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Session 1: Why do it?

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Introduction

The first Session will look at this essential element, why it is important to include children and young people in research about their lives. This underpins this course and the OU Our Voices project overall.



By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- give some reasons why it is important for children and young people to be involved in research that affects their own lives
- summarise key Articles of the UNCRC which relate specifically to children and young people's rights with regard to research that affects their lives
- identify some challenges that may be encountered when researching with children and young people.

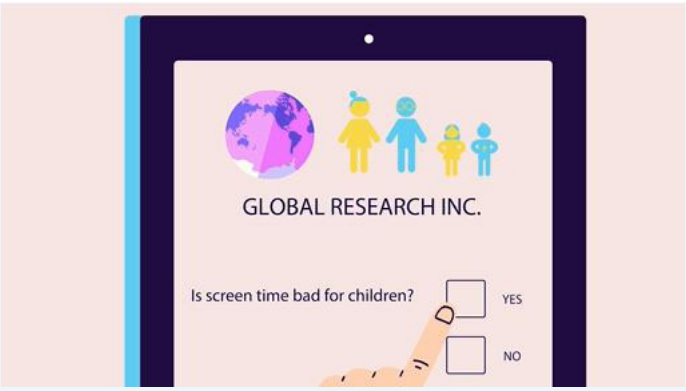
First of all, have a look at this short introductory video.

Activity 1

Allow approximately 15 minutes.

As you watch Video 1, consider what key points are presented in the video. What is the value of engaging with children and young people in research about their lives? Make notes as you watch, then click on the 'key points' below to compare your answers.

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 1



Discussion

Key points:

- Research questions are frequently aimed at, and answered by, adults.
- Children and young people have the right to express themselves.
- Children and young people are often more articulate than adults think they are going to be.
- They see things adults do not, they are experts in their own lives.
- Adults should be partners with the children and young people; this will lead to better research.

The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations for the course before you begin, in our optional start-of-course survey. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

1 Children and young people as researchers

While studying this course, you will think about ways to give all children and young people – aged 5-23, and regardless of gender, ethnicity or ability – a space to reflect on and raise their own voices around how they can be involved, as experts in their own right, in a research project. Consulting with them in this way allows them to be core and active participants to that research and ensures that their voices are heard.

Activity 2

Allow approximately 15 minutes.

In this video, you will see young researchers from Lincroft School talking about the research projects they participated in, which were based in their local communities.

You might like to make notes as you watch, and you can pause the video as many times as you wish. Once you have finished viewing, answer the questions that follow. Write your answers in the box on the screen, then click on 'reveal discussion' to see if that mirrors your own thoughts, or offers you further ideas.

View at: youtube:Wx4CbfpzFGA



Video 2

What did the children gain from carrying out the research?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Confidence, how to compose a questionnaire, understanding of ethical issues, communication skills (as well as answers to their own research questions).

What new insights, if any, have you gained from the range of children's perspectives and experiences expressed in the video?

Provide your answer...

2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Not only is it likely that better research will result, involving children and young people in research affecting their lives is actually mandated by an even more fundamental factor: their international rights. These rights were articulated in 1989, in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states that children and young people have the right to be consulted, to be heard and to participate meaningfully in matters affecting their lives. They also have the right to have their best interests as a primary consideration.

Box 1: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the UNCRC).

The UNCRC is the most complete statement of children's rights ever produced and is the most widely-ratified international human rights treaty in history – it's even been accepted by non-state entities, such as the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), a rebel movement in South Sudan. All UN member states except for the United States have ratified the Convention. The Convention came into force in the UK in 1992; in the UK, it is accepted that every child has rights, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status.

The Convention must be seen as a whole: all the rights are linked and no one right is more important than another. The right to relax and play (Article 31), for example, and the right to freedom of expression (Article 13) have equal importance as the right to be safe from violence (Article 19) and the right to education (Article 28).

You can read the full Convention, and a summary, if you click here.

If you are thinking about planning a research project with and by children or young people, three of the articles stand out as particularly relevant in this context:

- **Article 3** In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
- **Article 12** Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- **Article 13** The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice

Activity 3

Allow approximately 15 minutes.

