TOP TIPS FOR RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Compiled and edited by Michael Gallagher as an online resource for the continuing professional development course “Listening to Children: Research and Consultation”. This course is run by the Centre for Families and Relationships (CRFR) at the University of Edinburgh.
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Note from the editor

I initially compiled this list of research tips from responses to an e-mailshot in October 2004. The overwhelming response to this mailshot led me to consider alternative uses for the tips beyond the online teaching resource for which they were compiled. In particular, I decided that the contributors should be given a copy of all of the top tips as recompense for donating their insights. As most of them will probably carry out further research with children and/or young people in the future, it is my hope that this document could be of practical use to them in their work.

Some tips submitted were edited slightly, though every attempt was made to preserve their meaning. Others were excluded to prevent repetition, or, in exceptional cases, because the contributors had misunderstood the nature of the exercise. Where possible, I have fully attributed all the contributions. However, if contributors have any grievances with my editing, then correspondence should be sent to the e-mail address above. I will endeavour to resolve any such problems amicably.

Given the generous spirit in which this material was offered, I think that this document should be considered public domain. If readers wish to use it, they should should feel free to distribute it to like-minded people, use it in teaching practice, and so on, provided that:
(a) the material is used only in ways which are consistent with the spirit of the document as a whole
(b) the details of the document's origin are included (these can be found in the paragraph on the front page of this document).

Please bear in mind that contributions were offered on the understanding that they would be part of a teaching resource, rather than, say, a publication. Thus I would ask any readers who wish to quote from this document in a paper or text for publication to seek the permission of the relevant contributors first, if only out of professional courtesy (if necessary, please e-mail me for contact details).

Any readers who are inspired to make further contributions should e-mail their top tips to the address above. I will add any new contributors' e-mail addresses to my distribution list for this document, unless instructed otherwise. It is my hope that, in time, a more extensive second edition might be compiled and circulated once again. In particular, I would like to include contributions from children and young people who have been involved in research projects, as their perspectives are notable by their absence from this edition.

Finally, a big thank-you to all those who freely volunteered their advice. Colleagues have commented on the diversity of both the contributions and the contributors, and the document certainly testifies to the liveliness and healthiness of the field of research with children. I feel that reading the tips has improved my own abilities as a researcher, and I hope that others will have similar experiences.

Mike Gallagher, June 2005

General tips

Children and young people are the experts on their own lives.
(Gwynedd Lloyd, School of Education, University of Edinburgh)

Make no assumptions that children will speak to you. Don't launch in, take time to play with them or, in the case of older children, find out something about them - not what someone else has told you but something they say themselves.
(Frances Scott, Learning and Development Adviser, Scottish Social Services Council)

Be in touch with what children are interested in (i.e. current things/fads/ football teams etc...) and use this knowledge to connect and start your conversation. I have always found children more likely to tell me things about their worlds, if I have some understanding of what is important in their worlds!
(Jennifer Turpie, Director of Research and Policy, Children in Scotland)

Prior to contemplating research with children or young people, spend some non-research time with them (say in a voluntary setting). Understanding the world of children can be an excellent pre-requisite to using research techniques on and with them.
(John Thain, School of Health, University of Wolverhampton)

Be patient and persistent. A process of dialogue with anyone - adults or children - takes time.
(Bianka Atlas, Legal Research Counsel to the Principal Family Court Judge of New Zealand)

Make it fun!
(Rachel Thomson, Lecturer in Children and Young People, Open University)

Take a selection of games e.g. connect 4, draughts, etc. Offer to play these as a settling in/conclusion - and mention this/show them at the beginning of contact - can be helpful even if not used just to set a more informal tone.
(Gillean McClusky, Research Associate, Scottish Traveller Education Programme, University of Edinburgh)

Use lots of eye contact, smiles, warm heart, fun and laughter (if appropriate): children figure out in a split second whether you are really with them/interested or just extracting information from them. They need to see you care, that you can engage with them as they would like to be engaged with. They need you to understand why they may/may not be responding.
(Leslie Groves, freelance social development/child rights consultant)

Children can spot phonie a mile off so don't try to be cool and in tune, be yourself.
(Frances Scott, Learning and Development Adviser, Scottish Social Services Council)

Don't 'dress down' when doing research with kids - you're only fooling yourself. Don't call them kids either.
(Dr. Tom Hall, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University)

