

Being Participatory Through Videography

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Abstract

Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are powerful distribution networks for stories and ideas and an integral aspect of many (if not most) young people's lives. Participatory video (PV) methods offer a collaborative framework for working with young people to help them express their interests and perspectives within digital storytelling spaces.

Reaching young people in ways that many traditional research methods cannot, PV helps young people analyse their experiences and communicate their ideas and insights on things that affect them. By promoting the collective identification of important patterns within their stories, PV can elicit nuanced narratives and promote shared understandings through digital media. These shared understandings develop not only between adults and young people, but also between participants and other young people alike. The ability for PV to convey deeper truths and understanding makes it a powerful tool for change.

Using "The Creating Space Project: Youth Voice in Healthcare" as an exemplar, this chapter explores the advantages and challenges of undertaking PV projects with young people. The authors offer specific techniques, resources, and advice that facilitate collaboration with young people to identify the health issues most important to them. The videos produced through PV can be used to amplify the participants' ideas about what should be done to resolve the issues they have identified.

Keywords

Participatory video (PV); Digital storytelling; Participatory action research (PAR); Youth voice; Youth health; Participatory drama

10.1 Introduction

With video technology and social media now ubiquitous in so many young people's lives, digital media spaces are new playgrounds they inhabit. Participatory video (PV) enables exploration and analysis of issues that the participants themselves identify as being important to them. It does this by fostering participation and collaboration using fun and inclusive exercises that promote greater participation in both their immediate and wider communities. The knowledge and understandings generated by participatory video can then be shared using the digital spaces that children and young people are living within, amplifying their voices and promoting perspectives and ideas in their own literal voices. In this way, participatory video can engage and inform those not served by conventional research methods and academic literature.

Participatory video is a digital media research method that originated in the context of social development and community activism [1, 2]. It purposefully places researchers alongside and 'with' people to engage them in reflexive and creative processes. Being situated within a rights-based paradigm, participatory video with children and young people focuses first and foremost on building their capacity to be self-reflective and technically proficient in the art of visual storytelling to ensure the immediate and ongoing amplification of their voices [3, 4]. Groundwater-Smith et al. [5] also emphasise that participation should move beyond participants being seen as data sources to a position where they have designed, enacted and interpreted inquiries and can be honoured as authentic critical voices.

Eliciting information from children and young people can be a complex and daunting endeavour, with concerns about risk and capability often raised as barriers to actively seeking young people's views [6]. Yet the legal mandate set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) states that every child has the inalienable right to express their views freely in matters that affect them and to have those views considered. Unfortunately, the representation of the perspectives of children and young people in healthcare and governmental policy remains limited when compared to those of adults. Even when children and young people are consulted, they can still experience a distinct layering of marginalisation. The categorisation of "youth" is itself stratified into linear ages and stages. To be considered only as a "child" or "young person" is a singularity and a somewhat arbitrary measure incapable of capturing the unique and infinite ways in which a young person's identity is constructed, divided, and used to either include or exclude them from participation. These innate disparities and the relative invisibility of youth participation suggest that any inclusion of the voices of children and young people that does occur, does so within distinct and contested spaces.

Despite an increasing recognition of the ability of children and young people to contribute to the development of policies and healthcare provision, there remains a

general lack of consultation with them about their lived experiences or their perspectives on things that affect them. This may, in part, be due to a reluctance to use youth-centric approaches and an overarching perception that collaborating with children and young people is ‘hard’. While both may be true, the result is that important decisions about their care, their education and other aspects of their lives are most often being made by adult proxies rather than through any incorporation of unique and specific youth-centric insights. This essentially leaves policymakers, health professionals or anyone involved in their lives working in the dark and speculating on potential benefits and outcomes [7].

The importance of building trusting and ongoing relationships with children and young people cannot be underestimated if their true participation and collaboration is the goal. In this chapter we reflect on the techniques and the perceived advantages and potential pitfalls that come with facilitating participatory video projects with young people.

As we share the exemplar of participatory video below, we would like to acknowledge InsightShare, Oxford UK, for their contributions and leadership in global participatory video practice. They have been our role models and mentors and many of the techniques shared in this chapter were first introduced to us while students in their participatory video facilitation course. Their work inspired us, just as we hope the methods we share might inspire others, and most importantly, the young people we collaborate with. All images presented in this chapter are reproduced with the participant’s assent and parental consent.

10.2 Research Example: Creating Space Project—Young People’s Voice in Healthcare

The *Creating Space Project—Young People’s Voice in Healthcare*, [8] invited young people to explore and share their perspectives on what is important to them regarding their health and what barriers and protective factors exist in relation to their well-being (Fig. 10.1).



Fig. 1. Some of the Creating Space Project participants improvising a dance

10.2.1 Aim

The project aimed to answer the question, “How can collaboration with young people be facilitated using participatory video and drama to empower their voices in healthcare policy and provision?” It sought to identify barriers to and protective factors for young people’s health as defined by them and presents these in short video artefacts (films). The films are intended to inform policymakers, health professionals, and anyone involved in young people’s lives of the issues young people believe, stop them from living healthy and “good” lives. Importantly, the films share what young people think can and should be done to minimise the impact of these issues.

10.2.2 Type of Participation and Model Underpinning Participatory Video

Participatory video sits under the umbrella of participatory action research (PAR) and is situated within a rights-based paradigm, underpinned by critical theory. Drawing on Freirian critical scholarship PAR disrupts positivist power discourses of the researcher and validates the knowledge of local communities as well as their authority to determine what is or is not in their best interest [9].

10.2.3 Research Methods/Tools Used

The project utilised participatory video and drama methods to create the literal and metaphorical space for young people to “have their say”. In a 5-day participatory video workshop, 29 young people from New Zealand (aged 11–17 years) worked alongside facilitators to foster a social and creative space to develop digital and video storytelling skills and promote reflective discussion on what health means to young people and the issues they see as significant barriers to their health and well-being. These include in

school and online bullying, anxiety, depression and health and sexual health education that does not reflect their needs.

