1 Doing Research with Children and Young People: An Introduction
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Research with children and young people is crucial. It can advance understanding of how they develop and live their lives, it can contribute to theoretical debates, and its outcomes can impact directly and indirectly on the lives of those researched and others in similar situations. However, if the research is to be in the best interests of the children and young people themselves, it is essential that researchers take heed of a number of critical issues which arise in the planning, carrying out and dissemination stages of research. Relevant issues include ethics, consent, the legal system, power relations, methodology and the dissemination process. It is also important when reading research papers to consider whether the various issues have been addressed appropriately, in order to evaluate the research and its contribution.

In this book we have brought together researchers who have expertise in a variety of different spheres and who are particularly well placed to identify and reflect on some of the issues and questions which arise in research with children and young people. They differ from one another in many ways including the disciplines in which they work, the methodological approaches they favour, the groups of children and young people they research, and their primary interest – which for some is to understand children and young people better and for others is to improve the lives of children and young people. Despite these differences they share an interest in ensuring that research with children and young people is effective and appropriate. Although we invited particular researchers to reflect on specific topics there are a number of issues which appear in many of the chapters, such as access, consent, ethics and power relations. However, these are discussed by different authors from their different perspectives and often in relation to different groups of children and young people.

Not surprisingly, given their different backgrounds and experiences, the contributors express varied points of view and at times may even contradict one another in what they say. As editors we have not sought to ensure that a united picture is presented of how to tackle the different issues which are raised. This is because there is no single correct answer to each issue and it is important to acknowledge, debate and reflect on different views. Nevertheless, certain themes do emerge from many of the chapters. One recurring theme is that the theoretical and methodological approach that is taken influences the research outcome; another is that the power relations

which exist between researcher and researched affect the process of research; a third is the positive shift towards children and young people participating actively in research, even to the point of carrying out research themselves.

There are also undoubtedly gaps, some of which will only become apparent in time. The contributors can only present an account of some of the issues which are uppermost on their research agendas at the time they are writing in the early part of the twenty-first century. Fashions and trends shift and change in research and while we may believe that we have identified and solved a problem once and for all it is a fact of research, as it is of life, that many of the problems we identify and views which we hold today will be challenged by future generations and surpassed as different questions and approaches to research emerge. We can only comment on issues and possible ways of dealing with them in the light of our existing knowledge and understanding. However, by bringing together contributors from varied backgrounds our hope is that the ensuing chapters will enrich and advance discussion rather than complicate it.

There are things which this book does not do. As already noted, the contributors are working within different disciplines and therefore utilise different methodological approaches in their own research. The contributors reflect the disciplines of Education, Health, Social Welfare, Psychology, Sociology, Childhood Studies, Youth Studies, and Law. What unites the contributors are the participants in their research, namely children and young people. Further, since the contributors are exploring questions which arise in research with children and young people, they do not describe different methodologies in any detail, although they do comment on methodological aspects to varying extents. So, if you are looking for a step by step guide through different methodological approaches to research with children and young people this is not an appropriate book. Nevertheless, many of the chapters do provide examples and suggestions for how research with children and young people can be carried out effectively. It is also important to note that the contributors are all based in and predominantly working in the minority or Western world, although research with children and young people in the majority or non-Western world is the topic of one of the chapters.

This edited collection was put together in conjunction with a companion volume, *The Reality of Research with Children and Young People* (Lewis, Kellett, Robinson, Fraser and Ding, 2004). *The Reality of Research…* includes published accounts of 13 research studies involving children and young people supplemented by commentaries written by the researchers. In these commentaries the researchers discuss how their research came about, describe difficulties they encountered during the research and how they overcame them (or not) and reflect back on the research after its completion. Many of the commentaries touch on questions which are covered in the present volume. Reflection is a vital part of the research process and is one way in which researchers can develop their expertise and advance

their research. In the present book this is essentially what we have asked each contributor to do. We suggested a topic to each of them and asked them to reflect on the topic from their experience as a researcher. Self-reflection is a crucial part of the research process and we would encourage you to engage in this as you read each chapter in this book. As we have already pointed out, research fashions change over time, new issues arise and old issues may diminish in apparent importance, or resurface. Nevertheless, if research with children and young people is to result in better understanding and improved social conditions then we all need to stand back and take stock from time to time. We would not want this book to be seen as putting forward definitive answers to particular questions. Rather, it provides a starting point for us to reflect on a number of critical issues which every researcher working with children and young people should address.