For men: don't wear shorts. Children will want to stroke your hairy legs.
(John Horton, Centre for Children and Youth, University College Northampton)

The thing I would advise people is to make sure you think about what you wear as you need to ensure you are able to 'muck in'. For women, this includes considering not wearing anything even remotely low cut (I know it sounds a bit crude) as children will quite happily pull on your clothing and put things down your top.
(Verity Campbell-Barr, Research Assistant, Kent Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership)

As a lady, mind your dressing. Don't wear mini skirts or body exposing dresses.
(Ada Nnaemeka, MSc student, University of Edinburgh)

A warning: research with children can be extremely exhausting!
(Verity Campbell-Barr, Research Assistant, Kent Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership)

Like the creepy uncle in the fabulous Richmal Crompton's *Just William* stories, anyone who thinks they are 'good with boys' (sic) - read 'good with children' - needs to question themselves and be questioned. Some adults (researchers) will be 'good with children' - no question - *but it not always the ones who think they are!!* (The uncle patronises children and colonises childhood space).
(Dr. Owain Jones, School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol)

Be clear about who you are - and who you are not, e.g social worker.
(Gillean McClusky, Research Associate, Scottish Traveller Education Programme, University of Edinburgh)

Be mindful of when and where you (as an adult/researcher) have power over children. Also be sensitive to when the reverse is true and a child exerts her/his power over you.
(Jane Brown, Senior Research Fellow, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh)

Be prepared to document young people's participation in the research process, for example certificates for records of achievement.
(Rachel Thomson, Lecturer in Children and Young People, Open University)

Children and young people have views, experiences and knowledge that are unique to their own situation within society and which must be acknowledged. They have the ability to make important decisions and it is our responsibility to engage them in the consultation process and empower them make choices in matters affecting them. What they are asking for is respect, dialogue and action. Some of the changes children and young people want are difficult to achieve, cost a great deal and take time to implement, however this does not invalidate the relevance.
(Deb Ruiz-Dove, Childcare Development Officer, Bedfordshire Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership)

A seemingly obvious point, but often overlooked: it is important, prior to beginning research with children, for the researcher to be aware of her/his own understandings and preconceptions of childhood, children/young people. Such awareness can contribute to a greater flexibility in methods and data collection.
(Anne-Marie Smith, Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Liverpool)

Children read countenance easily so don't wear a worried look while dealing/working with them.

(Ada Nnaemeka, MSc student, University of Edinburgh)

Children are more likely to feel free, get closer and disclose their problems to adults who can listen to them patiently, tell them stories, etc. You should have a child-like heart. Play with them and don't scold or scream at them.
(Ada Nnaemeka, MSc student, University of Edinburgh)

Designing your research or consultation

Put children first - don't involve them unless there is really something in it for them.
(Dr. Mary Duffy, Barnardos Policy & Research Unit)

Think about how you could involve young people in the design of the research project.
(Fiona Hodgkiss, Researcher, Children and Social Care Analysis, Scottish Executive Education Department)

Start with a blank sheet - the more discretion young people can exercise over the content and direction of the project, the more confident they will be that their views are being taken seriously.
(Bianka Atlas, Legal Research Counsel to the Principal Family Court Judge of New Zealand)

Researchers need to build considerable time - probably much more than they originally anticipate - in order to deal with access and permissions, prior to conducting research with children.
(Helen Sweeting, MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, Glasgow)

My top tip would be on the importance of planning, preparation, pilot and time. That the quality of the work is dependent upon giving sufficient time and thought to planning and preparation - once you are into the actual work, research, it can often then be too late to make corrections or adjustments. Piloting is a great help to planning and preparation. In this, time is a crucial, and essential, resource - lack of time is an enemy of quality work.
(Mike Jones, Researcher, The Children's Society)

I think it's vital to establish, during the planning stage, who is signed-up or 'on board'; obviously the exercise will be of limited value if those with a policy/decision-making role are not involved, do not accept the results/messages from listening to children, are not able/prepared to act upon those findings or 'cherry pick' which messages they are prepared to hear. From our experience, even a firm commitment in advance can unravel if the results are too challenging or inconvenient.
(Tony Dobson, Researcher, The Children's Society)

Prior to beginning any research project relating to children and young people, all researchers should identify and assess the ethical considerations relevant to their proposed research.
(Nancy Bell, PhD candidate, Glasgow Centre for the Child & Society, University of Glasgow)

Before you plan any research with children, talk to them informally about your research questions and how they think these might be approached.

