

# METHODS BRIEFING 10

## Training in research with and about children

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A series of methods briefings from projects funded by ESRC as part of the Research Methods Programme.

The Programme aims to develop qualitative and quantitative methods within the context of substantive research. It also aims to encourage effective dissemination of good practice.

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There is a strong demand for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training in research and consultation with children. This project developed an advanced, interdisciplinary training package (*Listening to Children: Research and Consultation*), consisting of three main elements:

1. ten stand-alone tutor-facilitated classroom sessions
2. a skills-based resource, presenting case study material and practical exercises
3. a web-based learning environment

The course is now part of the CPD programme of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships.

*Listening to Children* is a ten-week training package:

1. Doing research and consultation with children
2. Children as part of the research team
3. Communicating with different children
4. Survey instruments
5. Evaluation
6. Individual interviews
7. Focus groups
8. Observation and participant observation
9. Dissemination
10. Review

The training is designed for those with a grounding in social science research methods and is accredited at SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) level 11 (Masters). In the pilot, course participants included commissioners of research, practitioners from statutory and voluntary organisations working directly with children, researchers from academic and voluntary sectors, and academics who provide training on working and researching with children.

The course is delivered via a combination of classroom sessions and online learning. This proved a convenient and flexible format for participants with demanding professional commitments.

### **1. Classroom sessions**

Classroom sessions are based around group activity and discussion, with a wide variety of contributors (including young people) involved in delivering them. Course participants appreciated the diversity of approach and the range of expertise and experience that this provided, although there was an important role for a consistent 'link' person across sessions to help participants make sense of the issues raised.

### **2. Case studies**

Sessions on a specific data collection technique draw on case studies describing research with and about children, using that technique. This enables the technique to be contextualised in a wider discussion of research issues, including ethical concerns, analysis decisions and dissemination.

The nineteen case studies were specially commissioned from research and practitioners working around the UK and abroad. These real-life accounts proved extremely popular with course participants, who found them practical, accessible and a rich source of reflective material relating to the key course themes.

### 3. Web-based learning environment

The course website (available to course participants and tutors) provides online discussion facilities and access to a wide range of learning resources. These include:

- sample research instruments (questionnaires, consent forms, information leaflets etc.)
- top tips (an extensive list of research tips contributed by people working with children from around the world, compiled by the *Listening to Children* project)
- recommended resources (links to a selection of high quality web-based resources together with a short description)
- training materials (slideshows and handouts used in the classroom sessions)
- self tests (multiple choice questions with detailed answers)
- interactive exercises on such issues as choices in research design, feedback to children and data analysis
- video clips of interviews with children, used as the basis for various practical exercises
- glossary

Most participants liked the opportunities provided by the tutor-facilitated online discussion programme for further engagement with the course topics, although lack of available time can be a significant factor in participation. Course participants appreciated the quality and range of the web-based learning resources and many took the opportunity to continue to use them beyond the end of the course (six months ongoing access to the website is provided as part of the training).

#### Reflections on training for research/consultation methods with children

For an advanced level course, participants appreciated the opportunity for in-depth discussion and ‘hands-on’ activities.

The top tips were an unexpected success, in terms of responses from researchers and external interest in them.

Market analysis and participants identified gaps in training and resources, which this course has sought to fill. These gaps were:

- How to analyse and present qualitative data from children, in a robust and systematic manner
- Bringing together lessons learned from development studies and UK-based research
- Learning across disciplines about working with very young children
- Incorporating plans and objectives for dissemination from the project’s inception, including how to involve children

#### Website / web resources

The *Listening to Children* website provides access to further background information about the training, sample learning materials and details of the next available course:

[www.crf.ac.uk/cpd/listeningtochildren](http://www.crf.ac.uk/cpd/listeningtochildren)

The Childhood Studies website provides an overview and links to University teaching (including the BA and MSc in Childhood Studies), research and networking activities at the University of Edinburgh:

[www.childhoodstudies.ed.ac.uk](http://www.childhoodstudies.ed.ac.uk)

#### Further information

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Enquiries are welcome from both individuals and organisations. Organisations may be interested in commissioning on-site or bespoke training.

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