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'Wow, It Were Like Wow': The Importance and Opportunity of Researchers Feeding Back Research Output and Being Fed Back Upon With Care Experienced Young People

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ABSTRACT

Research involving young people has become increasingly common and is widely regarded as good practice, though the 'how-tos' of this practice are less developed. One element of research practice that may be important to young people, especially those living in the care system, is the researcher returning to share with them what was found and how their participation has informed the output of the research. Feeding back moves beyond focusing on how we access the voices of young people, to considering the ways that young people involved in research can feel more listened to and that their voices have been taken seriously. A case study in which care-experienced adolescents were returned to following their participation in a qualitative, photo-elicitation study is summarised. The feedback phase involved sharing with participants the analytical output of the study and then exploring their responses to the results and their reflections on taking part. The interaction had multiple aims: for the researcher to feedback and to be fed back upon, as well as acting as the final punctuation point within a wider research process. The data generated from this phase is shared to create new learning and wisdom, with the perspectives of these participants offered to educate the academic community.

1 | Introduction

1.1 | Participation and Young People

The involvement of young people in research and practice has gained prominence in recent decades, with the importance of this being widely discussed and supporting a move from researching 'on' to doing research 'with' or even 'by' or 'for' young people (Boden 2021; Facca et al. 2020; Holland et al. 2010). This represented a shift in research practice, as the boundaries between producers, users and participants of research have transformed and lessened (Reed and Rudman 2023). A driving force in this progress was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), with Article 12 of this treaty formalising the rights of young people to share their views and be listened to on the matters that affect them. At the time this was met with some controversy internationally, due to fears that this would undermine the ability of adults to oversee the lives of young people (Lundy 2007). Despite these concerns, since then, the participation and involvement of young people has flourished, with questions about the 'how-tos' and ideas around 'best practice' evolving and maturing through reflexive practice on the work involving young people that has occurred since (Dixon-Woods et al. 2011; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008).

At its simplest, the act of speaking with young people as part of research and practice is seen as an opportunity to 'hear their voices'. The concept of 'giving voice' to young people, however, has been critiqued as overly simplistic and requiring reconsideration (Facca et al. 2020; Spyrou 2011). Over time more complex

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interpretations and models of what participation involving young people should and could include have been discussed. Lundy (2007) offers a four-part structure when discussing participation involving young people, all of which are suggested to be vital for successful involvement: voice, space, audience, and influence. It is suggested that all four elements are integral to meaningful participation. The act of 'giving voice' is built upon the foundation that there are listeners who are open to hearing (Reed 2022). With this possibility being achieved through making space, providing an audience, and being open to what has been shared having influence.

The pinnacle of participatory practice is often described to be involving young people from the beginning of a research process through coming together in setting the research focus and agenda as active partners (Montreuil et al. 2021). This practice represents a 'from the ground up' approach to participation (Hamilton et al. 2019) in which there is an attempt to share power and influence throughout a research process (Dan et al. 2019). This collaboration can be described as a coming together of 'young and old' researchers in both the research process and also the engagement and impact activities that follow a piece of research (Dan et al. 2019). This 'ground up' approach to participatory practice has been argued to be the only form of project that can be transparently termed 'participatory research', due to the involvement of young people during all key steps of the process (Montreuil et al. 2021).

Whilst interest in involving young people has grown in recent years, the majority of research involving young people retains elements of a 'top down' approach in which adults at some stage in the research process retain power in the decisions that are made (Larkins and Satchwell 2023). Research practices involving more 'managed' elements (Holland et al. 2010) are likely to continue as long as there are questions and issues that adults wish to understand about young people. This is alongside realities and restrictions around the research which is being conducted by these adults, for instance research as a part of academic study and limitations due to resources, time or money (Dan et al. 2019; Dixon et al. 2019; Spyrou 2011). For these studies, the term 'participatory methods' is argued to be most transparent, due to the selective application of these methods during the research process (Montreuil et al. 2021). Though, rather than denigrating this as not 'good participation', an opportunity remains available to explore the ways in which we can enrich the participatory methods that are being widely utilised, whilst being pragmatic about what is possible in many research contexts.