What is the key element, in your opinion, that stands out, in terms of children and young people expressing their views, in these three Articles?

Click on the option that you think is the key element, and see how other learners voted.

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Provide your answer...

Discussion

You may have noted:

- best interests
- freely
- due weight
- freedom of expression
- child's choice
- ideas of all kinds

3 The UNICEF U-report

The United Nations Children's Fund, (UNICEF), is a United Nations agency responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide. The UNCRC, that you have just been learning about, is at the basis of all of UNICEF's work. You can see how UNICEF promotes and supports the key tenets of the UNCRC in a practical way as you work through this next activity.

You are now going to look at a project from UNICEF, which offers an example of children being consulted so that they can participate meaningfully in matters affecting their lives. Click on the link here to find out as much as you can about the project, then try the activities that follow. Remember to open the link in a new tab or window, so you can easily refer back to the course.

Activity 4

Allow approximately 25 minutes.

1. Complete the sentences by dragging the appropriate ending to match with the beginnings.

The objectives of the U-Report are:

- of young people in developing countries.
- for the gathering of information from various sources.
- through SMS text messaging.
- based on the information gained.
- to decision-makers in positions of power.

Match each of the items above to an item below.

- To amplify the voices and views
- To provide a central platform
- To disseminate information gained
- To compile reports
- To send the reports

2. This project was successful for a variety of reasons, some of which you will see listed below.

Which was the most important reason out of this list, do you think? Remember there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer here.

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4 Listening to the very young: the Mosaic approach.

So far in this session, you have heard the views of secondary-aged school children who conducted research themselves, and you have just been considering the fundamental rights of all children to be heard and to participate. In this section, you are going to look at very young children whose views can easily be overlooked when they are deemed not to have anything of value to contribute.

The Mosaic approach, developed by Alison Clark and Peter Moss for use with young children in early years settings, brings together a wide range of methods and tools, which can be used in combination to gain an understanding of children's views and experiences of their environments. It recognises that some tools will be more suitable to use with individual children than others but assumes that all children's views and experiences are valuable. Examples of tools used within this approach include observation, interviews and child-led tours of their environment. Taking pictures and creating maps often involve children in a lot of talking and these activities are as much about a 'vehicle for listening' as they are about an end result. Children are in charge of the tours and are also in charge of reviewing the images they capture, deciding which ones to display and share with others. The advantages of this approach include building children's skills and confidence, as well as giving adults insight into children's perspectives, while the challenges include interpreting and representing the varied data gathered.



In the next video you are going to see a Headteacher talking about her own experience of research with very young children through a project she has called the Listening Project. Teachers in this project took a novel approach to 'tuning in' really effectively to nursery school children so that what they had to say was carefully listened to and heard.

The project was based at the Robert Owen Centre at the Rachel McMillan nursery school in London, where a whole Inset (staff training) day introduced the idea of children's participation and looked at the work of Alison Clark and Peter Moss. This video clip highlights the need to develop specific skills to listen to very young children. The Rachel McMillan nursery went on to build on the principles of the project and to develop the importance of not just listening to children but of attuning to them. You will look further at the concept of 'attuning' in Session 2.

Activity 5

Allow approximately 15 minutes.

For now, look at this short extract, but before you watch the clip, take a few minutes to consider how we listen to each other. The Headteacher refers to 'the many ways that people can communicate that aren't necessarily speaking;' what do you think

she means by this? Note down your thoughts now, then watch the video and try the activities which follow it.

Provide your answer...

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 3



How is listening described?

Discussion

Rachel Hogarth-Smith refers to ‘everything you notice about another person,’ rather than just directly hearing what they’re saying.

What effect did this project have on the ‘working atmosphere’ in the school?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The staff reflected on their own practice, how they responded to what they saw the children doing. Their own action plans focussed on the project.

Can you think of any barriers to listening to children and young people, and very young children in particular?

Provide your answer...