Using creative, analytical and reflexive exercises, the participants wrote, storyboarded, performed, filmed, and co-edited seven short films. These films and other videos are now hosted on a YouTube channel dedicated to supporting Youth Voice (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCekEZOZnSadZXRLVQgk6Lbg>) and forms a repository of participants' ideas and perspectives.

10.2.4 Findings

The participants identified that mental health issues are the key barrier to young people living healthy lives. They suggest a need for government, health professionals, teachers, and young people themselves to address the prevalence of in-school and online bullying and the distinct lack of an appropriate health and sexual health education. They also point out that young people are more alike than they are different and are commonly defined not by their individuality or actions, but rather by visible and immutable characteristics such as age, race, and sex that leaves many young people feeling “invisible” and/or unable to “fit in”. They propose solutions to these problems that include calls for easy access to youth counselling services, “kindness” and “courage” from each other to confront bullying and for changes in how health and sexual health education is taught at school.

This project demonstrates that the use of artistic and collaborative participatory video and drama methods can provide positive and empowering experiences for young people and insights into their experiences and stories of health. The unique video artefacts present participants' perspectives in perpetuity, in their own images and literal voices, enabling them to be seen, heard, and considered by adults and other young people alike.

10.2.5 Ethical Considerations

Children and young people are often considered vulnerable both inside and outside of research contexts [10]. Creating spaces that are considered safe can however be a Catch-22 dilemma or, worse, illusory. It is not easy to establish what is or is not actually safe or decide who is or is not competent enough to be self-determinant. The long-standing tensions inherent in establishing children and young people's competency frequently results in erring on the side of caution, often precluding young people's participation with a paternalistic, protectionist rationale rather than allowing any exposure to risk that might foster important contributions and gains [11, 12].

The fundamental question in PV is, do we encourage young people to have open discussions and the freedom to create their own films regardless of what they may wish to say or depict, or do we shut down dialogue on contentious topics to avoid participant or audience discomfort and the potential for emotional risk and harm? Creating truly

safe spaces for young people demands that we continuously juggle competing interests to both protect and serve at the same time. This can be particularly difficult when the ideas that young people share and are exposed to can be seen as controversial or potentially ‘triggering’. The wider consideration must then be whether restricting children and young people from participation is more or less harmful than open expression with support should any distress arise. There is also a need for wider consideration as to which voices are being raised most and why. Even within a given collaboration with a community of children and young people, there are diverse and contrary interests. Therefore, playing into any singularity or identity characteristic should be done with a realisation that the results may or may not translate into positive outcomes for all young people.

As participatory video practitioners, we believe the tensions between amplifying unheard voices and perpetuating marginalisation by inaction are unavoidable and necessitate a situated approach to video method ethics. The focus in participatory video must be on the relationships between participants and facilitators in order to find the best possible contextual balance capable of amplifying young people’s voices in a manner that effects positive change for both participants and young people in general [13, 14]. Participatory video facilitation brings with it the responsibility to listen to the many different voices within a group, working towards amplification in ways that do not serve some by adding another layer of marginalisation to others based on existing societal biases.

From a participatory video perspective, when young people are empowered to make decisions and drive the processes of analysis and dissemination, they are no longer passive recipients or objects of research, but rather valued contributors with a greater degree of agency [3, 15, 16]. Therefore, while there are aspects of young people’s vulnerability that must be considered and addressed, these are far less troublesome than any wholesale paternal refusal to allow them to participate or for interpretations of their situations to be made simply by adult proxy. According to Peterson [17] and Bamberg [18, 19], to encourage true thought and development of understandings, all ideas must be able to be spoken, particularly the ones we find most difficult to hear or discuss. They posit that most people are not capable of processing their thoughts independent of verbalisation or writing, so it is in the speaking and discussion of ideas that the creation of new understandings and potential solutions occur. The open expression of ideas should, therefore, be protected and fostered at every possible opportunity and arguably default towards participation and inclusion rather than exclusion. To do otherwise is more likely to produce greater marginalisation, not less, leading to the loss of an individual’s unique and valuable insights.

10.2.6 The Potential Problem of Legacy

The very capacity for participatory video to amplify participants' voices can also be its greatest risk. Once the films are released, and enter into the social media space, the images and ideas within them exist forever and can only be recalled through painstakingly difficult methods, if at all. Helping participants choose what is included in their videos and how their stories are told is a process that demands a high degree of reflexivity by both the facilitators and participants themselves. The facilitation process requires that each and every scene within their films is discussed, reflected upon and shaped to meet the group's expectations and satisfaction before it is shown to the public. This should be openly discussed with participants before and during the workshops and outlined explicitly in any consent and release forms signed. This process of reflection and consideration creates rich and valuable insights into participants' stories and ideas and what they hope to accomplish with them.

An example of the implications of legacy became evident in the Creating Space Project exemplar. Initial feedback from participants was that they were very excited and proud of the films they created for the project, however, 2 years on, the oldest participants (now almost 18 and 'adult') have become somewhat more critical of the films they had once been so proud of. They are not at all critical of their ideas or stories, but rather in how they themselves looked and acted within the films. Now as young adults, they claim to know so much more about creating films and, in their words, find their performances "cringeworthy". They have become more critical of their younger selves for looking and acting "awkward" and not saying enough. Specifically, they lament that they "could have done better" and that with the skills they learned through the workshops, could now make their films look and feel more professional, thereby making them more effective.

A desire to redo and improve upon what their younger selves had created is an inherent aspect of successful capacity building. After a successful PV workshop, participants should be able to create better films. That is the purpose of going through the exercises, but more importantly, that these participants are still reflecting on the work and their own individual abilities and stories 2 years on, could be construed as evidence of the project's value and success and the power of PV to engage young people.