As participatory methods with young people became more prominent, the methodological discussion and focus was on how best to access the voices of young people and undertake processes to represent these voices within analysis and dissemination (Facca et al. 2020; Spyrou 2011). There has been much less focus on the outcomes, impact and influence, especially from the young people's perspectives (Holland et al. 2010; Montreuil et al. 2021). There is also a risk of overlooking that what is 'best' in terms of participation will vary and depend upon the specific research being conducted (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Montreuil et al. 2021). This suggests a need to complicate our reflections on participatory practice, rather than solely focusing on 'at what stages' or 'how much' participation there was. An alternative focus could be upon the transparency and specificity around 'how' participation was attempted to allow an appraisal around how successful this appears to have been (Holland et al. 2010). Appraisal, and importantly learning, becomes more possible when we move away from ideas of 'perfect' participation being the only thing of value, and move toward an open discourse about the possibilities and limitations of a participatory contribution, and embracing the imperfections and messy realities of research with young people (Little et al. 2025; Lundy 2018).

1.2 | Feeding Back to Complete the Participation Cycle

McLeod (2007) established that adults tend to see 'listening' as a process in which young people are given the opportunity to express their views. However, in research with care-experienced young people, they found participants were less focused on this process and more on the outcome of participating in decisions. For these participants if the discussion points remained unchanged or were not addressed, then the young people viewed themselves as being unheard. Thus, listening was confirmed only when something changed, and the impact of their participation was communicated.

Feeding back to participants is suggested to be one way to ensure young people feel heard within research practice and to navigate around the risk of tokenistic or decorative involvement (Lundy 2007, 2018; Vosz et al. 2020). Whilst seeing change has an impact, it is just one way that young people can be shown their views have been taken seriously (Lundy 2018). The practice of feeding back and sharing the output of the research may be another way of 'demonstrating' the influence a young person has had and the impact of their participation (Vosz et al. 2020). The act of returning to young people in order to communicate the impact of their involvement is argued to be complementary to other aspects of participation, such as giving voice, creating a space, and providing audience (Lundy 2007).

Lundy (2007, 2018) sees feedback as a form of communication and 'influence', and as a right of the child, going as far as to say it is the 'strategy of choice' (Lundy 2018, 349) for ensuring research involving young people involves meaningful participation. Feedback is argued to be a way for young people to understand the extent of their influence. It is also suggested that the accountability that comes through returning to young people and sharing how their views were utilised may also act as a safeguard against tokenism (Lundy 2007). Participation for young people need not be a one-off event, but a process in which feeding back is deemed as important as the initial listening, as this allows participants to see what they said being put into action (Vis et al. 2012). This movement from 'listening' to participants, a unidirectional interaction, to engaging in a bidirectional dialogue (Lundy 2018; Tisdall 2015) has been suggested to contribute to young people feeling that their views are being taken seriously (Mitchell et al. 2023).

Following listening to young people, solutions and change may not always be possible; however, it remains important to feed this back and discuss this with young people so they understand this and may still feel heard (Golding 2006; Lundy 2007;

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Moore 2017). The alternative, in which such conversations are not undertaken and the feedback cycle is incomplete, has been suggested to leave young people not only feeling unheard but with additional difficult feelings, such as frustration (Moore 2017). It also reduces the potential for positive impact from participation, due to undermining the possibility of empowerment (Sinclair 2004) and the possibility of young participants feeling seen, heard, and important.

Rather than a desirable, gold standard feature, giving feedback to participants is emerging as an essential feature of work involving young people. The importance of feeding back to young people, for example, was highlighted in the United Nations (2009) publication that reflected upon the evolution of participatory practice. This publication centralised feedback as an underpinning feature of the participation process with young people, with the importance of feedback being emphasised so that young people learn 'how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of processes' (p. 5).

1.3 | Participation and Care-Experience

A group of young people for whom having influence, feeling heard, and being empowered has been suggested to be particularly complex is for those living in care (Matthews and Hugh-Jones 2024). This group has a unique social context as their lives are overseen by a range of professionals and adults (Golding 2006). In addition, listening to young people in care has led to this group sharing compelling narratives that communicate processes in their lives as inflexible and unresponsive (Selwyn and Lewis 2023). Furthermore, there have been experiences reported by young people in care where they are being denied a voice within the decisions that impact them (Dixon et al. 2019), also contributing to a view that they are unheard and have limited/no power or influence over decisions about their lives, whilst expressing a desire for more autonomy (Matthews and Hugh-Jones 2024; Munro 2001).

