Convening a young people's advisory panel: ethical issues, positionality, and implementation challenges

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Context: The Young People's Reading Project

- Declines in reading enjoyment, motivation, and engagement from childhood to adolescence (e.g., Clark et al., 2023).

- Lack of reading research which centres the voices of teenagers themselves (e.g., Jacquez et al., 2013).

Research questions:

(1) What do adolescents perceive as their reasons for reading (or not reading)?

(2) From their own perspectives, how can we inspire and sustain adolescent reading motivation and engagement?

Clark, C., & Picton, I., & Galway, I. (2023) Children and Young People's Reading in 2023. National Literacy Trust Research Report. *National Literacy Trust.* Available from: https://nlt.cdn.ngo/media/documents/Reading_trends_2023.pdf
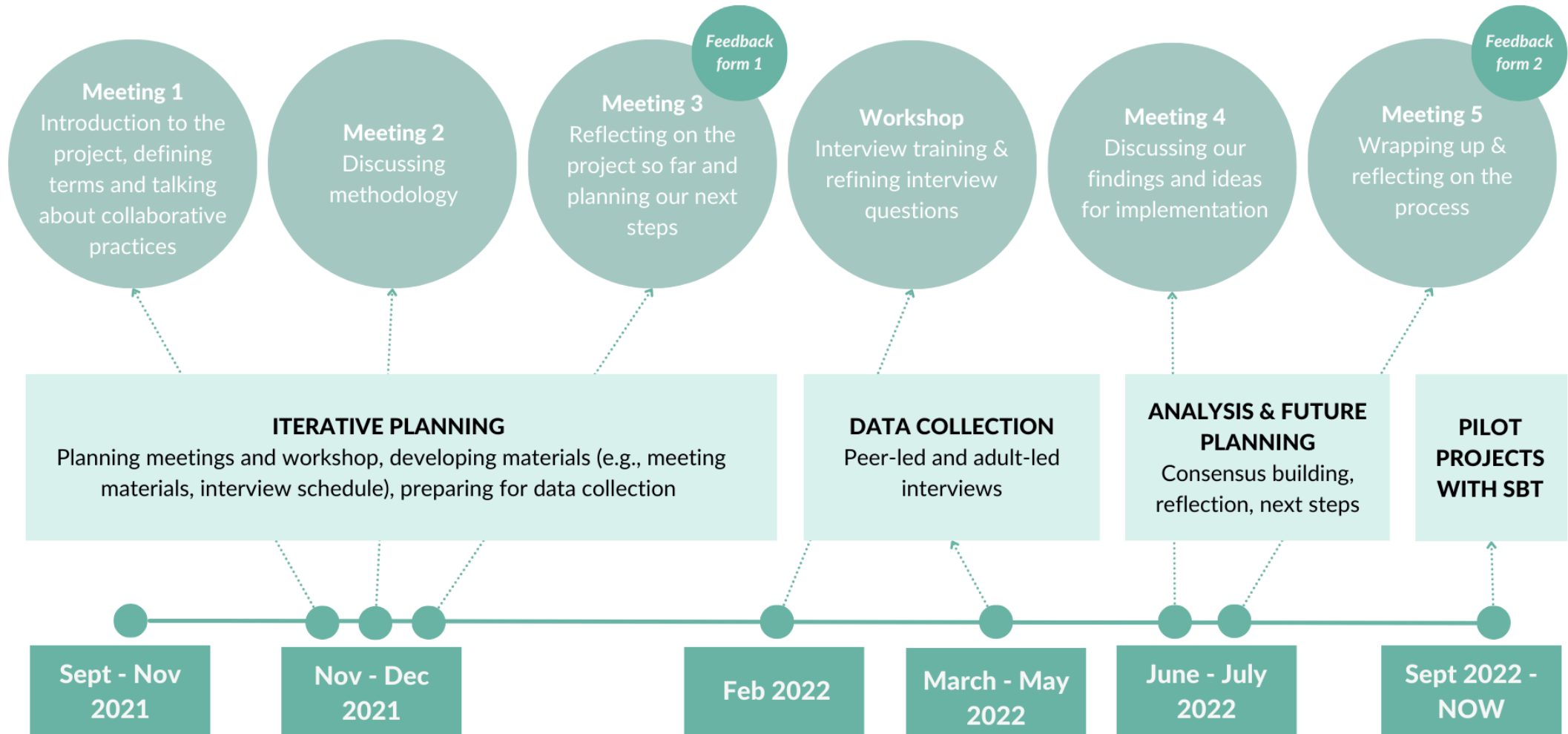Jacquez, F., Vaughn, L. M., & Wagner, E. (2013). Youth as partners, participants or passive recipients: A review of children and adolescents in community-based participatory research (CBPR). *American Journal of Community Psychology, 51(1)*,176-189.

