



Real Life Methods

Part of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods

YOUNG LIVES

The Young Lives project is exploring the dynamics of young people's lives and relationships in a prospective qualitative longitudinal framework of 10 years.

Qualitative longitudinal research

The aim of Qualitative Longitudinal (QL) research is investigating the textures of daily lives through and in relation to time. Time is thus appreciated as a social construct in its different dimensions, which go from the biographical and generational to the historical, industrial, and cyclical. Through exploring the intersection of individual biographies with the larger historical accounts, QL research can capture the personal and the social, the micro and the macro, as lives unfold.

Research questions

- How do young people construct their personal relationships and identities over time?
- What is the relative significance of family/peer group/school and community in their daily lives and how does this change through their teenage years?
- What values do young people draw upon in constructing their relationships and identities? What are the sources of their morality?
- How do young people make sense of their past, present and future? How do they refine their ideas at different turning points in their lives as they 'overwrite' their biographies?
- What opportunities and constraints exist in young people's lives and how far is the notion of 'life planning' applicable to them? How do diverse aspirations and subjective experiences relate to standard dimensions of social difference and inequality?

The ethnographic study

The ethnographic study has a flexible design which is modelled to respond to participants' individual styles and preferences. A wide range of tools are being employed for this purpose:

- Preliminary consultation focus groups
- First mapping interview, including self-portrait, photo-elicitation and time-lines
- Second interview, including photo-elicitation and relational map
- Follow-up methods, which the young people can choose amongst the following: collage, photo-reportage, diary, walkabout, video-diary, group video, 'official' photograph, interactive website.

Participatory approach

The Young Lives project has a participatory approach which recognises young people as active agents and citizens: it is research with, and not 'on', young people. There are several facets to this participatory approach:

- The research relies on the advice of a Young People's Panel, composed of young people of various ages, drawn from different research areas, as well as on an Advisory Group of academics and policy-makers.
- Young people from the different research areas are being consulted through focus groups on research issues and practicalities, including research methods, ethical issues, and archiving.
- The ethnographic methods being used in the research seek to reflect participants' own styles and preferences and to empower them.

The methods

There are three dimensions to the methods involved in this study, which link the micro picture to the meso and macro levels, connecting qualitative with quantitative approaches:

- In-depth ethnographic study, carried out with a creative range of tools.
- Qualitatively driven survey, exploring processes as well as patterns.
- Links to large-scale national survey tracking 20,000 young people (DFES Longitudinal Study of Young People in England).

Sample and design

The research aims to involve a total of 50 young men and women aged 13 with diverse backgrounds in terms of class, ethnicity, locality, ability and family circumstance. The young people are being recruited via schools, community centres and youth clubs, from five contrasting communities, ranging from disadvantaged to advantaged, and from inner city to rural, in the Leeds area. Participants will be tracked over 10 years. They will be met for interviews at about 18 month-intervals throughout this time. Data collection will however be a continuous process, thanks to the variety of ethnographic tools employed.

Research team

Dr Bren Neale (Project Leader), Dr Anna Bagnoli (Researcher) and Dr Sarah Irwin

Project associates: Dr Jon Prosser, Prof Jennifer Mason, Prof Inge Bates, Prof Phil Hodgkinson, Dr Aisha Walker

Contact

Dr Anna Bagnoli
a.bagnoli@leeds.ac.uk
+44 (0)113 343 4421

