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# Youth Participatory Research: A Review of Reviews and Practice Guidance

The Centre for Evidence and Implementation

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## About CEI

The Centre for Evidence and Implementation envisions a world where people can improve their lives through support that is equitable and effective. We are a global, for-purpose evidence intermediary and advisory organisation dedicated to using the best evidence in practice and policy to improve the lives of people facing adversity. Established in Australia in 2016, CEI is a multi-disciplinary team across five offices in London, Melbourne, Oslo, Singapore, and Sydney. We work with our partners, including policymakers, governments, practitioners, program providers, organisation leaders, and funders in four key areas of work:

- Understanding and making sense of the evidence base
- Generating evidence through trialling, testing, and evaluating policies and programs to drive more effective decisions and deliver better outcomes
- Developing methods and processes to get high quality evidence into policy and practice
- Building cultures for evidence use

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## Executive summary

While there is a wide body of evidence offering insights into participatory approaches with marginalised young people, little work has been done to consolidate and translate the existing evidence into a framework that can be applied across research and evaluation settings. This review is focused on developing understandings around youth participatory research and evaluation methods. This was achieved through a review that aimed to identify and consolidate the existing literature across both academic and practice contexts. The review responds to the following research questions:

- What can be learnt from previous research, and emerging practice, about how to effectively design and implement youth participation approaches?
- What conditions, practices, skills or processes do research organisations develop or embed to enable meaningful, impactful, ethical youth participation in research?

The review combined learnings from systematic reviews and practice guidance, documents and toolkits. Following abstract and title and full text screening, 18 reviews were included in the review of reviews – and a further 15 practice guidance, documents, and toolkits were included to complement the literature. Data was extracted in accordance with pre-determined data extraction fields and then synthesised to establish findings relating to youth participatory approaches. The review focussed on how participatory approaches can promote the voice of young people who have been marginalised through systemic inequalities.

From the synthesis, it was found that researchers inconsistently implement youth participatory approaches. Additionally, reporting of emerging practice or methodologies in accordance with clear phases of research and evaluation delivery is limited. To provide a more structured and implementable understanding of emerging youth participatory

practice, we synthesised learnings in accordance with a research journey consisting of the following inter-related phases:

- Engaging, recruiting and training
- Framing, scoping and setting up
- Designing
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Research dissemination
- Reflection, feedback, and closure

Emerging practices were identified within these phases to support our understanding of how youth participatory approaches can be implemented throughout research and evaluation projects, as opposed to at 'touch points' which is commonly seen in practice. The positioning of young people varied within participatory research; in some instances, they take the lead in research projects as youth researchers, while in others they take on a more advisory role.

In addition to identifying existing practices and methods, the review also sought to identify facilitators of promising practice. These facilitators held varying levels of applicability to the different stages of the participatory research and evaluation journey outlined above. The extent to which these facilitators can be implemented in practice were dependent on wide ranging contextual factors. The literature suggested that the presence of these facilitators throughout the research and evaluation journey results in higher level of quality participation, subsequently leading to more meaningful experiences for young people and researchers involved.

The review identified the following facilitators of promising practice:

- Theorising, conceptualising, and reflexivity
- Consideration of youth voice
- Power sharing between adults and youth
- Communication and engagement throughout participation
- Transparency and feedback cycles
- Inclusive practices
- Safe spaces for participation
- Trauma-informed collaboration
- Incentives and recognition for youth participation

The learnings suggest that more needs to be done to ensure that participatory approaches are clearly planned, monitored and evaluated for impact. Developing participatory approaches holds the potential to empower marginalised young people, enabling them to lead knowledge production and inform systemic change.

This review provides an oversight of current participatory approaches and identifies the drivers of 'good practice'. These evidence-led insights provide a practical framework for research and evaluation practitioners to improve their current ways of working ensuring that marginalised young people engage in participatory approaches in ways that are both ethical and likely to increase positive outcomes. The following recommendations could improve the implementation of participatory approaches:

- **Reflecting on current participatory approaches** – Practitioners should use the learnings from this review to think about the extent to which they have implemented participatory research approaches and how this aligns with organisational ambition.
- **Use frameworks to inform intentional approaches** – The pre-existing academic models of youth participatory research should be used during design phases of research projects to promote a more transparent and intentional approach to participation approaches.
- **Identifying spaces for improvement in line with drivers of promising practice** – Practitioners should reflect on how they can improve their participatory approaches by implementing the drivers of promising throughout the research journey.
- **Monitoring and evaluating participatory approaches relationship with outcomes** - Practitioners should evaluate the ways in which their participatory approaches relate to outcomes for young people more widely.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. The importance of youth participatory approaches

Youth participatory approaches have risen in both prevalence and importance over recent years (Montrosse-Moorhead et al., 2019). Participatory approaches are increasingly associated with improved outcomes (Valdez, Valdez & Garcia, 2021; Anyon et al., 2018) and present opportunities to promote youth empowerment, social justice, and improved accessibility to evidence (Torre et al., 2012; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). The movement towards heightened participation of marginalised young people in research and evaluation activities presents an opportunity to ensure participatory approaches are practiced in a high quality and ethical manner.

Youth participatory approaches are of interest within both academic literature and ‘practice settings’ (including research and evaluation settings). The contexts that youth participatory approaches are implemented vary, with practice present across employment, health, public health, social care, education, crime and justice, housing and homelessness, community development, and poverty reduction research and evaluation settings. The importance of ensuring that young people take a leading role in research and evaluation is understood from an ethical perspective of “nothing about us without us.” Underpinning these conceptualisations is a rights-based legal foundation. Article 12 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states:

- *All children who can form their own views have a right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them.*
- *Views of child are given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.*

This human rights’ underpinning provides a backdrop for participatory approaches to take on an emancipatory framing within research and evaluation (Greenbaum & Madsen, 1993; Australia Government Department of Social Services & Families, 2010). In line with these emancipatory framings, marginalised young people are empowered to drive decision-making throughout research and evaluation processes, establish insights emerging from their interpretation of evidence, and advocate for change using their own voice and through mediums that resonate with them.

While there is a desire and commitment for increased youth participation within research and evaluation, this does not always translate to practice. Outlined ideals and action diverge on the ground due to barriers that prevent young people from participating meaningfully (Dong et al., 2023; Partnership for Young London, 2022). For example, we know that cultural, linguistic, and structural barriers can play a notable role in excluding marginalised young people from research and evaluation activities (Giuliano et al., 2001; Rugkåsa & Canvin, 2011). The impact of these barriers can mean that research and evaluation activities can inadvertently become spaces of exclusion, favouring the voices of some young people (or facilitators) over the voices of others. To challenge these unintended consequences, more work needs to be done to ensure that participatory approaches are truly inclusive, consider equity, and are mindful of power imbalances.

Although there is a growing consensus that youth participatory approaches should play a significant role within research and evaluation, this contrasts with the diverse ways in which these approaches are conceptualised and implemented. This review brings together the disparate evidence base and offers learnings which can be applied to youth settings to improve participatory approaches where appropriate. These settings can range from those more explicitly focused on supporting young people, such as youth clubs, schools, and into work support programmes, to more generalised welfare provisions such as social care settings which work closely with families more broadly.

## 1.2. What is the context and scope for this review?

The Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) commissioned the Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI) to conduct a review to inform approaches to youth participation with a specific focus on ensuring that research and evaluation practices are inclusive spaces that promote the voices of marginalised young people. Specifically, the review seeks to support research and evaluation to improve outcomes for young people who are at risk of marginalisation (in the labour market and beyond).

The scoping phase of the study sought to define key terms and refine the scope through collaboration between CEI, colleagues at YFF and a YFF youth advisory group.

## 1.3. What evidence do we draw on?

In this review, we draw on two forms of evidence to establish 'good practice' for youth participatory approaches:

- **Reviews:** syntheses of evidence from primary studies of participatory approaches, focussing on conceptualisation, implementation as well as barriers and facilitators. We refer to these throughout the report as 'reviews.'
- **Resources:** guidance documents (toolkits, guides, etc.) that outline strategies and approaches for integrating participatory approaches into research and evaluation practice contexts. We refer to these throughout the report as 'practice guidance'.

While these two forms of evidence are distinct, they are presented alongside one another throughout the body of the learnings. By integrating the learnings from these resources within thematic areas, we have been able to ensure that the evidence responds to key research questions in a complimentary manner.

## 1.4. What is the background behind key terms?

One notable challenge of the review is the varied definitions and contextual understandings of terms that underpin the topic, particularly:

- Youth participation
- Marginalised
- Research and evaluation

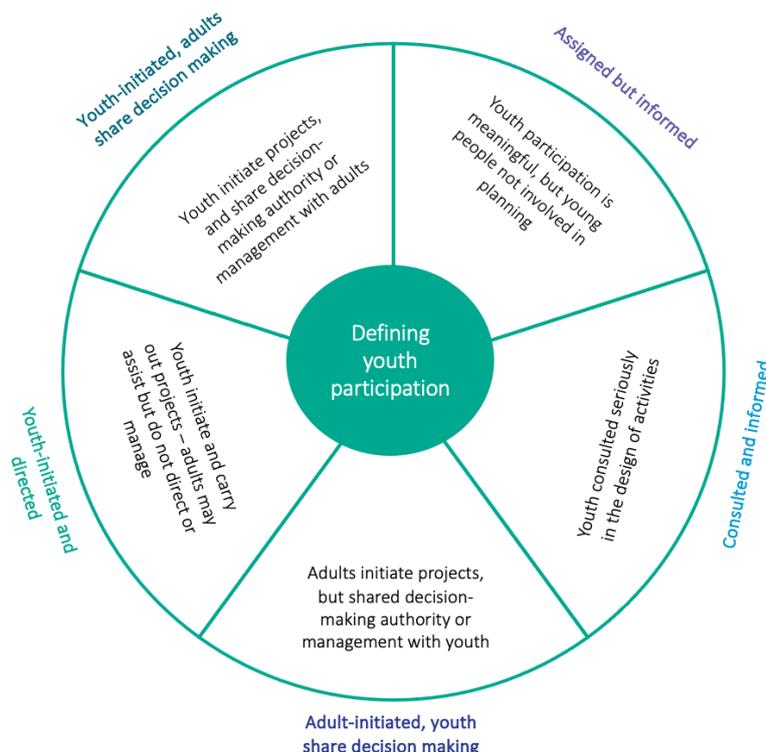
In order for these terms to reflect research and practice, we held consultations with YFF colleagues as well as their youth ambassadors called the Future Voices Group. The perspectives were used to complement and re-affirm academic definitions available.

The definitions of these terms and how they were operationalised are covered in the methodology, but this section covers some of the underpinning literature and conceptualisations around the terminology. We agreed to use ‘participatory research’ as an all-compassing term in this review that covers varied levels of involvement of young people in the processes of designing, undertaking, and/or disseminating research.

### 1.4.1. How do we conceptualise youth participation?

The existing evidence on participatory approaches emphasises the variation in involvement young people take in research and evaluation (Hart, 1992). The revised version of Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation developed by YFF is used throughout this review to understand differing levels of participation across included reviews and guidance documents. While Hart’s (1992) ladder reflects participatory approaches as hierarchical, the YFF adaption suggests a more fluid process which extends beyond participation in research and includes participation in governance. The wheel adaption offered by YFF speaks to the wider divergences on how youth participatory approaches are conceptualised depending on context and subjective perspectives.

**Figure 1.** Youth Futures Foundation’s revised youth participation wheel



- **Youth-initiated adults share decision-making** – Youth initiate projects and share decision making authority or management with adults.
- **Youth-initiated and directed** – Youth initiate and carry out project – adults may assist but do not direct or manage.
- **Adult-initiated, youth share decision making** – Adults initiate projects, but shared decision-making authority or management with youth.
- **Consulted and informed** – youth consulted seriously in the design of activities.
- **Assigned but informed** – Youth participation is meaningful, but young people not involved in planning.

There is not one way to conceptualise youth participation: the table in appendix 1 outlines other models that were identified during this review. This is not a comprehensive summary of all available models, but instead an acknowledgement of the diversity of conceptualisations available.

While the type of involvement varies, participatory research involves some level of collaboration and of involvement of youth in decision making. This was reflected in the youth Future Voices Group when a young person articulated participatory research means ‘Being part of the decision and not just “subjects” of the study.’

#### **1.4.2. How do we conceptualise marginalisation?**

The scope of this review sought to identify how participatory approaches can reach marginalised young people to ensure that they are the drivers of solutions to the societal exclusion they experience. Much like ‘participatory approaches’, conceptualisations and definitions of ‘marginalisation’ depend on context. Due to the varied conceptualisations of marginalisation within the literature we acknowledge that our discussion only reflects on some of the key overall academic interpretations of the term.