Young People's Advisory Panel

- 6 young people (13-14 years old), 5 female

- 3 schools in Scotland (West Lothian, Aberdeenshire, East Kilbride)

- Self-identified readers & non-readers

- Recruited through schools with connections to project partner
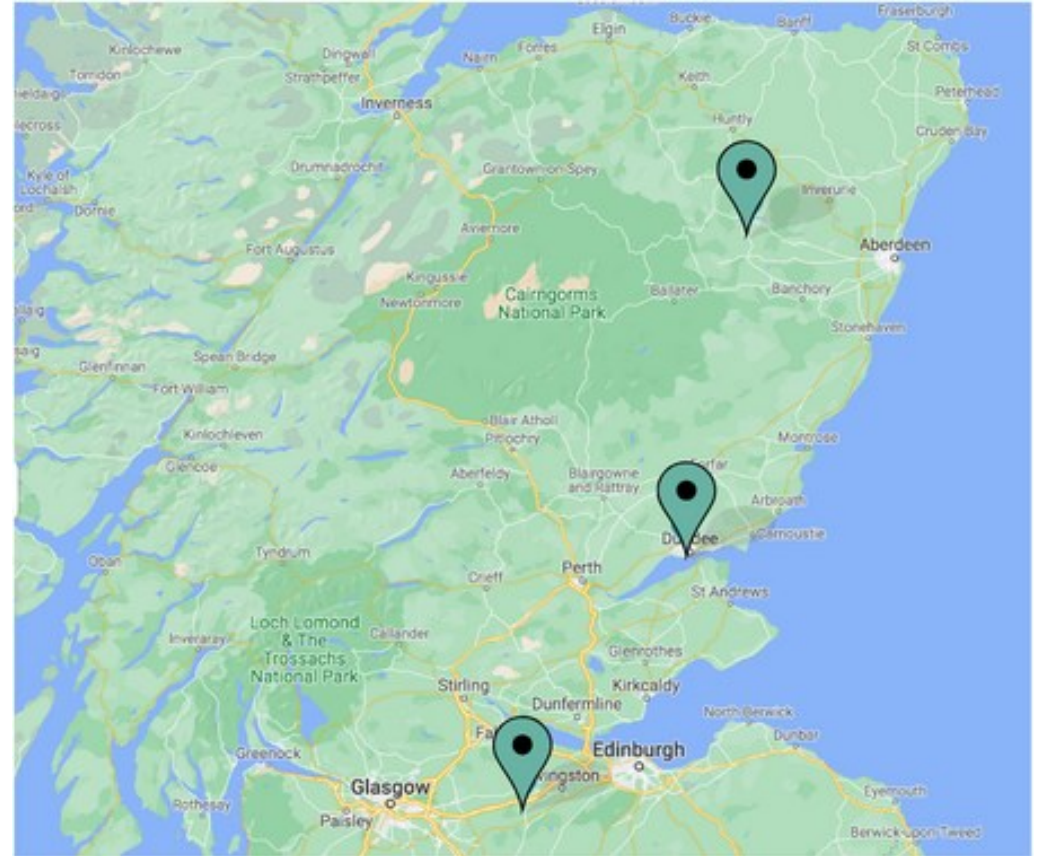
Young People's Advisory Panel

Young People's Advisory Panel

- Analysis of methodology
- Adult researchers' and YPAP's perspectives

Benefits:
- Challenging systems of power and privilege
- Producing outcomes which are more relevant to young people

Limitations & considerations:
- Planning participatory projects
- Including diverse and representative voices
- 'Bounded empowerment'

Working with a young people's advisory panel to conduct educational research: Young people's perspectives and researcher reflections