Alongside the experiences of being in care, young people entering the care system are likely to have a history of adversity, trauma, and displacement, and for many this may be a part of an intergenerational story of difficulty. These experiences may set the foundations for development for young people in care (van der Kolk 2005). Young people people in care are not overcoming their traumatic life events and social circumstances alone, however, as they remain embedded in a support system made up of others (Roffey 2017). These adults have the potential to alleviate and challenge the foundations built through adversity, or to consolidate them through further oppressive practices. Without the opportunity to share their perspectives, it may be that the systems which support young people in care could be working against them and their developmental needs, prioritizing the needs of the professionals and adults, and potentially therefore contributing to an experience of stress and distress (Munro 2001).

Highlighting the common early life experiences of these young people is not with the intent of foregrounding adversity, but instead illuminating the importance of participatory methods and involving care-experienced young people in research and policy discussions to inform the adults who oversee their lives. Broadly, for young people in care, it appears participation in their own lives, in terms of contributing to decisions, has positive effects (Francis et al. 2021; Riley 2019). Literature has recommended that young people in care's development can be supported when we understand how these young people see themselves, when we maximise their participation in decision-making, and when we understand the important relationships in their lives (Dixon et al. 2019; McMurray et al. 2011).

1.4 | Feeding Back Research Findings to Care Experienced Young People: A Case Study

Whilst the role of feedback in research with young people has been established, an exploration of the process and potential of feeding back to care-experienced participants of research was undertaken as a part of a study into the experiences of care-experienced young people during adolescence (detailed in Matthews and Hugh-Jones 2024).

2 | Method and Materials

2.1 | Aims

The decision to include a feedback phase had four aims: to share the findings of the research with participants so that they felt heard; to find out what this feedback process was like; to find out what it was like to participate in a participant-led methodology; and to seek feedback on the findings of the research from the participants with whom they were generated. The intention of the meetings was therefore to feedback as well as to elicit new knowledge, and to assess the output of the research; to feedback and be fed back upon. In this way the research attempted to both explore young people's experiences of hearing the findings generated from their participation, whilst also responding to an acknowledged need to understand the perspectives of young people who had engaged with participatory methods as a part of research (e.g., Montreuil et al. 2021). By exploring these questions, the research had the potential to allow young people to 'train' and inform researchers and academics about conducting participatory research (Dan et al. 2019; Larkins and Satchwell 2023; Ryu 2022). The process and procedure will be detailed below as a case study on 'how' feedback was undertaken in this study.

2.2 | Project Background

This research was a qualitatively driven study which utilised a photo-elicitation methodology (see Harper 2002; Lapenta 2011; Rose 2022) with six care-experienced adolescents aged 13–15 years old. Participants were asked to take photographs in response to the question 'what is important to you at the moment?', and they brought their images to a research interview. This interview was guided by a semi-structured topic guide which aimed to facilitate participants' sharing what was important to them about each photograph.

Photo-elicitation has been described as supporting young people to engage with and to 'open up' in research (Lapenta 2011;

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Smith et al. 2012). Through listening to their interpretations of the images they have chosen to bring to the interview, photo-elicitation can allow the researcher to gain insight into the participants' perspectives on their lives as they experience them (Croghan et al. 2008). In these ways, photo-elicitation interviews are argued to be participant-centred, as they drive the substantive content of the interview (Matthews and Hugh-Jones 2024).

Boden (2021) acknowledges the different ways that young people can be involved in research, aligning this to levels of participation. Boden differentiates research where young people are researched 'on' or about, from that involving young people being researched 'with', acknowledging the possibility of going as far as the research being 'by' young people as researchers or co-researchers. Based on this conceptualisation, an aim of the main study was to engage young people in ways that moved from research 'on' to research 'with' young people. This was embodied through engaging in participatory methods such as consultation with a group of care experienced young people around research design and also utilising a creative methodology which gave increased choice and control to participants.

2.3 | Procedure

Participants were approached again post-analysis, with five out of six participants agreeing to take part. All participants chose to be interviewed at their home. Ethical approval was granted for this feedback stage with the initial ethics application, so the feedback stage was a feature of the information given about the study to participants throughout. This inclusion was to allow participants to be aware of the full opportunities of the study at the point of initial consent, and also to create an accountability in the process to deliver on all that the research set out to achieve. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Leeds School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (Ethics Reference numbers: 15-0230; 16-0001; 16-0088; 16-0106).

