Youth Participation Practice Network Forum
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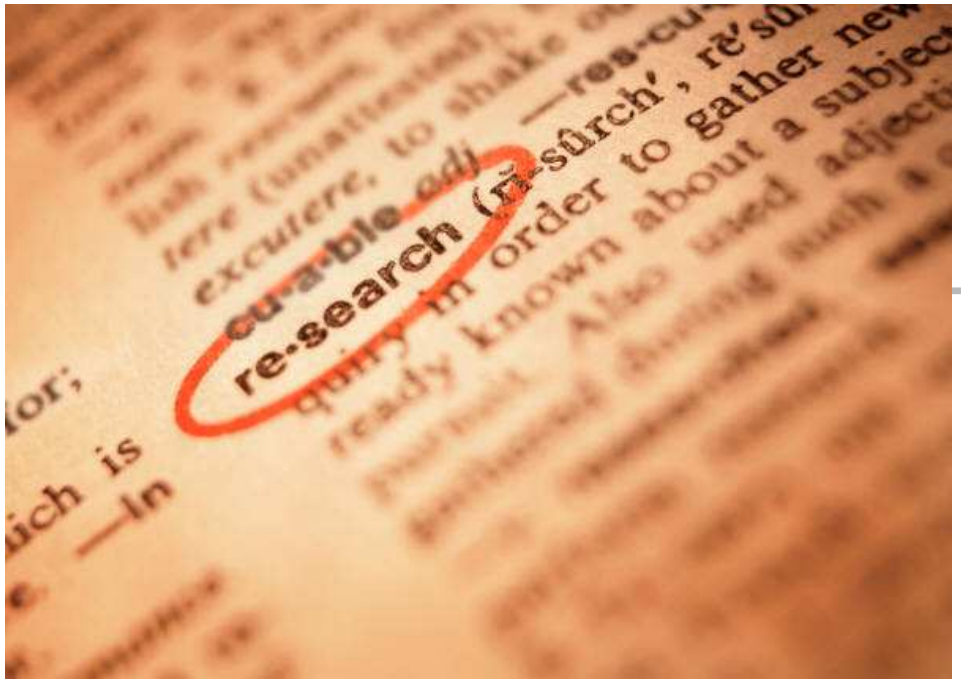
'Sounds like a plan: Engaging young people in research and community planning'

Research 101(a)
Involving young people in research

Dr Paula Geldens
Lecturer in Sociology, Swinburne University of Technology (pgeldens@swin.edu.au)

Linda Randall
Participation and Development Officer, YACVic (pdo@yacvic.org.au)



Research: The act of going beyond intuition, the obvious or the immediately at hand, in order to increase our knowledge or understanding about a particular domain/issue

Participation Point 1: Sample research questions

Characteristics of ‘good’ research

As a general rule, ‘good’ research is:

- Underpinned by an understanding of the field and the work of others
- Driven by an answerable research question
- Doable and systematic
- Designed and undertaken with adherence to ethical considerations
- Generates new questions
- Published

Lecture outline

- **The researcher's world-view**
- **Approaches to research**
- **Developing a research project**
  - Get to know the field
  - Develop an answerable research question
  - Select a method
  - Consider audience and ethics
  - Construct a sample
  - Prepare yourself for the field
  - Collect and analyse data
  - Prepare output
- **Conclusions**

The researcher's world-view

Ontology: The study of our assumptions about the social world.

Common ontological assumptions include:

1. The nature of humans (instinct…blank slate)
2. The nature of society (competition…cooperation)
3. Our potential for independent action (agency…structure)
4. The purpose of scientific research (knowledge…change)
5. The persuasiveness of scale (macro…micro)

Approaches to research

Quantitative	Qualitative
Theory testing	Theory producing
Highly structured/standardised measurement tools (numeric data- trends)	Naturalistic/flexible 'measurement tools' (textual data - meaning/experience)
Larger samples	Smaller samples
Purports to be objective/value-free	Explicit foregrounding of subjectivity
Randomisation, control measures, replication and generalisation are assumed	Randomisation, control measures, replication and generalisation are rare and contested
Data collection completed before analysis	Data collection and analysis undertaken concurrently

Developing a research project:
Get to know the field

- Read as widely as you can – you don't need to reinvent the wheel
- Speak to others who share an interest in the field
- If you are thinking of publishing the research in an academic journal, aim to map the literature in terms of:
  - Key researchers and theorists and their discipline areas
  - Theoretical debates
  - Methodological debates
  - Vehicles for publication
- Having read as widely as you can, and having spoken to others, you will be in a position to make an informed decision about whether or not your idea is 'worthy'

Developing a research project:
Develop an answerable research question

There is no 'single'/'best' approach to research: Different research questions require the employ of different approaches. Your research question will drive all of your decisions

Answerable research questions:

- What are the challenges face by young people living in the City of Whitehorse?
- Does young people's participation in local government lead to 'youth friendly' policy?

Unanswerable research questions:

- Should young people participate in local government?
- Do young people want…

Developing a research project:
Select a method

Quantitative approach when your research question:

- Seeks to reveal trends
- Lends itself to providing subjects with a prescribed field of responses

Qualitative approach:

- Seeks to reveal meaning and experience
- You are unable to provide participants with a prescribed field of responses

Consider 'mixed'/'multiple' methods (triangulation)

Common research methods – pros and cons

- Surveys
- Interviews (Structured, Semi-structured and Unstructured interviews)
- Focus groups/Group interviews
- Observation/Participant observation/Ethnography

'Interviewing is rather like a marriage: Everyone knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets.' (p. 31)

Oakley, A. (1981), 'Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms' in Roberts, H. (ed) *Doing Feminist Research*, Routledge, London.