In this instance the participants did not wish to remove their films from view, but rather only point out that they believe they could do so much more. The potential for a change of perspective had been considered during the initial workshops, and the groups nominated four people to be their final 'editors'. These four worked closely with the facilitators during the final edits to confirm the films were true to each groups' vision. Participants were later invited to become moderators of the Project's YouTube channel with a distinct goal being to empower the group to develop their own independent projects and present these alongside their original works. Equally important was the

intention for adult facilitators to become redundant unless specifically invited to support future projects.

This highlights the relationships within and process of participatory video as an adoption of reflective practice beyond the confines of a singular project. Lunch and Roberts [16] and Shaw [14] suggest that participatory video is relational work that extends beyond the confines of a singular interaction or workshop. While it produces artefacts that may exist in perpetuity, it also recognises that the films created are only representing thoughts and ideas captured at a particular moment in time. The processes, however, should be viewed as the means of promoting participants' ongoing and evolving cultures, not trying to archive or constrain it [20]. However, because the processes are relational, when artefacts no longer reflect participants' views, the participants can choose to remove content from display if possible, or alternatively use their newly acquired skillset to create new content that refutes or augments previous ideas alongside the original. This longitudinal commitment should therefore, be an important consideration at the inception of any participatory video project, and while having high expectations of the final films can produce excellent results, to avoid disappointment among participants, the emphasis must be on the participatory process and the relationships, not on the final product [21].

The films created in participatory video research capture only a snapshot of a group's thoughts and abilities across the time that is available, but once the films are completed and released, these snapshots do become a visual legacy. Young people are in a continual transition from childhood and their perspectives and capacities can and do change. The potential temporality of their concerns and ideas should be considered in relation to the permanence of their final creations and openly discussed with participants throughout their creation.

Many of the stories shared in the Creating Space Project identified young people's vulnerabilities and were remarkably insightful. Publicly admitting their fears and uncertainties took trust and courage. While some participants of participatory video projects may go on to look back with a degree of criticism of the efforts of their younger selves, in the exemplar, they still believed the ideas they had created were sound and representative of what young people experience, even if they themselves no longer felt "young".

It is of course, just as possible that some ideas might not continue to resonate with a participant after a project is completed. In such a case, the legacy may not be a positive one for them. This brings to the fore the importance of developing long-term relationships in participatory work to facilitate subsequent and ongoing opportunities for reflection that extend beyond the initial project and until such time as participants themselves are satisfied with the outcomes. This enables new ideas and voices to be uncovered and refined continually and contextually.

Considering this, we suggest that prior to recruiting young people into participatory video collaborations, a researcher or facilitator's ability (and capacity) to maintain relationships over time should be considered. Participatory video is a research methodology that is 'with' young people, not 'on' them and thus requires continual clarification and discussion before, during and after content analysis and creation.

10.3 Why Use Participatory Video?

Over the last two centuries, information and stories have been created and shared faster than ever. With the advent of the printing press and increased literacy, oral communications gave way to the written and ideas spread very quickly. With the development of media such as radio, film, and television an even greater sharing of ideas has occurred. Not all ideas shared have fostered human well-being or rapid progress, but arguably widespread access to collective knowledge has allowed for incredible gains.

Yet all of these early tools for sharing information pale in comparison with the power of the internet. Social media's ability to spread ideas as efficiently as a virus and without the associated costs and controls of previous technologies, has quickened our pace of change. The allure of PV is that it can serve as a canvas for presenting any creative technique or genre to then seamlessly integrate with social media. The increasingly emergent nature of video in our everyday world points to its ability to simultaneously facilitate the creation and sharing of stories [[22](#), [23](#)].

The use of participatory video to create effective links between diverse segments of a community or group is relatively well documented and, as Harris [[24](#)] suggests, it can have a bridging effect between established societal groups and those more marginalised. This bridging can make it possible for dialogue to flourish where previously there may have been only alienation and division, giving rise to new ways of seeing and integrating other's viewpoints, societal challenges, and solutions.

Social media has become endemic to the majority of young people's lives and is even woven into most public education systems via Google and Apple curriculums. These curriculums require students to engage in social media spaces in order to access learning content [[25](#)]. However, perhaps the real value of participatory video is that more people can listen to or watch content than can read it. This translates into increased inclusivity and engagement and increased interconnectivity and generation of understandings between the facilitators and participants and between children and young people themselves. Digital spaces can also facilitate the exchange of ideas in iterative 'chat' formats enabling young people to continue to provide their opinions when and how they choose and without the need to enter into more formal academic spaces and processes.

With digital media being ubiquitous, platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google, and TikTok (among others) are now the new distribution networks for stories and ideas. In this way, the internet takes us away from the written word and brings us back towards more oral traditions [26]. This allows for the inclusion of voices and ideas that would otherwise remain unspoken such as those who lack literacy. Using participatory video methods with children and young people places an emphasis on individuals' stories in a manner that allows for the inherent expression of an individual's tone and voice, without a focus on formal written language, similar to more oral traditions. The notion that each person has the right to express themselves and tell their stories suggests that these online and digital spaces are the new 'town square'. However, in the case of the social media, it is far more complex than simply 'a square' as it might be better considered more like an entire city, where there are multiple connections, voices and relational networks. This means that young people being able to tell and receive stories through video increases the potential reach of each voice, and each story, facilitating the access and contribution of children and young people to vast numbers of conversations [27]. This is the essence and aim of PV practice.

In the Creating Space Project exemplar, three separate Youth Advisory groups (aged 5–18) identified video, music, art and drama as young people's first preferences for how they would want to engage with research. They overwhelmingly called for us to use methods capable of changing people's thinking by "going viral" [8]. Participatory video can enable and promote marginalised voices by making use of the diminishing cost and easy access to 'free' publishing through social media platforms. In the example, participants identified that bullying and loneliness are challenges that most children and young people face, paying close attention to the complexity of friendships, online behaviours and the gaps between adult understandings of young people's educational experiences. They portrayed their protagonists wrestling with bullies, depression, anxiety and mustering courage to be kind to one another in order to face "sad dragons" and to confront their "ghosts of anxiety" [8]. They discussed the changes they felt were necessary if health and sexual health education is to meet young people's needs and most of all, they were adamant that these are not problems that adults alone can solve. On the contrary, they pointed out that young people are often the perpetrators of bullying so they themselves need to change and be part of the solutions.