Participants initially consented to the feedback meeting during the main study process but then provided consent again at the beginning of the feedback meeting. The re-consenting process included the researcher providing the participants with an information sheet which communicated information about the purpose of the meeting as well as areas such as their right to withdraw and how their data will be treated and analysed. These procedures were unchanged from the main study in which they participated. The meeting began, and was recorded, once consent had been given verbally to the meeting by the young person.

The researcher began the interaction by telling participants what the research had found, followed by an interview about the research process and the findings. The feedback sessions lasted between 22 and 34 min ($M = 29$ min). During the meeting participants were audio-recorded, and an interview schedule was followed; these procedural elements were similar to the main study meaning that there was a level of both familiarity and formality to this interaction. A topic guide was designed which collected feedback from participants about what worked well, what could have been different, if and how the research had benefitted them, and what they would have liked to see happen next.

The recordings were transcribed and based upon these descriptive themes, alongside brief extracts, will be provided. This process was informed by a descriptive, participant-directed approach to coding, rather than progressing to the interpretative and reflexive level which is possible with thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021). The intention of this more descriptive presentation is to allow the voice of young people to be central and the final comment on each aspect of the research, as a moment of punctuation in the interpretation process. Extracts are presented alongside the young person's chosen pseudonym. The descriptive findings have been grouped together to mirror the focus of the topic guide aims.

A single participant chose not to take part in the feedback phase of the research and so received his feedback from the research via post.

2.4 | Materials

Participants were provided with a written summary of the research findings, which included the diagram of the themes generated and a summary of the key points for the core theme and each of the main themes. Within photo-elicitation-based research, it is common practice to present generated images alongside transcribed extracts to give the greatest context to the data. Each theme was therefore presented in writing alongside at least one image, with the images that were included in the results section of the research always being included. Additional photos were selected to accompany a theme when these had connected with the theme during the initial analysis. Not all participants had their images included in the feedback document, which enabled exploration of what it was like to not see any of their photographs featured. This exclusion of some participant images was due to the consent process for including other people in photographs and the images including people in them who had not signed consent forms in relation to being in the photographs.

3 | Results

3.1 | Seeing the Output of the Research

Following hearing the findings of the research, participants spoke about their initial thoughts and reactions to what had been found. On hearing the results of the analysis, participants shared that they were surprised that other young people felt the same as them. This was described as bringing relief and reassurance, as they were not alone as they perceived other young people in care as having similar experiences to them:

> like they feel like similar so I know like I'm not the only one that feels like that.—
>
> Mr. Popper

In the following extract, No Pseudonym spoke about how hearing the findings reduced his feelings of being 'alone'. No Pseudonym described a feeling of connection with other participants, with the findings motivating him to be more open about his experiences:

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> It's actually relieving to know that you've got some other people, some other people out there that's actually just like you, just the same as you and going through the same things with you, cause then if feels like you're not alone. It feels like you can talk to other people more about other things.

A concern of the researcher prior to the feedback session was what it would be like for participants to hear findings that whilst including their narratives, may also not fit with their experiences. Participants, however, did not speak about this and instead expressed that the results fit with their experiences well, and that they were surprised to hear about how research including five other young people had found themes which sounded similar to their personal experience. This led to positive feelings being reported by participants:

> It's just good to know I'm not the only one that feels like that.—
>
> Mr. Popper

> It sounds like it all came from me really because like, it were like all the experiences that people have put into the interviews have come from my point of view. It sounded really good.—
>
> Tyreasha

Participants spoke about how seeing the results following the analysis made them feel listened to and understood, and that they were pleased with the results of the analysis. Participants also indicated that the process of hearing the feedback had positively impacted on them. In the following extract, No Pseudonym reflected upon hearing the findings of the research:

> it's actually good that you've been listened to, you know what I mean? It's a good feeling to know that what you've actually said has actually gone into consideration and someone has actually put the time and typed it up and listened to you, and they've actually understood what you've said, so I mean that's nice to know.