Lockyer et al. (2009) offer a broad understanding of the term marginalisation and connect it to those who experience fewer opportunities. Further to the connection with opportunity, their definition also highlights a sense of separation from wider society. In contrast, Sclater & Piper (2001) specifically reflect on how youth marginalisation stems from a level of voicelessness which is not experienced by wider social groups. In turn, they claim that this results in exclusion from political and legal systems. Further developing the interrelated nature of marginalisation and structural inequality, Russel (2016) outlines a reflexive relationship where marginalisation both shapes and reproduces inequality. The wide range of conceptualisations and definitions typically highlight the following underpinning ideas.

- Fewer opportunities to realise a range of outcomes.
- A sense of separation from wider society.
- Voicelessness within decision making.
- Exclusion from local and notional systems which shape life experience.

While these definitions highlight the varied understandings of marginalisation, there is a consensus that those who are marginalised are seen as 'other', often articulated through comparing 'marginalised' with the wider ('non-marginalised') population. This is typically driven by a lack of opportunity due to a range of socio-political factors. As many areas of research and evaluation specifically aims to address these imbalances, youth participatory approaches ethically should ensure that marginalised groups are meaningfully included, becoming active decision makers and primary drivers of change.

### **1.4.3. How do we conceptualise research and evaluation?**

'Research and evaluation' initially felt like a broadly accepted term, but it became essential to operationalize a working definition. For the purpose of this review, we align with a broad definition provided by Kellaghan (2010):

*'A form of disciplined and systematic inquiry that is carried out to arrive at an assessment or appraisal of an object, program, practice, activity, or system with the purpose of providing information that will be of use in decision making.'*

The Youth Advisory Group were invited to provide further definitional insights into 'research and evaluation.' The perspectives provided by the young people widely aligned with Kellaghan (2010). Building on Kellaghan's (2010) reference to decision making, one young person connected research and evaluation to change making process:

*'[research & evaluation] brings about productive change e.g., policy change' (Youth Future Voices Group Young Person)*

These definitions provide clarity on the way youth participatory approaches will be explored resulting in more applicable learnings for the research and evaluation sector. This clarity is critical, as youth participation is also a prevalent method in advocacy and campaigns. While learnings from this review may be applied to these areas, it's important to note that reviews and guidance documents predominantly focus on research and evaluation contexts. The next section explores the methods used to operationalise these terms.

# 2. Methodology

## 2.1 Objectives

This review focussed on identifying youth participatory research and evaluation methods as well as drivers of promising practice. This was achieved through a multi-phase review design to identify and consolidate the existing literature across both academic and practice contexts. The review responded to the following primary research questions:

- What can be learnt from previous research, and emerging practice, about how to effectively design and implement youth participation approaches?
- What conditions, practices, skills or processes do research organisations develop or embed to enable meaningful, impactful, ethical youth participation in research?

The review responded to these questions by combining learnings from systematic reviews as well as practice guidance documents and toolkits.

## 2.2 Review design

The review followed an explicit protocol, shared with YFF in a scoping document. The protocol was reviewed by YFF and is available on Open Science Framework at: <https://osf.io/4chmz/> (Ott & Rowland, 2023).

The review had three distinct phases to respond to the research questions:

**Figure 2. Multi-phase review design**



### 1.2.1 Phase one: Scoping and defining

Over the scoping period, the focus of this project was to refine the research plan and establish early definitions to inform the search strategy. During this period, we collaborated closely with YFF research and evaluation professionals and consulted with the Future Voices Group (a young person’s advisory group). The definitions established through this phase informed the inclusion and exclusion criteria used for phases 2 and 3.

The background conceptualisations (in Section 1.4) and following definitions of key terms were established through desk research and consultation with the Future Voices Group:

**Table 1. Definitions of key terms established during scoping phase**

Term	Academic definitions	YFF Future Voices Group definitions	Synonyms
<b>Research &amp; evaluation</b>	<p><i>'A form of disciplined and systematic inquiry that is carried out to arrive at an assessment or appraisal of an object, program, practice, activity, or system with the purpose of providing information that will be of use in decision making' (Kellaghan, 2010).</i></p> <p>Evaluation is considered a subset of research.</p>	<p><i>'Identifying gaps in what we know and filling them.'</i></p> <p><i>'Accumulating knowledge from a variety of sources.'</i></p> <p><i>'...brings about productive change e.g., policy change.'</i></p>	N.A.
<b>Youth participation</b>	<p>Please refer to previous content detailing YFF's re-conceptualisation of Hart's (1992) ladder of participation (1.4.1).</p>	<p><i>'Providing a platform for youth voice.'</i></p> <p><i>'young people being at the heart and focus.'</i></p> <p><i>'Not just feeling heard but being heard and having opinions voiced upon.'</i></p> <p><i>'Being part of the decision and not just "subjects" of the study.'</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-design</li> <li>• Co-production</li> <li>• Inclusive practice</li> <li>• Engagement</li> <li>• Youth engagement</li> <li>• Youth empowerment</li> <li>• Action research</li> <li>• Youth voice</li> <li>• Participatory research</li> </ul>
<b>Marginalised</b>	<p><i>'Those with fewer opportunities [...] marginalization is the social process of being outcast from regular society' (Lockyer et al., 2009)</i></p> <p><i>'Many commentators have attested to the marginalization of children as a social group as a socially silenced group'... as a 'muted group' who are denied participation in political and legal systems' (Sclater &amp; Piper, 2001)</i></p>	<p>N.A. (The Future Voices group were asked to reflect inclusive practice but did not define 'marginalised' as a term itself).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oppressed</li> <li>• Excluded</li> <li>• Silenced</li> <li>• Subjugated</li> <li>• Disadvantaged</li> </ul>

## 1.2.2 Phase two: Reviews of existing reviews

The second phase of the project focussed on synthesising learning from existing reviews of young people's involvement in research and evaluation (Hunt et al., 2018). This brought rigour to the research and allowed for learning from other sectors and synthesis of a vast literature. This approach best leveraged existing resources within the timescales and resources available.

We defined 'existing reviews' broadly within a rigorous and robust approach. We included reviews that followed processes that were systematic, with transparent criteria for inclusion. This included reviews of qualitative and mixed-method studies as well as quantitative studies. We did not require that reviews used quality appraisal. This approach allowed us to capture methods such as rapid evidence reviews, narrative reviews, rigorous literature reviews and scoping reviews as well as systematic reviews, but did not include for example 'think pieces' that draw on wider literature but without clear inclusion criteria.

### **1.2.3 Phase three: Reviews of existing guidance documents**

The third and final phase of the review focussed on synthesising existing toolkits, guides and other resources that aim to include marginalised young people in research and evaluation. This phase specifically enabled the review to focus on practical approaches to engaging with marginalised young people established through practice contexts. The resources initially screened were agreed with YFF and were taken from a range of organisations promoting young people's involvement in research and evaluation. The developed inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to these resources to make final decisions regarding their relevance for inclusion.

### **1.2.4 Participation of young people's advisory group**

Alongside the three phases of the review outlined above, young people supported the conceptualisation, refinement and communication of our learnings. Critically, the review was an opportunity to ensure young people were involved in further shaping our understanding of participatory approaches. By bringing marginalised young people's voices to the fore and ensuring that our learnings were in line with their perspectives, this review presented an opportunity to ensure lived experience shaped the study findings.

Two consultations with the Future Voices Group<sup>1</sup> were co-ordinated by YFF during the review, one in the scoping phase in December 2023 and another in August 2023. During workshops young people offered insights and perspectives on the following key questions:

- How should youth participation be framed and understood in research and evaluation?
- What language should be used? What are facilitators/examples of good practice from YP perspective? What data should be extracted?
- Do the findings make sense? And how would you like to see these learnings disseminated and put into action?

## **2.1. Study eligibility criteria**

The 'PICOSS'<sup>2</sup> framework is presented below and was applied, to differing extents, to both phases of the research design (review of reviews and identification of effective practice). Specifically, the practice guidance documents did not provide necessary detail/hold relevance to all items of the PICOSS (study design and intervention). In these instances, a

<sup>1</sup> <https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/our-work/ignite/future-voices-ambassadors/>

<sup>2</sup> The 'PICOSS' focuses the study inclusion and exclusion criteria across a range of relevant domains: population, intervention/activity, context, outcomes, setting, study design.

pragmatic, inclusive approach was taken to ensure that meaningful learnings were synthesised.

**Table 2. PICOSS inclusion and exclusion criteria**

	<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria</b>
<b>Population</b>	Children & Young people and emerging adults (5-30 years old) who have been involved in research or evaluation activities.	Studies or guidance documents that were not youth focused and/or reflected on participatory approaches relating to general populations.
<b>Intervention / Activity</b>	Existing reviews that focussed on participatory research design and/or other synonymous terms such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-design</li> <li>• Co-production</li> <li>• Inclusive practice</li> <li>• Engagement</li> <li>• Youth engagement</li> <li>• Youth empowerment</li> <li>• Action research</li> <li>• Youth voice</li> <li>• Participatory research</li> </ul>	Existing review/practice guidance documents that did not explicitly focus on participatory approaches. <p>Participatory approaches focusing on the involvement of young people in activities other than research and evaluation – e.g., programme design, grant-making activities.</p>
<b>Context</b>	Existing reviews were only included if they synthesized evidence from high-income countries. <p>Additionally, at least 50% of the guidance documents focussed on the involvement of marginalised young people in research UK contexts.</p>	Studies and guidance documents were excluded from low to middle income countries due to the differing national contexts and implications these hold on notions and implementation of participatory approaches.
<b>Outcomes / Themes</b>	Included reviews had an explicit focus on exploring and framing participatory methodological approaches. As mentioned above, this spanned across a range of contexts so outcomes and themes varied and as such did not instruct review/guidance document inclusion.	Studies were not excluded based on relevance of outcome areas as the included reviews and guidance documents spanned across a range of contexts.
<b>Setting</b>	Studies and guidance documents could span a range of sectors which use participatory approaches, including the areas of employment, health, public health, social care, education, crime and justice, housing and homelessness, community development, and poverty reduction.	No settings were excluded from the review due to learnings that are likely to be transferable.

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<b>Study design</b>	<p>For the review of reviews, only reviews were included, and they needed to have clear and transparent methods and inclusion criteria.</p> <p>The following studies were considered for inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematic reviews</li> <li>• Rapid evidence reviews</li> <li>• Rigorous literature reviews</li> <li>• Narrative reviews</li> <li>• Scoping reviews.</li> </ul> <p>The guidance documents needed to have an explicit focus on informing improved practice.</p>	<p>Primary studies focusing on participatory approaches were not included in the review.</p>

## 2.4 Search strategy

The review adopted a pragmatic approach to identifying relevant studies. For the phase 1 review of reviews the following databases were searched between March 2023 and April 2023 (no year restriction applied).

- PsycInfo (Ovid)
  - Scopus
  - Web of Science
- EconLit (EBSCO)
  - Evidence for Policy and Practice Information Centre - EPPI-Centre

The following search strategy was used across four out the five sources. The EPPI-Centre did not have adequate search functions resulting in a manual review of relevant resources.

**Table 3. Key search strings for review of reviews**

Component	Search terms	Search fields
<b>Research Design</b>	("Systematic review" or "systematic overview" or "rapid review" or "evidence review" or "literature review" or "scoping review" or "narrative review" or "conceptual review" or "integrative review")	Title, key words, abstract

Component	Search terms	Search fields
<b>Participatory approaches</b>	("participatory approach*" or "participatory research*" or "youth inclusion" or "co-production" or "co-produced" or "co-design" or "action research*" or "youth voice")	Title, key words, abstract
<b>Young people</b>	("child" or "young person" or "young people" or "young adult" or "youth" or "adolescent" or "teen" or "student" or "school" or "college" or "pediatric" or "young men" or "young women")	Title, key words, abstract

In addition to database searches, we also searched for additional literature across a range of youth focussed websites agreed with YFF during the scoping phase of the project. When searching these sites, we aimed to identify both guidance documents and toolkits that bring an implementation focus to participatory approach delivery as well as reviews that may have been missed during the database searches. The following websites were searched from June 2023 to August 2023. For full details on search strategy and results please refer to the table in Appendix 2.

- The Centre for Children and Young People’s Participation
- UK Participatory Research Network
- Centre for Social Justice and Community Action
- UK Youth
- Children and Young People Now
- Young Voices Heard
- Youth Scotland
- Lumos
- YERP
- Youth Link Scotland
- Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Research
- Youth Futures Foundation
- Youth Endowment Fund
- What Works for Children’s Social Care

- UK Department for Work and Pensions research
- US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE)
- Institute for Employment Studies
- YMCA George Williams College
- Participation people
- The UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities
- Google Scholar (top 50 hits)

The following toolkits were identified for review during the initial scoping phase of the project and provided the initial basis of toolkits to be included. In addition to these toolkits, a further list was shared by YFF during the early stages of the review and further resources were identified during websites searches.