In 1945, human knowledge was estimated to be doubling every 25 years. In 2013, knowledge was doubling every 12 h [28] and today we are reportedly doubling knowledge every 12 min. We have ever increasing access to ideas—good, bad, and indifferent. With access to the internet and a computer (or even a smartphone), almost anyone can publish ideas and stories that have the potential to reach millions of people and affect change. This means that virtually every idea holds the potential to go 'viral' and promote local and systemic actions and reactions. This can prove useful to young people who are frequently marginalised by their age, but of course, responses can also

be unforeseen and uncontrollable when comments and videos take on lives of their own.

Young New Zealanders have some of the highest internet and social media use in the world, second only to Denmark [29]. With a known correlation between time spent on social media platforms and the prevalence of depression and acts of self-harm, it is no wonder the youth suicide rates in New Zealand are some of the highest in the world. The New Zealand Ministry of Development identifies the suicide mortality rate for young people (aged 15–24 years) as 23.9 and 6.9 per 100,000 for males and females respectively [30]. Youth suicide and poor mental health are of notable concern in New Zealand and around the world [31,32,33].

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, children and young people moved even more rapidly into online worlds as their real-world spaces, such as school, sports, clubs, and community, had been disrupted by actions and mandates implemented in the name of protection but undoubtedly at a cost to many young people [33, 34]. The films created by the children and young people in the exemplar provide a clear picture of their experiences of online and in-person bullying, anxiety, and mental health prior to and within the context of Covid-19 lockdowns.

Participatory video offers a collaborative framework for working with young people to identify what is and is not important to them. Using digital storytelling methods, young people's interests, strengths and proclivities are used to build their capacity and access their unique knowledge and perspectives—ensuring the unknown potential that each young person has to offer is not lost.

10.3.1 Video and the Power of Story

At its heart, participatory video is a method of gathering stories and developing narratives that enable an audience to buy into or refute the teller's story and ideas. Story is a central tenet of creativity and an integral aspect of our being, both genetically and psychologically embedded within us [17, 35, 36]. Stories create a counterbalance to the complex chaos of the world and the antithetical strict and repressive order we find in societal structures such as laws and customs. More specifically, they situate us and advance us as individuals, as communities and, more broadly, as a species because they evolve our structure of values—enabling us to more easily see the world around us through abstractions that reduce the infinite number of complexities to more manageable representations [37].

In gathering and considering young people's stories and supporting them to create artistic representations of them in video, participatory video holds the potential to foster change through the establishment of new and agreed-upon patterns—patterns that exist across the many different stories within a group but are pulled together to form a more singular narrative. For example, the fictional stories created by the young people in

the exemplar are not simply made up or make believe, but rather should be considered 'hyper real'. They amalgamate so many of the participants' stories and experiences into a singular representation, which in turn, makes their perceptions on poor health outcomes and possibilities for resolution more easily identifiable and relatable.

The stories embedded in a participatory video do not just mirror the world or experiences within it, they aspire to express and make attainable much deeper truths and understandings. In this way, all stories (in particular archetypal stories) allow us, as the audience or reader, to see or experience them as enduring representations of living cultures, as examples of wisdom, and as maps to follow [17, 38, 39].

Stories allow us to position ourselves so that we clarify to ourselves and project to others what we believe. Placing our own experiences within and alongside the frameworks of particular stories is a means of collectively guiding ourselves towards how we should be and act. As Hogenboom [40] points out, human's use of story has enabled a collective hive mentality that has accelerated human progress in ways no other animal could achieve. Stories therefore serve as judges of our actions and inactions just as any literal existential judge might, with language laying out our values in a hierarchy that forms the landscape we live within and providing the geographical maps to be followed within our broader geographies. Participatory video has a unique ability to gain understandings of children and young people's geographies [15]. It achieves this through iterative creative and reflexive processes that focus on developing a participant's capacity to share their stories and perspectives on themselves, their environment and their communities. It can encompass the entire landscape that they live within while also considering the individual portraits and relationships and within it.

Provided we create environments that facilitate the ability to listen to the stories of children and young people with an intent to understand, we learn from their experiences, their losses and gains. In other words, we ourselves do not need to have experienced every young person's struggles to attend to them. On the contrary, the act of listening and considering perspectives can itself elicit new and shared understandings and steer us towards more collective safety [4, 35, 41].

10.3.2 Importance of Process over Product

Children and young people are far more capable of complex thinking than is often presumed and, in many cases, can contribute to and even lead aspects of data analysis [42]. The participatory video process integrates data collection with analysis by using exercises and discussions that probe participants' thoughts and ideas about the videos they are creating. Although there is a distinct gap in the lexicon relating to data analysis in participatory video literature, like all participatory action research, participatory video is an iterative process in which data creation and analysis is undertaken concomitantly during individual and group discussions. Participants' creative processes, performances and stories form catalysts for discussion, helping identify key concepts that in turn

inform the planning and creation of their next undertaking. These ongoing and iterative discussions which are a key component of the data analysis enable a collective reflexivity that garners shared understandings between the participants and facilitators.

Participatory video methods place the process of building trusting relationships above any need to create polished video content [16, 43, 44]. The participants in a participatory video project have significant ownership over the planning, design, and execution of the workshops and wholesale freedom in their selection of the topics and stories they develop and share, thus ensuring that the processes are as participatory as possible. This is fundamental to empowerment because, regardless of the final product, any content that is created facilitates discussion. The resulting relationships and trust fully establish participants as co-researchers and promote the commencement of distinct action research cycles. The cycles of PAR include a process of observation (identification), reflection, planning, and implementation of action that carries on to the next observation and subsequent cycles of analysis [45].