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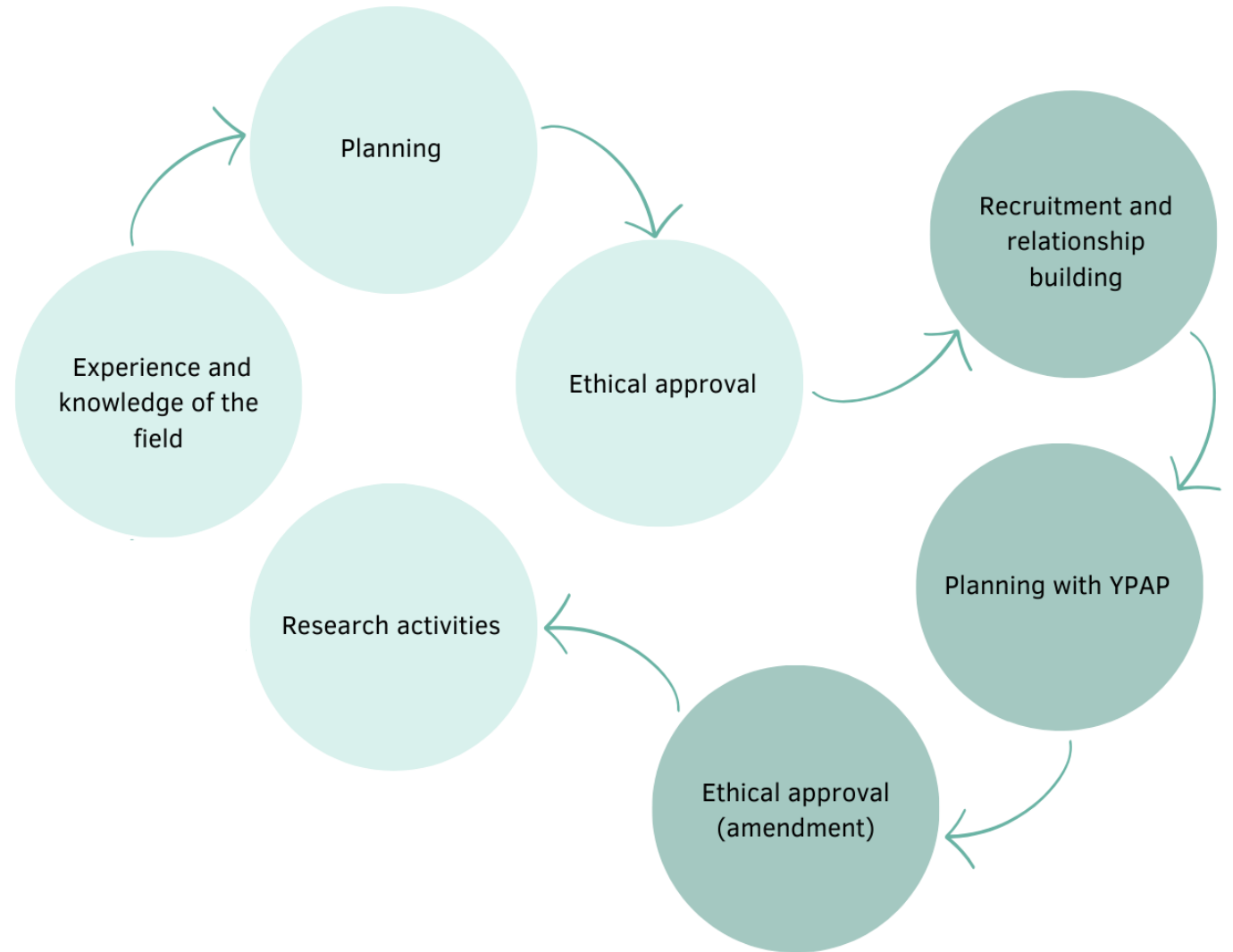
Planning YPAP

Planning YPAP

- More time invested at the early stages to develop relationships and build consensus on research aims and priorities.
- Multiple 'rounds' of ethical approval.
- Need to plan some elements in advance, but when do young people get to contribute?
- How much time and responsibility is reasonable to expect young people to commit to a project?

Including diverse and representative voices

Recruitment through schools, via teachers – voluntary but with caveats...

Participatory work can "encourage a reassertion of control and power by dominant individuals and groups" who possess the skills and/or motivation to engage with the project, or those whose contributions fit within a framework of assumptions regarding the 'right' responses (Kothari, 2001, p.142)

Is it ever possible for a small number of individuals to represent everyone?

How do we create / maintain group cohesion whilst still including different experiences and opinions?

Kothari, U. (2001). Power, knowledge and social control in participatory development. Participation: *The new tyranny?*, ZED books, London.

'Training'

- Tension: young people requested being trained in interview procedure, but following participatory principles means not shaping their practice to fit academic/adult norms.

- Possible solution: external visitor trains us all?

- Resolution: Interview training workshop involved us all sharing our ideas about good interview practice.

'Bounded empowerment'

- The project still existed within structures which prevented it from being truly driven by young people from start to finish.

- Young people were still constrained by the power held by adults e.g., initial selection of an issue of inquiry, research experience and training of adults.

- How can we include young people in the earliest stages of research development?

Ozer, E. J., Newlan, S., Douglas, L., & Hubbard, E. (2013). "Bounded" empowerment: Analyzing tensions in the practice of youth-led participatory research in urban public schools. *American journal of community psychology*, *52*, 13-26.

Positionality

Me:

- Reading researcher at a university
- Not a teacher but project was managed through schools
- Young (but not a young person!)

Two roles: (1) facilitator, and (2) researcher; I have different priorities in each of these roles – how do I navigate these?

Concluding thoughts

- The group worked very well together – perhaps because the research topic was not too emotionally charged, or because members all shared characteristics which facilitated collaboration.

- Some aspects of the project extended beyond panel's active involvement – how do we stay true to their contributions as the project evolves without overburdening them?

- Carrying out the meetings online had strengths (e.g., geographic diversity, easier access) and limitations (e.g., harder to build social connection, harder to work creatively).

Discussion points

How do we navigate competing priorities when we want/need particular outcomes (e.g., to report to funders) but these don't fit with what the group decides?

How can we minimise the influence an (outsider) facilitator might have on group dynamics and decisions?

What if the group isn't working well together? What if individual members have different ideas?

Information about the Young People's Reading Project:
https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/current-projects/yprp/

Methodological analysis paper:

Webber, C., Wilkinson, K., Duncan, L. G., & McGeown, S. (2024). Working with a young people's advisory panel to conduct educational research: Young people's perspectives and researcher reflections. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *124*, 102308.
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