- Youth Participation Toolkit (Participation Pool)
- Youth Employment Evaluation Toolkit (Youth Impact)
- Youth Voice Data Platform (YMCA George Williams College)
- Child and Youth Participation Toolkit (TUSLA)
- Youth Voice and Participation Toolkit (Sefton)
- Participation Toolkits (Young Minds)
- Youth Engagement Toolkit (HM government)
- Evaluating Participation Work – The Toolkit (Participation Works)
- Youth Co-Research Full Toolkit (CRIS)

## 2.5 Process of study selection

Titles and abstracts identified from the search strategy were imported into the online review application Covidence for initial screening in line with the PICOSS. Title and abstracts were reviewed by one reviewer, with a second reviewer resolving queries where study alignment with inclusion criteria was unclear. The review team had discussions about eligibility for any papers that were unclear or presented conflicting perspectives.

The same process was carried out for the screening of full-text studies. One review author read the full-text versions of all potentially eligible studies that were selected, and a second reviewer resolved any uncertainties.

## 2.6 Study records and data extraction

Data was extracted into a framework developed for this review (on google sheets). Only review data was extracted (data from primary studies included in the review will not be extracted). The below is a list of the summary information that was extracted and recorded for each study and toolkit/practice resources. Many of the studies did not report all of the details outlined below, in these instances only the data that was available was extracted.

**Table 4. Data extraction framework**

Category	Detail
<b>Bibliographic information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Title</li> <li>• Author</li> <li>• Year</li> <li>• Publication type (published / unpublished)</li> <li>• Study design (e.g., systematic review, scoping review, literature review)</li> </ul>
<b>Topic area / intervention details</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field of research (e.g., health, employment)</li> <li>• Description of topical area / intervention(s)</li> <li>• Levels of participation considered</li> <li>• Year commenced/completed</li> <li>• Activities of participation covered (e.g., Advisory Groups)</li> </ul>
<b>Setting and Population</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country</li> <li>• Location (e.g., regional, urban/rural)</li> <li>• Where the participation happened – provider (e.g., further education college, employer, secondary school, mental health services)</li> <li>• Sample size</li> <li>• Age range</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• Relative disadvantage</li> <li>• Demographics (Gender / race and/or ethnicity / disability / location / relative disadvantage)</li> </ul>
<b>Methods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit objectives(s) or questions(s)</li> <li>• Study risk of bias assessment</li> <li>• Synthesis assessment (meta-analysis)</li> <li>• Number of papers</li> <li>• Certainty assessment/ Quality appraisal</li> <li>• Summary of findings</li> <li>• Country of paper/research</li> </ul>

Category	Detail
Participatory approaches, implementation <sup>3</sup> , and Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels/types of participation (Hart/YFF)</li> <li>• Levels commenced-completed (range)</li> <li>• Activities of participation (e.g., Advisory group, data collection, analysis)</li> <li>• Definition of participatory approaches</li> <li>• Stages YP were involved in the research</li> <li>• Considerations of voice in research</li> <li>• Training, coaching and engaging young people</li> <li>• Provision of guidance materials</li> <li>• Setting research questions and priorities</li> <li>• Sensemaking of research findings (including analysis)</li> <li>• Involvement in dissemination / communications of findings</li> <li>• Communication between researchers, young people and other stakeholders (and relational aspects)</li> <li>• Financial support offered to young people</li> <li>• Outcomes domain (e.g., other/how participatory approaches lead to any improved outcomes)</li> <li>• Outcome measure</li> <li>• Impact on research quality (if detailed)</li> </ul>
Quality appraisal	CASP Checklist for reviews – Yes/No/Can't tell and comments

## 2.7 Data analysis and synthesis

A narrative synthesis review approach was used. This approach primarily used text to summarise and explain the findings of the synthesis. The structure was used to draw on the strengths and weaknesses of achieving participatory approaches, while ensuring that learnings which are relevant to marginalised communities are embedded throughout.

The review took a configurative approach (Gough et al., 2012), meaning that evidence has been brought together with a focus on interpreting, arranging (or configuring), and developing concepts, so that the resulting learning is 'more than the sum of its parts' to generate a better understanding of successful participatory approaches.

## 2.8 Adaptations made to design during the review

### Age range

Many of the review of reviews included primary studies which had inconsistent age ranges; some studies may have focussed on participatory approaches for those aged 16-24, others 12 – 18, etc. As a result, it was not possible to align inclusion with the 16–30-year-old age range set out in the scoping report. A more pragmatic approach was taken, including

<sup>3</sup> This draws upon the CFIR (Damschroder et al., 2009) framework for barriers and facilitators and ERIC framework for implementation strategies (Powell et al., 2015)

reviews that held overlap with the PICOSS age range but were not solely 16+ (some were aged younger than 16 years).

It was decided that increasing the age coverage also increased the coverage of experiences with marginalisation: integrating learnings relevant to children's experiences was felt to strengthen the reviews learnings, particularly given the differing power dynamics at play and often voiceless position of children and young people.

## **2.9 Limitations of review design**

### **Reflections on engagement with the Future Voices Group**

In line with the learnings of this report, we wanted to reflect on the engagement of the Future Voices Group during the review. While the two consultations provided insights that informed decision making relating to both the search scope and the interpretations of the findings, with more resources, young people could have taken a more leading role within the review. The 'touch-point' approach was responsive to the scope and resourcing of the study, but resulted in relatively limited input from young people. The majority of decision making around design and delivery of the study was led by an adult research team, as was the interpretation and findings. While this report provides a foundational understanding of existing evidence on participatory approaches, we would suggest that dissemination of learnings is co-led by young people in line with 'nothing about us, without us.'

### **Explicit focus on research and evaluation contexts**

While the protocol outlined a focus on research and evaluation, in practice terms such as 'service design' were vague and rarely articulated whether they included research methods. This led to reviewer disagreements in the interpretation of the inclusion guidance. We interpreted the inclusion criteria to include only studies that had an explicit research and evaluation focus. Many studies and practice guidance focussed on the participation of children and young people but were framed through the lens of differing contexts, including political participation, advocacy, and service and systems design. While there are transferable messages from other activities with young people, a focussed approach highlights what we know from research specifically.

# 3. Findings

## 3.1 Introduction

As this review sought to both identify and understanding the existing evidence on youth participatory research, the findings firstly outline the results that were found in line with the agreed search strategy and subsequently reflect on the learnings from our synthesis of both reviews and practice guidance simultaneously. The findings discussion takes the following structure:

- Search results.
- Characteristics of included studies.
- Identifying current participatory practice.
- Reflecting on drivers of promising practice.
- Youth participatory approaches relationship with outcomes.

## 3.2 Search results

As outlined in the methodology, the review was carried out in two distinct phases, the first exploring available reviews on youth participatory approaches and the second exploring practice guidance documents across the sector. The subsequent tables and figures outline the results of the initial searches and screening using the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

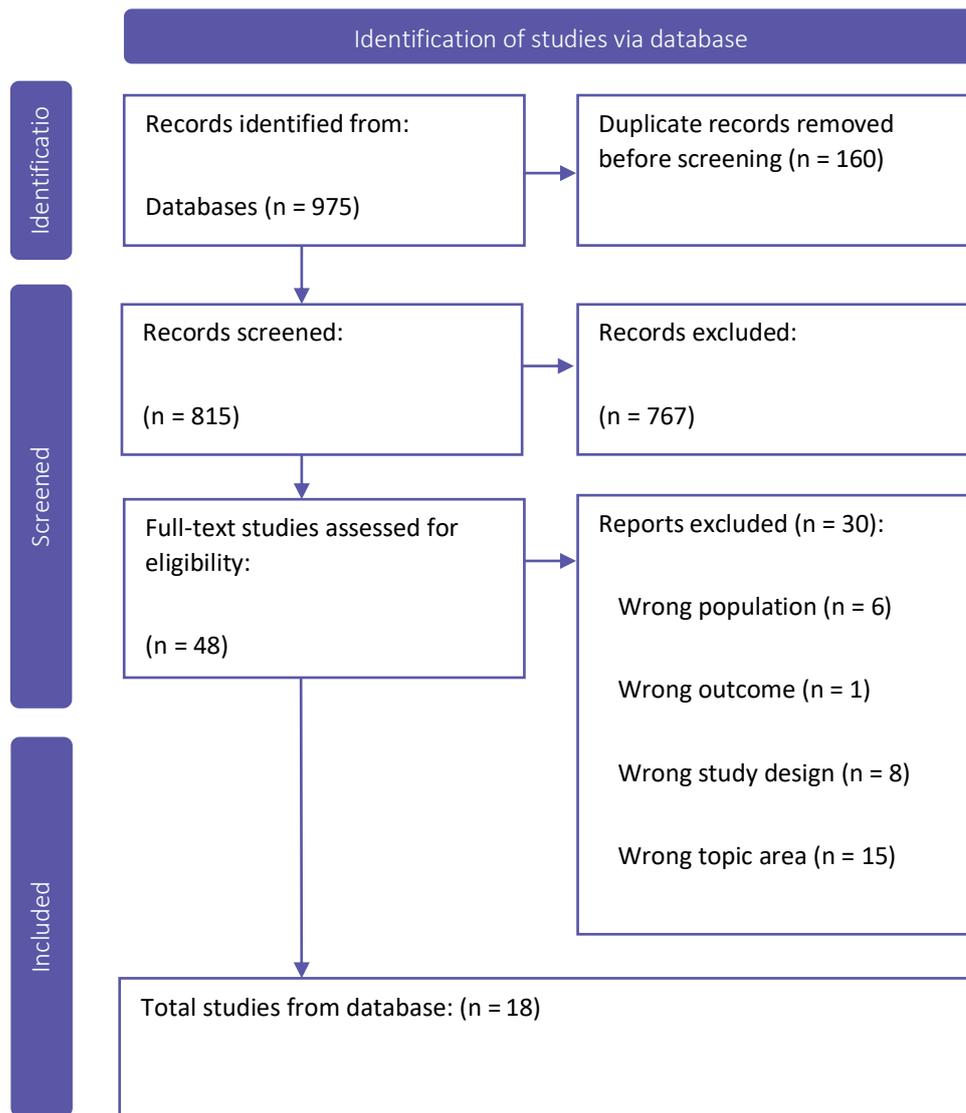
From the initial searches of the agreed databases a total of 975 studies were found to hold potential relevance to the review. The majority of the 975 studies were from Scopus (534) and American Psychological Association (326), while an additional 111 were found from Web of Science and 4 were from Econlit.

**Table 5. Database search for reviews**

Databases of published research (April)	Records identified
Scopus	534
American Psychological Association (Psych info - Ovid)	326
Web of Science	111
Econlit (EBSCO)	004
Evidence-informed Policy & Practice	000
Total	975

Following the initial data searches, 975 studies were imported into Covidence for review using the review tool, for abstract and title screening, followed by full text screening. At the point of import 160 studies were found to be duplicated and were therefore excluded leaving a total of 815 studies for screening. At the abstract and title screening stage, 767 studies were found to be irrelevant to the inclusion criteria, resulting in 48 studies taken forward to full text screening. During full text screening, 30 studies were found to not meet the inclusion criteria, leaving a total of 18 reviews to be taken forward to full extraction in line with agreed data points. One study was found to not meet the inclusion criteria during full text extraction.

**Figure 3. PRISMA<sup>4</sup> flow diagram for review of reviews**



<sup>4</sup> The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) is a 27-item checklist used to improve transparency in systematic reviews.