10.4 Participatory Video Techniques

The exercises used in participatory video have two distinct goals. The first is to bring participants together as a group to create trust and facilitate discussion and analysis of ideas. The second is to teach the technical skills required to become storytellers and filmmakers. There are many exercises that can be used to create a fun and explorative participatory video workshop. The five techniques presented below are some of the fundamental exercises used in the exemplar and are presented in a chronological order that can facilitate an iterative approach to the development of participant's stories so that they culminate in distinct video artefacts and films.

10.4.1 Technique 1: Portraiture, Using Body Maps

This exercise often includes lots of giggles and laughter and immediately starts conversations as the complexity and diversity of the group emerges. Participants outline their bodies on large sheets of paper and identify themselves in terms of their origins and their roots (feet), what moves them (legs), their fears (stomachs), who they love (hearts) and what their dreams and aspirations for the future are (heads) (see Fig. 10.2). This can be very intense for the group as they reflect on their own bodies and being as well as explore each other's 'portraits'. The shared experience of reflecting on themselves and others is an important first step to establishing a reflexive and reciprocal group dynamic. Participants' intense curiosity and relative acceptance of each other's uniqueness is a means of fostering a community of trust and encouraging discussion and analysis of ideas.

Once the participants finish their body maps, they explore each other's silhouettes and are asked to consider each one as a rough map of the artist's being. They are encouraged to consider the similarities and differences in the things they value and to discuss these with each other to see if there are any consistent hierarchies of value across the group. Lastly, they are asked to find drawings that contain values or dreams that are similar to their own and to lie down and try to fit themselves into that drawing. This is done to make connections between participants while also acknowledging their individual differences.

Some children and young people can find this aspect of the exercise very challenging, not so much in terms of finding similar value structures, but rather in finding shared future dreams. In the exemplar, their dreams were often very career specific, and both surprisingly specific and diverse. Another challenge identified by participants was physically fitting into a smaller person's portrait, which they reported as "difficult" or "painful". In some ways, this exercise perhaps mirrors the challenges that adults often face within children's games. It can be difficult to play along when we become too big,

both physically (when we have outgrown certain things) and metaphorically (when we have replaced playful and imaginary concepts with more rigid or inflexible ones).

Interestingly, participants also avoided trying to fit into the portrait of a participant in a wheelchair. Many shared the same dreams and values, but for some who tried to fit into the portrait they cited their attempts to fit as “impossible” claiming that even trying to fit was potentially “bad luck”. This exercise provides the opportunity to heighten participants’ own sense of self and can act as a reminder that they share so much with each other despite their individual physical differences.

10.4.2 Technique 2: Vox Pops, Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism is “the reporting and dissemination of news and information independently of conventional news institutions by individuals who are not professional journalists” ([46], p. 18). The main aim of this exercise is to empower the children and young people with the skills to gather information by asking questions and reporting on it. The group learns how to set up cameras and microphones, frame questions, and explore ideas through interviews. The facilitators discuss how different types of questions (such as open, closed, or leading) might make them feel and affect the responses they receive. These skills will transfer to many aspects of their lives and are meant to enable them to initiate future projects independently if they choose to do so. The children and young people practice how to plan their interview questions to explore other’s perspectives and meanings. In the exemplar, the group did this by focusing on their drawn portraits. Following instruction and practice, they then take turns filming each other as journalists conducting interviews (see Fig. [10.3](#)).

Fig. 10.3



Asking questions and listening to others- “News with Katie” video example here: <https://youtu.be/fb7yc1bjKeo>

10.4.3 Technique 3: Story and Tell

Lunch and Lunch [1] explain that creating successful participatory video projects relies on exercises that engage participants in technical but fun and playful experiences that promote the sharing of their stories. Story and Tell is based on their example of Show and Tell, in which control of the exercise is handed to the community to show things that are important to them by filming and contextualising them. In the exemplar project, children and young people were each asked to bring in one item that represents health to them. They were then asked to use their newly learned citizen journalist skills to interview each other to learn what the item was and how and why it represents health to the owner.

The interviews were then screened to the whole group and discussions facilitated about the unique and varied items on display and individual health constructs participants hold (see Fig. 10.4).

Fig. 10.4



Group screenings and discussion

The process in the exemplar exposed how health can be interpreted in many different ways, but also identified that regardless of what item they chose to represent health, all participants described their item as representing a time when it made them feel safe or loved or as having the power to help them cope when they have it with them. Revelations like this are powerful and the next step in this exercise is to help them tell the story of how a chosen item does what it is claimed to do.

To do this, you place participants into groups of at least four or five people, then have them discuss and consider each item in relation to ‘telling its story’. After all the items have been discussed, use a voting process (in which people cannot choose their own), to identify only one item for the group to focus on.

Once an item is selected, guidance is provided as to how to elicit particular emotions from the audience using cinematographic techniques. Participants are asked to use a variety of type of shots (e.g. close-ups, mid-range, wide angle, low camera angles etc.) and to storyboard six shots to tell the story about the item. This means that the children and young people work collaboratively to determine where to film, what and who each scene will contain and what if any dialogue there will be. This is all done with a tight time limit to keep the groups progressing. Once they have filmed the scenes, the video clips are quickly edited by facilitators to create short films that tell the story as close as possible to how the groups envisioned in their written storyboards.

The most important aspect of any participatory video exercise is the reflective screening of the videos [1, 2]. The techniques used are discussed in relation to their effectiveness

and ability to tell the story they set out to tell. The Show and Tell exercise is an integral step as there are always mistakes to be made and these mistakes are to be encouraged and celebrated as lessons that enhance their ability to plan for the next filming exercise. “Mistakes are great!” should be a mantra said often in participatory video work because overcoming failure requires reflection and collaboration.

