Participatory approaches in education research

An overview of participatory methodologies and an example from a reading research project

Defining participatory research

01 "PR can be defined as an umbrella term for research designs, methods, and frameworks that use systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by the issue being studied for the purpose of action or change"

02 "PR prioritizes co-constructing research through partnerships between researchers and stakeholders, community members, or others with insider knowledge and lived expertise"

Vaughn, L. M., & Jacquez, F. (2020). Participatory Research Methods - Choice Points in the Research Process. Journal of Participatory Research Methods, 1(1)

Aims of participatory research

SHARING POWER & DEMOCRATISING RESEARCH → **AMPLIFYING DISPRIVILEDGED SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE** → **PRODUCING RELEVANT OUTCOMES**

Intrinsic power imbalance between "the researcher and the researched" (Schäfer & Yarwood, 2008, p.121)

Amplified by social and cultural structures which position adults as holding more power than children and young people (Heath et al. 2009)

Communities (i.e., children, teachers) hold more knowledge about their own lives than external researchers do. This should be privileged within the research process (Cahill, 2007) .

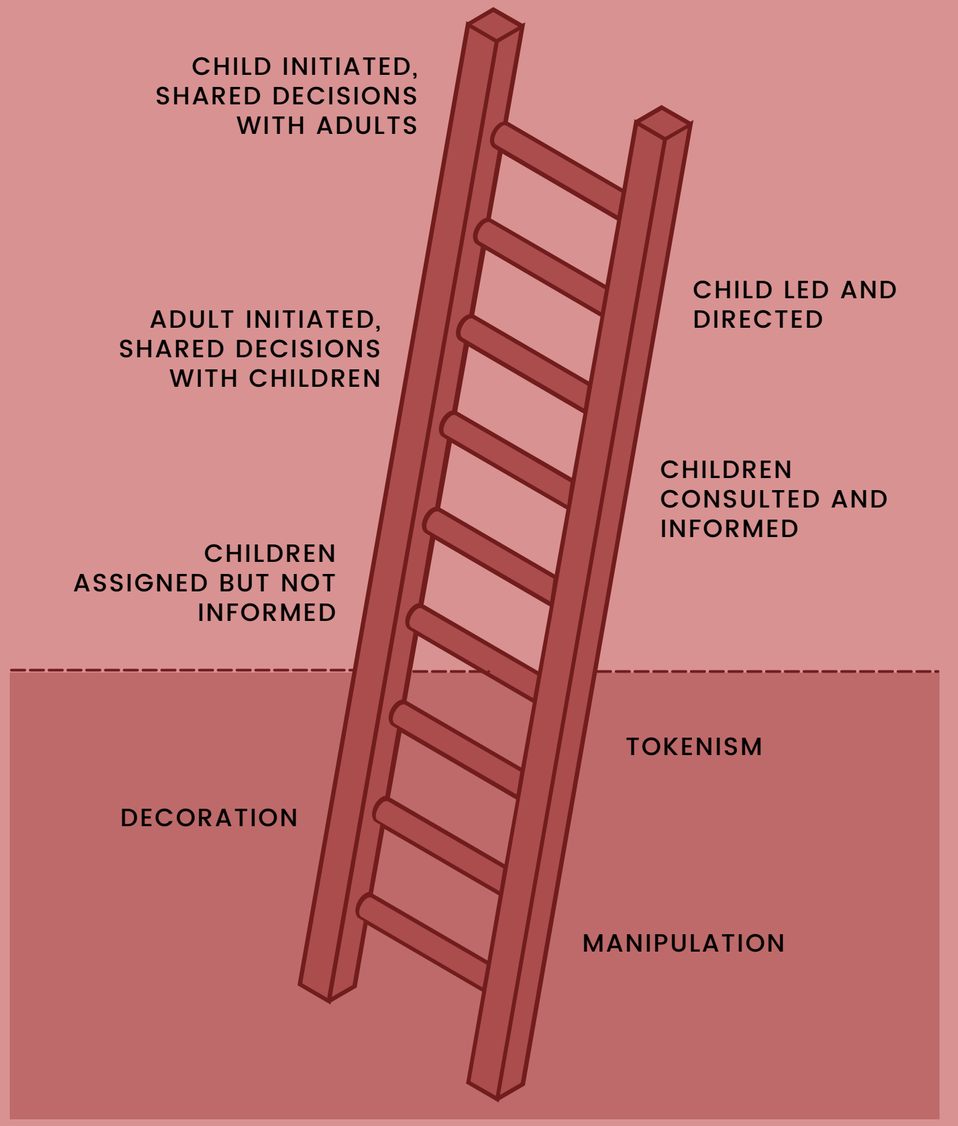
Failing to include children and young people in research about their lives risks producing outcomes which reinforce adult perceptions of their experiences and needs (Webber et al. 2022)