In the remainder of this chapter I have provided an overview of the other chapters. The chapters are organised into four sections although, as you will discover, there is some degree of overlap between chapters within and across sections. The first section, 'Setting the Context', provides a background to research with children and young people from several different perspectives. The second section, 'Research Relations', explores the nature and influence on the research process of the varied relationships which arise between researchers and those who are researched. The third section, 'Diversity', examines a number of different populations who are often involved in research and draws out some of the implications of their diversity for research. The final section, 'Relevance, Evaluation and Dissemination', looks beyond the actual carrying out of research to what is done with the findings. Taken together, the chapters in this book provide an overview of research with children and young people.

In Chapter 2 'Situating Empirical Research', Sandy Fraser argues that for research to lead to better understanding of children and young people and to identify ways of improving their lives it is important to understand its limitations. He considers this in two parts. First he explores the characteristics of social and psychological research, such as discovery and engagement, and contrasts empirical research with other forms of knowledge such as may be gained through poetry and philosophy. He then addresses the question of why research should be *with* children and young people rather than *on* or *about* children and young people, arguing that for research to have positive benefits for their lives it is crucial that researchers engage with children and young people and negotiate the nature of the research with them. This argument is developed further in a number of chapters in later sections of the book and its importance is reflected in the use of the phrase research *with* in the book's title. Towards the end of this chapter Fraser mentions two crucial considerations which are also developed in more detail in later chapters, namely diversity and power relationships.

Fraser points out that historically developmental psychology led to children being viewed in particular ways, and briefly mentions how this view

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influenced research. This idea is developed further in Chapter 3, 'Images of Childhood'. In this chapter Mary Kellett, Chris Robinson and Rachel Burr provide an overview of different images that have been held of children and young people historically, culturally and within different disciplines. They give examples of how children have been portrayed in different ways at different times and in different places and how these images are affected by many factors. They demonstrate how research at a particular time or in a particular location can often be seen to reflect the ways in which children and young people are comprehended at that time and in that place. They show how different academic disciplines have influenced the images held of children and young people, looking at developmental psychology, anthropology and sociology in particular. They also consider the influence that economics, the media, language, religion, politics and culture have on how children and young people are viewed.

The legal system also impacts on how children and young people are viewed and Kellett, Robinson and Burr include examples of this. The current legal systems in England and Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland and their impact on research are examined in detail in Chapter 4, 'The Legal Context', by Judith Masson. Masson outlines the current legal rights of children and young people in the UK and points out that researchers must work within the relevant legal system. However, she makes the point that legal systems tend to set the minimum acceptable standard rather than specify good practice. It is therefore crucial that researchers address the ethical issues which arise in their research, a topic covered in greater detail in Chapter 7 and mentioned in other chapters. Interestingly, Masson points out that within the UK legally the term 'child' means anyone under the age of 18 years, which fails to acknowledge the clear differences between an infant and a young person. Like Fraser in Chapter 2, Masson also comments on the distinction between 'research on' and 'research with' children and young people and argues that it is important to include children in research, while ensuring that their rights are safeguarded. Masson deals with the important question of consent, describing the roles and responsibilities of gatekeepers and discussing the legal status of those with parental responsibility, as well as children's ability to consent. She contrasts the situation in Scotland with that existing in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and in clinical research as opposed to non-clinical research. Research confidentiality and the question of when researchers may disclose information are discussed in some detail. Likewise, the protection of data and of children and researchers are covered, as are the implications for involving children and young people as researchers. Many of these important points are also developed elsewhere in the book, in particular in Chapter 7 on 'Ethics' and in Chapter 12 'Young People'.