The reflective screening sessions (see Fig. 10.4) are a vital debriefing exercise that allows the participants to share their perspectives across the whole group while also creating distinct learning moments regarding the effects that different filming techniques have on the audience.

Examples of a story and tell short about how ‘Airpods’ represent health to some young people can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/1G1UN-gFPho>. To see what participation behind the camera looks like, a video that captures the storyboarding process for the short as well as footage of participants setting up their shots, filming, and creatively capturing audio can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/SQOr5OOSTeQ>.

10.4.4 Technique 4: Margolis Wheel, Spinning Ideas into Action

To be effective, participatory video projects should explore participants’ views through a variety of structured exercises that give equal weight to individual voices ([1, 14, 47]; Shaw [1]). Ensuring equal weighting across multiple domains such as age, gender, interests, and personality types can present challenges, but to support the widest possible inclusion of all participant voices, we recommend a technique called the Margolis Wheel [1]. This exercise encourages in-depth conversations between participants in relation to their perceptions and perspectives on a broad topic. The process identifies more specific topics of interest and becomes the catalyst for selecting a particular topic that the group will then develop further and create a short film about.

To facilitate this exercise, participants arrange themselves into groups of six or eight people. In their groups, they sit in concentric circles facing another participant (see Fig. 10.5) and a facilitator then presents a series of open-ended questions. In the exemplar these were health-related questions for them to consider and discuss with the partner they were facing. After approximately 5 min of discussion, the outer wheel rotates and those people changed seats, thereby now facing new partners for the next question and discussion point.

Fig. 10.5



The Margolis Wheel—video example here: <https://youtu.be/803OpfOrTig>

The Margolis Wheel is a reflective tool that incorporates time-bound conversations with participant movement in order to facilitate wider discussions across a group. The systematic movement of conversation partners ensures that every participant has multiple opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas with others and also to listen to other perspectives. It minimises the group dynamic of conversation by focusing participant responses only to another individual, not the wider group. This has the effect of minimising fear of being different or having ideas that do not fit with a group view.

Once the rotations are complete and there have been five rounds of discussions, participants are asked to individually reflect on their conversations and write down on separate sheets of paper the three things from the discussions that they found most interesting, that they found most important, or that made them want to think, talk, or learn more about.

These individual thoughts and ideas are then placed in a pile to enable the group to undertake a thematic analysis across the group. The process aggregates the most

salient ideas through a process of individual reflection and subsequent collective discussion and thematic analysis. Once the group has identified a cluster of five to six topics that they are most interested in, a democratic process is undertaken to draw out the one topic that most captures a group's collective interest. To do this, a three-point voting technique is applied where each participant has three votes that they can cast on the topics they are most interested in. They can spread their votes across topics or, if there was one that they are strongly drawn to, they can cast all of their votes on the one to increase the odds of it being selected.

Our experience of using this technique is very positive, though there can be points at which intergroup recruitment starts to have an impact on the younger participants if they themselves are not confident in their choices. Having used both blind and visible methods of voting, each has advantages and disadvantages. In groups where there is evidence of the younger members voices being overshadowed by older members, protecting participants from peer pressure to vote in a particular way can be mitigated by using blind voting,

The most valuable aspect of this exercise is that it generates topics directly from the interests of the children and young people and that they themselves identify as being the most important or interesting to them.

10.4.5 Technique 5: Problem Trees and Storyboards

Once groups have an identifiable issue or problem, Chevalier and Buckles [48] propose the use of a “problem tree” for creating a structural analysis of the causes and effects of an issue. We have adapted their problem tree model to include consideration of potential solutions within the exploration of cause and effects, in essence, by also using the metaphor of “bearing fruit” (see Fig. 10.6). To enable individual children and young people in a group to contribute and develop their ideas into relatable stories, we plant the “seed problem” the effects and root causes of the problems being presented.

Fig. 10.6



Examples of problem trees, audience pathways and storyboards.

In this exercise, each group draws a tree on a large piece of paper and places the core issue they are considering on the trunk. They discuss the root causes of the issue and write these down on sticky notes at the roots of the tree. They then consider what the effects of the problem are on children and young people and place those in the branches of the tree in a different colour. Finally, they explore potential solutions that cover the causes in the roots and effects in the branches, and these are represented in a third colour as the leaves and fruit of the tree. This metaphorical growing provides the group with opportunities to discuss their perspectives and explore their personal experiences relating to the issue. They work to find common ground in terms of how they see the given issue and what might help address it. The last step returns to storyboarding so that the children and young people can organise how they wish to share their findings to an audience. Using storyboards, they map out each scene so that they carry the audience along and deliver both their perspectives on a topic and tangible solutions to be considered—all being told in their literal voices and images (Fig. 10.7).

Fig. 10.7



Lights, Camera Action! Participants filming their stories

To see the films and ‘behind the scenes’ videos from the Creating Space Project exemplar (see Fig. 10.8), visit the channel here: <https://www.youtube.com/@creatingSPACEproject-suppo3284>.

Fig. 10.8



The Creating Space Project: Supporting Youth Voice YouTube Channel

10.5 Advantages and Challenges of Participatory Video

The importance of inclusion and participation to ensure positive intergroup relationships and achieve positive social outcomes has been a long and instantiated position in ethnographic, anthropologic, and action research methodologies [1, 23, 49,50,51]. Gruber [43] identifies participatory video as an exercise in supporting participants to create new knowledge and to shape their own image. It can be used in a variety of settings, and is increasingly popular in fields such as community development, social justice, and international development [3, 47].

Participatory video has advantages when working with children and young people because of its ability to provide a fun and novel experience that is shared with others in a group setting. Learning to use a video camera still has appeal despite the predominant use of the mobile phone to record digital moving pictures. Lunch and Lunch [1] promote the ease and accessibility of video and its ability to bring people together to creatively tell stories. Learning to use a video camera and the technical skills that are associated with filmmaking provide the allure. The relational aspect of participatory video is core as group work draws people together, engaging them in issues that affect them, developing their capacities and potential to drive change [1, 2, 15]. The process transfers the power

and privilege associated with researchers to participants, enabling them to express what is important to them and to tell their stories.