Cahill, C. (2007). Repositioning ethical commitments: Participatory action research as a relational praxis of social change. ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies, 6(3), 360-373.
Heath, S., Brooks, R., Cleaver, E., & Ireland, E. (2009). Researching Young People′ s Lives. Sage
Schäfer, N., & Yarwood, R. (2008). Involving young people as researchers: Uncovering multiple power relations among youths. Children's geographies, 6(2), 121-135.)
Webber, C., Wilkinson, K., Andries, V., & McGeown, S. (2022). A reflective account of using child-led interviews as a means to promote discussions about reading. Literacy, 56(2), 120-129.

NOVEMBER 2022

The Ladder of children's participation

(HART, 1992)



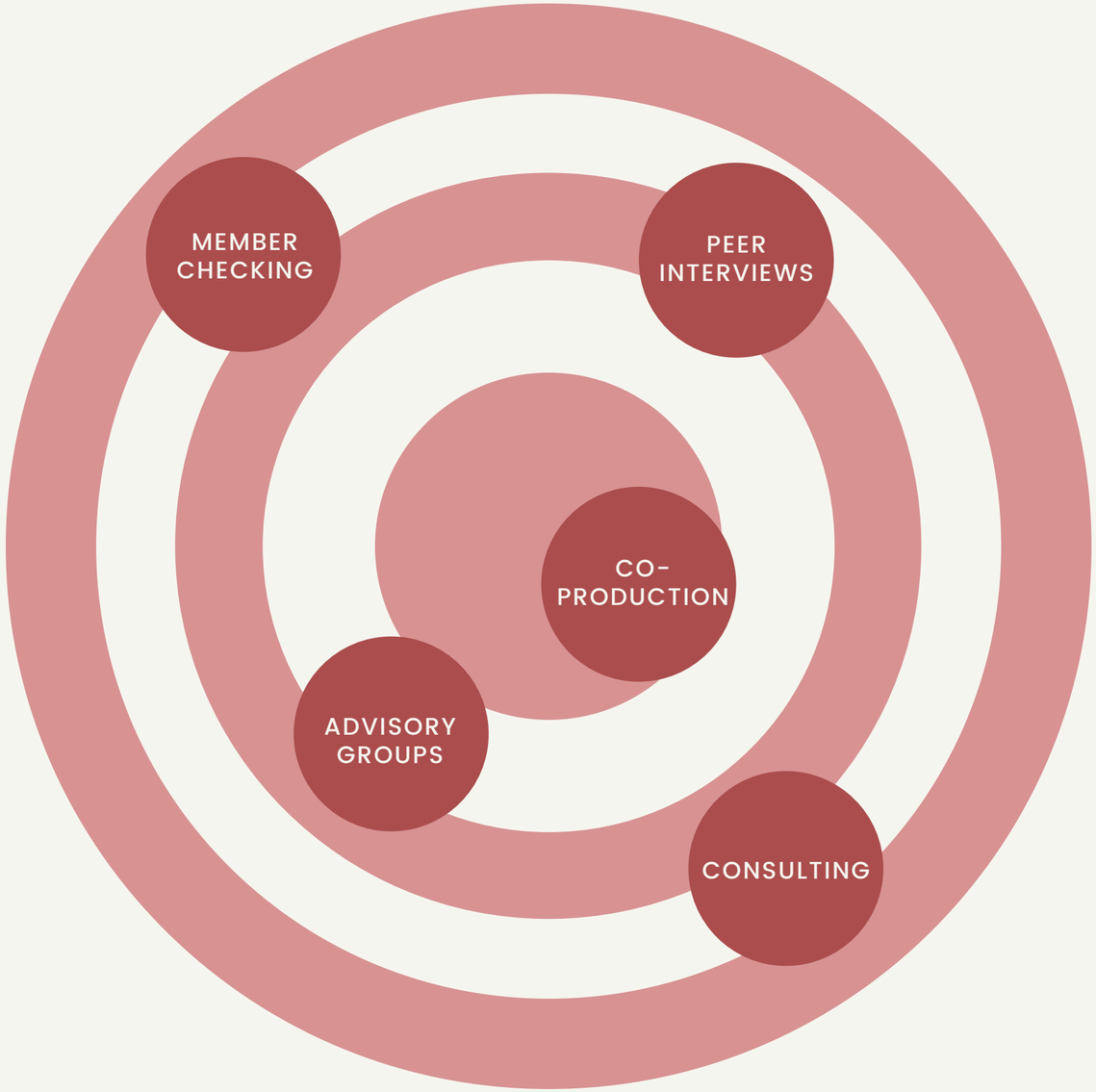
LALCO MEETING