(Martin Richards, Professor of Family Research, Centre for Family Research, Cambridge)

Whenever possible, undertake a pilot study because this will undoubtedly reveal hidden hitches, mistakes or biases, or reveal new unthought of outcomes/results.
(Bernadette Maloney, Researcher, Derby University)

Pilot extensively with young people. This doesn't just include the tools, but also the research questions. Make sure the research makes sense to children and young people. If it doesn't you haven't thought it through enough yet.
(Rachel Thomson, Lecturer in Children and Young People, Open University)

Only ask young people/children questions that they can answer from their own experience.
(Rachel Thomson, Lecturer in Children and Young People, Open University)

Children can only talk about what they know, so you need to empower them to think outside normal experience. For example, children being asked about their dream playground drew their school playground with security guards in it to protect them and it from inner city stuff. After a trip to a staffed playground, they were asked to stick stars on their favourite thing so they stuck them on the playworker as they had not previously known such a species exists. Their drawings after the visit showed water, complex structures and fantasy, whereas the first ones had shown monkey bars.
(Simon Rix, Play Development Worker, Haringey Play Association)

Try to have the confidence to encourage children to talk about their everyday lives, to listen to what they have to say, to let them set the agenda and contextualise their own concerns. Think twice (and reflexively) about structured techniques - draw and write, picture response, ranking, etc. They have their place, but do we hide our insecurities as adult researchers behind them?
(Prof. Kathryn Backett-Milburn, Research Unit in Health, Behaviour and Change, Co-director Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh)

Don't overestimate the amount of time you usually have with children or young people. Forty five minutes to an hour is usually the maximum. Plan accordingly.
(Susan Elsley, Head of Policy and Research, Save the Children)

Don't let yourself fall into the trap of thinking that if you just take a certain number of steps and precautions, plan well, reflect on your practice, etc. your research will run perfectly. All of these things will help, but there will still be situations which you hadn't expected, and which you make a mess of. Research is by nature full of botches and blunders. This doesn't in any way invalidate the knowledge it produces.
(Mike Gallagher, University of Edinburgh)

There are no rules for research with children! When apparent ‘formal’ methods do not work, it is important to acknowledge ‘just hanging out’ time with groups of children as valuable data in itself. It’s O.K. to bin the questionnaires or work-sheets and follow your instinct, or the children’s lead in some cases.
(Anne-Marie Smith, Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Liverpool)

Dealing with difference

Before doing research with children, be critically reflexive about whether you think there may be potential differences researching with children rather than adults and, importantly, why? Do not assume that there will automatically be differences, and be aware that if there are, it could be because of the ways childhood is constructed in our society, or because of your own adult assumptions and/or skills in communicating with children, rather than because children are inherently different.
(Samantha Punch, University of Stirling)

I would say that the most important thing to consider when working with young people who have Down's syndrome or Additional Support for Learning Needs is to find out as much as you can about the individual or individuals that you wish to consult or do research work with. This should be in terms of both their learning needs and personality. The need for preparation is crucial in terms of the visual tools that you will require.
(Karen Bain, Children's Worker, Down's Syndrome Scotland)

Make every single child feel valued, and that their input is really important.
(Leslie Groves, freelance social development/child rights consultant)

Don't underrate or belittle any boy no matter the age as they see themselves as men already.
(Ada Nnaemeka, MSc student, University of Edinburgh)

Doing focus groups

Location and area lay out of interviews/focus groups/observation can impact upon the atmosphere and therefore content.
(Bernadette Maloney, Researcher, Derby University)

Bear in mind that children will talk about different stuff more openly in different contexts. I once conducted focus groups in a youth group. The young people talked about smoking, relationships and getting into trouble at school. When I conducted interviews in their own homes, they were far less open about such stuff and talked about things within the frame of reference of their own household (times to be in, rules about TV etc).
(Pete Seaman, Research Fellow, Glasgow Centre for the Child & Society)

Understanding the power dynamics in a group of children is crucial: who is/isn't talking, why not, is it appropriate to bring in the quieter ones, how can you do this in the least disruptive manner so that there will be no repercussions afterwards for speaking out?
(Leslie Groves, freelance social development/child rights consultant)

Game formats for focus groups work well and can increase participation without exposing individuals as everyone takes a turn.
(Rachel Thomson, Lecturer in Children and Young People, Open University)