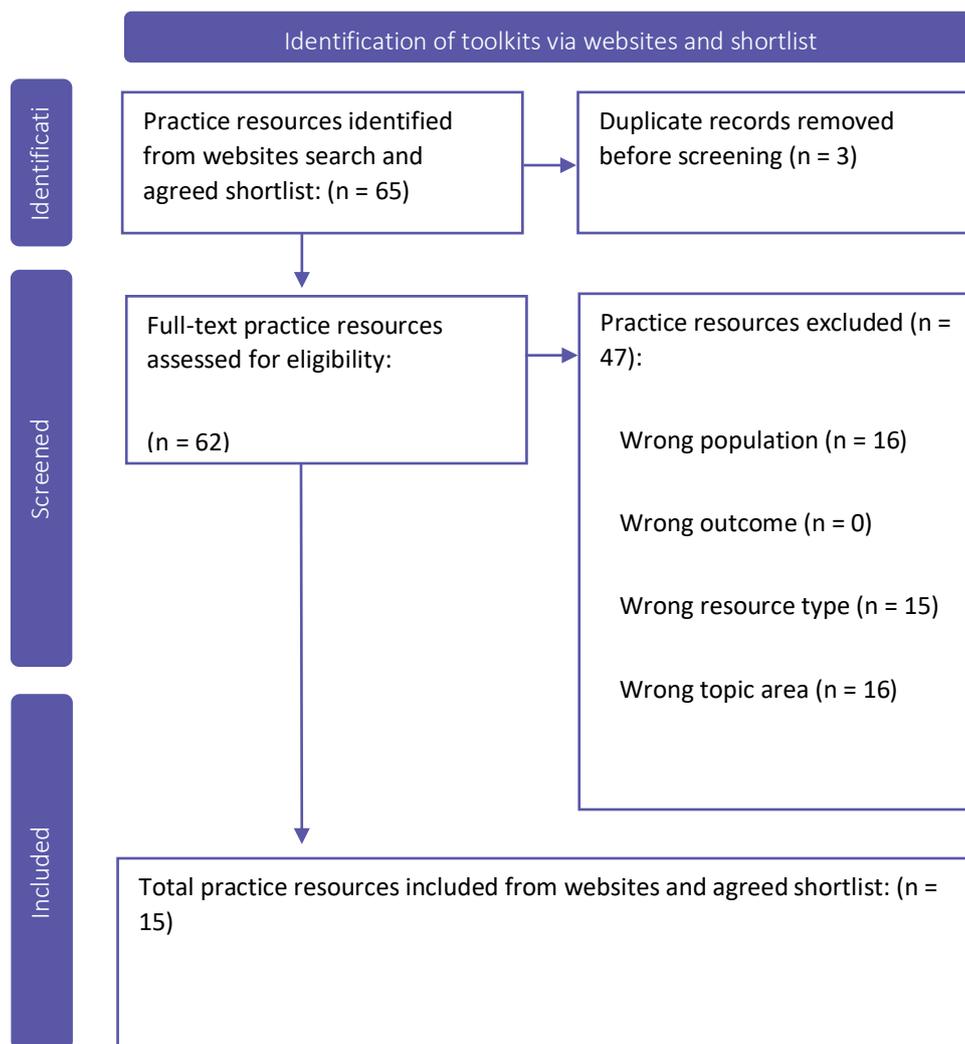
In addition to the database searches, a list of websites were agreed upon in the scoping and inception report. The search strategy for each website can be found in appendix 2. A total of 9,255 records were found through web searching. These records were screened for both potential missed reviews and relevant practice resources. As table 6 demonstrates, there was variation between the amount of records from sites, partially due to website search functionality, sometimes returning many results irrelevant to the scope of the study.

**Table 6. Website searches**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Records screened</b>
The Centre for Children and Young People’s Participation	1129
UK Participatory Research Network	18
Centre for Social Justice and Community Action	14
UK Youth	164
Children and Young People Now	5730
Young Voices Heard	29
Youth Access	53
YERP	1
Youth Link Scotland	12
Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Research	162
Youth Futures Foundation	210
Youth Endowment Fund	108
What Works for Children’s Social Care (historic)	94
UK Department for Work and Pensions	832
US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation	258
Institute for Employment Studies	110
YMCA George Williams College	233
Participation People	8
The University College London Centre for Policy and Equalising Opportunities	40
Google Scholar	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>9, 255</b>

Following the review of the websites, as well a shortlist shared by professionals working at the Youth Futures Foundation, a total of 65 practice resources were identified as holding potential relevance to the review. The PICOSS was applied to these resources, to inform inclusion and exclusion decision making. Three of the 65 practice resources shortlisted were identified as duplicated, leaving 62 studies to be fully screened. 47 practice resources were excluded during the full text review for a range of exclusion reasons, outlined below. The remaining 15 practice resources were taken forward for full text extraction.

**Figure 4.** PRISMA table for practice resources



### 3.3 Characteristics of included studies

#### Review of reviews

Table 8 sets out key characteristics of the 18 reviews included in the study. Some of the reviews failed to provide the level of detail to report consistently across all data extraction points. In these instances, ‘not described’ has been added. Full references to all of these studies can be found in the bibliography. As mentioned in the adaptations section of the methodology, the age ranges vary within and between reviews because the primary studies that are included in these papers vary significantly.

**Table 7. Characteristics of the studies included from the review of reviews**

Lead Author	Title	Year of publication	Country of publication	Fields covered	Age ranges of included papers	Number of primary studies reviewed
<b>Ali et al.</b>	Review: Patient engagement in child, adolescent, and youth mental health care research – a scoping review	2022	Canada	Mental health	10 – 24	16
<b>Anyon et al.</b>	A Systematic Review of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in the United States: Methodologies, Youth Outcomes, and Future Directions	2018	USA	Schools, Community organisations and universities	25 or younger	44
<b>Bradbury-Jones et al.</b>	The complexities and contradictions in participatory research with vulnerable children and young people: A qualitative systematic review	2018	UK	Not described	Not described (‘young people’)	13

Lead Author	Title	Year of publication	Country of publication	Fields covered	Age ranges of included papers	Number of primary studies reviewed
<b>Branquinho et al.</b>	Community-based Youth Participatory Action Research studies with a focus on youth health and well-being: A systematic review	2020	Portugal	Health and wellbeing	11-25	13
<b>Cullen et al.</b>	A Narrative Review of Ethical Issues in Participatory Research with Young People	2020	Canada	Mental health, homelessness, youth pregnancy, abuse/neglect	5 – 25	26
<b>Forshaw et al.</b>	Student participation in the development of whole-school wellbeing strategies: a systematic review of the literature	2022	UK	Wellbeing and mental health	11-18	10
<b>Fountain et al.</b>	A 10-Year Systematic Review of Photovoice Projects with Youth in the United States	2021	USA	Health	8-26	47
<b>Freire et al.</b>	Engaging with Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review of Participatory Methods and Approaches in Research Informing the Development of Health Resources and Interventions	2022	Australia	Health	3-17	26

Lead Author	Title	Year of publication	Country of publication	Fields covered	Age ranges of included papers	Number of primary studies reviewed
<b>Geurts et al.</b>	Co-creation and decision-making with students about teaching and learning: a systematic literature review	2023	Netherlands	Education	12-19	15
<b>Gibbs et al.</b>	Literature Review on the Use of Action Research in Higher Education	2017	UK	Education	Not described ('students')	Not described
<b>Grace et al.</b>	Where are the silences? A scoping review of child participatory research literature in the context of the Australian service system	2019	Australia	Child protection, disability, education, health, housing and homelessness, juvenile justice and mental health	18 and younger	207
<b>Kennedy et al.</b>	More than Data Collectors: A Systematic Review of the Environmental Outcomes of Youth Inquiry Approaches in the United States	2019	USA	Education, health, social inequalities, violence and safety	25 and younger	68
<b>Malorni et al.</b>	Facilitating youth participatory action research (YPAR): A scoping review of relational practice in U.S. Youth development & out-of-school time projects	2022	USA	Community based	12-18	40

Lead Author	Title	Year of publication	Country of publication	Fields covered	Age ranges of included papers	Number of primary studies reviewed
<b>McCabe et al.</b>	Youth engagement in mental health research: A systematic review	2023	Canada	Health	9-16+	16
<b>Nowland et al.</b>	Peer Research by Children and Young People and their allies: Rapid Evidence Review of best practices in health and social science literature	2022	UK	Violence	5-25	196
<b>Ozer et al.</b>	Youth Participatory Approaches and Health Equity: Conceptualization and Integrative Review	2020	USA, India & Australia	Health	Not described ('youth')	24
<b>Raanaas et al.</b>	A Scoping Review of Participatory Action Research to Promote Mental Health and Resilience in Youth and Adolescent	2020	USA	Mental health and resilience	10-30	54
<b>Tilley et al.</b>	Qualitative Methods and Respectful Praxis: Researching with Youth	2018	Canada	Not described	8-25	30

## Review of practice resources

Table 8. sets out key characteristics of the 15 practice guidance documents included in the study. As is reflected in the ‘country of publication,’ these resources come from varied geographical contexts. 5 practice resources are from UK contexts, 3 are taken from Australian contexts, 3 from the US, 1 from Canada and the remaining two are transnational.

**Table 8. Characteristics of the studies include in review of practice guidance documents**

Lead organisation	Title of resource	Year of publication	Country of publication	Field of participatory approaches covered
<b>Australia Government Department of Social Services &amp; Families</b>	On PAR: Using Participatory Action Research to Improve Early Intervention	2010	Australia	Child and family early intervention services
<b>Centre For Community Engagement</b>	Community-based research Toolkit	2019	Trans-national	Community based youth work
<b>Centre for Young Peoples Participation</b>	The magic 6: Participatory action and learning experiences with Roma youth training manual	2016	United States	Community based youth work
<b>Elevate Children’s Funders Group</b>	Weaving a collective tapestry: A Funders Toolkit for Child and Youth Participation	2022	Trans-national	Funding, Philanthropy & Grant Making

Lead organisation	Title of resource	Year of publication	Country of publication	Field of participatory approaches covered
English National Youth Arts Network	Creative Youth Consultation & Participation Toolkit	2013	United Kingdom	Youth Art
Maine Youth Action Network	Youth participatory action research	2020	United States	Community/youth leadership
Partnership for Young London	Trauma Informed Youth Engagement toolkit	2022	United Kingdom	Youth Engagement
SALTO Participation & Information Centre	Youth Participation Toolkit	2021	Trans-national (Continental Europe focussed)	Community based youth work
The Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies	What is co-research? Introduction to the co-research toolkit	2022	Australia	Youth Social Research
The Knowledge Institute	Walking the talk: A toolkit for engaging youth in mental health	2019	Canada	Mental health
YMCA George Williams College	Young peoples participation in decision making: UK 2022 Survey Report	2022	United Kingdom	Community based youth work
Young Minds	Evaluating Participation: A guide for professionals	2020	United Kingdom	Mental Health

Lead organisation	Title of resource	Year of publication	Country of publication	Field of participatory approaches covered
<b>Young Minds</b>	Supporting the participation of children and young people experiencing extra vulnerabilities	2020	United Kingdom	Mental Health
<b>The Research Hub for Youth Organizing and Education Policy</b>	Youth Participatory Action Research Teachers Toolkit	N.D	United States	School & Community
<b>Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre</b>	Participatory Design of evidence-based online youth mental health promotion, intervention and treatment	2012	Australia	Mental Health

### 3.4 Identifying current participatory practice

This section uses the reviews and practice resources to answer the first research question:

- What can be learnt from previous research, and emerging practice, about how to effectively design and implement youth participation approaches?

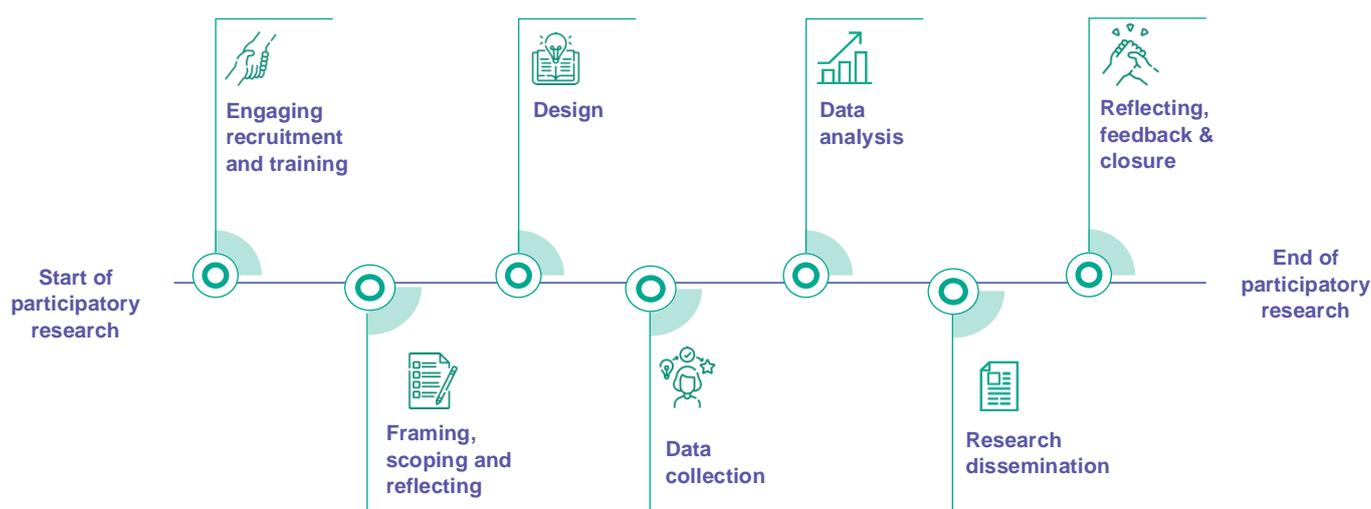
The review suggests that young people engage with research and evaluation projects at differing points, shaping decision making, analysis and dissemination in contrasting ways. This divergence in practice is driven by contextual factors which inform decision making around youth participatory approaches. Specifically, research and evaluation organisations are positioned in contexts with varied resourcing, knowledge, expertise, and backgrounds. Unsurprisingly, the quality of youth participatory implementation varies based on the approaches taken.