5 Getting the adults involved

In the ‘Listening Project’ you have just been looking at, the focus was on finding ways for adults to listen effectively to children, in this case very young children. Creating good conditions for children and young people to take part in research involves creating an environment where people of all ages recognise their interdependence and diversity, and feel comfortable expressing their views alongside each other. Empowering children and young people as participants in research has the potential to redress some of the balance in terms of the way in which adults dominate the world of research. It means that children and young people have an opportunity to present their own understandings and interpretations in ways that they choose, rather than adults directing their participation in the research and interpreting ideas on their behalf.

It is important that adults think carefully about their own influence and how it impacts on the research if the research is to reflect children and young people’s perspectives.

In the final sections of this Session, you are going to think about adults’ involvement in research with children and young people. You may start to consider your own research project, what that might be and what role you might play in it, while keeping in mind the rights of the children and young people to be fully involved.

In this next clip, you are going to hear an interview in which a researcher, Alison, talks about a research project she carried out. There are some activities to follow, which you may like to look at first, so you can keep the questions in mind as you listen.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 1

Activity 6

Allow approximately 15 minutes.

What was the purpose of Alison’s research?

Provide your answer...

How and why did she involve children and young people?

Provide your answer...

What was the result of her research?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

She wanted to examine the role of social media in schools and professional practice.

She realised that the voices of the children and young people were actually more important and that they should be ‘brought to the table’ along with the voices of the teachers and professionals.

They created a social media charter.

This research involved the voices of the children and young people but it had been initiated by an adult.

What do you think were the challenges Alison faced in conducting this research?

If you were carrying out a similar project, how would you ensure that the children and young people were active participants?

Provide your answer...

6 Undertaking research with children and young people.

In the recording you just heard, Alison referred to ‘ethicality’; you will be looking in more depth at the ethical aspect of research later in this course. For now, you are going to think about issues that may arise for you, as a researcher, and how your own feelings and experiences may impact on your research. Throughout this Session you have been considering the importance of children’s and young people’s participation in research that affects their lives. Whether you are an adult or a young person conducting the research, you need to bear in mind that children and young people are not a homogeneous group; they bring their diverse views and backgrounds to research, and the same will be true for the adults working alongside them.

Sometimes, some groups of children and young people will have more in common with some adults with whom they share particular experiences than they will with their peers. For example, some children, young people and adults will all have experiences of being diabetic or growing up in poverty. At the same time, experiences of children and young people in these situations will, potentially, differ from those of adults, and for researchers these differences are worth investigating. You might like to look at the Our Voices website here, for more detail on this aspect of sharing experiences; there will be links to this website throughout this course and in particular in Session 4.

Activity 7

Allow approximately 15 minutes.

In this last recording for this Session, you will hear three adult researchers talking about the personal and emotional impact their research had. Before you start to listen, look at the questions below, and keep those in mind as you listen. Record your answers in the box as you listen to the recording, then click on ‘reveal discussion’ to see a summary of the key points raised.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 2

As an adult, can you think of any issues raised in this audio that you have had to face personally in your work with children and young people, or in your daily life?

Provide your answer...

As a young person, are there any issues raised by these researchers that you have had to face when working with an adult, or in your daily life?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

It can be difficult not to get emotionally involved in the lives of the people you are researching with.

People may share personal information. It's important to have a 'safe space' for people to talk.

Some issues raised during a research project may be contentious or cause conflict.

Adults may find their personal experiences impact on the way they research the experiences of children and young people.

7 Summary of Session 1

Throughout this Session, you have been making notes and completing various activities. Anything you have written into the online boxes will be saved, so you can return to these at any time. You may prefer to keep a separate notebook, either digital or paper; take some time, now, to check that all your notes are up-to-date and organised, and to decide which is your preferred way of note-taking. Have another look back at any sections that you would like to re-visit or to work further on.

Finally, reflect on your own background and motivation to research, and put your ideas in the boxes below:

Activity 8

Allow approximately 15 minutes.

Why is it important to include Children and Young People in research about their lives?

Provide your answer...

What age group will you be conducting research with?

Before you work through Session 2, make a note of any particular challenges and opportunities you think you will encounter in your chosen age-group.

Provide your answer...

Now get started with Session 2.