Hart, R. A. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. Florence, Italy: United Nations Children's Fund International Child Development Centre.

How else might participatory research look?

IS THE LADDER OF PARTICIPATION APPROPRIATE?

The Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1992) presents a hierarchy for different ways of participatory working. However, different types of participation may be more appropriate for different projects.



An example of a participatory approach to education research

GROWING UP A READER (2018-2020)

Funded by Challenge Investment Fund
All researcher details available on website.In collaboration with Scottish Book Trust and Edinburgh's Museum of Childhood

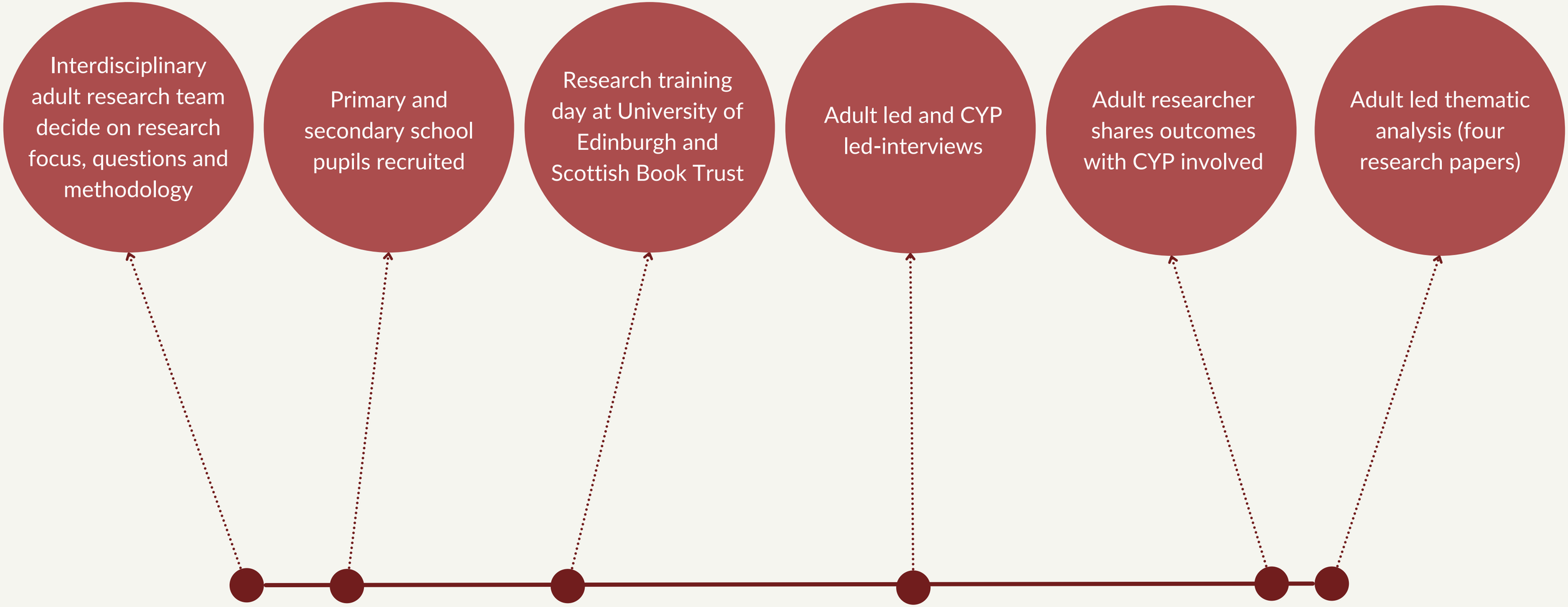
Growing Up A Reader (2018 – 2020)

Aims: To understand children and young people's (CYP) perceptions of a reader and why CYP read different text types.