Participation Point 2: Select a method

- Revisit your research question
- You may decide to cover many things briefly (wide/shallow) or a few things in-depth (narrow/deep)
- The tool should allow you to progress in a logical sequence from one topic to another, from the general to the specific
- Think about the language you are using
- Avoid questions that draw on dichotomous categories (good/bad; best/worst) - these often prove meaningless
- Avoid leading questions - these tell us about the researcher
- Use 'why' wisely: Participating in research can be intimidating - avoid practice that leans towards interrogation!

- Include a variety of questions:
  - ***General/Indirect questions*** allow for 'distance' and can raise important points of interest which can then be explored:
    - Do you think that most young people…? (closed)
    - What can you tell me about young people in…? (open)
  - ***Specific/Direct questions*** often require participants to draw on their own experiences and can be used effectively following a general question:
    - As a young person, do you think…? (closed)
    - Can you tell me about your … (open)

- The beginning of research participation is not unlike the early stages of any relationship: Trust and rapport must be earned
- Initial questions should be basic and factual (not personal) or a general question about the issue:
  - Can you tell me about…
  - I am interested to know what you think…

- The conclusion of research participation is not unlike the end stages of any relationship: An amicable parting is desirable
- Final questions should draw the interaction to a conclusion:
  - Is there anything further that…
  - Do you think that I missed…

Developing a research project: Consider audience and ethics

- Before beginning more detailed planning it is wise to consider your audience and their demands (your project has to be 'do-able'):
  - Timelines
  - Overall format (formal research report; scholarly article; community report; media release; submission to a Government inquiry; university assessment)
  - Tone (formal…casual)
  - Length
  - Level of detail (use of statistics/quotes)…
  - Multiple audiences?

- Consider the potential for harm/danger/risk **and** benefits for all:
  - Informed consent and young people
  - Confidentiality and anonymity
  - Power, exploitation and incentives

Insider/Outsider status

"Yes, you are an outsider, and you don't really know us…if it was somebody I knew I don't think that I would feel comfortable saying these things…you don't feel comfortable sometimes talking about your business with people that know you". (Natalie)

Participation Point 3: Ethical implications

Developing a research project: Construct a sample

Define the target population

- Subjects/Participants/Secondary data sources – whatever you select, the source must be able to help answer your question

Define the sampling criteria

- A clearly articulated and defensible sampling criteria is essential (rules of inclusion and exclusion must be clear and reflect desires for homogeneity or heterogeneity)

Decide upon an appropriate sample size

- Quantitative – as large as possible
- Qualitative approach – an initial idea for size is important, but will likely be driven by reaching 'saturation point'

Sampling approaches

- Purposive approach to sampling (sampling for particular individuals, events etc…).
- Convenience approach to sampling (sampling amongst those readily accessible).
- Representative or comparative sampling ('random sampling', 'typical case sampling', 'extreme or deviant case sampling', 'maximum variation sampling' or 'homogenous sampling').
- Special/unique case sampling (generally used in 'case study' research).
- Sequential sampling (often, but not only, 'snowball sampling').

Participation Point 4: Recruiting

Developing a research project: Collect and analyse data

Collecting data face-to-face

- Be attentive and flexible in recruitment
- Be attentive and flexible when collecting the data - active listening
- Consider what silences/body language/deflections mean: Do they indicate reflection, rules or boundaries…?
- You may wish to transcribe audio-recorded data. Be conscious of inclusions and exclusions - 'accuracy'

Collecting data remotely

- Be attentive and flexible in recruitment
- Consider what a lack of response means

Analysing survey data

- Closed-ended questions: A systematic mechanical process
- Open-ended questions: See below

Analysing interview or focus group data

- Closed-ended questions: A systematic mechanical process
- Open-ended questions: A systematic creative process (document all decision-making) commonly involving: Thematic, Content or Narrative analysis…
- *Immerse* yourself in the data:
  - Listen to the audio recordings
  - Read and re-reading transcripts
  - Write summaries for each transcript

Open coding

- Identify 'themes' and assign each a 'code'. If working in a team, collaborative coding will ensure consistency
- Remain open to what the data has to 'say' and to try not to be concerned about contradiction
- When themes continue to emerge across the data you have reached 'saturation'

Focused coding

- Having established an initial set of codes, look specifically for these in the data **and** identify exemplars
- You may identify additional themes - in which case you go back over the data again
- Look for evidence that challenges your argument

Strategies for enhancing rigor

- Methodological choice – is the 'fit' good?
- Mixed or multiple methods (triangulation)

With quantitative research:

- Reliability – produces the same result when repeated?
- Validity – 'measure' what it claims to measure?

With qualitative research:

- Member checking
- Peer review
- …

Developing a research project: Prepare output

- Ensure that you are addressing the needs of your audience(s)
- Ensure that you 'put your reader in the picture':
  - Demographic information
  - Explain codes
  - Rich/thick description
- Make sure that the analysis is grounded in the data:
  - Too much, or too much data of one type, can be misleading
  - Our first impressions are often intense but…
  - Events occurring at the same time may seem to be related when they are simply coincidences
  - Keep in mind that participants can exaggerate and/or omit

Conclusions

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Where to get support/build partnerships?

- From each other
- From your friendly neighbourhood academic