The final chapter in the first section, by Sandy Fraser and Chris Robinson, 'Paradigms and Philosophy', focuses on four paradigms used in social and psychological research and their philosophical underpinnings. The authors examine scientific, structuralist, interactionist and post-structuralist paradigms

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and point to the relevance of each for the sorts of research questions that researchers might want to ask. They deal with the scientific paradigm in some detail since this has impacted on the development of the other paradigms. They question whether social and psychological research can ever be scientific in the sense of being truly objective and point to the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research. In order to explore the background to this distinction, Fraser and Robinson examine three historical developments, namely positivism, falsification and Kuhn's view of paradigms. The structuralist paradigm is illustrated by reference to the views of Marx, Durkheim, Piaget, Chomsky and Lévi-Strauss, all of whom based their theories on the idea that there is some underlying objective structure that empirical research seeks to uncover. The interactionist paradigm sought to shift attention away from the facts of the scientific paradigm and towards the idea of individuals attributing meaning to events around them. Reference is made to the views of Robert E. Park, George Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman and Howard Becker. The final paradigm to be considered is the post-structuralist or social constructionist in which meaning and understanding are argued to be constructed through discourse.

The shift from research *on* children and young people to research *with* children and young people has a number of implications. One implication concerns the nature of the power relations between researchers, who are normally adults, and those who are researched, in this case children and young people. This topic is considered from a number of different perspectives in the second section, 'Research Relations'. In the first chapter in this section, Chapter 6, 'Power', Chris Robinson and Mary Kellett focus on power relationships between researchers and those who are researched in the minority world. They begin by examining the theoretical frameworks which have informed the concept of power, and the particular role of feminism. They explore the different ways in which children and young people may be viewed by researchers, from being seen as dependent and incompetent through to having an active participatory role in the research, and how this influences the research process as well as the power relationships. Robinson and Kellett argue that it is important to give children and young people an active participatory role in research and they provide several examples of how this can be achieved. They discuss the problems of the generation gap between adult researchers and child participants and the need for adult researchers to acknowledge the rights of children as citizens. In the final section of their chapter Robinson and Kellett consider particular questions to do with power which arise when carrying out research in schools, a point which Kellett and Ding develop further in Chapter 11.

Robinson and Kellett point out that discussion of the power relations arising in research with children and young people raises questions about ethics. This is the focus of the second chapter in this section, 'Ethics', by Priscilla Alderson. Importantly, Masson in Chapter 4 and France in Chapter 12 comment that not everything that is legal is ethical and researchers must ensure that not only are they working within the relevant legal system but

that their research meets appropriate ethical standards. Alderson begins by providing the historical context for research ethics, particularly within medicine. She discusses the importance of ethics and how careful consideration of ethical issues can make a useful contribution when any piece of research is being planned. In this context she comments on a number of existing formal ethical guidelines. Throughout her chapter Alderson provides examples of how researchers can address some of the ethical questions which arise when research is carried out with children and young people, such as designing information leaflets which are appropriate for children, and watching out for indications that children and young people might prefer to withdraw from the research despite the fact that they may not express this desire verbally. She points out a number of things that researchers should avoid doing. In her conclusion Alderson returns to her earlier point that addressing ethical issues can benefit research in often surprising ways.

