

Conducting Research with Children and Adolescents

3

Design, Methods and Empirical Cases

Julie Tinson

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

3 Research Design for Researching with Children and Adolescents

Objectives

- To explore how a researcher's philosophy may influence how they conduct research
- To establish a variety of methods that can be employed when researching with young people taking into account their age and development
- To identify different ways in which the data can be recorded and suggestions to overcome issues that may arise as a consequence
- To summarise employing a mixed methods approach and the different models that can be used to collate data.

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the ethical issues that must be considered and addressed before starting a research project. A comprehensive design that incorporates and employs a practical yet ethical approach is the type of research considered in this chapter to further illustrate best practice for researching with children. Before considering types of research, however, the researcher's philosophy and its possible influence on research approach will be explored. There is a wide variety of choice in relation to methodological design and the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches (qualitative and quantitative) will be summarised. The method section consists of two distinct phases, namely researching with younger children (8-11 years) and researching with older children (12-17 years). Researching with older children will be further subdivided into early

adolescence (12-14 years) and late adolescence (15-17 years) where appropriate. The recording of the data and the implications of this (in an ethical research context) will also be explored.

Research Philosophy

The case for choosing any research method, whether qualitative or quantitative, is almost impossible to present in the abstract. It is important to provide an explanation of the researcher's assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the methods through which that knowledge can be attained. These assumptions, together with the nature of the phenomena to be investigated, need to be examined in the context of the wider and deeper ongoing debate surrounding the rival methodologies of social enquiry.

There are generally thought to be two main research paradigms, or 'consensus of thinking' (Kuhn, 1970) and agreement on the methodological rules to be followed (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). These are what Burrell and Morgan (1979) describe as the interpretivist (or phenomenological) and functionalist (or positivist) paradigms. Both these major paradigms have been given a variety of names including objectivist, scientific and traditionalist (to represent the positivist paradigm) and subjectivist and humanistic (to represent the interpretivist paradigm). Each set of assumptions along the objectivist/positivist-subjectivist/interpretivist continuum are intended to provide a rough typology for thinking about the numerous views that different social scientists and marketing and business researchers hold about human beings and their world.

It is accepted that both positivist and interpretivist paradigms are valid research philosophies and as such have had a bearing on research design and execution (Channon, 1982). Channon also notes that the influence of 'instrumental validity' and 'organisational validity' has tended to steer researchers towards the positivist paradigm. Barker *et al.* (2001) however, report a growing incidence of interpretivist-based research in applied research journals and illustrate the apparent dominance this model has had within the most recent discussions on paradigms. Whatever the 'accepted' methodology might be in any given discipline, the appropriateness of the one employed in any study must be derived from the nature of the social phenomena being explored and the researcher's own ontology, if it is to be a credible and transparent piece of research. In the context of research methodology, is the author's own assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the methods through which knowledge can be obtained (Morgan and Smircich, 1980) that are important. Johnson and Duberley (2000: 4) argue that there:

[There] are no incontestable foundations from which we can begin a consideration of our knowledge – rather what we have are competing philosophical assumptions about knowledge that lead us to engage with management and organizations in particular ways.

The philosophies underpinning the competing paradigms therefore offer an 'intellectual authority' (Hughes, 1990). This foundation for the social research theories of

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