

Useful resources

Learning through research: teaching sessions

The CRC have produced a range of resources to support children and young people in designing their own independent research, collecting and analysing data and writing up their research for dissemination. The following teaching sessions based on the original work of Mary Kellett, and built on in the more recent book *Developing Children as Researchers*, support practitioners when working on research projects with children and young people.

PART ONE: RESEARCH DESIGN (sessions 1-3)

Designing and carrying out research not only provides opportunities for children and young people to develop their own interests it also invites them to join a research community where they can learn a variety of academic skills. Carrying out research is empowering. Not only can research explore different areas but can also drive change

What is research?

Research is about asking questions, exploring issues and reflecting on findings. It is concerned with extending our knowledge and pursuing 'truth'. What is important to those who carry out research - whatever its scale - is that it should somehow make a difference. Research creates knowledge by exploring issues and finding answers to questions that might not otherwise have been asked. We all experience the world in different ways. We have different perspectives and we disagree about what is true in our different experiences. So how can we establish the truth between different and often conflicting experiences? Research systematically and sceptically investigates claims to truth and even commonplace assumptions are treated with doubt.

How is 'research' different from a school project? A school project typically 'researches' a topic area by finding out information. The 'finding out' part of this is an important learning experience but does not usually include:

- the depth of analysis that is required by empirical research;
- the generation of new knowledge;
- a design element;
- a scrutiny of validity;
- the collecting and processing of raw data.

Research ethics:

Research activity also has to be **ethical**, to have regard for the interests and needs of participants and those upon whom the findings of the research might have an impact. Informed consent is essential. In doing research we have to be frank and critical about what, how and why our research is taking place. We have a duty to make our observations accurately and clearly, whether or not such observations agree with our previous assumptions. We have to describe the circumstances in which an observation or measurement is made and who makes the observation and expect our methods and findings to be open to scrutiny. This concern to be systematic, sceptical and ethical is what distinguishes research from other types of investigation undertaken by, for example, journalists and barristers who very much use their investigative findings to advocate and represent a particular view.

Different types of research: Research is frequently divided into 'positivist' and 'interpretive' paradigms (a paradigm is a standard 'model' or 'example'). Positivist research is concerned with objectivity and controllability, with the ability to predict and to measure and with cause and effect. It is sometimes referred to as the scientific model and is often characterised by quantitative methods (quantitative methods use numerical data). Interpretive research focuses on understanding and interpreting the world in terms of its actors and has a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of things rather than testing hypotheses about them. It is associated more with qualitative methods (qualitative methods use descriptive data). Why is research important?

It is not unreasonable to question whether we should be undertaking research at all. Research is important because:

- its innovative and exploratory character can bring about beneficial change;
- its sceptical enquiry can result in poor or unethical practice being questioned;
- its rigorous and systematic nature extends knowledge and promotes problem-solving.

Learning from other people's research

Through guided reading of child-friendly research studies, participating young people are encouraged to improve their critical evaluation skills. Helpful activities to improve rapid reading and record keeping skills are also covered.

PART TWO: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS (SESSIONS 4-7)

Observation

Systematic observation in real time and suspended time, participant observation, partial-participant observation and ethnographic-style observation. We discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using observation as a data collection technique.

Interview techniques

We focus on four different types of interview: structured, semi-structured, unstructured and focus/group interviews. Appropriate matching of interview style to research question(s) is explored and the role of the interviewer rehearsed and evaluated. Interview transcripts are used to compare different approaches and outcomes. Questionnaires

Introduces questionnaires and surveys and teaches how to avoid common pitfalls when designing questionnaires. We explore different designs for participant responses and examine the advantages and disadvantages of using Likert-type attitude scales.

Experiments

Designing valid and ethical experiments. Learning how to isolate independent and dependent variables and how to control extraneous variables.

At the CRC children learn about research process over ten weekly sessions before they begin work on research studies of their own choosing. The ten sessions are supported by handouts and engagement with content is encouraged through interactive activities. The taught programme is divided into four parts: Research design; Data Collection tools; Data Analysis and Dissemination. Short synopses of the kind of teaching that takes place are shown below.

PART THREE: DATA ANALYSIS (SESSIONS 8-9)

Learning how to cope with large amounts of unwieldy data. Simple coding of qualitative and quantitative data and some basic level statistics are covered.

PART FOUR DISSEMINATION (SESSION 10)

Focuses on the importance of identifying and targeting audiences for children's research. Different types of dissemination e.g. video documentaries and drama are explored alongside more conventional dissemination such as conference presentations and journal writing. The importance of clarity of presentation is emphasised and different ways of presenting findings explored including imaginative ways to display qualitative data using graphs, flow charts etc.

- Kellett, M. (2009) [*How to develop children as researchers*](#), London, SAGE.

- [*Kim, Chae-Young, Sheehy, K. & Kerawalla, L. \(2017\) Developing Children as Researchers. London, Routledge.*](#)