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Title: Knock Knock! Who’s there? Gaining access to children as researchers

Originally presented to: The Postgraduate Research Degree Student and Early Career Researcher Annual Conference 2010

Event location: The University of Northampton

Event dates: 1 July 2010

Knock Knock!
Who’s there?
Gaining access to children as researchers

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Postgraduate Research Degree Student and Early Career Researcher Annual Conference 2010
This presentation considers ...

How I addressed challenges of securing access to data in the ‘real world’ (Robson, 2002) for my research degree:

‘An attempt to conceptualise ways in which young children aged 4-8 years are researchers, may develop as researchers and may be considered researchers’

Firstly, I present some background

Next, I will share five challenges I encountered while accessing data in the ‘real world’ for YCaR and how I addressed them

Finally, I will share what I learned about securing access to ‘real world’ data whilst conducting the YCaR enquiry
What is the Nature of the Enquiry?

- Young Children as Researchers (YCaR)
- Epistemological focus
- Asks: can young children aged 4-8 years be researchers?
- Located in field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), nested within educational research
- A critical ethnographic study... (Carspecken, 1996)
- ...within a constructivist grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006)
Questions emerged from a preliminary study (Murray, 2006)... 

- What are the nature and definitions of research in the field of early childhood education and care?
- What enquiries might be important to young children and how might they engage in them?
- What support structures and barriers might affect young children’s participation in research in matters affecting them?
- How might a project develop to explore ways in which young children aged 4-8 years are researchers, may develop as researchers and may be considered researchers? As part of this question, issues relating to access emerged during the study.
In *Young Children as Researchers*, what is access? Why was securing access important?

For ethnographic educational researchers...

- Access is more than walking through a door
- Access is important (Hood *et al.*, 1996; Robson, 2003; Cutler, 2004; Cohen *et al.* (2007)...
- Access leads to the data which provides enhanced understanding of people and their ideas, behaviours and cultures (Cutler, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001; Schostak, 2002)
- Access involves both ethical and practical issues, often predicated on each other.
- This is particularly highlighted in research involving children...
This enquiry was about children accessing research
Issues of access relating to children in research refer increasingly to children’s involvement in research about themselves (Brownlie et al., 2006; Morrow, 2008; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008).

Internationally we have seen emerging discourses on:

- Children as researchers - progression from research on children...with children...by children (Clark and Moss, 2001; Brownlie et al., 2006; Woodhead and Faulkner, 2008)
- ‘New sociology of childhood’ (James, et al., 1998; Corsaro, 2005).
- Children’s rights (Alderson, 1995; 2001; CRAE, 2009; UN 1989; UN 2000)

There is now patchy recognition of the child as autonomous and active, rather than an object being prepared for adulthood (Hart, 1992; Qvortrup, 1994)

Such recognition is relatively weak in England (UNCRC, 2008; DCSF, 2009)
Five challenges encountered while accessing data in the ‘real world’ for YCaR

1. Establishing an instrument fit for purpose
2. Getting inside an ECEC setting
3. Gaining acceptance from setting staff
4. Gaining informed consent from primary carers
5. Gathering data on children’s natural behaviours in their homes

How did I address these challenges?
Access Challenge 1: An instrument fit for purpose

- Professional Educational Researchers (PERs)
- Mixed methods
- Survey [n=20]
- n=1
- Critical ethnography within constructivist Grounded approach
- Qualitative Design
- Interview
- PERs (n=9) Interview Conversations + ECEC PERs (n=5) Focus Group

Webb and Webb, 1932; Charmaz, 2006; Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2008
Research Behaviours

Explore with an aim
- Want to explore
- Explore with an aim which changes during the process
- Find a solution
- Conceptualise
- Use and apply findings in new contexts
- Can communicate what they have achieved
- Develop increasingly better understanding of the world through exploration
- Explore broadly
- Go beyond instinct
- Plan
- Investigate
- Believe what they are doing is good
- Can replicate output
- Make links
- Can communicate what they attempt to do
- Reflect on process
- Base decisions on evidence
- Are systematic
- Build on others’ work
- Reflect on results
- Can replicate process
- Use processes that are fit for purpose
- Are objective
- Participate with others
- Test and check
- Seek a solution
- Find out how things happen
- Explore with a fine focus
- Increase knowledge
- Question
- Enquire
- Do no harm
- Examine problems
- Reflect on results
- Can replicate output
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Access Challenge 2: Getting inside an ECEC setting