Method: Interdisciplinary project, collaboration with 12 children, 10 young people and Scottish Book Trust. Interviews: CYP and adult led.

More info:
https://www.growingupareader.education.ed.ac.uk/
+ Growing Up A Reader bios (GUAR guests and project team)

Project timeline



Reflection & analysis

NATURAL DISCUSSION

Interviewee: [i]t sounds really weird, because you know, we're ten-but you sort of pick up a book, and you feel like a little kid again!

Student interviewer: Yeah! Yeah!

CREATIVE COMMUNICATION

Interviewee: Because I enjoy them, and the history books I read are very funny.

Student interviewer: Horrible Histories, right?

Interviewee: Yep! [Both laugh]

Student interviewer: How do you feel when you read history books?

Interviewee: I feel interested and intrigued because most of the stuff that are in it I [dramatic tone] never knew befooooore

LANGUAGE USED

Student interviewer: Okay, and do you think you are a reader?

Interviewee: I think I'm a pretty good reader. Not a full, full,full, full, full reader, but a reader.

Student interviewer: Why do you not think you are a full, full, full, full, full reader?

CORRECTING THE INTERVIEWEE

Interviewee: Generally, because if you are in P1, you are more likely to read picture books without much words cause you cannot really read.

Student interviewer: Many words, not much words.

Interviewee: Many words! [Both laugh]

Reflection & analysis

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Interviewee: I read a bit of non-fiction, like about animals and stuff. Mostly about rats. They're cool. Um, but- .

Student interviewer: You and [a classmate] seem to really like rats!

POWER IMBALANCE

Student interviewer: Do you think of yourself as a reader?

Interviewee: More...like a bibliophile.

Student interviewer: A what?

Interviewee: A bibliophile.

Student interviewer: What's a bibliophile?

Interviewee: Like, someone who's really into books.

POSITIVE FEATURES

Student interviewer: That's great, thanks

ADULT-LED INTERVIEWS COULD STILL BE PLAYFUL

Interviewee: I read all the Harry Potter books when I was seven

Adult interview: Wow! Oh my gosh, what was that like?

Interviewee: It was amazing. I wanted to go to Hogwarts - and I still do!

Adult interviewer: Did you get a letter? I'm still waiting for my letter!

Interviewee: Yeah - but I'm still 10, so - maybe next year! [Both laugh].

Research papers

McGeown, S., Bonsall, J., Andries, V., Howarth, D., Wilkinson, K., & Sabeti, S. (2020). Growing up a reader: Exploring children's and adolescents' perceptions of a reader. Educational Research, 1-13.

McGeown, S., Bonsall, J., Andries, V., Howarth, D., & Wilkinson, K. (2020). Understanding reading motivation across different text types: Qualitative insights from children. Journal of Research in Reading.

Webber, C., Wilkinson, K., Andries, V., & McGeown, S. (2021). A reflective account of using child-led interviews as a means to promote discussions about reading. Literacy.

Wilkinson, K., Andries, V., Howarth, D., Bonsall, J., Sabeti, S., & McGeown, S. (2020). Reading during adolescence: Why adolescents choose (or do not choose) books. Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy.

An example of a participatory approach to education research

YOUNG PEOPLE'S READING PROJECT

Funded by:
ESRC/SGSSS (ESRC Grant Ref: ES/P000681/1)
Scottish Book Trust

Meeting 1
Introduction to the project, defining terms and talking about collaborative practices

Meeting 2
Discussing methodology

Meeting 3
Reflecting on the project so far and planning our next steps

Feedback form 1

Workshop
Interview training & refining interview questions

Meeting 4
Discussing our findings and ideas for implementation

Meeting 5
Wrapping up & reflecting on the process

Feedback form 2

ITERATIVE PLANNING
Planning meetings and workshop, developing materials (e.g., meeting materials, interview schedule), preparing for data collection