While the implementation of youth participatory approaches varied significantly, the research and evaluation 'journey' for projects was relatively uniform, consisting of a range of stages which interacted with one another in differing ways. These stages include:

- Engaging, recruiting and training.
- Framing, scoping and setting up.
- Designing.
- Data collection.
- Data analysis.
- Research dissemination.
- Reflection, feedback, and closure.

To reflect this learning, a diagram was created to visually demonstrate the common stages of the typical research project journey. These stages can often be found to follow a sequential path. However, this linear conception is not always followed in practice and the varied 'stages' of the research journey can be more fluid and adaptable, with blurred lines between stages. Organisations may not implement all of the stages – for example, youth participatory data collection may not always be followed by, reflecting, feedback and closure. Similarly, some organisations may not involve young people in data analysis.

**Figure 5. Research and evaluation participatory approach journey**



The lack of consistency and transparency of the nature of participatory approaches was a finding of the synthesis and was reflected upon explicitly by Larkins et al. (2021).

*“There was no consistency in the way that the stages of research were described, and there was rarely sufficient detail to judge the extent to which children, young people and adults involvement influenced what actually happened, which made it impossible to use a common measure of whether different stages of the research were participants, peer or co-researcher lead” (Larkins et al., 2021).*

The research and evaluation journey seeks to not only encourage greater clarity when conceptualising emerging youth participatory practice but also provide a structured framework to present and frame our learnings within this review. The following presents learnings organised by the journey elements highlighted above. Specifically, the following section reflect on each stage of the research and evaluation journey in turn, setting out finding and lessons, and providing an ‘at a glance’ summary of how youth participatory approaches are actioned in practice. It is important to note that not all of the included reviews and practice resources reflected on the more practical methods of delivery. Many were more focused on barriers and facilitators to participatory approaches as an overall and did not look in more granular detail at different stages of the research journey.

### **3.4.1 Engaging, recruiting & training**

The included literature suggested that in good practice, engaging, recruiting, and training young people should take place prior to scoping and set up of research projects. This ensures that young people play a leading role in early decision making. However, in many instances, recruitment and engagement with young people was a secondary step, taken once decisions around project scope, aims and parameters had already been taken by research professionals. This was typically a result of embedded organisation processes, a lack of available funding for projects which were yet to be defined, and an absence of ongoing working relationships with marginalised young people. Research organisations who have ongoing engagement with youth advisory panels, for example, were more likely to engage with young people to collaborate on early project decision making.

The Research Hub for Youth Organizing and Education Policy specifically highlighted how vital it is to build a 'community' amongst those involved in participatory projects to establish a collective foundation to build from:

*'Building community is an important first step in the youth participatory action research cycle...Being part of a community that is trying to make change can be a source of empowerment and strength building and can provide a sense of purpose and belonging for participants' (The Research Hub for Youth Organizing and Education Policy, n.d., p. 8).*

There was variation in how organisations initially engaged with young people and the level to which they were expected to participate. Some young people were trained as peer researchers following initial recruitment, while in other instances young people were consulted about key decisions relating to the start of projects in a lighter touch manner. While approaches to recruitment and training of young people varied, there was a shared finding on the importance of recruiting and engaging with young people effectively.

### *What's happening in practice?*

- **Ethical recruitment for participatory approaches** – Recruiting marginalised young people to focus on reaching those with relevant lived experience, but ensuring engagement in the project does not re-traumatise young people.
- **Expectation management** – At the point of initial engagement and recruitment of young people, managing expectations carefully to ensure young people are clear on the parameters and potential outcomes of the research project.
- **Seeking advice from professional networks** – Engaging practitioners and academics who work closely with young people to develop greater reach strategies to recruit young people to participatory projects.
- **Peer to peer recruitment** – Supporting young people who have already engaged in the project to discuss it within social groups may result in increased engagement from marginalised young people, as they can help others to overcome any concerns they may have about participating.
- **Clear, engaging and accessible explanatory materials** – Ensuring that explanatory materials are engaging to young people, use accessible language and are culturally sensitive.
- **Peer to peer research training** – Youth researchers offering peer to peer training prior to the start of framing, scoping and reflecting, providing benefits to the design and delivery of the project.

### **3.4.2 Framing, scoping & reflecting**

Framing, scoping and reflecting provides space for young people to work collaboratively with researchers to ensure that research projects are focused on issues that resonate with lived experiences of young people, that the questions are focused in ways which are meaningful, and that potential outcomes are meaningful to young people. As mentioned above, while in good practice scenarios this phase of the research journey would come

following meaningful engagement with young people, this was not often the case in practice.

As noted by the Centre for Community Engagement (2019), young people should take a leading role in determining research questions in participatory approaches. This prevents research professionals projecting their subjective perspectives onto the lived experiences of marginalized young people and is a point within the research journey where power is shared in a tangible manner:

*“PAR [Participatory Action Research] is an approach to research that values the significant knowledge people hold about their lives and experiences. PAR positions those most intimately impacted by research as leaders in shaping research questions, framing interpretations, and designing meaningful research products and actions” (Centre for Community Engagement, 2019, p.4).*

In addition to collaborating with young people to determine the scope of the project, this phase provides a space for researchers to think about what they are bringing to the project from an ethical perspective. Specifically, having high levels of reflexivity can ensure that researchers have actively considered power relationships present within the participatory approach which should inform nuanced ways of working alongside young people. Furthermore, researchers can actively consider how they attempt to implement participatory approaches throughout the research project, which theoretical model underpins the project and how might this materialise in practice. Applying an existing theoretical framework, such as those outlined in appendix 1, is likely to create a shared level of understanding across research teams which can be referenced throughout the project.

### *What’s happening in practice?*

- **Collaborating to define issues** – Working alongside young people to clearly identify what issues they are facing and how these issues may tangibly impact upon their lives.
- **Identifying points for reflective practice** – Discussing and deciding with young people when may be the best time to reflect on the project progress in line with key participatory approach considerations.
- **Co-producing research questions** – Creating space for young people to define and determine specific research questions in collaboration with researchers.
- **Researcher reflexivity** – Holding a specific space within projects for adult researchers to think critically about what they may bring to the project, what power dynamics they may need to be mindful of and how they can practice in an empowering, trauma informed manner.
- **Strategising and clarifying participatory approach** – Referring to participatory research literature to take a strategized and evidence led approach to the project which has a clear understanding of how involvement of young people relates to existing frameworks at differing points in the research journey.

### **3.4.3 Designing**

Reflecting on the key messages taken from the included literature, when young people are involved earlier in the research process, they have more influence over the direction of the

research and how it is conducted. A consistent learning throughout this review, was that the way in which young people were found to be involved in methodological decision making varies depending on the level of inclusivity throughout the participatory approach. Critically, a level of knowledge is seen to be required to ensure that decision making about method and approach would appropriately respond to the research questions, which required a level of training for young people. By empowering young people to have a greater level of understanding of the impact of key decisions relating to projects resulted in heightened autonomy to shape decision making. This autonomy facilitated improved equity and mitigated against more extractive practice. For those organisations who are unable to offer in depth training to young people, decision making often sits with professional researchers. In contrast, organisations which implemented peer researcher training approaches are more likely to share methodological decisions.

Involvement of young people in design decisions supports researchers to reflect on how accessible approaches are to a diverse range of young people. Small things like language used in discussion guides are able to be reviewed and refined by young people to become more closely aligned with youth voice more generally. In addition, young people think about how methodologies could become more engaging to young people and subsequently generate more meaningful learnings.

### *What's happening in practice?*

- **Co-development of data collection tools** – Collaboration between young people and researchers to design tools like surveys and qualitative discussion guides.
- **Identifying diverse approaches** – Working with young people to think about creative and diverse methodologies can respond to the varied forms of interaction likely to be seen throughout the project.
- **Identifying points of flexibility** – Identifying with young people where and how data collection may have to be adaptable and flexible to meet young people's needs whilst maintaining high levels of rigour.
- **Creating strategies for wider engagement** – Working with a smaller group of young people to reflect on potential barriers to reach and developing co-produced strategies to overcome challenges.
- **Defining and refining key concepts** – Collaborating with young people to strengthen understandings of key terms that hold relevance to the study ensuring that academic definitions are reflective of lived experience.

### **3.4.4 Data collection**

We found data collection is implemented in differing ways depending on the levels of participation. In projects with lower levels of youth engagement, research methods were led by adult researchers and participatory approaches were implemented, typically through qualitative interviews, focus groups and consultations. In line with higher levels of participation, methods were often led and implemented by young people trained as peer researchers.

Offering a diverse range of methods through participatory approaches can facilitate more effective engagement from young people. Specifically, implementing more creative and innovative research methods alongside the more traditional data collection approaches was seen to facilitate an environment that would be more inclusive to a range of voices and perspectives (English National Youth Arts Network, 2013; Raanaas et al., 2020). Using creative methods was seen to facilitate engagement from young people who may not always feel comfortable verbally articulating their experiences or perspectives:

*'Stories aren't always verbal. Art, theatre photographs, or memes are commonly used to communicate experiences. Researchers can also use arts-based methods to invite people to share their views experiences or ideas through photographs, memes drawing, or other creative arts' (Maine Youth Network, 2020, p.8).*

### **What's happening in practice?**

- **Peer-to-peer-led data collection** – Young people leading qualitative interviews and focus groups with peer groups.
- **Traditional methods** – Researcher leading more traditional data collection methods to engage with young people (e.g., focus groups, qualitative interviews, consultation).
- **Visual and digital methods** – Using photovoice, thematic drawing, and symbolic approaches to engage with young people in participatory ways that are not based on direct conversation which for some young people can be challenging.
- **Action orientated methods** – Encouraging young people to identify and think about issues within local systems (schools, services, community provisions) and actively provide potential solutions which could be implemented.
- **Culturally responsive delivery** – Delivering methods in settings that are familiar to marginalised communities by researchers that are familiar and embedded within young people's cultural worlds.

### **3.4.5 Data analysis**

Studies noted how young people's involvement helps with interpreting the words of youth participants authentically and expands adults' understanding of the data. Involving young people in the data analysis stage of research can encourage deeper and more nuanced understanding of lived experiences that may otherwise be challenging to establish. In addition, working alongside young people during this phase of the research journey ensured that professional researchers were able to consult young people on their interpretations of data to ensure that subjective perspectives were not projected onto the lived experiences of marginalised young people.

The extent to which young people were involved in this phase of the research journey varied. One review noted that even in studies that did involve young people in the data analysis process, sometimes youth were involved as consultants after themes had been developed, rather than as active participants in the interpretation and development of themes. This distinction again reflects how varied the implementation of participatory approaches can be; in some practice environments participatory approaches may be applied to some phases of the research journey but not others, creating inconsistent levels of youth involvement.

### *What's happening in practice?*

- **Youth-led analysis groups** – Young people working with qualitative data to interpret into key learnings, drawing on their own lived experiences to refine and reframe.
- **Identifying methodological challenges** – Young people and researchers working in collaboration to think about how data may have been impacted by methodological decisions (acceptability of data collection approaches).
- **Youth-led reflection on data trends** – Encouraging young people to connect quantitative data trends to driving factors based on their lived experiences.
- **Researcher-led consultations** – Researchers working with young people to present and refine existing analysis to ensure framing aligns with young people's perspectives and experiences.

### **3.4.6 Research dissemination**

Knowledge translation and dissemination is often aimed to directly create impact. An absence of youth directed decision making in this phase of the researching journey was seen to be symptomatic of approaches that failed to share power at a critical stage of the project:

*“A lack of involvement and translation of the knowledge into action when doing participatory action research with youth may risk that the original power structures are maintained and reinforced rather than the young ones being provided with any new tools, capacity or skills to improve their lives” (Hoechner, 2015).*

The ways in which young people were involved in knowledge translation and dissemination were not described consistently across the included literature. Working alongside researchers to determine the mode of dissemination, young people were found to promote more diverse ways of communicating learnings that were accessible to young people as well as academics, policy makers and other relevant audiences. These more creative and youth-centred approaches typically sat alongside more traditional research outputs such as technical reports.

