at a policy and programme level. What are some of the benefits and pitfalls?
- 3 How may you have to change your perceptions and practice to make participation an overarching principle of your organization, rather than an option?

– CHAPTER 12 –

The Purpose of Advocacy for and with Children

Glenn Miles

The biblical basis for advocacy

ADVOCACY is sometimes seen as too political for Christians to be involved in, but it is important to see that the Bible is an advocate for advocacy!

Advocacy means standing up for others – often at our own expense. It is based on the fact that people have inherent worth in God and that God is just and righteous. Children, like all human beings, are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27; Ps. 139:13–14) and have a unique relationship with God. This relationship is defined in terms of responsibility. Each person is not only unique with a sense of responsibility towards God (vertical), but each person also has a responsibility towards others (horizontal), who are equally unique. Chris Wright (1995) concludes that, 'A Christian understanding of 'human rights' is therefore different from the secular because [the secular] omits this divine dimension.'

There is no term in the Bible that corresponds exactly to the English 'advocate'. The word *paracletos*, which John uses to describe Jesus (once) and the Holy Spirit

(four times), comes very close. When referring to the Holy Spirit, it is translated 'counsellor' in the New International Version. Other possible translations of *paracletos* are 'helper', 'advocate', 'comforter' and even 'paraclete'. In the first letter of John, the word refers to Jesus and is translated as 'one who speaks . . . in our defence' (1 John 2:1).

The picture here is of Jesus' disciples making every effort not to sin but, when they do fall, Jesus is there to plead on their behalf. He is able to do this because, through his sacrificial death, Jesus has turned the righteous wrath of God away from us (1 John 2:2). He was prepared to stand between us and disaster, even though it cost him his life. Having risen from the dead, he continues to plead our cause constantly and consistently (cf. Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34).

As our advocate, the Holy Spirit encourages and helps us from within. He is an empowerer (John 14:16) who also leads us into truth (John 14:26). He is particularly present when Jesus' followers face persecution, which often results from speaking the truth in the power of the Spirit (John 15:26).

The Holy Spirit also convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:7–11). In this context, the Spirit is an advocate in the sense of substantiating (proving) charges against the guilty. In other words, Jesus is saying that when the Spirit comes, what his followers say about sin, righteousness and judgement will have an impact on those who hear their words. This truth may incense them and lead to persecution, or it may cause them to accept the truth and change their ways.

Divine advocacy flows in two directions: from people towards God and from God towards people. The flow from people towards God takes place through intercessory prayer; the flow the other way is prophetic. As advocacy is shown to be a characteristic of God, it must also be a characteristic of God's children. Jesus stands up for the weak and the Holy Spirit empowers the weak. Jesus' followers are called to proclaim justice to the nations, in the prophetic tradition. They must take their stand with the Almighty in defence of the fatherless, widows and strangers (Deut. 10:17–18; 24:17–21; Pss. 10:18; 68:5; 146:7; Prov. 23:10–11; Isa. 1:17; 10:1–2; Jer. 5:28).

Rights

Children have an inherent sense of whether something is 'right' and 'fair'. C.S. Lewis suggests that behind the use of the word 'right' is a tacit acknowledgement of some external standard or norm. As Christians, we believe that this standard is God's righteousness and justice (Isa. 5:16).

'Rights' are not about one person's obligation to act towards another in a certain way because they deserve it or are owed it. Rather, 'rights' are about acting towards one another as God demands. Responsibility for orphans is, therefore, primarily a responsibility to God (Exod. 22:22; Jas. 1:27). In the Old Testament, such acts of charity were enshrined in law. In the New Testament, Jesus underlines the Old Testament principle that the positive face of obligation is love. The greatest commandments are that we should love God with all our being and that we should love our neighbour as ourselves.

Human rights are not something to be demanded, but something to be given and conferred on others – by active obedience to God, as modelled by Jesus.