DATA COLLECTION
Peer-led and adult-led interviews

ANALYSIS & FUTURE PLANNING
Consensus building, reflection, next steps

Sept - Nov 2021

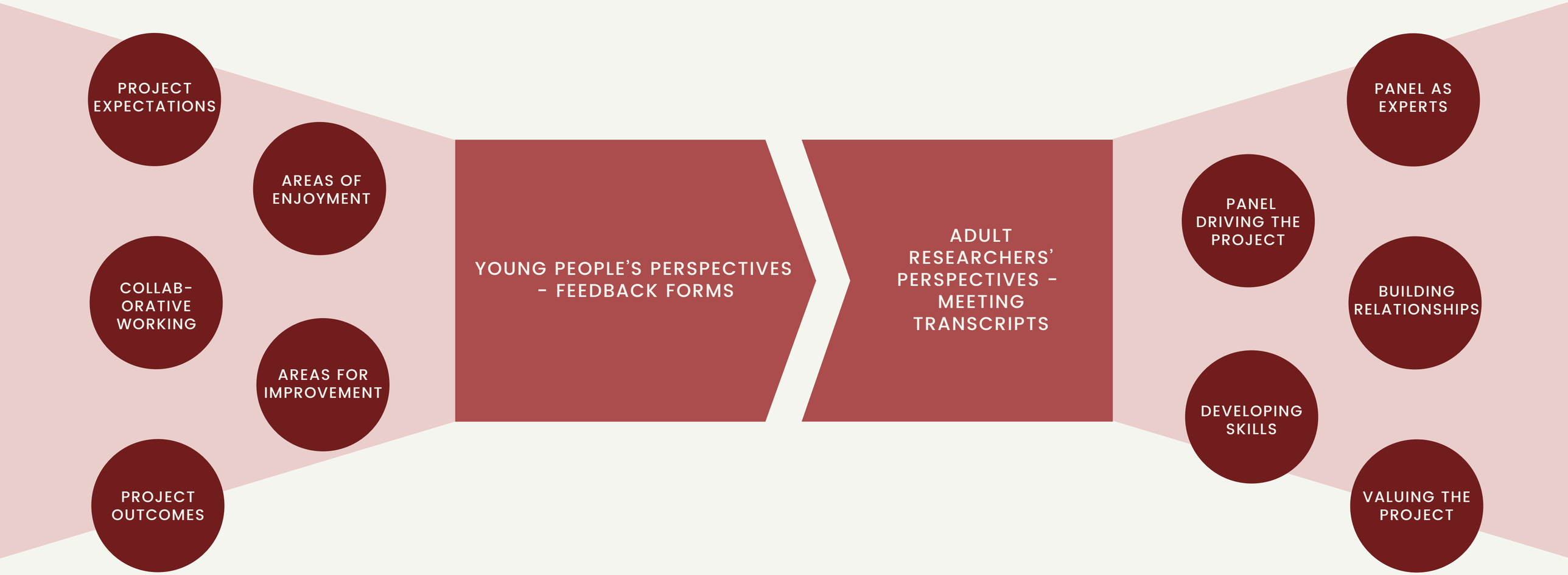
Nov - Dec 2021

Feb 2022

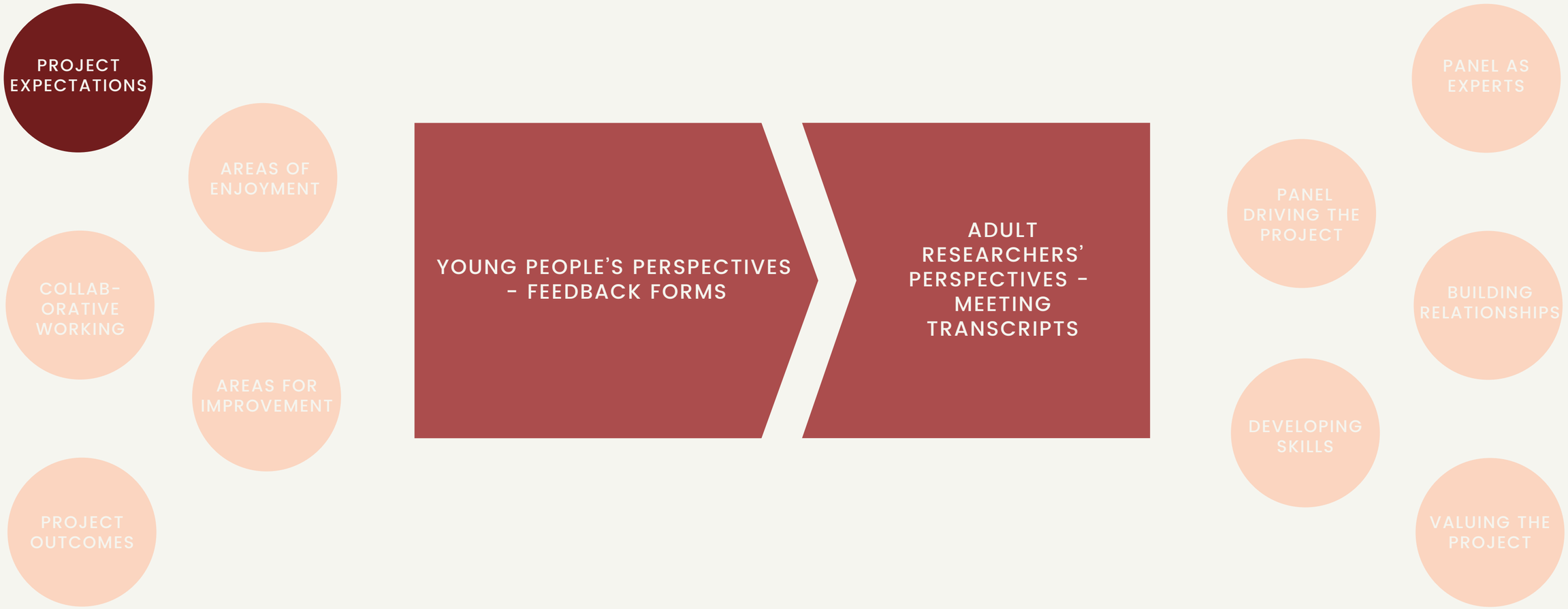
March - May 2022

June - July 2022

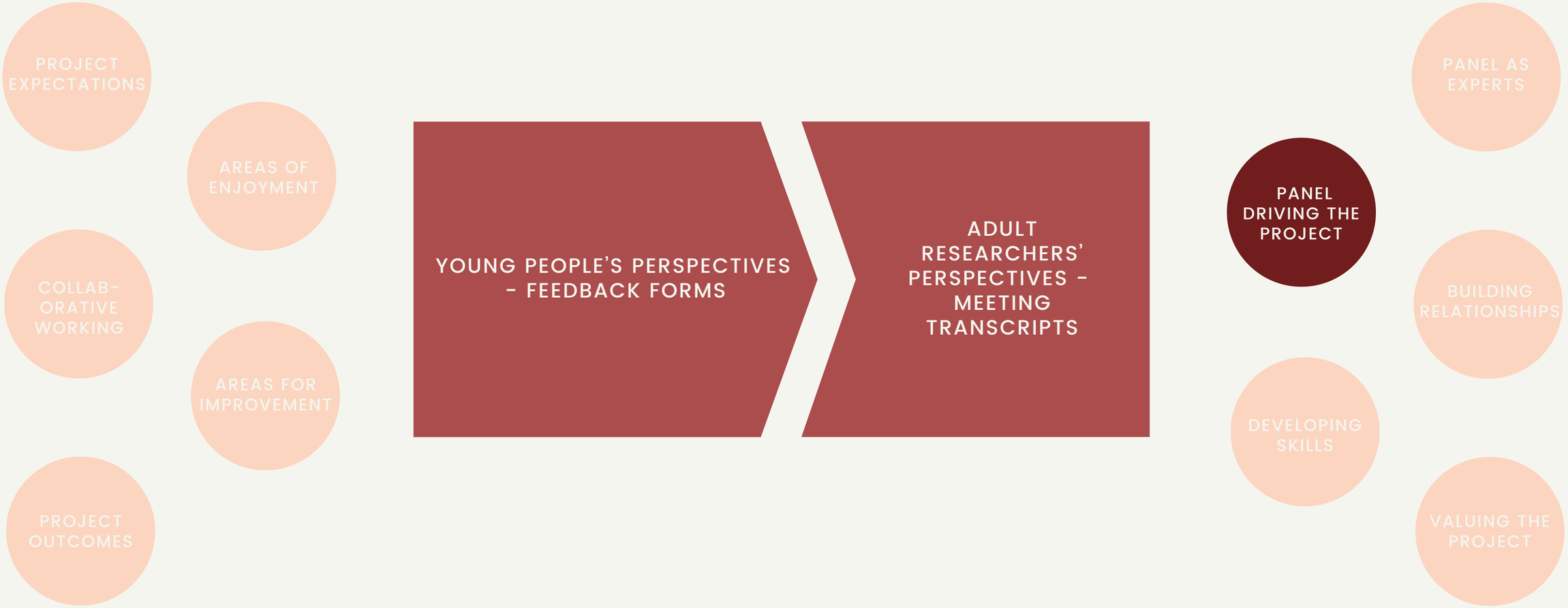
Reflection & analysis



Reflection & analysis



Reflection & analysis



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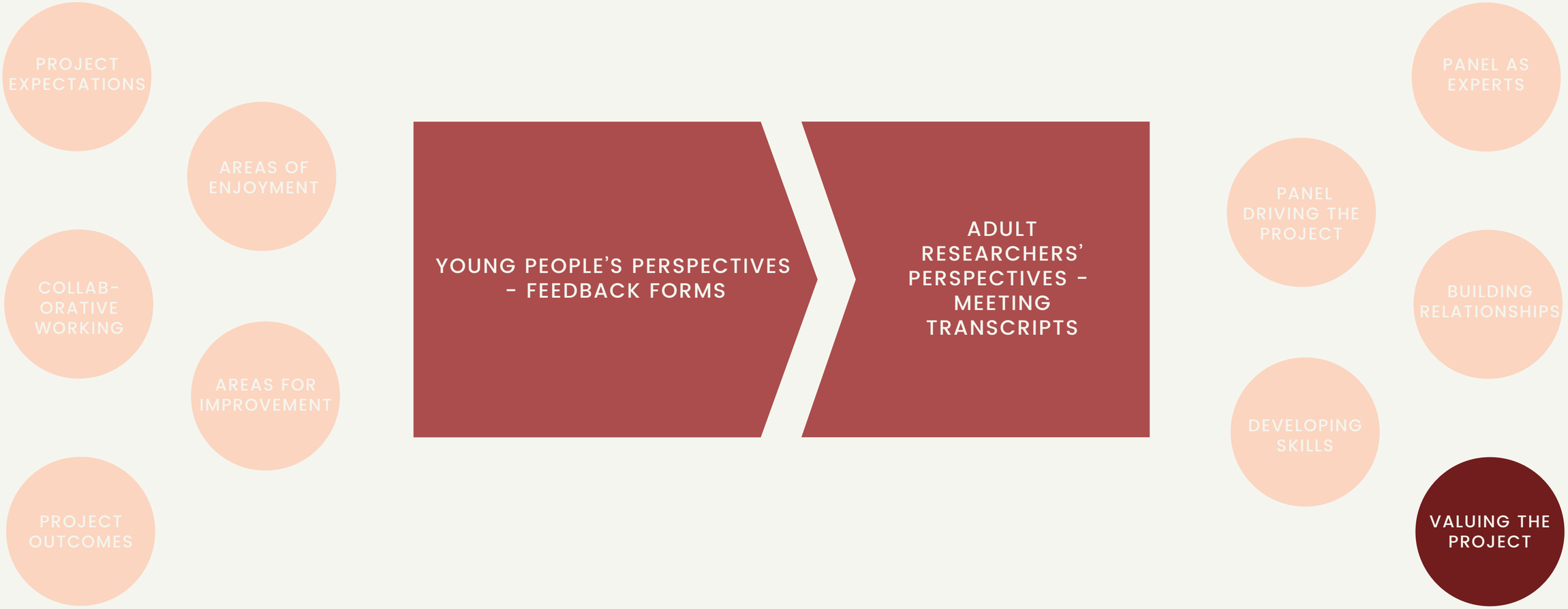

Considerations

TIMELINE

Dedicating time and care to developing relationships with collaborative partners, building consensus on research aims, priorities and ways of working

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Establishing what each member of the team hopes and expects from a participatory project, and emphasising any constraints on what can be achieved

INCLUDING DIVERSE VOICES

Considering who has access to the space and who doesn't and working to create spaces which privilege groups whose voices are overlooked

INCENTIVES

Appropriately reimbursing partners in ways which recognise the value of their contribution without being coercive or tokenistic

Discussion points

01 How valuable is collaborative working with children and young people for education policy and practice?

02 How can we move towards involving children and young people in research as a norm?

03 What are the barriers to true co-production with children and young people?