

Research ethics of research in schools with children under 10

Vikki Butler

Senior research and policy
officer

Barnardo's Cymru

Studies this presentation draws on

- Generation 2020 (Butler 2005)
- The Homezone feasibility study (Bevan et al. 2006)
- Understanding children's communication of their emotional and psychological well being (Newman 2007)
- Young people's experiences of, and solutions to, identity related bullying' (Butler 2007)
- 'The complexities of girls relationships and the impact of negative peer groups' (due Oct. 2011)
- An evaluation of the impact of the City and County of Newport's 2008- 2011 single plan (due Dec 2011)

What are ethics and what is it to be ethical?

- A set of philosophical considerations to aid good responsible research
- The interpretation of 'good' and 'responsible' will vary between research communities and the theory of childhood held.
- To be ethical is two fold- institutional procedures and individual researcher practice.
- Be pragmatic! Look at mechanisms that enable philosophical considerations to be put into practice.
- Focus of this presentation is the ethics of research with children under 10 in a school environment: parental consent, informed consent, informed choice, adult child hierarchies and the impact of the school environment.

Parental consent: when is it needed?

A matter of balancing children's rights, family relationships and laws regarding guardianship and child protection. 'The consent of parents or guardians should be routinely sought except:

- Where it is clear that participation in the research involves risk no greater than that in everyday life
- Where parental or carer permission is impossible or would not protect the child or young person
- Where the young person concerned is resistant to parent/ carer consent being sought on the grounds of their right to privacy and confidentiality AND where the vulnerabilities of the young person have been assessed and the risks of participation are considered to be low'

Barnardo's Statement on Ethical Practice 2008

- Parental opt out forms and information leaflets

Gaining informed consent from children

- Informed consent is often based on Gillick principle and 'competence'- risks researcher judgements on who is incompetent and their exclusion from research.
- National children's bureau research guidelines (2003) suggest informed consent is a process.
- Building consent into the fieldwork process- taster sessions, fieldwork over time, reflection and planning mechanisms
- Child accessible consent forms- words, colour, pictures
- Explaining long words- anonymity, confidentiality and child protection

A child's informed choice

- Ensuring children are informed about the research.
- Ensuring children are choosing to participate or not, and that there is choice in each session regarding any series of fieldwork.
- Ensuring children are able to engage with the research topic and are feeling confident to be able to give their opinions and experiences.

Credwch
mewn plant
Believe in
children



Barnardo's
Cymru

Adult- child hierarchies

- Researcher effect upon participants is commonly documented- working with younger children there are differences in psychology and construction of social meaning between the adult and child.
- There are differences in power afforded to adult and younger children by society. Children know this!
- Can they be eliminated? Unlikely ... but bridging these differences starts from researcher's ethical practice feeding into research design
- Using child accessible forms of communication- choosing methods, individual and group work

Impact of the school environment

- Institutional setting- enforcing hierarchy
- Gate keeping
- Cherry picking
- Many children give answers they think teachers want to hear
- Effects of school environment on informed consent
- Child protection procedures
- What other choices are there for fieldwork sites?

Overview: ethical research in schools with children under 10

- Ethics is more than committees and consent... but these are important in the ethical processes of a study
- Informed consent as a process begins to solve problems regarding competence BUT then requires considerations about research design and accessible methods.
- Schools based research can be problematic but can be the only fieldwork site.
- Adult child hierarchies!