In both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 reference is made to different ways in which children and young people can be involved in research and in Chapter 2 Fraser argues for the importance of this, hence 'research *with*…' rather than 'research *on*…' One way that children and young people can be involved is as active participants, which can sometimes lead to the children and young people actually carrying out the research, for example interviewing other children or young people. As Robinson and Kellett point out, when children and young people become co-researchers in a project this can be genuinely empowering. The topic of children and young people as co-researchers is the particular focus of Chapter 8, 'Involving Children and Young People as Researchers', by Adele Jones. Although this is more participatory and consequently empowering than many other approaches, Jones points out that when children and young people act as co-researchers the research is usually initiated and guided by adults. Involving children and young people as co-researchers raises additional issues, such as ensuring that the research activities and arrangements are appropriate for the child-researchers and considering the consequences for the children when they cease being researchers. Jones addresses the issues she raises by describing how children and young people can be involved as researchers at all stages of the research process from design through to dissemination. She illustrates her argument by describing three projects in which children and young people were involved at different stages: design and data collection, interpretation and finally dissemination.

The final chapter on 'Research Relations' addresses the topic of gender. In their chapter, 'Gender', Rob Pattman and Mary Jane Kehily focus on the ways in which gender, both of the researcher and the participant, can influence the form an interview takes. There is an interesting link between this chapter and Chapter 6 by Robinson and Kellett. Robinson and Kellett examine some of the questions which arise when research is based in schools, arguing that the power relations which exist in schools have specific implications, such as making it difficult for children and young people to

refuse to be involved in a piece of research. Pattman and Kehily argue that the very structure of schools can directly influence the gendered development of children and young people. They make the important point that it is the participants in the research, in this case children and young people, who are the experts and therefore it is essential when carrying out research with children and young people to find ways of enabling them to share their experiences. Pattman and Kehily provide an insight into how this can be achieved, focusing on male and female interviewers talking with both boys and girls individually and together. Although Pattman and Kehily discuss the role of gender in the particular context of interviewing, it is important to remember that the genders of both researchers and the children and young people involved can influence the research process and the outcomes, whatever methodology is used.

Pattman and Kehily's chapter reminds us of the diversity of the children and young people who may take part in research and that it is essential that researchers think carefully about the suitability of their methodological approach, given the participants. Some of the implications of researching with different participant groups are the focus of the third section in this book, 'Diversity'. A number of themes recur throughout the chapters in this section. These include the contributions of different disciplines to our beliefs about the competence of children and young people and how these affect research, questions of power relations, and who should provide consent.

The first chapter in this section, 'Early Childhood', is by Ann Langston, Lesley Abbott, Vicky Lewis and Mary Kellett and considers research with children from birth to five years. Langston, Abbott, Lewis and Kellett begin by discussing how, although researchers have portrayed pre-school children as relatively incompetent in the past, this has not accorded with how these children have been viewed by the largely female workforce who care for them and they question why this has been the case. They examine the status of early childhood research in terms of who carried it out. In the remainder of their chapter they discuss a number of methodological issues which arise with this age group: who carries out the research, access, consent, the context in which the research is carried out, appropriate methods and interpreting findings. These and other issues are all important ones to consider when carrying out research with young children. Langston and her co-authors conclude by arguing that research in which early childhood practitioners and academics collaborate is crucial in order to gain as full an understanding of young children's development and lives as possible.

Langston, Abbott, Lewis and Kellett are justifiably critical of research which fails to take account of the social contexts of young children's lives. Often such research has been the domain of developmental psychologists who may study young children in unfamiliar situations using materials which may have little meaning or relevance to the children involved. This criticism is not just relevant to studies of pre-school children but is also evident in research with older children. This is the starting point for Mary Kellett and Sharon Ding's chapter, 'Middle Childhood'. After exploring the

influence of developmental psychology, in particular the Piagetian account, Kellett and Ding examine some of the methodological challenges facing researchers studying children in the middle years of childhood. They discuss the nature of competence and argue that it is up to researchers to identify methodologies which enable children to demonstrate their competence. They delve into one methodology, that of interviewing, in some detail and indicate a number of aspects which any researcher planning to interview children in middle childhood should consider, including gender, a topic which is covered more fully in Chapter 9. Kellett and Ding also consider a number of non-verbal ways in which children's views can be sought effectively. They conclude by emphasising one of the themes that runs through many chapters in this book, that of enabling children and young people to participate as fully as possible in all aspects of the research process.