Make the children feel as comfortable as possible by having some control over the direction, content and running of the sessions. I find this can be done by letting them choose their own additional warm-up games, or playing games when they are restless - and thus rescheduling the session. Or getting them involved in setting up the room, scribing out answers, asking the questions, and also letting them chat for

a while about things that you may think are not directly relevant but they want to discuss. You can usually steer the discussion back into the topic quite easily.
(Claire Lanyon, National Children's Bureau)

Don't cram a group session with children and young people with too many different participatory methods. Keep the session simple so that you can remember what you are doing and the participants are not overwhelmed by the range of activities
(Susan Elsley, Head of Policy and Research, Save the Children)

It helps to have two people to facilitate a focus group - one as the lead facilitator and another person to handle the mechanics.
(Kay Tisdall, Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh)

It is well worth talking to the youth leader, teacher, personal assistant in advance of the focus group, to discuss their role within it. Otherwise, such people can begin answering for the child or young person rather than facilitating their participation.
(Kay Tisdall, Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh)

In designing a focus group, I need to make sure I spend the most time on a key objective - and not lots of time on warm ups that don't meet the research agenda.
(Kay Tisdall, Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh)

Always worth having a 'cool down' planned for a focus group - just in case you have stirred up a lot of energy or potentially sensitive issues.
(Kay Tisdall, Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh)

Interviewing children

Don't underestimate the tried and tested methods of straightforward interviewing techniques. Children and young people like talking!
(Susan Elsley, Head of Policy and Research, Save the Children)

If you have arranged to interview a young person or a group of young people, ring them up the day before (or in the morning if you are meeting them in the afternoon or evening) to remind them that you are coming. In my experience young people can forget about appointments and may be out, about to go out, asleep or otherwise unprepared when you arrive. This can be embarrassing for you both. Give them the opportunity to Be Prepared!
(Jessica Datta, National Children's Bureau)

Make sure you ask if interviewee has any difficulty with reading or writing etc. This sounds obvious but it amazes me how often adults working with children do not tell you basic information unless you ask specific questions like 'does he have dyslexia?'
(Gillean McClusky, Research Associate, Scottish Traveller Education Programme, University of Edinburgh)

Make sure that the questions can be phrased in lots of different ways; so the idea of a "structured" interview is perhaps a non-starter. What one child understands won't be what another understands, so be versatile in finding ways of saying the same thing.
(Frances Scott, Learning and Development Adviser, Scottish Social Services Council)

Be clear about the length of time involved in the meeting.

(Gillean McClusky, Research Associate, Scottish Traveller Education Programme, University of Edinburgh)

I think you have to be ready to experiment with the games and/or props that you use in the interviews with children. And you have to learn to live with the anxiety when something does not work out as expected. Read up on games that others have used and spend some time adapting them till you feel confortable using them, and you have found that they work either as intended or they support your interview communication in some way. Keep some extra game(s) in your bag, just in case your chosen game(s) does not suit the child with whom you are working. Keep the games in good condition, sorting them, washing them after every interview.
(Helen Kay, contract researcher)

People seem to be happy for me to audio-tape the interview or focus group if I explain to them that this is because (a) I have difficulty writing down and talking, and (b) I want to ensure I have an accurate record of what they have said. Children often really like hearing themselves on the audio tape.
(Kay Tisdall, Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh)

Never underestimate how tiring interviewing in homes can be. Even sitting and having a cup of tea with the parents can leave you exhausted as you are having to do a lot of presentational work, and sometimes you won't feel like doing it.
(Pete Seaman, Research Fellow, Glasgow Centre for the Child & Society)

Observation of young children

Adult researchers should not expect, or aim, to fully enter the worlds of children or 'see through their eyes' - common assumptions in some qualitative methods. I think such aims are questionable in ontological, epistemological and ethical terms.
(Dr. Owain Jones, School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol)

Start by jotting down things which strike you as interesting, rather than trying to record everything that happens.
(Mike Gallagher, University of Edinburgh)

Get down as low as you can - sit on the floor, kneel, crouch, whatever - and get into the thick of things. If you have to bend down every time a child wants to speak to you, it'll be hard work.
(Mike Gallagher, University of Edinburgh)

Make a point of learning all the names of the children in your study group as soon as possible.
(Mike Gallagher, University of Edinburgh)