Emphasising the impact of this feedback opportunity, toward the end of the discussion one participant, No Pseudonym, spontaneously spoke again about the feedback session itself. They shared their view of the importance of finding out how their contribution was used, and describing that the feedback process had led to positive feelings associated with seeing the results of his participation:

> It's actually nice 'cause you know you've actually, because I actually took the time to take the photos and they've actually been used instead of them not being used and just being a waste of my time but to see them actually gone on paper and going to be used in some research it's made me feel better.—
>
> No Pseudonym

The impact of seeing their data and photographs included in the summary of the research was a focus of what some young people spoke about. This included a sense of surprise that what they had said and the photographs they had taken had been used, due to an assumption that other young people would have said better things and taken better photographs.

> my photos are me and like theirs might have been like better quality and stuff like that.—
>
> Tyreasha

The inclusion of photographs taken by participants appeared to be particularly impactful. For instance, when seeing her images as a part of the feedback, Melissa said 'wow, it were like wow' and ended the interview by saying taking part made her 'like really proud and I'm really happy with myself'.

3.2 | Editing and Removing Consent

An unexpected moment in the feedback process included a young person taking the opportunity of the feedback meeting to remove consent to use one of her images in dissemination, a photograph of her foster dad. This had not been communicated up until this point, and Tyreasha had previously agreed for this image to be included. During the feedback session, however, she said: 'I did actually have second thoughts about the photo but I just thought I'd tell you that when next time you came'. Further discussion revealed that Tyreasha had almost immediately decided after the interview that she did not want this photograph used and had thought about that since but had trusted and waited until the feedback session to communicate this.

3.3 | Experience of Taking Part

A number of participants stated they were initially wary as the research began and some participants spoke about not knowing that the researcher was coming to visit or what this was about. This experience of the research being unexpected was not as planned, as the method had involved the social worker gaining the consent of the young people for the researcher to attend and undertake the initial meeting,

> It was like – sort of like a shock because I didn't really found out about until like you obviously came and explained it all to me so it was kind of like a shock.—
>
> Tyreasha

This experience led to participants describing they were initially unsure about the researcher and required some time to settle into the research as 'just at first like, first encounter of it like, that were hard, like obviously as it went on it became easier' (Junior). Participants, however, described that they were glad that they decided to participate in the research, and thought it had been a good process for them:

> Yeah, I were just a bit wary of you know, what to say, what the answers would be, you know what kind of

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> questions would be asked. I mean after doing the research I thought they were all reasonable questions you know, so I felt comfortable.—
>
> No Pseudonym

When feeding back on taking part, participants contrasted this experience against their previous experiences and described they had found it difficult to get involved in the past. This included participants volunteering to take part in activities but this not being followed up:

> not many people have asked me to take part in anything.—
>
> Mr. Popper

> I just felt like I was – I got included in something that I wanted to do. Like because sometimes for the council and stuff I don't really get included like I put my name down and everything and they've chosen like five completely different people.—
>
> Tyreasha

Some participants described that they had found the interview to be difficult initially, due to being unsure what would be asked of them and due to an expectation they may have to talk about personal information and to know what to say for each image. However, this was contrasted against a comfort that emerged over the interview due to a particular feature of the photo elicitation procedure. Utilising a set of photographs which young people have taken in advance of the interview, a semi-structured topic guide was used during the main study based upon the SHOWeD technique (detailed in Johnson et al. 2011). Part of this process involved the same questions being asked in relation to each of the six photographs and then returning to the beginning of the topic guide each time a new photo was discussed. The topic guide leaves each question sufficiently unstructured and open so that the participant introduces the topic for discussion based on the meaning that were communicating with their image. Questions, for example, include 'Tell me about this photograph?' or 'What do you want me to understand from this photograph?'. The SHOWeD technique was chosen as it had the benefit of a semi-structured interview, such as providing structure and pre-consideration of the wording of questions, whilst maintaining the flexibility and participant-led nature of an unstructured interview.

Based upon the repetition in the interview process, participants said that as the interview progressed they became more comfortable, particularly as they became aware of the questions that would be asked.

> Yeah, I think like once you talked about one photo like you know more or less what to talk about so the second photo and the third photo etc. gets easier.—
>
> Junior

Adding to this, Junior also suggested that knowing the questions that were likely to be asked, by showing them at the beginning of the interview, may have assisted him to become more quickly become comfortable with the interview.