Involving parents

It is an inappropriate use of power to withhold information from parents that would help them make decisions. Where possible, parents must be given the freedom to choose a course of action that they believe to be in the best interest of the child and family. If everyone has equal 'rights' to life, this does not mean that parents' 'rights' are superior to children's rights. Once again, responsibility and accountability to God for our actions are key.

Involving children

It is also an inappropriate use of power to withhold information from children that would help them make good decisions. Children need to be able to make decisions that are appropriate to their age and ability.

Scripture encourages youth to have an impact on their communities by maintaining personal purity and by obeying God's word (Ps. 119:9). They are also to be exemplary in their speech, life, love, faith and purity (1 Tim. 4:12), to pursue godly virtues (2 Tim. 2:22) and to be self-controlled (Titus 2:6).

The story of Samuel gives a picture of God speaking directly to a child and, through the child, to his people (1 Sam. 3). God gave Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (young men in their teenage years) 'knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds' (Dan. 1:3-17). As a result, they were able to speak out as adults against King Nebuchadnezzar – even under extreme persecution.

Case study: Eradicate Sexual Child Abuse and Prostitution Everywhere (ESCAPE) Sri Lanka

ESCAPE was set up by the Lanka Evangelical Alliance Development Service (LEADS), in response to concern among Christians about sexual exploitation of boys on the beaches. ESCAPE now has a broad-reaching programme involved in rehabilitation, prevention (through education of children and families) and advocacy towards legal reform. ESCAPE believes that knowledge can help to empower children, families and communities. Education is in itself a form of advocacy when it means that children and parents can begin to believe that change is possible and that sexual exploitation of children (prostitution) is neither inevitable nor the only option.

ESCAPE originally used the media to advocate on this issue. For example, short advertisements and documentaries on television have been used to inform children and parents of the problem and to educate them how to prevent it. Newspapers have also been used, in a non-sensational way, to encourage practical public support.

It was considered important to get the church involved in the issues so that they could vol-

unteer to help, pray and be aware of the dangers even within the church community. Training was therefore arranged for pastors, volunteers and youth leaders.

The team has assisted the government in setting up a police vice squad to investigate cases of abuse, and workers have also assisted in training the wider police force. Education becomes advocacy when the police change their attitudes – no longer seeing children as criminals, but seeing them as victims instead. Taking a very low profile, ESCAPE has been involved in a number of prosecutions of perpetrators and pimps. Although this action could compromise the safety of people within the organization, it is seen as a calculated risk.

The attitudes of children and their teachers have also changed as a programme of training teachers in child protection and sex education has been introduced to schools in high-risk areas. A video was produced to show in schools, encouraging children to advocate for themselves in times of danger rather than being passive victims.

Through networking over a few years, the organization has gained credibility at the highest level of government and was asked by the prime minister to make recommendations to improve government policy and practice. As a

result, the National Child Protection Agency has been set up and the director of ESCAPE has been invited to be the assistant to the director of the agency.

Practical ways of doing advocacy

The following practical steps for advocacy are based on Tearfund's 'Advocacy Study Pack' by Andy Atkins, public policy advisor, and Graham Gordon, public policy officer, for Tearfund UK.

Step 1: Proposal. Propose advocacy on an issue of concern to you.

Step 2: Information gathering. Gather the necessary information to assess the situation and consider whether you have a potential role in any advocacy activity.

Step 3: Information assessment. Once the information has been gathered, assess the issue or situation to decide whether you should engage in advocacy or not.

Step 4: Planning. Once you have decided to engage in advocacy, formulate a strategy. This will include clear ideas of the issues, objectives, targets, methods and activities, advocates, responsibilities, timescale, success indicators and evaluation points.

Step 5: Action. Take action according to the strategy agreed in Step 4, using the range of methods available. The key to Steps 4 and 5 is co-ordination of all the people involved in advocacy and all the methods being used – lobbying, campaigning, media work and prayer.