Designing a self-report questionnaire

Enabling children and young people to participate in questionnaire design from the outset through consultation ensures it is young people led. They are best placed to inform us on issues to consult on, ways to engage with their peers and practical considerations such as what language to use.
(Young Voice, Children's Research Charity)

In preparing research tools such as questionnaires and interview guides, consider whether preparatory discussions and piloting work with children has included sufficiently heterogeneous individuals. It will not be possible to pilot tools with children from every relevant permutation of circumstance but it is important to do whatever you can to be sensitive to the wide range of family and household circumstances in which children might live and the diverse experiences they might have. For example, I know from personal experience that the child whose mother or father has died may not welcome the presumption that they are alive.
(Lynn Jamieson, Co-director Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh)

When using questionnaires which will be filled in by groups of children at the same time (e.g. in school), include an activity at the end (e.g. wordsearch). This means that those who finish early have something to do and don't make others who are slower feel dumb.
(Rachel Thomson, Lecturer in Children and Young People, Open University)

Use as much visual material as possible - questionnaires need not be entirely text and there is nothing wrong with decoration. Why not spend some proper money on the research materials? Use a designer, show that it is important.
(Rachel Thomson, Lecturer in Children and Young People, Open University)

Multiple methods

Read the children a story then they will read one for you too.
(Julia Chen, past MSc student, University of Edinburgh)

A key means of witnessing and attempting to represent children's worlds is to watch and listen to them together (as far as it appropriate to the specific research task) and, beyond that, to let them do their own research and reporting (as is happening in some initiatives). This is all about power relations and children being in their own worlds.
(Dr. Owain Jones, School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol)

Ask the same question in loads of different ways with the answers in varying mediums. [In research about children's views on playground improvement,] one little girl who was full of ideas drew a swimming pool every time there was a drawing session, even though it didn't fit in with her other ideas and she knew there wasn't enough money…[because] swimming pools were the only thing she felt competent to draw!
(Simon Rix, Play Development Worker, Haringey Play Association)

Multiple methods must be entirely flexible! Much of the literature on methods for research with children is based on a Northern context of childhood; this is important to bear in mind when carrying out research within different socio-cultural contexts. Methods perceived to be 'child-friendly' in a Northern context may not work at all elsewhere where children are not used to, for example, group discussions or expressing opinions. Therefore be prepared to take time to respond and adapt to the realities of the children you are researching, and adapt research accordingly. This may involve scrapping all 'formal' methodology plans, and just observing or playing marbles with children.
(Anne-Marie Smith, Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Liverpool)

Thematic analysis

Be aware that emotions experienced during fieldwork constitute important data. They can reveal a lot about the researchers own preconceptions about childhood and children. An analysis of these emotions and reactions (recorded in a fieldwork diary, another key tool for data collection) will feed important points into the final theoretical and empirical analyses.
(Anne-Marie Smith, Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Liverpool)

Start thinking about analysis while you're still collecting your data. Keep notes - either mental or written - on recurring themes. That way, when you come to the formal analysis stage, you'll be well prepared, and things will run much more smoothly.
(Mike Gallagher, University of Edinburgh)

Dissemination

Avoid smash and grab operations. Too many adults ask for one-off views and don't do enough to make sure information goes back meaningfully to those who provided it.
(Dr. Mary Duffy, Barnardos Policy & Research Unit)

It is vital to provide some form of feedback to young people in the dissemination phase, whether it is a letter or a young person's version of the findings. Showing them what is being done with their contribution enables them to feel empowered and can help ensure they continue to participate in future research.
(Young Voice, Children's Research Charity)

One of the things that I have learnt from my experiences consulting with children is to show them results and do this, at least in part, very quickly! If children see the proof that they are being listened to then they are more likely to get involved again, rather than get disillusioned with the whole process (i.e. "Not another consultation....").
(Pippa Cosimini, Play Development Manager, London Borough of Enfield)

The one tip I would like to share relates to dissemination. We are getting better at involving children as active participants in research but we are still not very good at involving them in the dissemination of that research. We need to give more attention to how we give children genuine opportunities to disseminate from their perspective with their voice and in their style, which may not be as polished and 'eloquent' as an adult dissemination but should have equal value.
(Mary Kellett, Director, Children's Research Centre, The Open University)