### *What's happening in practice?*

- **Co-production of traditional research outputs** – Young people working alongside researchers to bring together findings in reports, fact sheets and summaries.
- **Co-presenting learnings** – Researchers and young people engaging with stakeholders to communicate key learnings and advocate for change.
- **Development of diverse and creative outputs** – Producing creative outputs showcasing research findings (e.g., films, poems, social media campaigns, live performances, exhibitions).

- **Promoting accessibility** – Young people leading on decision making around voice and language of final outputs to ensure that learnings are accessible to the communities that have established them.

### 3.4.7 Reflecting, feedback & closure

The final phase of the research journey, which was found to be a critical stage of participatory approaches, was reflection, feedback and closure. While this phase is presented as the ‘final stage’ of the linear journey, often moments of reflection and feedback were found throughout. Providing space to young people to offer insight, and recommendations relevant to their experiences of engaging in the research project, was a way of ensuring that power relationships were equal and balanced. It also meant that professional researchers assumed a ‘learning’ position within the project, refining their methodological approaches based on lived experiences.

*‘Processes should be constantly open to scrutiny—that is, letting a range of people observe, reflect, question, and interpret what is happening as it goes along. This means that sometimes participants can claim their input was misinterpreted and say ‘no that’s not what we meant’ before a strategy is developed and implemented. An open process also allows for monitoring of who is involved and consulted, and what their input actually means’ (Australian Government Department of Social Services, Families and Children, 2010, p. 4).*

Having a closure session towards the end of the project gives space to young people to voice any issues they had during their experiences, meaning that researchers could take forward these insights into future projects.

#### *What’s happening in practice?*

- **Documenting points of participation** – Reflecting on where most effective points of participation happened from the perspective of young people to encourage refinement of method moving forward.
- **Reflecting on successes and challenges of the project** – Answering: What were the shared stories of success throughout the project? Contrastingly, where did challenges arise and how may these have been mitigated?
- **Youth-led personal growth reflection** – Providing space for young people to reflect on the ways in which they have developed through participatory approaches.
- **Next steps and close** – Thinking about the ways in which young people and researchers can take their experiences forward into new research projects as well as life more widely.

## 3.5 Drivers of promising practice

Building on the examples of emerging participatory practice within the existing literature and documents, we identified perceived drivers of promising practice and responded to the second research questions:

2. What conditions, practices, skills or processes do research organisations develop or embed to enable meaningful, impactful, ethical youth participation in research?

The identified drivers of promising practice typically apply to, and hold varying levels of relevance to, the different stages of the participatory research and evaluation journey outlined above. The extent to which these drivers can be implemented into a practice setting will depend on contextual factors. However, the literature indicates that their presence throughout the research and evaluation journey results in a high level and quality of participation, subsequently leading to meaningful experiences for young people and researchers involved, as well as higher quality research produced.

The review identified the following characteristics of promising practice:

- Theorising, conceptualising, and reflexivity
- Consideration of youth voice
- Power sharing between adults and youth
- Communication and engagement throughout participation
- Transparency and feedback cycles
- Inclusive practices
- Safe spaces for participation
- Trauma informed collaboration
- Incentives and recognition for youth participation

A learning from this synthesis is how interrelated these drivers of promising practice are - while they are discussed and presented in separate entities, it is clear that they are not siloed in practice. For example, considerations of voice are interrelated with power sharing and depend on the provision of safe spaces. Similarly, high levels of inclusivity during participatory approaches can only be achieved through meaningful communication and engagement. In reality, the drivers of promising practice established through this review, where possible, should be delivered in a blended manner and respond to contextual factors and the needs of young people. The following sections go through each of the points in more detail.

### **Theorising the participatory approach to be used**

One of the learnings across both the reviews and practice resources was the varied way in which participatory approaches were conceptualised and applied in practice. Variation in terminology and application meant that there was limited scope for comparing the levels of participatory approaches, meaning comparative analyses on successful implementation were not possible. This not only presented an issue in terms of bringing together the included literature, but also was reflective of the practice landscape of youth participatory approaches:

*“There was no consistency in the way that the stages of research were described and there was rarely sufficient detail to judge the extent to which children, young people and adults involvement influenced what actually happened, which made it impossible to use a common measure of whether different stages of the research were participants, peer or co-researcher lead” (Larkins et al., 2022).*

This issue highlights the need to have a clear and strategic sense of how, where and why research and evaluation projects aim to achieve participatory approaches. What conceptual underpinnings are informing the approach and how can these conceptualisations meaningfully shape the delivery and design of youth participatory research? For example, if Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation (see appendix 1) provides the theoretical underpinning of the project, what degree of participation ought to be achieved and at which points in the research journey? Subsequently, can this foundational decision making provide an ongoing reference point throughout the delivery of research and evaluation projects to monitor delivery and inclusion of young people? By taking time to theorise and conceptualise the nature and implementation of participatory research, accountability can be brought to delivery in practice.

In addition to theorising and conceptualising the overall participatory approach, studies highlighted practitioners should take time and space to reflect on what they bring to the project and how their identities could impact upon the success of participatory approaches. Specifically, this is relevant to avoid unintentionally re-affirming imbalances in power, particularly if researchers’ identities do not reflect those of the young people that they are working alongside. Larkins and colleagues (2022) suggest that prior to engagement with young people, researchers should actively take time to think about how they can mitigate and prepare for instances where during participatory approaches there may be notable imbalances.

Highlighting how reflecting on theory can lead to improved practice, Elevate Children’s Funder’s Group (2022) demonstrate how reflecting on historic shortcomings of philanthropy should inform active approaches to recruitment and reach:

*“Shifting power requires critically reflecting on the wrongs in philanthropy’s history and putting in extra efforts to reach out to children and youth from more marginalized backgrounds or who are traditionally excluded” (Elevate Children’s Funders Group, 2022, p.21).*

While theorising, conceptualising and reflexivity may seem like more abstract notions to be connected to practice settings, when applied meaningfully and throughout participatory approaches they can ensure that delivery is equitable, transparent and of high quality. By embedding space for this thinking throughout the research journey, participatory approaches can take an informed and strategic approach to empowering young people from marginalised backgrounds.

## **Consideration of voice**

The role of youth voice was one of the prominent components of promising practice in participatory approaches across both practice resources and reviews. Considering youth voices involves ensuring that a range of young people’s opinions are considered and centralised in the research process, and that the research is grounded in a diverse range of

lived experiences. Definitions of participatory approaches typically suggested that the involvement of youth voice was the common component defining this way of working. By successfully harnessing youth voice, participatory approaches hold the potential to challenge 'traditional ways of knowing, and result in findings that challenge dominant narratives... question existing structures or disrupt the status quo' (Maine Youth Action Network, 2020, p.2).

While the voices of young people and children can be involved in all stages of the research journey, some of the included literature specifically focussed on involvement of youth voice in the scoping and framing stage and the data analysis research stage. Specifically, increased voice can give adult researchers an understanding of the issues and barriers that young people are facing which could otherwise be misunderstood or missed entirely (Anyon et al., 2018; Branquinho et al., 2020; Fountain et al., 2021). Ensuring that young people's lived experiences shape the research to begin with will result in youth research and evaluation activities that respond to the issues faced by young people, and in learnings that resonate with lived experience.

*"You need to understand what young people perceive as a problem, or you want to understand particular issues in the context of young people lives and here there is potential for the most impact" (Young and Well Co-operative Research Centre, 2012, p. 4).*

In the data analysis stage of the research journey, involving youth voices and experiences can lead to more nuanced and sensitive understandings of data, which may not be possible by adult researchers alone. Interpretations of data may be more grounded in reality, and learnings produced can be more holistic and reflective of lived experiences (Cullen & Walsh, 2020). However, Larkins and colleagues (2022) note that it is sometimes the case that youth are only engaged at the later stages of the research journey, where they typically would have less influence over the research. Therefore, it is important that youth voice is considered throughout all stages of the research journey.

The included literature highlighted a range of methods to facilitate the voices of diverse groups of young people. Of significant importance was that adult researchers recognise the unique perspectives that young people bring to the research journey, and that their diverse range of experiences can drive the development of richer framings and approaches to research (Forshaw & Woods, 2022; McCabe et al., 2023). To facilitate this, participatory approaches may utilise a range of age-appropriate, engaging and creative data collection techniques to create space for youth voice to be incorporated into learnings (Frieire et al., 2022; McCabe et al., 2023; Larkins et al., 2022; Raanaass et al., 2020; Tilley & Taylor, 2018).

*"Seeking a number of voices in a range of different ways that suit various groups assists making well-founded rigorous conclusions. Looking at an issue from a range of perspectives is a bit like colouring a picture. You might start out with a sketchy, black and white outline of what something 'looks like.' Then, as people provide their own views and input, the issues come into clearer focus and the picture becomes more complex and three dimensional with subtle shading and colour" (Australian Government Department of Social Services: Families and Children, 2010, p.45).*

Overcoming power imbalances between adult and youth researchers and finding ways to actively centralise and prioritise the youth voice was highlighted as a facilitator across reviews (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018; Geurts et al., 2023; Malorni et al., 2022; McCabe et al., 2023; Raanaas et al., 2020). Geurts et al. (2023) found that to harness the values of young people, researchers need to shift towards sharing voice as opposed to assessing it. This was achieved by supporting adult researchers (e.g. through training) to break down existing power structures, so that young people can engage in research processes effectively, shaping decisions through their voice (Geurts et al., 2023, Raanaas et al., 2020). The Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies (2022) found that the participatory approaches should reflect a democratic process which values all voices in equal measure. Alongside considering power, youth can have autonomy and space within the research process (Freire et al., 2022).

Whilst considering youth voice in the research process, the resources highlighted the following reflections. First, youth voices may take a range of forms, including silence which may also be considered to be a form of communication, and can be used by young people to express opinions about a topic (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018). Furthermore, as youth researchers become involved in the research process, adult researchers should continue to consider and assess whether the voices of the youth involved are representing general youth, or if they have developed sufficient knowledge of and skills in research, that their voice becomes representative of a researcher (McCabe et al., 2023).

### **Power sharing**

Relationships of power were found to be critical threads that ran through participatory approaches. The majority of both the reviews and practice resources, either directly or indirectly, reflected on how awareness of power dynamics was key. While participatory approaches provide opportunities for young people to become change makers, they can re-enforce the power researchers have over those from marginalised communities. Effective youth participatory approaches not only are mindful of these dynamics, but also are delivered in ways which address potential power imbalances to create equitable spaces that are empowering to marginalised young people. Having a clear understanding of the level of participatory approaches is foundational to identifying where power should be shared.

From reviewing the literature, one consideration when thinking about power was positioning of adults when engaging with young people. Specifically, reflections were made on what is often a top-down relationship, where professional adults are assumed to be expert knowledge holders and educators, while children are recipients of knowledge offered by adult counterparts. Reflecting on how this dynamic is particularly prevalent to education contexts, The Research Hub for Youth Organizing and Education (n.d.) identified how participatory approaches challenge assumed power positionings and empower children to taking a leading role in creating change:

*“The relationship between teacher, schools, and students creates a power dynamic that places students as recipients of knowledge. This toolkit challenges that power dynamic and views youth as experts and teachers as guides; teachers and students can act and learn together, create critical research, take charge, and create change!” (The Research Hub for Youth Organizing and Education Policy, n.d., p.5).*

When thinking about the different stages of research and evaluation projects, power sharing can be applied throughout participatory approach research journeys, from decision making on who set's research questions to who takes the lead in the dissemination of learnings. Across the included literature, the levels of power sharing varied, typically reflecting the extent to which young people were involved in the project overall. In instances of higher youth participation, young people were able to drive decision making throughout. In those with lower levels of participation, young people were consulted at key touch points.

## **Communication & engagement**

If youth voice is to be seen as the fundamental characteristic of promising participatory approaches, well-practiced communication and engagement is the means to achieve it. Transparent, frequent and clear communication ensures that young people are heard throughout the differing stages of research and evaluation and that their level of participation does not deviate from the initially intended level. Initially, it is important to ensure young people have a sense of the contribution through their participation in the research (Young Minds, 2020).

Using multiple methods of communication helps young people participate in a way that feels comfortable to them and also ensures high standards of communication. Some young people feel more suited to communicating in person in larger groups, whilst others may prefer less direct ways of communicating. Offering flexibility and diversity in different communication approaches ensures all young people feel comfortable to participate meaningfully, and to reach more youth at the margins (Anyon et al., 2018; Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018; Larkins et al., 2022; Raanaas et al., 2020). Above all, modes of communication were viewed positively when youth-focussed and include those such as instant messaging, as well as more traditional communication channels.