Step 6: Evaluation. Monitor actions, evaluate their results and decide what further action is appropriate or how advocacy could be done differently in the future.

(For a full copy of the Tearfund 'Advocacy Study Pack' or the 'Child Development Study Pack' write to Tearfund, 100 Church Rd, Teddington, Middlesex, TW11 8QE, UK. E-mail: enquiries@tearfund.org.)

– Questions to Consider –

- 1 Read the story of three young men: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Dan. 1:3–17 and 3:8–30). What does this passage teach us about 'speaking out' (advocacy) in terms of: a) preparation, and b) risks?
- 2 Go through the six steps for doing advocacy above, carefully considering a particular issue or need of which you are aware.
- 3 Assess how ESCAPE has followed the strategies and suggestions for advocacy set out in this chapter.

The Ethical Issues of Listening to Children

Glenn Miles

THERE is a story of a programme involving street children, for which the programme managers had built a brand new day centre. It had a kitchen, dining hall, day-cots, game rooms, showers and staff all ready to get started with a huge range of activities – but, on the first night, no children came. The previous week, staff had gone out on to the street to invite children and their friends to come and use the facilities, and the kids had seemed to want to come, but when the day came the place was empty. The staff could not understand it. What had gone wrong?

Steve, the co-ordinator, went out for a long walk and bumped into Pablo, one of the natural leaders of the boys on the street, whom he had known for a long time. They sat down together and talked about things. Then, in a rare moment of vulnerability, Steve admitted, 'I just can't understand why none of the street kids are using our new centre.' Pablo looked at Steve and asked him if he had thought about where the centre was situated. Even though it was around the corner, it was only 500 metres from the nearest police station. 'Most of the kids would be afraid of going that close to the police station even if they hadn't done anything wrong,' Pablo said. Steve had a horrible feeling in the pit of his stomach as he realized what he had done. 'But why didn't you tell me?' he asked Pablo. But even as he asked the question he knew the answer. Slowly and quietly Pablo responded, 'But you never asked!'

Is 'But you never asked!' something that children in our programmes might say if we asked them? Or do we value and include their opinions in policy, planning and programme development? Why listen to children? This story illustrates the importance of listening because of the importance of understanding the context. Unless we listen to the recipients of the programmes we are developing, we are likely to miss vital components of what makes it appropriate in the context.

As Christians, listening to children is also about giving them value because they are made in the image of God and therefore have inherent worth. Instead of doing things *for* children, we do things *with* children. Doing things for people without involving them may be necessary in emergencies, but we must quickly move into a situation where we can involve them. We should enable all children – even, where possible, young children or those with learning difficulties – to 'have a say in things that affect them' (Article 12 of the CRC). Otherwise we can be exerting our power as adults in an unhealthy way, feeling that 'we know best' when we actually only have half the picture. Is not 'exerting our power as adults' another form of abuse, the very problem our programmes are trying to address?

More formal listening is known as research with children. Until recently, children were rarely involved in social research. Morrow and Richards (1996) suggest that educational researchers often use teachers as informants, while research on 'the sociology of the family' often uses parents as informants. In both cases, children

have not usually been directly involved – even though they were the central concern. In development research that I conducted in refugee camps in Thailand (unpublished), and then in a slum district of Phnom Penh (Miles, Sidebotham and Young, 1994), community leaders were the key informants, followed by the mothers (rarely the fathers, who were less accessible). Only recently have children become more involved in this kind of research. However, it is probably the development of participatory rural appraisal methods in developing countries that has resulted in some of the most creative and participatory methods of research with children (cf. Johnson et al., 1998).

The ethical relationship

The relationship of the child-care worker

If child development workers are doing their job effectively, they will need to allow children to participate in things that affect them by finding out from and/or with children a wide variety of information.

An ethical relationship could be described as 'preventing harm, promoting good, and being respectful and fair' (Sieber, 1993). The child-care researcher, then, first has to acknowledge that the child is worth doing research with, and thus 'establishing a relationship' with, at all. Then, the way in which the relationship develops will decide how much the child is seen as an object, subject or participant.