PERs suggest data collection from children and adults in ECEC settings [n=3]

Homes also indicated [n=5]

Sylva et al., 2004; Feinstein et al., 2008; Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Wells, 1986; Hart and Risley, 1995; Yee and Andrews, 2006
## Participating Settings in Primary Schools (n=3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting A</td>
<td>Class of 7-8 year-old boys and girls (n=30) and their practitioners (n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting B</td>
<td>4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an Early Years Foundation Stage unit and their practitioners (n=7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting C</td>
<td>4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an Early Years Foundation Stage unit and their practitioners (n=5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pollard and Filer, 1996
Participating Families (n=5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>Child (age)</th>
<th>Other participating family members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting A</td>
<td>Child A (7)</td>
<td>Family A: Mother / Father [no siblings]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child B (8)</td>
<td>Family B: Mother / Father / Sister (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting B</td>
<td>Child G (4/5)</td>
<td>Family C: Mother / Father / Brother (8) / Grandmother 1 / Grandfather 1 / Grandmother 2 / Grandfather 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child H (5)</td>
<td>Family D: Mother / Father / Brother (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting C</td>
<td>Child M (5)</td>
<td>Family E: Mother / Father / Sister (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study Design for Accessing Data in Settings and Homes

1) Personal CRB check and UoN ethics committee approval

2) Gain access to ECEC setting

3) Secure informed consent

4) Work as Volunteer TA

5) Collect multiple layers of data in the setting WHILE identifying children for closer focus

6) Home visits 1 and 2 – multiple layers of data collected by families

7) Share data, review and analyse then develop next steps in study

8) Share outcomes

Ryle, 1968; Fine and Sandstrom, 1988; CRB, 2010
Accessing Setting A: 
Class of 7-8 year-old boys and girls (n=30) and their practitioners (n=3)

Link between colleague and headteacher

Initial meeting with headteacher

Headteacher presented project to staff

Quid pro quo: Consultancy for Early Years Foundation Stage

Participants: Children (class of 30x7-8 year olds), teacher, headteacher, supply teacher

‘Outsider’ ↔ ‘Insider’

Griffiths, 1998; Charmaz, 2006
Access Challenge 3: **Gaining acceptance from setting staff in Setting B**

4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in an EYFS unit and their practitioners (n=7)

- Setting A leader encouraged Setting B leader to participate
  - Storytime cements acceptance
  - Setting B leader and I: shared history

- Setting B teacher and I: shared history

**Weak acceptance by new Practitioner**
Indicates importance of trust and positive relationships through communication and actions over time

Corsaro and Molinari, 2008; Greig et al., 2007
Access Challenge 4: Gaining informed consent from primary carers in Setting C
4-5-year-old boys and girls (n=60) in EYFS unit and their practitioners (n=5)

1) Secure written, voluntary, informed consent of staff first

2) Secure written, voluntary, informed consent of primary carers

3) Locating non-returners highlighted ‘outsider’ status

4) Secure written, voluntary, informed consent of children -1

5) Exclude 1 child from data collection

6) Tension between primary carer’s rights and child’s rights

UN, 1989; BERA, 2004; Coyne, 2010; Skelton, 2008; UN, 1989; BERA, 2004
Access Challenge 5: Gathering data on children’s natural behaviours in their homes [n=5]

1) 1st home visit: consent + set up data collection by family

2) Assume ‘outsider’ status in children’s homes

2nd home visit: share data, analyse and review with family

3) primary carers and children collect data in their own homes

Some observations seemed ‘staged’ / Best research behaviours from activity Instigated and developed naturally by children

Mayo, 1933; Pelligrini, 2004; Fielding, 2001; Lewis, 2001
Conclusions: What did I learn about securing access to ‘real world’ data whilst conducting the YCaR enquiry?

- Researching with young children in England presents a challenging context
- Researchers cannot expect access to settings ‘as a matter of right’ (Cohen et al., 2007: 55)
- Accessing children’s research behaviours presented challenges
- The majority of staff, children and parents were amenable to participating in this study. However, problems presented by a minority can significantly affect access to empirical data
- Legislation and guidance (UN, 1989; BERA, 2004) have limitations
- Legislation and guidance can deny children their rights
What enabled me to address challenges to accessing ‘real world’ data for the YCaR enquiry?

- Detailed preparation
- Time to create shared experiences with participants
- Sensitivity to participants
- Strong communication
- Drive for positive, equalised relationships
- Facilitation of trust
- A little luck
STILL...