



**Tassie Researchers:  
Child-led research  
through the dialogical  
imagination**

Peter Underwood Centre for  
Educational Attainment



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A partnership between the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government in association with the Office of the Governor of Tasmania.  
Our remit: that all young Tasmanians flourish through the transformative power of learning.  
We act by:

- Listening to the voices of children and young people.
- Exploring and delivering opportunities which nurture confidence for children and young people to think about what is possible;
- Championing and facilitating professional learning, innovation and technologies that assist schools and teachers to be agents of change;

Child-centred and child-led research

A rights-based perspective:

- Children have a right to express their views on matters that concern them, and to have them taken seriously.
- Children have a right to be facilitated by adults in understanding and engaging with their rights.
- Children and young people are capable of conducting their own research.

Whose voices are being heard?

- Researchers select children's words and phrases to build their arguments (James, 2007)
- Adults are generally in control of research design and dissemination (Harden, Scott, Backett-Milburn, & Jackson, 2000)
- Are participatory processes a tool for adult purposes? (Roberts, 2017)
- Do adults take children seriously? (Perry-Hazan, 2016)
- Are participatory processes primarily an opportunity for children to practise 'good' citizenship, develop a responsible attitude and learn about the complexity of public decision-making? (Crowley, 2015)

- Child-led research project – Tassie Researchers
- Dialogical heuristic

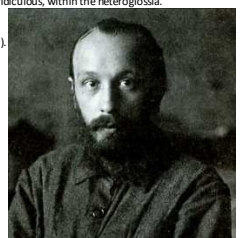
Dialogism

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) – Russian philosopher who wrote essays on literature.  
Dialogism adopted as a heuristic in different fields, including medicine, cultural studies, psychology and education.

Based on the idea that all meaning is created between self and 'other', which may be a being, object, or idea. Communication is via 'voices' which may include words, gestures, and acts within a given context. Within this are some key concepts:

- Heteroglossia – the context in which meaning is made, consisting of a cacophony of 'voices' shaped by history, culture and situation within a given moment, in relation to past and future.
- Polyphony – moments of alignment between voices.
- Carnival – subversions of authority, often humorous or ridiculous, within the heteroglossia.

In the social sciences, Dialogism is a reminder to constantly see the world in inter-relational terms (Ooi, 2013).

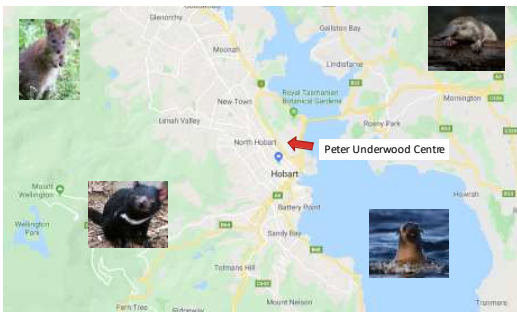


Dialogism

*[In carnival], what is suspended first of all is the hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it – that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics, 1963)*

## Tassie Researchers

Pilot delivered at a primary school in the northern suburbs of Hobart, Tasmania



## Tassie Researchers

Child-led research project

Design based on:

- University of the First Age (O'Donnell, 2017)
- Researchers such as Kellett (2005a, 2005b, 2010, 2011)
- Children's Research Centre, Open University UK

Ethical approval for the project given by University of Tasmania and the Department of Education Tasmania.

Pilot:

School within a disadvantaged socio-economic area  
High percentage of CALD students (Culturally and Linguistically diverse)  
A pre-existing relationship with the Peter Underwood Centre (Children's University)

## Tassie Researchers

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Ice-breaker activity: squares of toilet paper, one thing about yourself on each square  Children's current knowledge about research: what is research? Who carries out research?  What questions would the children like to investigate?	Mock survey carried out by children  Analysis of results led by adult researcher  Discussion: Survey vs research questions AND Ethics  Reflection (written, in notebooks)	Development of survey questions and creating online surveys using Survey Monkey  Reflection (written, in notebooks)
Break	Day 4	Day 5
Adult researchers: Collated final survey  Delivered survey to participating school classes (paper), N=80  Collected surveys and tallied results	Analysis of data  Representations of data  Reflection (written, in notebooks)	Representations of data  Discussion of dissemination options  Reflection (written, in notebooks)  Presentation of data representations at assembly.

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### HETEROGLOSSIA of Tassie Researchers - Child-led research project

15 participants from four classes (two combined 1/2 classes and two combined 3/4 classes)  
Aged from 7-11 years. Participant characteristics reflected the diversity of language and culture of the students attending the school. Participants were selected by their class teachers on the basis that they would benefit from extension activities.

Four researchers:  
two initiators of the project employed by the Peter Underwood Centre; and two who were trained teachers and experienced researchers, who joined the project shortly prior to the pilot.

Materials:  
Large sheets of paper ("Butcher's paper")  
White-board markers

"Tassie Researcher" t-shirts  
Stationery set containing:  
• Scented tissues  
• Ruler  
• Notebook  
• Sticky notes  
• Pencil with eraser  
• UTAS pen

Catered lunch provided each day – sandwiches, fruit, muffins, juice and water.

### HETEROGLOSSIA Tassie Researchers - Child-led research project

#### School context – Public Square

- School classroom
- Visits from the Principal
- Sitting on the floor and following accepted school behaviours (raising hand before speaking; giving attention when an adult researcher clapped a rhythm; waiting for and following instructions from adult researchers)
- The first teacher researcher stood or sat on a chair. The other three researchers moved around, sometimes sitting on the floor with the children.

The adult researchers were able to use the existing hierarchical structures of the school environment to create a positive learning situation (e.g. children understood when they should listen, when they should work in groups, when they could ask questions)

#### "Tassie Researcher" identity

- Children selected to take part (special)
- T-shirts
- Stationery sets
- Food

# HETEROGLOSSIA

## Tassie Researchers - Child-led research project

### The children - We did not capture individual voices.

The Peter Underwood Centre advocates for opportunities for participation of children who may not otherwise have a voice. That said, the process for selecting child participants for "Tassie Researchers" reflects some of the barriers such children experience. Firstly, only children with signed and returned consent forms were able to participate. Failure of parents and children to return forms represents self-exclusion, perhaps a consequence of disengagement, literacy or language skills, and/or poor communication. Secondly, the fact that children were selected by teachers according to their perceived ability to benefit from extension activities is also likely to exclude children who are often unheard. We therefore acknowledge that, within the heteroglossia of "Tassie Researchers", there are voices that are silent and/or omitted.

### The researchers - different perspectives and motivations

Teacher-researcher #1	Teacher-researcher #2	Initiator researcher #1	Initiator researcher #2
developing children's skills and understanding, including thinking within, beyond and behind the data, and ultimately to come back to data to inform decisions.	teaching critical thinking skills and in awakening an understanding in the children that research involves more than doing a Google search. She also wanted to gain insight into the things that children saw as important, to create better teaching experiences and help children be more engaged in their learning	facilitate children's voice in ways that respected children as agentic, rights-holding beings.	facilitate children's voice in ways that respected children as agentic, rights-holding beings.  Learn about managing groups of children

early on these two researchers felt that their lack of practical experience as teachers and in managing groups of children could constitute a risk to the success of the project. This realisation prompted the initial invitation to the teacher-researchers and the goal of learning from the relative safety of an assistive role. This decision