Object: Something to find out information about

Subject: The focus of the research

Participant: An active player in finding out about something

This will affect the research methods and the research topic. How the child's role is seen may be partly a conscious or a subconscious decision. For example, if the child is seen as a participant or even as a subject, his ideas are more likely to be considered fairly. However, in order for this to happen 'fairly', the researcher needs to acknowledge her own part in the process and be aware of the external (e.g., academic, funding and ethical committee expectations) and the internal (e.g., personal prejudices and attitudes to children's competence) aspects that influence the relationship.

Children have their own separate subcultures with its traditions, values and rules but, because they live within the mainstream of society, there is a tendency to believe that their culture is similar to adult culture. This way of looking at the world, however, is problematic – and even more problematic is the tendency not to realize that it is a problem (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988, p. 34)!

Once children are seen to be able to participate, the next question that needs to be asked is what is the intended and possible impact of the research on children? For the 'rights' lobby, the emphasis is on non-interference: is the research too intrusive or restrictive? And, if so, does it need to be done at all? Is it being done in the 'best interest of the child' as recommended in the CRC?

In a small research project I conducted with militarized children on the Thai-Burmese border (Miles, 2000; see Chapter 2), the concern was that getting children to consider their past (as well as their present and future) might have been traumatic in itself, even though Piaget suggests that play, including art, may

be a therapeutic method of dealing with past events. After careful consideration it was felt that a balance could be achieved by looking also to the present and future, taking the emphasis away from the past.

Can it be assumed, however, that the researcher is the best person to decide what is in the children's 'best interest'? Ethical committees may provide an additional safeguard, but researchers should be careful not to pass on ethical responsibility without carefully considering their own responsibilities (Alderson, 1995, p. 38).

The relationship between the researcher and the child is affected not only by intention, but also by how skilled the researcher is in developing the relationship and then in listening to and involving children, as appropriate. It also depends on how aware they are of their limitations and how able they are to adapt to other methodologies. In my research in Thailand (Miles, 1998) and Sri Lanka (Miles, 1999), we chose to work with adolescents – partly because I felt that I had an insufficient understanding of more creative methodologies appropriate for young children. Although self-administered anonymous questionnaires were successfully used in this literate population, they could not be used in most developing countries due to the high level of illiteracy, nor could they be used with younger age groups.

Developing creative methodologies depends on the duration of the relationship between the researcher and the child and the time available to do the research. In a research project, the research relationship can be broken or stop at any point between the choice of the research topic and the presentation of the findings. But if there is time for a good research relationship to develop, it is more likely to have the potential to be ethically fair (that is, for the child to be included in designing and participating in the research).

Concern about the ethical relationship may lead some researchers to avoid doing research with children at all, for fear of exploiting, offending, distressing or misrepresenting them, but a better understanding of the relationship should help them work more effectively (Alderson, 1995, p. 10).

The relationship from the child's perspective

Of course, research is not all about the researcher! The participant and the researcher play equal roles. The child's part in the relationship will depend on his age, gender, ability/disability, ethnicity and social status. The child's exposure to and experience of the issue to be studied is also important.

Neither children nor researchers exist in isolation; they are affected by their respective relationships to others – including peers, parents and teachers – whose expectations and influence could also affect the ethical relationship. Mercer (1995) suggests that a child whose ideas are challenged by other children with opposing ideas progresses intellectually – implying that learning is collaborative. Would it therefore be more appropriate to do research with children in groups rather than with individuals, which is how much research is currently conducted with children?

In my limited research with children in Thailand and Sri Lanka, questionnaire surveys were conducted in examination-like conditions so that respondents would not influence one another. However, Woodhead and Faulkner (1999) suggest that developmental psychologists are finding that interpersonal

relationships influence the social construction of knowledge. This has enormous implications for the influence of others on children – during the research itself as well as outside it.