10.5.1 Empowerment of Participants

A significant advantage of participatory video over some traditional research methods is the empowerment of its participants. Gubrium and Harper [52] argue that PV can provide participants with control over the research process and help them to tell their own stories. This sense of ownership can be particularly empowering for marginalised communities and individuals who may feel excluded from traditional research methods or underserved by mainstream media. Participatory video methods help marginalised groups develop and express their perspectives and experiences in their own words and in a visual format that can speak to others. It then helps amplify their voices through the dissemination of content and the creation of new networks. This empowers them to participate in the decision-making process and contributes to their personal development, in particular promoting youth leadership by helping young people to develop skills in teamwork, communication, analysis, and dissemination of ideas.

The potential emancipatory power of participatory video work was first identified by Don Snowden, and the Fogo Islanders of Newfoundland in the 1960s. The remote Fogo Island Community had little influence on centralised government policies that encouraged urbanisation. The process Snowden used to explore the community's challenges, needs and potential solutions came to be called the Fogo Process [53]. This was the inception of participatory video practice and resulted in a recognition of the Fogo Islander's plight and subsequent shift of governmental policies and resources to those living in the marginalised regions of Canada [44, 54].

Although explicit examples of participatory video work with children and young people are rare, one notable example is a project called "Supporting each other: Children dealing with cancer in the family" [55]. The film was created by young people who live with a parent with cancer and shares their experiences and what they think people can do to support young people living with a terminal parental illness. The film went on to inform palliative care services' policies and guidelines in the UK for working with the children of patients with cancer. The video can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLGvjmCUgJw>.

10.5.2 Inclusivity and Accessibility

Video is an accessible medium that can be easily understood and shared by a wide range of audiences, including those who may have limited literacy or language skills. It can meet the needs of a diverse range of young people, including those who may not be able to participate in other research methods due to physical, cognitive, or linguistic barriers associated with the written methods. Takeda [56] identifies that participatory video provides a platform for young people to express their unique perspectives and

experiences, that may not be captured through more traditional research methods such as interviews, ethnographic filmmaking or observation. Participatory video can also reach out to marginalised and hard-to-reach communities and involve them as collaborators and co-researchers. Lunch and Lunch [1] suggest that in situations where there is a low level of literacy, visual and oral documentation through participatory video provides content in a form that can be more easily understood and shared, giving a decided advantage over the written word in documenting local innovation.

10.5.3 Flexibility and Creativity

Participatory video is a flexible method that can be adapted to different research contexts and objectives. It can be used to explore a wide range of topics, from social issues to personal experiences, and can be adapted to suit different cultural contexts or technological resources. Participatory video encourages young people to think creatively and explore different ways of communicating their ideas and experiences. This can lead to the production of engaging and thought-provoking videos and content that can raise awareness, advocate for change, and inform policy decisions.

10.5.4 The Key Challenges

Although this chapter clearly advocates for the use of participatory video with young people, there are several key challenges that should be considered before embarking on a participatory video project. Fraser et al. [57] identify the risk of participatory video projects not providing participants with a positive experience when the process fails to identify specific needs of the group. Therefore, it is particularly important to know the context of the groups being worked with or to have liaisons familiar with the group who can advise throughout the participatory video process. In another example of our participatory video work, we collaborated with young people from refugee backgrounds to explore their perceptions and understandings of health and well-being (Ripley, forthcoming). We invited leaders and youth advocates from the refugee community in New Zealand to be liaisons between the young people and us as facilitators. They provided guidance on recruitment of youth from the community, support to ensure cultural needs would be met and insights into gaining the trust and participation of the harder to reach members of the group.

As it is rare to work with completely homogenous groups, all participatory video projects should be considered through a lens of unconditional regard to pull people together to work “with” not “on” participants. As such, the following challenges should be considered in relation to participatory video practice.

10.5.4.1 Participatory Video Is Time and Resource Intensive

Due to the importance of building trusting relationships PV can be a time-consuming and resource-intensive method. It requires a degree of technical expertise to operate the equipment and edit footage. Those wishing to pursue participatory video methods are

encouraged to consider formal facilitation training as we did with InsightShare. However, this can be a challenge for researchers, organisations, or communities with limited resources. It is important that young people may also have limited time availability due to school or other commitments, making it challenging to schedule workshops, feedback sessions or screenings.

10.5.4.2 Potential Research Bias

There is a risk of bias in the research process, as the perspectives and experiences captured in the videos may not be representative of the wider population. For example, children and young people who are more comfortable with the use of technology or have stronger communication skills may dominate the process, while others may be excluded or may not feel comfortable participating. This is not dissimilar to other participatory research methods but is mitigated by using a variety of games and exercises that play to participants' different strengths and preferences. The role of participatory video facilitation is to ensure bias is minimised. This is done by ensuring that those children and young people who have a tendency for introversion or fear of performance or speaking have opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas. Participatory video methods are not rigid, and the facilitators can offer numerous opportunities for the use of both individual and group work. These include written, verbal, creative and physical activities with many different 'roles' within each of them. Likewise, in the creative process of developing stories and films, democratic voting processes are integrated so that everyone in the group gets to put forward their vote on whether something should or should not be included. This breadth and depth of exploration provides an opportunity for most if not all young people to participate by playing to their individual strengths and or interests.

10.5.4.3 Ethical Concerns

Concerns around informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy need to be considered and continually assessed throughout the participatory video process. It is important to ensure that young people understand the purpose of the research, how the data will be used, and who will have access to it. Additionally, the use of visual media may inadvertently reveal sensitive information or identities, which could put young people and their family, friends, and wider networks at risk. Participatory video therefore requires a collaborative approach, where young people assume control over the research process but with unconditional support to explore any ethical issues that arise. However, power dynamics between adults and children and young people can make it difficult to create an equal partnership therefore maintaining a constant reflexive approach during facilitation is paramount.