Recognising both the strengths and weaknesses of differing modes of communication ensures that youth engagement is informed and considered. For example, digital engagement and communication with young people is likely to result in wider reach and enhance the ways that young people can provide their perspectives. Specifically, digital communication methods provide a less direct option when compared to traditional research methods such as one-to-one interviews. SALTO Participation and Information Centre (2021) recommend that digital tools should be used for facilitating consensus building and sharing decision making when face-to-face communication is not an option. However, the levels of digital exclusion across some more marginalised communities may mean that use of this approach as a primary communication method could prohibit the involvement of young people who may have unique perspectives to share.

In addition to offering diverse modes of communication to respond to the needs and voices of young people, another prominent learning was the need for inclusive language. Specifically, the world of research and evolution can be embedded in the academic world, which normalises technical language which is not always accessible to the communities that it seeks to serve. In youth participatory approaches, this division between adult academics and young people and children can be even more entrenched due to the varying levels of exposure to academia held by young people. Research should not only consider accessible language, but also culturally appropriate and non-triggering language to different young people. For instance, the power of language during micro interactions

between researchers and marginalised young people who may have experienced trauma is summarised by Partnership for Young London (2022):

**Figure 6. Partnership for Young London (2022) – Resist re-traumatisation through using inclusive language**

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Say this</b>	<b>Why</b>
Wow you're so articulate	Thank you for saying such an informative story	Reduced socio-economically micro-aggressive language
Knife crime/suicide 'epidemic'	Concerning rate of	It is really helpful how clearly you communicate your thoughts
Committed suicide	Took their own life	Committed implies it is a crime and stigmatises
Boys and girls	People, everyone, humans, earthlings, change makers	Inclusive language for people in the LGBTQ+ community. 1 in 8 people aged 18-24 in this community have attempted to end their life
Amazing opportunity	An opportunity to [brief outline of proposed reward/process]	Outlining features of unpaid experiences in an unbiased way alleviates pressure for a YP to come get involved
My young people	Young advisor/experts of experience/those with experience of	To avoid infantilising competent experts of the room
What do you think about	If you feel like sharing, I'd like to understand your perspective	Being more specific about wanting to gain insight as a form of collaboration
[after a focus group] any other thoughts or feelings	How was it for you to talk about this	A reflective checking out and checking in on how the session was

### **Transparency & feedback cycles**

A further driver of promising practice was transparency from adult researchers, and feedback cycles to provide youth researchers with opportunities to contribute to the

process and content of research periodically. Specifically, the literature highlighted the importance of ensuring that there was clear communication to young people from offset about the scope, parameters and reach of the project so expectations were managed to mitigate against diverging expectation of what was feasible to deliver. Parameters not only provided transparency in relation to the scope of the project itself, but also outlined clarity around roles and responsibilities from offset – where decision making could be shared, and where it may be more challenging.

Having feedback cycles was seen as a mechanism of maintaining transparency. This involves building in a mechanism for asking for feedback from youth about the engagement process and how you will incorporate feedback into the process. By planning for feedback cycles throughout the participatory review, there was space for young people to challenge decision making and take the lead in the delivery of the project, including next steps.

Having transparency throughout the project and actively establishing points for young people to feedback was seen to be a driver of increased trust and subsequently improved participatory approaches (Larkins et al., 2022). The prominence of trusting relationships between researchers and young people was a common thread throughout the drivers of good practice (Ali et al., 2022; Forshaw and Woods, 2022; Fountain et al., 2021; McCabe et al., 2023; Tilley & Taylor, 2018). Without high levels of trust between all involved in participatory research projects, it's unlikely marginalised young people would feel motivated to engage in the process in a meaningful way. This holds particular relevance to when marginalised young people have had negative experiences when engaging with services, programmes and systems and therefore hold limited levels of trust within professional environments. Developing these trusted relationships can be challenging (McCabe et al., 2023), but facilitators to developing them included building in time at the outset of youth participation activities to build rapport between the research team members, making sure that space for honest communication was provided and encouraged (Ali et al., 2022; Larkins et al., 2022; Tilley & Taylor, 2018), and by having a young person on the training team (Larkins et al., 2022).

## **Inclusivity**

Relatedly, inclusivity was a driver of effective participatory approaches, specifically when engaging with marginalised young people. As highlighted by SALTO Participation and Information Centre (2021, p.5):

*“To be real and meaningful for young people, participation experiences must be sensitive to diversity, accessible to all and inclusive of all young people, no matter their background, social situation, level of opportunity, ability or disability” (SALTO Participation and Information Centre, 2021, p.5).*

Larkins et al. (2022) suggests that researchers should actively think about how they can design and deliver methods which are ‘de-colonised’ that is that they are adapted based on the perspectives and needs of young people from marginalised backgrounds. Specifically, methods should be adaptable and diverse in nature, and not solely informed and shaped in line with more traditional academic practices.

One practice resource which specifically focussed on participation of young people from traveller communities noted how practitioners should be familiar with informal language used by young people to ensure that there is a understanding of terms used by young people from specific backgrounds (Partnership for Young London, 2022). While this reflects engagement with a specific demographic group, it can be more widely applied to engagement with young people more widely. Creating an environment and space that is built on inclusivity of language, and ways of being is critical to ensure that young people feel a sense of belonging and that the world of participatory research belongs to them as much as it does adult practitioners and researchers.

## Safe spaces

The provision of safe spaces was found to promote inclusive participatory approaches and built upon a significant body of research highlighting this as a key ethical consideration (Forshaw & Woods, 2022; McCabe et al., 2023; Larkins et al., 2022). As youth participatory approaches actively seek to engage young people who have experienced oppression and may, to some level, have unresolved trauma, safe spaces provided psychologically-informed spaces (McCabe et al., 2023; Larkins et al., 2022). Where necessary, adult researchers can be trained in trauma-informed approaches to facilitate this (Larkins et al., 2022). While discussions around safe spaces were not prominent across all of the resources, one common reflection from the literature was the need for physical environments that were above all else safe to young people:

*“Work towards creating spaces with youth that are safe from physical, emotional and psychological harm. Youth are free to express themselves openly and authentically without fear of discrimination based on their gender, sex, sexual orientation, race, class, appearance or other identifying factors” (The Knowledge Institute, 2019, p.10)*

The Knowledge Institute (2019, p. 31) note that safe spaces should ‘go beyond the physical place’ - that safe spaces are equally about interactions, behaviours and dynamics of communication; safe spaces should ensure that young people feel empowered to articulate their true reflections and challenge professional positions in a judgment-free way, regardless of their social identities. This resonated with wider learnings across the practice resources which also reflect on the necessity of ‘culturally responsive’ spaces (Australian Government Department of Social Services: Families and Children).

The actual location of safe spaces were discussed within the resources. Specifically, assumptions around which locations constituted safe space were found to be connected to research power. Partnership for Young London (2022, p. 16) suggest that safe spaces should be closely aligned with where youth engagement work already takes place (within their communities). Delivering youth participatory approaches where youth engagement work already takes place was seen as a benefit when compared to bringing young people to the more traditional spaces of adult led research.

Safe spaces for participatory approaches, transcend all stages of the research journey and should be seen not only as a facilitator to achieving promising practice but also as a key ethical consideration for research involving marginalised young people.

## Trauma-informed

A further driver of high-quality participatory approaches is ensuring that professionals directly involved have trauma-informed training to navigate young people's journey through participation in an ethical manner. Researchers working alongside young people, specifically in mental health contexts can receive training on trauma informed practice to ensure that when facilitating participatory approaches there is a level of mindfulness to the way in which interactions are handled (McCabe et al., 2023). Sources recommended professionals competence to work alongside young people from differing cultures and understand the sensitivities that may be prevalent particularly between those with diverging backgrounds and identities of adult researchers and their younger counterparts.

Elevate Children's Funders Group (2022) also emphasise the need to ensure that staff members are experienced in navigating the issues at hand within the research, including an awareness of how to manage trauma responses and how to avoid retraumatising young people involved in the research. By ensuring that young people are collaborating alongside researchers who have a clear awareness of how to respond to these issues, participatory approaches can become spaces of guided support where past experiences are able to offer valued contribution to research and evaluation in an empowering way.

## Incentives & recognition

Reflections on incentives and recognition for young people engaging with participatory research and evaluation were not discussed across the resources in great detail. Where they were discussed, they were framed as ethical considerations within participatory research. Typically, there was a seeming conflict relating to incentives between researchers, which was articulated by Cullen & Walsh (2020):

*"While some authors argue that young people must be paid or compensated in some way for their involvement, others expressed that paying people to participate because of their marginalized status can be exploitative. In light of this, it is important for researchers to critically think about remuneration" (Cullen & Walsh, 2020, p. 382).*

In response to this conflict, The Partnership for Young London (2022) conceptualise remuneration as an equity issue. Specifically, they argue that young people should be treated no differently to adult researchers and should therefore be paid for their time, efforts, and expertise in driving forward the outputs of research. Additionally, they encourage thinking about how failure to offer remuneration may perpetuate socio-economic disadvantage, commodifying disadvantaged identities whilst simultaneously expecting young people to volunteer or accept precarious employment. Elevate Children's Funders Group echo these sentiments, stating that 'compensating young people for their time and expertise is not only fair, it's a necessary condition for equal and inclusive engagement' (Elevate Children's Funders Group, 2022, p. 16).

While these perspectives highlight the complexities involved in decision making around incentives, what is demonstrated is the need for participatory researchers to ethically consider which position is most appropriate in their context and ensure it is reasoned and well justified. Incentives offered included: gift cards, cash, materials for the project, class credit, community service hours and certificates of completion. Food and travel

reimbursement was also found to be common among the resources that reflected on incentives. The extent of incentives and compensations varied depending on the level of involvement of young people. For one off consultations, interviews and focus groups, single payments and incentives were more likely in comparison to higher levels of participatory approaches where co-researchers were likely to receive ongoing payments.

Overall, the literature that did discuss incentives viewed it as not only an effective way to drive initial engagement but also as a necessary reciprocity-benefit which further challenged unequal power dynamics between adult researchers and young people.

### 3.6 Perceived relationship with outcomes

In addition to developing understandings of emerging and promising practice, this review also sought to explore the relationship between participatory approaches and improved outcomes. While much has been written about the ethical necessity of participatory research, comparatively little has been articulated around how participatory approaches may improve research and evaluation outcomes. Across both the included reviews and practice resources, there was a notable absence of quantitative data measuring the impact of participatory approaches. Typically, positive outcomes were reflected on qualitatively, and framed within the following domains:

- **Improved outcomes for young people participating in the research and evaluation activities** – Through providing empowering spaces where young people can experience socio-emotional development and transferable skills.
- **Improvement to research quality and methodological approaches** – Through youth led framing of research questions, co-produced data collection tools and data analysis approaches were seen to be of a higher standard.
- **Improvement to design of services and local systems** – Through youth led adaptations to programmes and services which respond to nuanced insights offered through participatory approaches.
- **Increased benefits for the wider community** – Through increased community engagement and promotion of systems changes that align with community needs.

#### Outcomes for young people

Improvement in young people's socio-emotional development was perceived to be one of the most common ways participatory approaches resulted in positive impact (English National Youth Arts Network, 2013, Young Minds, 2020; Centre for Community Engagement, 2019). Specifically, young people's involvement in research and evaluation activities was seen to improve their social skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills and self-efficacy (Elevate Children's Funders Group, 2022; The Knowledge Institute, 2019). This improvement was described across a number of the included reviews and practice resources. Critically, these perceived impacts were typically not substantiated through quantitative data collection of validated measures. This highlights a key evidence gap relating to participatory approaches.

## Impact on research quality and methodological approaches

Participatory approaches were also perceived to have a positive impact on the quality of research and improved methodological approaches (Young Minds, 2020; The Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, 2022; The Knowledge Institute, 2019). This positive impact, which has been discussed in detail throughout this review, was consistently identified among the included literature. As discussed in the previous sections, the included literature often highlighted improved impact on framing of research questions, increased acceptability of data collection and more youth resonant ways of disseminating learnings. This was perceived to improve the likelihood of research and evaluation projects resulting in systemic change for marginalised communities.

In addition, youth participatory approaches were perceived to have a beneficial impact on adults, both directly and indirectly, involved in the delivery of these approaches (The Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, 2022; The Knowledge Institute, 2019). As mentioned, both researcher reflexivity and young people's feedback facilitated improved research approaches across all phases of the youth participatory journey. Specifically, ensuring that their practice is aligned with the varied needs of young people supports continued professional development and encourages innovative approaches to research and evaluation. More widely, the promotion of youth voice ensures that adults in positions of power are more attuned to the needs of young people and mindful of the impact of their decisions.