Would children respond better if they could discuss their ideas with friends? Researchers might be concerned that children would ‘copy’ from each other, thus ‘contaminating’ the results, but social interaction approaches emphasize that changes in behaviour or attitudes or beliefs are achieved through interaction with significant other people. Is the research environment a learning environment too, or should the two be kept separate?

The ethical relationship is also strongly influenced by democratic traditions of respect for the individual’s rights. It must be remembered, however, that in many societies, especially in developing countries, the ‘rights’ of the community take precedence over the rights of the individual. The researcher needs to consider the vulnerabilities and strengths of the child’s community as well as of the child herself.

Trust and respect

A relationship depends largely on trust and respect. In the past, however, when children have been asked for their opinions in questionnaires, for example, these opinions have often not been considered to be useful or worthwhile. Some of the concerns that critics of research with children have are that:

1. Children can’t tell truth from fiction.
2. Children make things up to please the interviewer.
3. Children do not have enough experience or knowledge to comment or report on it usefully.
4. Children’s accounts are influenced by what they have been told by adults.

Mayall (1994, p. 11), however, has pointed out that all of these drawbacks can apply to adults as well.

Now, more and more, children’s opinions are being sought. The danger is that this is being done because it is considered ‘important to do so’, but the reasons for the involvement and participation of children are often unclear. The question then needs to be asked whether ethical standards are being sought out of fear of criticism from influential sources rather than to truly develop an ethical relationship.

Unless the power differential between adults and children is understood, the ethical relationship will not be fully appreciated either. Woodhead and Faulkner (1999) describe how psychological experiments previously conducted with children were what would now be described as harmful, and therefore unethical.

Issues of consent

Children must be informed about the research, its objectives, how it will be used and its possible consequences. They need to be informed about what is happening before it happens, and they must be invited to participate and have the freedom not to participate without being coerced or bribed. Children and researchers need to agree on confidentiality at the beginning of the project. It may be better for children to be apart from adults who have influence on them when research is being conducted. Anonymity should be adhered to by changing

details that might otherwise be recognized. Much research has been done involving children who were not aware of what was happening and who did not have an opportunity to consent. If children are considered to have at least some competence, this practice must be seen as unethical. Ethics in research is about 'preventing harm, promoting good, and being respectful and fair' (Sieber, 1993).

Parental consent is often seen as a key criterion for research with children to be seen as ethical, especially in the medical field. Tymchuk (1992) makes a distinction between the terms 'consent' and 'assent'. Informed consent is where 'someone voluntarily agrees to participate in a research project, based on a full disclosure of pertinent information'. Assent, on the other hand, is 'a parallel process whereby the parent or guardian agrees to allow a child to participate in a research project, and the child assents or agrees to be subject in the research'.

The age of eighteen years is acknowledged in many societies (and by the CRC) to be the age at which children become adults and are competent to make decisions for themselves. But this age varies from culture to culture, and one must ask on what empirical evidence it is based. We should also remember that older children in many parts of the world are not considered to be 'children' at all. They might work hard, fight in armed conflicts and get married well before they are eighteen years old. Although eighteen is often used as a cut-off point after which children do not need parental consent, children at different ages are capable of making decisions, and their competence to consent may depend more on the context and what they are consenting to than their age. If some children are considered to be competent, then the question becomes, 'who decides?'

The consent of parents or guardians will nevertheless usually be sought. But, to preserve the relationship between the researcher and the child, children should know whether or not information will be passed on to parents, guardians or teachers. They should receive the same level of confidentiality and privacy as adult subjects. Where researchers feel that they must report what a child has said, Alderson (1995, p. 3) suggests that they should discuss it with the child first.