10.6 Getting the Best Out of a Participatory Video Project

To facilitate participatory video effectively we recommend participatory video facilitation training. Our training provided the opportunity to be a participant in a participatory video project before trying to facilitate one. Experiencing the participatory video process as a participant not only ensures familiarity with the video and audio equipment, but more importantly provides a clear understanding of how particular exercises contribute to the gathering and analysis of stories and the building of participant's individual capacity. As mentioned previously, we have benefited greatly from the instruction and guidance of InsightShare associates (see Key Resources). However, there are many other training providers who could be considered to meet the context of any proposed project.

The success of a participatory video project with children and young people relies on the quality of participation and collaboration it can foster. Focus foremost on creating an environment that works to strike a balance of analytical exercises with fast paced and fun challenges. The whole process should be one of exploration that leaves the children and young people wanting to ask more questions and create more films. To determine how to choose the right exercises, ensure that your project is co-created with the children and young people you are working with and that they are involved in all stages of the process, from conceptualising the workshops through to production of the films and on to dissemination of them to audiences. Ensuring open communication and transparency with children and young people is paramount.

Participatory video projects can have a lasting impact on individuals and communities, so it is important to think about the long-term implications of your project. Consider how you can ensure that the project delivers a sustainable impact and be integrated into any of the group's ongoing efforts or networks. To avoid potentially negative outcomes relating to privacy, participants should be informed that giving consent or assent is not a one-off event and their assent/consent is ongoing throughout the creative processes and extends into the future during dissemination of findings. Although assent/consent can be withdrawn even once final films and findings are released, recalling their individual contributions from the works and from the public view may be very difficult or potentially impossible. This should be included in the project's consent, assent, and release forms.

Participatory video projects can be complex and challenging, so it is important to be prepared for the unexpected. Technical issues need to be overcome as well as interpersonal and relational ones. Facilitation of participatory video projects includes challenges related to logistics, cultural differences, and often unexpected changes in the community or political contexts. These contexts can be jarring and even destabilising for the facilitators and the wider group. For example, some experiences children and young people share about the challenges they face can be emotionally trying for them and challenging for the facilitators. This is particularly so if the project

has limited resources or time to address sensitive disclosures in the moment. Being flexible and adaptable, responsive, and prepared to adjust your approach as needed will bring positive results. The pace of discussion and analysis that can occur during the workshop exercises and film screenings can be daunting, but with continual reflexivity and purposeful participant feedback opportunities established in the plan, shifts and changes in approach can be made in real time to help meet the specific needs of the group. Try to allow for participants' creativity to guide the timelines and discussions, ask open-ended questions and listen intently to what participants are saying. Always seek clarification when unclear, and of course, work to remain open to all perspectives, and storytelling styles. The focus needs to remain on the process of creation and analysis, not the final product. It is important to welcome or even encourage mistakes because they provide the opportunity to facilitate deep reflexive analysis of ideas. Creating the space to explore ideas without fear of judgement, means participants can engage in blue sky thinking about the problems that affect them. Using their own voices and styles to tell their stories encourages young people to incorporate different forms of expression, such as drama, music, dance, or spoken word to bring out the true richness of their world views.

10.7 Key Advice

1. Consider undertaking formal participatory video training. Experiencing a participatory video project yourself supports understanding of the processes
2. Focus on participation, collaboration, exploration and fun. This can be achieved by choosing and co-creating the right exercises with children and young people
3. Ensure open communication and transparency
4. Consider the legacy and long-term impact of the project and remind children and young people that their assent/consent is not a one-off event and their assent/consent is ongoing throughout the creative processes and extends into the future
5. Be flexible and prepare for challenges, be reflexive and provide purposeful feedback. Remember that mistakes are to be encouraged as they are great opportunities for learning!
6. Keep the focus on the process of creation and analysis, not the final product

10.8 Conclusion

Participatory video is a digital media research method that purposefully places researchers alongside participants to engage them in reflexive and creative processes. At its core, it sits within a rights-based paradigm and acknowledges participants'

potential to contribute valuable insights in an inclusive way. By creating shared spaces from a position of unconditional positive regard, participatory video can help ensure children and young people have a say in the things that affect them, making their contributions visible not only to their peers in participatory video workshops, but also to wider, more disparate audiences through the distribution of their films.

The participatory video techniques shared in this chapter (Portraiture, Vox Pops-Citizen Journalism, Story and Tell, the Margolis Wheel, Problem Trees and Storyboards) tap into participants' innate creativity and affinity for story. They build the capacity for critical and creative thinking of children and young people by providing them with the skills to explore and express their ideas through digital storytelling.

As child health researchers, we strongly believe in participatory video's potential to help children and young people express their perspectives, thereby fostering greater shared understanding of their needs and understanding of their world (Fig. [10.9](#)).

Fig. 10.9



Participants and facilitators celebrating at the end of a workshop

10.9 Useful Resources

1. Insightshare

This website introduces the ethos behind InsightShare's work and a comprehensive assortment of information pertaining to participatory video practice, including films from international PV projects, downloadable participatory video facilitation resources, and

face-to-face and online training courses. <https://insightshare.org> Accessed 8th March 2024.

2. The Creating Space Project: Supporting Youth Voice YouTube channel

Following the completion of the participants' films, this channel was established, at their request, to share their films with other young people and enable health professionals, teachers and policymakers to hear their concerns and ideas. The channel contains seven short films and behind the scenes filming and facilitator reflections that capture the essence of the 5-day workshop. It is hoped that the channel will become a platform for disseminating future youth research that is undertaken with or by young people. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCekEZOZnSadZXRLVQgk6Lbg>. Accessed 8th March 2024.

3. Three books to guide your participatory video practice

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