## Improvement to design of services and local systems

Another perceived impact that was outlined across the included literature was using research to improve service designs and local systems delivery (Young Minds, 2020). The input of young people through participatory approaches was specifically seen to inform youth centred adaptations to services thus improving reach and acceptability:

*“Participatory design approach helps us to develop interventions that are engaging to young people and therefore are more likely to be used, increasing the overall reach and impact of the intervention” (Young and Well Co-operative Research Centre, 2012, p.6).*

While there was no quantitative evidence to support the claim that this could lead to improved outcomes, the causal relationship between improved youth services and improved outcomes has been widely evidenced (The Knowledge Institute, 2019; Young and Well Co-operative Research Centre, 2012). As such, effective youth participatory approaches, which inform improved adaptations to local services, programmes and systems, could create improved impact for marginalised young people. More work needs to be done to evidence this and create a robust evidence base to promote increased uptake of participatory approaches.

## Impacts on wider community

In addition to the perceived positive impacts above, there was also a focus on the impact effective participatory approaches can have on communities more widely (The Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, 2022; The Knowledge Institute, 2019; Partnership for

Young London, 2022). Specifically, young people's involvement in participatory approaches was perceived to encourage them to be more engaged with civil society and initiatives focussed on social impact. Additionally, the empowering spaces they had experienced through participatory approaches meant that they were more likely to feel heard by those in positions of power, resulting in less adversarial relationships and more alignment with wider community goals. This, in turn, could influence peer groups to take a more positive level of engagement with their local communities and promote improved relationships across local systems.

## **Youth employment and participatory approaches**

This review also explored the relationship between youth participatory approaches and employment. While there was no quantitative data outlining how participatory approaches related to improved outcomes, there was often a hypothesised causal link between participatory approaches and the skills young people develop that can impact upon their overall development:

*“Youth have access to a variety of opportunities where they develop important life skills that can contribute to their own overall development, prepare them for the future and help them build healthier communities” (The Knowledge Institute, 2019, p. 10).*

This suggests youth participatory approaches, and the skills young people develop through research and evaluation activities, may support young people into various forms of employment. However, without more robust quantitative insights into this potential relationship, this can only be framed as a perceived impact.

To create true equity between youth researchers and those who engaged in research through more traditional routes, young people's involvement with participatory approaches should be seen as legitimate employment itself. This validates young researchers input, informed by lived experience, as an equal source of influence over research and evaluation projects to those they collaborate with.

# 4. Conclusion

While youth participatory approaches are continuing to grow in importance across research and evaluation settings, the available evidence that reflects on the impact and implementation of these approaches is inconsistent and limited. This inconsistency is reflective of how youth participatory approaches are delivered in practice settings, with varying levels and methods of youth participation. Participatory approaches need to be clearly strategised, monitored and connected to potential outcomes. By further enhancing the evidence base, more can be learnt about best practice and causal relationships with improved outcomes. Further investment into more rigorous measurement and testing of young people's outcomes would strengthen the existing evidence base. Developing participatory approaches will empower marginalised young people, enabling them to lead knowledge production and inform systemic change.

The diverging ways in which youth participatory approaches are implemented in practice speaks to the differing spaces that research and evaluation organisations occupy. Many organisations, or academic teams, may have limited experience of designing and delivering participatory approaches, while others may be specialists. To further the take up of promising participatory approaches more widely, rigidity around appropriate paradigms, models and methods should be avoided. Instead, inclusivity, support and sharing of what works should take a leading role to ensure that marginalised young people are heard and respected.

While this report presents learnings relating to the positive impact of participatory approaches, as well as their effective implementation, it is important to be mindful of potential negative consequences of their application. Specifically, decisions to proceed with participatory approaches should be carefully considered, including the ethical risk of re-traumatisation. Additionally, there should be clear justifications as to why and how young people's openness to share will drive impact and speak to gaps in pre-existing evidence.

The findings from this report create an evidence base to reflect on the implementation of participatory approaches. Using the drivers of promising practice and thinking about the timepoints of implementation can arm researchers to reflect on their own practices and plan evidence based participatory approaches. Furthermore, to respond to the absence of robust outcomes data relating to participatory approaches, the key outcome areas established through this report offers a framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

## 4.1 Limitations of available literature

While the available reviews and practice guidance provided an overview of some of the issues relating to youth participatory research, there were clear gaps in what was reported. Specifically, there was limited reflection on emerging practice, that is methods that could be implemented to differing stages of the research journey. More commonly, preconditions or underlying drivers of promising practice were discussed more broadly.

In addition, few of the resources had an explicit focus on strategies to support ethical inclusion of specific marginalised groups. There was little consistent discussion across the resources that offered insight into supporting those from minoritized groups in general, making synthesis challenging. At times, young people in general were considered

marginalised compared to older adults, but there was limited discussion on intersectional marginalisation.

Another gap in the literature was how participatory approaches related to outcomes. Many of the resources reflected on how high-quality participatory approaches improved outcomes for young people involved, researchers and research quality, but there was little evidence causally connecting participatory approaches and impacts for young people more broadly. The result of this limitation is that questions still need to be answered about the effectiveness of youth participatory approaches for various outcomes.

The literature was overwhelmingly positive in terms of perceived impact and ‘more is better’, but exposed large questions on when participatory approaches may cause harm or how to have the ‘right-sized’ participation level in particular contexts. The search strategy as well as the research questions, drove the explicit focus on promising practice resulting in papers and toolkits highly in favour of the implementation of youth participatory approaches. As such, within the review, there was limited synthesis of the challenges and critiques of participatory research. More critical perspectives should be considered further to ensure of ethical implementation in practice settings.

## 4.2 Recommendation for practice

This review provides an oversight of current participatory approaches and identifies the drivers of ‘good’ practice. These evidence-led insights provide a practical framework for research and evaluation practitioners to improve their current ways of working ensuring that marginalised young people engage in participatory approaches in ways that are both ethical and likely to increase positive outcomes. The following recommendations could improve the implementation of participatory approaches in practice settings:

- **Reflecting on current participatory approaches** – Practitioners should use the learnings from this review to think about the extent to which they have implemented participatory approaches and how this aligns with organisational ambition.
- **Use frameworks to inform intentional approaches** – The pre-existing academic models of youth participatory research should be used during design phases of research projects to promote a more transparent and intentional approach to participation approaches.
- **Identifying spaces for improvement in line with drivers of promising practice** – Practitioners should reflect on how they can improve their participatory approaches by implementing the drivers of promising throughout the research journey.
- **Monitoring and evaluating participatory approaches relationship with outcomes** - Practitioners should evaluate the ways in which their participatory approaches relate to outcomes for young people more widely.

# Appendix

## Appendix 1. Breakdown of models of youth participatory approaches

Model	Summary
Ladder of participation (Hart, 1992)	The ladder of participation creates a linear 'rungs' of varied participation ranging from 'manipulation' to 'child initiated, shared decisions with adults.'
Degrees of participation (Treseder, 1997)	This model takes a similar approach to YFF's re-conceptualisation of Hart's (1992) ladder of participation where there is no hierarchy or sequence, more differing degrees which can be involved at varied phases of research and evaluation activities.
Spectrum model of participation (Shier, 2001)	The spectrum model utilises a set of reflective questions to aid professionals to understand levels of project participation. These questions fall under three distinct areas (openings, opportunities & obligations).
Matrix of participation (Davies, 2009)	The matrix model is built from Harts (1992) ladder establishing a range of questions to enable professionals to demonstrate where and how in their project young people have engaged in participatory activities.
Non categorisation models of participation (Lundy, 2007)	The non-categorisation model moves away from distinct categories of youth participation and contrastingly prompts professionals to think about key elements of participatory approaches such as 'space', 'voice' and 'influence.'

## Appendix 2: Search strategy for additional website search

Source	Search method
The Centre for Children and Young People’s Participation	<i>Main site search function: Participatory approach results: 34 Participatory research results: 63 Youth inclusion results: 54 Co-production results: 186 Co-produced results: 169 Co-design results: 284 Action research results: 303 Youth voice results: 36</i>
UK Participatory Research Network	<i>Reviewed 'resources.' Books: 4 Position papers &amp; guides: 5 Research articles &amp; reports: 1 Useful links &amp; websites: 5 Member reading suggestions: 3</i>
Centre for Social Justice and Community Action	<i>Reviewed resources section of the Centre for social justice and community action page.</i>
UK Youth	<i>Main site search function: Participatory approach results: 0 Participatory research results: 0 Youth inclusion results: 16 Co-production results: 0 Co-produced results: 0 Co-design results: 8 Action research results: 33 Youth voice results: 107 No reviews available, toolkit resources not meeting PICOSS. Digital resource hub No relevant reviews or toolkits Resources and reports No toolkit with direct focus on R n E more broadly framed 'youth in clusion.'</i>
Children and Young People Now	<i>Main site search function: Participatory approach results: 34 Participatory research results: 35 Youth inclusion results: 1, 062 Co-production results: 227 Co-produced results: 378 Co-design results: 393 Action research results: 2146 Youth voice results: 1, 455 Searched the following filters under 'article types': 'Research' &amp; 'best practice'</i>
Young Voices Heard	<i>Reviewed resources: 'Young participation and leadership in organisations' 'Youth voice, participation: charters, reports, res earch</i>

Youth Scotland	<i>Reviewed 'free resources'</i>
Youth Access	<i>Main site search function: Participatory approach results: 0 Participatory research results: 0 Youth inclusion results: 4 Co-production results: 4 Co-produced results: 0 Co-design results: 2 Action research results: 4 Youth voice results: 14 Our work = 0 relevant Policy publications = 25</i>
Lumos	<i>Main toolkit to be reviewed (PICOSS applied)</i>
YERP	<i>Main toolkit to be reviewed (PICOSS applied)</i>
Youth Link Scotland	<i>Main site search function: Participatory approach results:0 Participatory research results: 0 Youth inclusion results: 0 Co-production results: 0 Co-produced results: 0 Co-design results: 1 Action research results: 0 Youth voice results: 0 Search 'What we do' + 'Equalities and participation': 8 resources 0 relevant Search 'What we do' + 'Professional frameworks': 3 resources 0 relevant</i>
Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Research	<i>Searched 'Skills and training' - 'Skills research and reviews' - no relevant results Main site search function with 'show only publications filter': Participatory approach results: 34 Participatory research results: 27 Youth inclusion results: 29 Co-production results: 0 Co-produced results: 0 Co-design results: 4 Action research results: 68 Youth voice results: 0</i>
Youth Futures Foundation	<i>Main site search function with: Participatory approach results: 2 Participatory research results: 4 Youth inclusion results: 22 Co-production results: 0 Co-produced results: 1 Co-design results: 8 Action research results: 9 Youth voice results: 62 Reviewed EGM: No categories relevant to review or guidance documents on participatory approaches Reviewed 'Our Work' - 'Identifying what works' - 'Resources': 18 resources Reviewed 'Our Work' - 'Identifying what works' - 'Research': 22 resources Reviewed our work - 'igniting change' - 'Future voices' - 31 resources Reviewed our work - 'igniting change' - 'Youth empowerment voices' - 31 resources</i>

Youth Endowment Fund

*Main site search function with: Participatory approach results: 1 Participatory research results: 1 Youth inclusion results: 6 Co-production results: 2 Co-produced results: 2 Co-design results: 31 Action research results: 51 Youth voice results: 14 Review 'project and evaluations' and 'what works' - YEF toolkit - 0 results Reviewed 'Resources' -- 'Resources for evaluators' - 0 relevant results Reviewed 'change' - 0 relevant resources*

What works for Childrens Social Care (historic website)

*Main site search function with: Participatory approach results: 0 Participatory research results: 3 Youth inclusion results: 2 Co-production results: 5 Co-produced results: 3 Co-design results: 14 Action research results: 66 Youth voice results: 1 Reviewed 'Practice' = 0 relevant results Reviewed 'evidence store' = 0 relevant results*

UK Department for Work and Pensions research

*Revised research and statistics published from 2010: 832 results, 0 relevant resources*

US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation

*Main site search function with: Participatory approach results: 16 Participatory research results: 35 Youth inclusion results: 16 Co-production results: 1 Co-produced results: 0 Co-design results: 0 Action research results: 82 Youth voice results: 9 Searched 'resource library' - 'methods and tools' - 99 results*

Institute for Employment Studies

*Main site search function with: Participatory approach results: 1 Participatory research results: 3 Youth inclusion results: 21 Co-production results: 24 Co-produced results: 1 Co-design results: 0 Action research results: 58 (filtered by publication) Youth voice results: 2*

YMCA George Williams College

*Main site search function with: Participatory approach results: 15 Participatory research results: 17 Youth inclusion results: 33 Co-production results: 12 Co-produced results: 3 Co-design results: 11 Action research results: 61 Youth voice results: 81*

Participation people

*Reviewed 'our work' - 'Reports' - organisation focussed on systems changes/programme and or service design participation and not about research and evaluation*

The UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities

*Reviewed 'working papers'*

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Google scholar

*Search key terms*

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