Conclusion

Following are some of the factors involving the child, the child's community, the researcher and the researcher's community that can affect the ethical relationship between the child and the researcher:

a) *The child:*

- Child's age, gender and ability/disability
- Child's experience and exposure to the issue
- Child's own hopes
- Child's socio-cultural background/ethnicity and socio-legal status in society

b) *The child's community:*

- Family's (guardian's) expectations and effect on the relationship
- Peer expectations and influence
- Significant other adults' expectations and influence
- Socio-cultural expectations and influence
- Current environment of the child (how urgent/dangerous is the problem?)

c) *The researcher:*

- Researcher's experience and exposure to working with children, to the particular issue being looked at and to the context
- Reflexivity of prejudices: seriousness/trivialization of the child's views
- Chosen research topic, level and content
- Hope for outcomes
- Awareness of limitations
- Research methods used and the adaptability of research methods to the specific context

d) *The researcher's community:*

- Family expectations and influence on the relationship
- Significant other adults present, especially teachers and/or parents and their influence
- Socio-cultural and political expectations and influence
- Academic peers' and/or ethics' committee expectations and influence
- Research donors' needs/priorities, expectations and influence
- 'Rights' lobby's expectations and influence

e) *Relationship between the child and researcher:*

- Researcher's relationship to the child, including length of time
- Respect and trust for each other
- Perceived competence of the child to the researcher and vice versa
- Information and preparation
- Consent and anonymity assured and achieved
- Under- or over-participation of the child in collecting, interpreting and using the results

It is useful to ask whose interest the research serves: the children's, the adults' they serve, the researchers' or the relevant institutions' and professions'?

Inevitably, the social researcher does have an obligation to develop an ethical relationship, but the process of doing this involves a wide range of factors – some of which are in his control and some of which are not. There is a continuum of 'less ethical' towards 'more ethical' in the ethical relationship. In practice, relationships are not 'ethical' or 'not ethical' but somewhere on the continuum (see Table 1, below). In order for the researcher to be 'more ethical', she needs to be continually aware of the relationship (see Figure 1, below) and of whether the child's best interest is foremost.

– Question to Consider –

Consider a research project with children with which you are familiar. Look at the way in which it was done and how it involved the children. Now consider, in the light of this chapter, how it could have been done more ethically (see Table 1, below).

Less ethical

1. No children are involved at any level.
2. Different groups of children are excluded or, if included, no provision is made for particular needs (e.g., children with disabilities are invited to participate, but the research takes place upstairs and no lift is provided).
3. Children are coerced and/or unable to opt out at any point. Children are not given explanations or asked to consent. Children's refusal is ignored. Children and parents are not given an opportunity to complain.
4. Children are not given any, or adequate, information concerning the purpose and consequences of the research.
5. Parents are not asked to consent or, if they are asked, then the child is not asked.
6. Confidentiality is ignored or abused. Parents or other adults are informed of results without consent from the child. The records are open.
7. Research is not piloted.
8. Research does not benefit children and/or puts children at further risk.
9. Researcher ignores his own prejudices.
10. Researcher has no accountability. Research benefits researcher's career more than children's needs.
11. Research information is 'lost' in academic journal.

More ethical

1. Children are involved at varying levels.
2. Different groups of children are included, taking account of their ages and abilities, and provision is made for particular needs.
3. Children are able to opt out at any point. Children are given careful explanations and asked for consent. A child's refusal is accepted without a reason having to be given. Children and parents are given the opportunity to complain if necessary.
4. Children are given full explanation of the purpose and consequences of the research.
5. Parents are asked to consent where necessary, and the child is informed about what parents will be told.
6. Confidentiality is ensured where possible. Parents or other adults are informed of results with the full knowledge of child. Records are locked away or destroyed.
7. Research is adequately piloted.
8. Research benefits the children and does not put them at further risk.
9. Researcher reflects on his own prejudices.
10. Researcher is accountable to external person/ethical committee. Research benefits the children's needs.
11. Research information is widely disseminated.