Whilst participants spoke about participation positively overall, it was also acknowledged that the process had involved talking about difficult content:

> it's like the personal things. I mean things in here it's like delving into someone's like personal life.—
>
> No Pseudonym

Two participants spoke about how they had felt upset immediately after the interview, due to the content of what was discussed. They both, however, stated that they had coped with their emotions similarly to how they usually would, and similar to the strategies they had described during their main interviews. Further providing a sense of credibility to the findings of the original study, namely use of space and the importance of animals:

> I just went to look at pictures and then had a cup of tea and I were fine [...] the dog cuddled me.—
>
> Melissa

No participants spoke about ongoing upset or seeking additional support following their participation in the research. The majority of participants said that they had not thought about the research since the interview, and that they had not noticed any troublesome thoughts, feelings or a change in behaviour that had occurred as a result of it. No Pseudonym, conversely, stated that taking part had been enjoyable and had led to him having a greater understanding of himself and why certain objects or activities were important to him. He stated in the following extract, for instance, when he had used his earphones since the interview he had taken a moment to reflect why he had chosen to do so at that time.

> I'm now properly processing stuff about why I'm using it and it's just made me feel better [...] I mean there's a few times where I've just picked up my earphones or something like that and looked at it and think 'Oh right, that's why I'm using them right now'. It's clicked with me and I've understood why myself now so that's made me feel so much better about it.—
>
> No Pseudonym

4 | Discussion

The feedback phase provided an insight into the experiences of young people living in care when they participated in a photo-elicitation, participatory methods-informed research study, and what it is like for a young person to hear the findings of research that they have taken part in. The impact of hearing the findings appeared to be positive for participants and removed some of the uncertainty about what had happened to their contribution. This is aligned with the existing suggestion in the literature about the importance of feeding back to young people to ensure

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the completion of a participation cycle (e.g., Lundy 2007, 2018; McLeod 2007).

Within participant narratives it was shared that participants assumed their data would not be used, a communication of feeling not listened to which continued up until the feedback stage where they heard the results and saw their impact. Young people described an assumption that their contribution would have been of an inferior quality to their peers and so would not have been included. There was also some concern about what would be said about them and how they would be represented. These concerns were described as being alleviated through having the opportunity to hear the results. Such uncertainty about the outcomes of the research may have continued had the feedback session not occurred.

It appeared that as participants were not involved in the analysis or write-up of the research, following data collection increased power had returned to the researcher (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2009). This period seemed to be experienced by participants as involving taking a passive, unknowing role in which they had to wait to hear about the research outcomes. As research does not always return to its participants, these powerless feelings may be sustained by those who are involved in research and do not get any feedback. The interviews during the feedback session supported this assertion, as it appeared that for some participants their involvement alone had not led to them feeling empowered and important. Through hearing the results, however, the participants could see and hear how their interview had been used, and the plans for the future of their data.

Through 'demonstrating' (Vosz et al. 2020) how their narratives had been used, this seemed to communicate to participants that their contribution had been important to the findings of the research. The experience of 'seeing' what came of their involvement is a thread that flows throughout literature on participation in young people. Examples include the use of 'demonstrating' (Vosz et al. 2020) and descriptions of impact being subjective and based on 'perception' of what is to have impact (Reed and Rudman 2023, 971). It appears that a feedback stage, where the researcher returned to the participants, provided an opportunity to 'see' how their narratives had become pieces of a larger analysis. Both seeing aspects of themselves as individuals, and also as a part of a group provided a sense of connection and similarity.

4.1 | An Opportunity for Research to Be Fed Back Upon

Returning to participants for feedback also enabled greater critical reflection on the methodology, rather than solely evaluating the study based on its participatory intentions (Gallagher 2008), allowing a realistic description of the limits and barriers to the participatory methods utilized in the main study. This aligned with Montreuil et al. (2021) call for transparent descriptions of the participatory elements of research. During the feedback phase it was apparent that despite intentions to engage participants in certain ways, the need to engage with other adults as the gatekeepers to accessing young people had undermined the consent procedure as planned. Participants shared that they had not known the researcher was coming, and this had added to a difficult emotional context at the outset of the research interaction. It is known that gatekeepers have the ability to exercise significant power in the facilitation or prevention of a researcher-participant relationship forming (Emmel et al. 2007).

A limitation of the process is the researcher presenting the research to the participants, with the power dynamic inherent in this interaction likely impacting the responses of participants. Examples of this can be seen in the largely positive feedback on the process and research output. For example, participants reported having a positive experience of being involved, with some of them reporting that they had gained a greater understanding of themselves. However, the feedback session also enabled a change in consent and for feedback to be received on the ways in which the research process had been hard or not as intended. Examples included participants sharing how it felt to be approached, what had assisted with their engagement and participation, such as the use of a repeated interview schedule and the suggestion to see the questions in advance.