Chapter 12 considers 'Young People'. As the title suggests the focus is the period between being a child and becoming an adult, although as Masson points out in Chapter 4, and Alan France does in this chapter, within the UK legal system the term child includes anyone below 18 years of age. France begins by reviewing how concern with the problems often seen to be the province of young people has motivated researchers both historically and currently. France, like other contributors, also points to the relatively recent move towards research *with* as opposed to research *on* young people, and how this change in approach has led to changes in how young people are viewed. Some of the issues raised by Pattman and Kehily in their chapter are also mentioned by France, as is the importance of social context for making sense of any situation. Two issues are dealt with in some detail by France, namely consent and protection. France, like Masson, comments that the law is not always ethical, and illustrates this with respect to obtaining consent for young people to be involved in research, pointing out that how researchers go about this says something about how young people are viewed. He also raises the question of whether competence should influence decisions on who is included or excluded from research. While debating these questions France provides a number of useful pointers to ways in which the focus can be on the young people themselves providing informed consent. France then considers the second key issue of protecting young people from harm, discussing where the research takes place, the impact that the research might have on young people emotionally, protection from harm by adults and questions of confidentiality.

In Chapter 11 Kellett and Ding raise the question of competence and argue that rather than seeing children as incompetent, researchers must adopt approaches which are inclusive rather than exclusive. Interestingly, in Chapter 12, France comments that incompetence should not be a reason for exclusion from research and describes the insights he gained from including, against the advice of the teachers, a young person with learning difficulties. The issues arising in research with disabled children and young people are the focus of Chapter 13, 'Disability', by Vicky Lewis and Mary Kellett. They

begin by discussing how the ways in which disabled children and young people are referred to can have implications for how they are perceived. They consider some of the issues which arise when researchers study the development of disabled children and young people, such as the heterogeneity of children and young people who are described as having the same disability, and the problem of comparison groups. They examine the implications of research with children with severe learning difficulties and provide several examples of ways in which such children have been involved successfully in research studies, pointing out that an inclusive approach increases the social validity and real world relevance of research. They argue that a reflexive and flexible approach is essential, and point out that researchers need to question assumptions of apparent incompetence. They end by raising a key question in the shift towards increased participatory research, that of whether able-bodied people should research disability.

An especially prominent theme throughout this book is of children and young people participating actively in the research process. This is brought to the fore once again in Chapter 14, 'Participatory Action Research in the Majority World' by Olga Nieuwenhuys, who describes the use of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach with children in the majority world. She begins by contrasting childhoods in the minority and majority worlds and points to the implications of the differences for research in the majority world. She then outlines the philosophy behind PAR and its aims of empowering those involved and of carrying out research of direct relevance to their lives. She addresses a number of questions, or dilemmas as she refers to them, which arise in PAR with children: the balance between children's active role and their dependency on adults; the role of the researcher as a facilitator while also ensuring that the children and young people participate; making sure that research findings actively benefit the children and young people involved rather than being used in ways which might not be in their best interests. She illustrates each dilemma with numerous examples from research with children and young people in the majority world.

The focus of the final chapter in this section, 'Race and Ethnicity', by Mani Maniam, Vijay Patel, Satnam Singh and Chris Robinson, is on issues of race and ethnicity in research within the British context. After clarifying some of the terms used in this area, Maniam, Patel, Singh and Robinson explore some of the issues for research by discussing different approaches to race and ethnicity since the 1960s. They begin by taking a critical look at early studies of race and ethnicity. They then explore some of the problems of the multi-cultural approach which replaced the earlier assimilationist approach. They point out that multi-culturalism failed to take issues of power into account and they examine the anti-racist approach which focused on racial oppression and questions of power. Throughout their chapter these authors refer to a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods. In their final section they examine ethnographic approaches to research into race and ethnicity. They discuss the importance of research taking account of the experiences of black and ethnic minority children and

young people. Although they do not provide specific suggestions for how to carry out research in this area, by appraising different research approaches Maniam, Patel, Singh and Robinson raise a number of key issues which researchers need to take into account.