Table 1: The ethical relationship between the researcher and the child

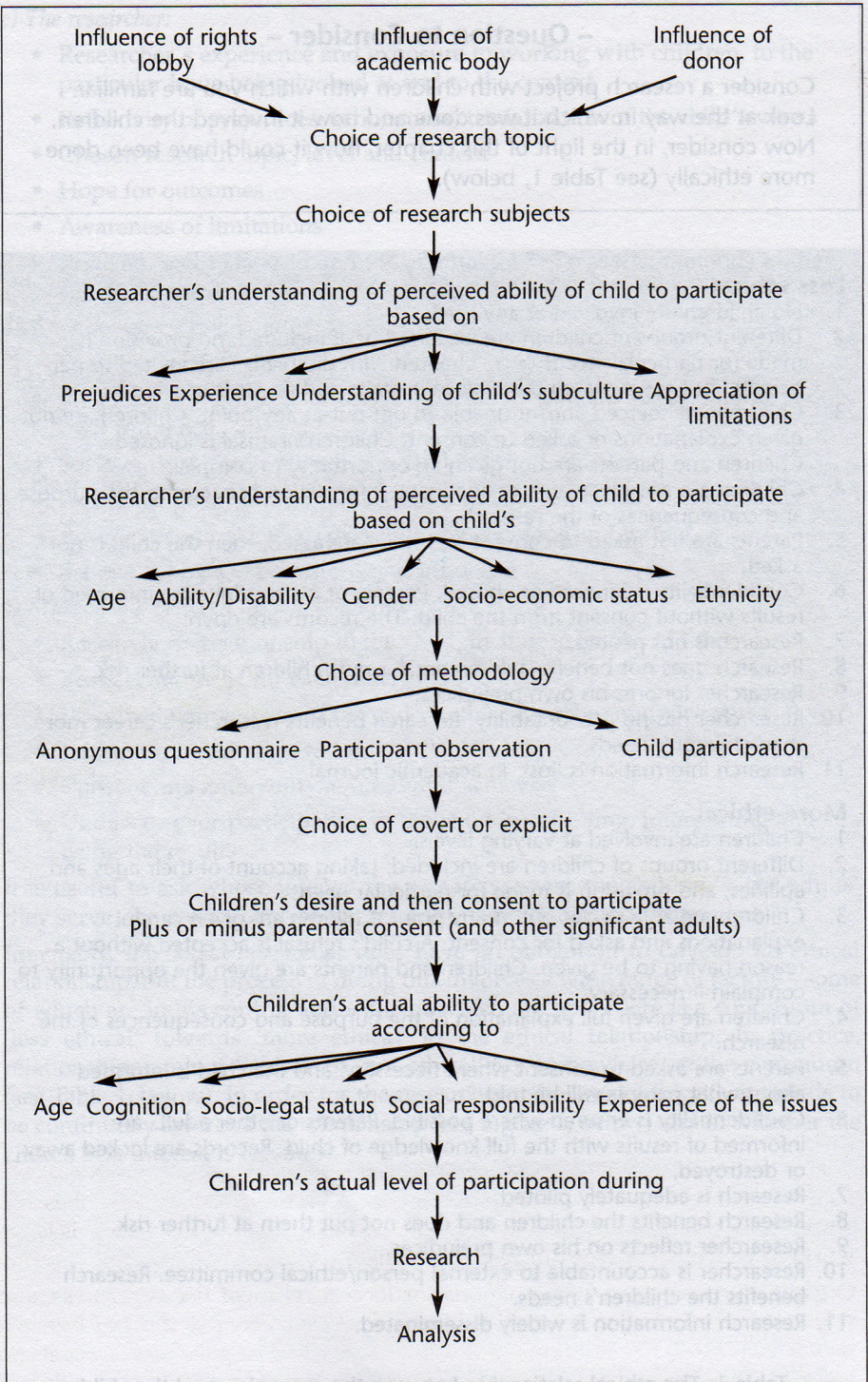


Figure 1: Process in the relationship between researcher and participant