The feedback stage provided further opportunity to contextualise the data through engaging with participants in their perceptions of it, as well as facilitating further power sharing and allowing their voices to be heard in response to the data. The feedback stage went beyond solely sharing what was found, and instead also incorporating further data generation in the feedback stage. This dual approach enabled the research to progress from a one-way transfer of knowledge, the more traditional research approach of participant to academic, to a two-way knowledge flow and dialogue, a common feature of participatory methods (Reed and Rudman 2023). Participants of this study took the opportunity of feeding back to inform and 'train' the researcher and the wider academic community that there was still some work to be done in terms of participation and power-sharing (Larkins and Satchwell 2023). It appeared that the inclusion of a feedback phase could be seen as moving the research from being 'with' young people toward being done 'for' young people (Boden 2021). Conducting a feedback phase appeared to open up a possibility for young people to contribute to better experiences for young people in future research.

The ability to communicate change or impact at the time of the feedback interaction was limited. Simply, whilst hope for change existed, demonstrated change was not shown. There was a dilemma illuminated in which providing timely, fast feedback, which is the preference of young people (Lundy 2018), meant that the opportunity to share outcomes resulting from their participation was limited. This reflects a common reality of participatory research with young people where, though change is possible, the time it takes to make change within complex systems means that many changes will come after they would have an impact on the young people who participated (Tisdall 2015). However, whilst partial, it appears that the feedback experience in this study still acted as a communication of the young people's views being taken seriously and navigated around potential experiences of tokenism and associated feelings such as unimportance (Lundy 2018). It may be that this was achieved through communicating with the participants the possibilities of their involvement in future and connecting with a sense of being a changemaker in the future, even if not right now (Templeton et al. 2023).

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4.2 | Increased Importance of Feeding Back to Care Experienced Young People

The context of care experience was central to the responses provided by participants. Hearing the output of their research participation led to participants describing that they felt they may be more similar to others who are care experienced, which reduced their feelings of being 'alone'. Participants described that the findings represented their experiences well and resonated with them. The experiences which lead young people to being in care, and the reality of being care experienced, are argued to shape the ways in which care experienced young people view themselves and interact within their context (Matthews and Hugh-Jones 2024). This includes recognition of the stigma associated with being in care, as well as the ways in which young people in care may internalise a view of themselves as unimportant, bad, or worthless due to their life experiences (Hughes and Golding 2012). It appeared that the inclusion of their perspective and voice in the research, communicated via the feedback process, interacted with and challenged some of these constructions of self. Seeing their perspective in research provided an alternative experience to that which participants may expect based on their past experiences of the world and others. It may have provided an alternative experience to the commonly reported one of being unheard, unseen, and being denied a voice about their experiences (Dixon et al. 2019; Matthews and Hugh-Jones 2024).

During the feedback phase participants commented that they were surprised to hear that other young people felt similar to them, were having a comparable experience to them, and spoke about comparable topics of importance as them. This indicated that participants typically may have felt disconnected, alone, and different from others. They however reported that seeing the results and their similarities with other young people led to feelings of comfort, connection, and reassurance.

5 | Conclusion

A critique of the literature on participation, particularly involving young people, has been a lack of focus on the 'how-tos' of participatory methods (Dixon-Woods et al. 2011). A risk of such oversight is the generation of an overly simplistic view that participation is solely about 'giving voice' to young people (Facca et al. 2020; Spyrou 2011).

The example explored in this paper communicates the importance of feeding back and returning to young people involved in research. This practice also provided an opportunity for the participants of this research to educate the academic field. The feedback phase provided an opportunity for the researcher and participants to learn together, and perhaps inverted the perspective on who is teaching whom (Ryu 2022). Whilst imperfect, it appeared that providing some feedback and moving to a dialogue with young people still acted as a communication that their views had been taken seriously (Lundy 2018). Returning to participants to feedback research appeared to be one means of making space, providing an audience, and being open to what has been shared having influence (Lundy 2007). Whilst returning to all young people is argued to be important (Lundy 2007; McLeod 2007), the importance of this seems to be particularly powerful for care experienced young people. This may be similar for other groups who could feel oppressed or unheard.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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