The final section in the book, 'Relevance, Evaluation and Dissemination', considers issues which arise when a particular piece of research has been completed. Three areas of research are covered: health and social care, education, and childhood. Not all research has implications for policy and practice but one area that often does is research in health and social care. In Chapter 16, 'Health and Social Care', Helen Roberts focuses on issues which arise in making sure that the voices of children and young people are heard and responded to in these fields. Roberts begins by discussing the extent to which the usefulness of research is on the agendas of the main agents influencing the dissemination of research, namely the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the Research Assessment Exercise within UK Universities, and the organisations who fund research. She provides a number of examples of how various factors can affect dissemination, ranging from pressure groups to researchers not believing what research participants tell them. In order to illustrate some of the questions which arise during the dissemination phase of research, Roberts describes three pieces of research and how their findings were disseminated. She then considers the important stage of evaluating the impact of research and suggests a number of factors which contribute to successful dissemination. Finally, Roberts explores how researchers can increase the likelihood of their research findings having an impact on policy and practice.

In Chapter 17, 'Education', Anne Edwards takes this further when she considers the dissemination of educational research findings. She begins by contrasting the practices of teaching and research and argues that for research to impact on practice, dissemination strategies must be thought through at the beginning of any research project rather than being left to the end. She contrasts a linear view of the relationship between educational research, policy and practice with a model in which research, policy and practice mutually interact and influence each other. In order to develop her argument for a mutually reciprocal model she explores how communities, such as early years teachers, produce and apply knowledge. She follows this through by illustrating how involving educational practitioners in the design of a research study can increase the likely benefit of the research for the end users. Thus, Edwards argues for a participatory type of research, in which the practitioners contribute to the planning and analysis of the research. However, such an approach depends on effective and ongoing communication between researchers and practitioners which extends beyond the end of the research, even to the generation of further research questions. She concludes by identifying several ways in which educational research is moving and which should inform both practice and research.

The final chapter in the book, 'Childhood Studies', by Jim McKechnie and Sandy Hobbs, examines academic research on childhood and asks

whether this has had any impact on policy. They begin by taking a look back in time and examine the impact on policy and practice of John Bowlby's research on maternal deprivation. Through this historical account they emphasise the role of the context in which Bowlby was working on the impact that his research had. They then discuss different ways in which research may influence policy and practice and examine two current research areas focusing on childhood – bullying and child employment – and their rather different impacts on policy and practice. They use these two examples to illustrate a number of more general issues associated with dissemination and the effect of research: the way in which research influences policy; the need to disseminate research in a range of different ways depending on the audience; and the increasing influence of funding bodies in setting the research agenda. They end by reflecting on how research can influence policy by leading to shifts in how issues are conceptualised. As an example they discuss a theme which is evident in many of the chapters in this book, that of listening to what children and young people have to say.

As this introduction has hopefully demonstrated, the chapters in this edited collection make an important contribution to discussion and debate about research with children and young people. They cover a number of underlying themes and concerns and make a number of suggestions for how to address the issues. However, despite offering various practical suggestions, it is also clear that addressing the questions which are raised and discussed at some length by the contributors is not straightforward. There is no single solution to each question. Rather, it is up to individual researchers to reflect with great care on the many and varied issues which may arise in their research and to think creatively about ways to address them at all stages of the research process, from the initial design and choice of methodology through to dissemination.

Reference

Lewis, V., Kellett, M., Robinson, C., Fraser, S. and Ding, S. (eds) (2004) *The Reality of Research with Children and Young People*, London, Sage.