Dissemination is important in socially relevant research and often students are encouraged to send copies of their report to participants. When the research involves children, more often the report is sent to organisations (schools, youth clubs) through which access was gained rather than the children themselves. It is useful to think of other ways (factsheets, posters and discussions) of ensuring children are informed and have opportunities to comment on the findings and feedback how they feel they have been represented. This will further inform and enhance your research.
(Dr. Lorraine van Blerk (nee Young), Research-Lecturer in Children's Geographies, Brunel University)

Have something as an end product that is concrete and not a piece of policy that may come into being by the time the children are young adults. In our case we invited all the participants and their families to two Family Fundays and sent them all a map of outdoor play spaces in Tower Hamlets. This was produced specifically for the project from the children's request for more fundays and more information about where to play in the borough. The map contained pictures and text generated during the research and has proven to be popular with children and adults alike.
(Suzannah Carey, Play Association, Tower Hamlets)

Handling the media

(The following top tips were all contributed by Viv Cree, Professor of Social Work Studies, University of Edinburgh)

1. Do your homework before you say 'yes' to a request for a story – buy the relevant newspaper, watch the TV series and read the material written by the journalist who has approached you. (Look for the journalist's 'by-line' in the newspaper.) From this you should be able to make a fairly accurate assessment of what approach is likely to be taken to your story. Some newspapers make their money by trashing people – so don't be afraid to say 'no' to them.

2. In advance of the meeting with the journalist, prepare written documentation that you are happy to hand over. This should include material that you feel OK about being 'lifted' in the form of a quotation by you. Journalists are busy people (some are also lazy!) and pleased to have written sources that they can go back to in writing their articles.

3. Ask for a 'run-down' of the likely areas to be covered in an interview – not necessarily exact questions, but what is likely to come up nonetheless. This should prevent you feeling 'wrong-footed' in the interview.

4. Think about the ethics of what is being asked for. For example, if the journalist asks for the names and addresses of children in your study, you should rightly refuse this, but you may be able to give the journalist the contact details of a self-help group or voluntary agency which would be willing to talk to the journalist. (You must, of course, check this out in advance with the organisation.)

5. Be prepared to be honest and to explain some of the complexities involved in your story to an interviewer. Journalists appreciate openness and are much more likely to write a sympathetic piece if you share your concerns with them, rather than seeming cagey and resistant.

6. Follow up the interview by sending on further written material or contacts which have come up during the interview.

7. Ask the journalist to talk you through what is likely to appear in the piece. Some journalists will send you a copy of their article, but many are not willing to do this, partly because their article is still to be edited by a sub-editor and given a headline over which the journalist is likely to have no control. Good journalists will talk you through their piece, and this should give you the

opportunity to make any final comments before it goes forward to the news-desk for editing and headlining.

8. If you are pleased with the end-result, contact the journalist after the article has been published, to thank her/him for their support, and ask if there is any chance of a follow-up in the future (if this is appropriate). Ask them to come back to you in the future with any other stories. You will be added to someone's contacts' book at this point!

Accessing children through schools

Be aware of the route by which you reach children. As an adult introduced to them by a teacher, parent or youth worker, you can be seen as an ally of this particular adult. Consequently, accounts can be framed in terms of what the children know that particular adult approves of or disapproves of.
(Pete Seaman, Research Fellow, Glasgow Centre for the Child & Society)

School staff can have particular ideas about what research should be - and that usually is quantitative and not qualitative.
(Kay Tisdall, Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh)

Schools are presently being inundated with requests for research. One needs to be clear why they should choose to be involved in your research.
(Kay Tisdall, Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh)

It takes ages to get into a school - find a link person there and pester them to liase with you. School secretaries can be a little like doctor's receptionists, plus having a name to deal with provides a much speedier response. Make your case well and have all the paperwork to hand. Schools are not going to let a load of babbling fools loose on their classes!
(Suzannah Carey, Play Association, Tower Hamlets)

We should have made the links between the research we were doing and the educational value this would have to the class. For example, on a mapping exercise children were using co-ordinates (maths) and discussing and evaluating their local area (geography).
(Suzannah Carey, Play Association, Tower Hamlets)

Don't contact a school until you have prepared a very short, succinct, clear statement of what your research is about. Teachers don't have much time, I have a tendency to waffle on vaguely in a rather abstract way. This hasn't done me any favours in the past!
(Mike Gallagher, University of Edinburgh)

Don't expect school staff to share your concerns about consent; and don't let this put you off, either.
(Mike Gallagher, University of Edinburgh)

Obtain informal access permission from the head of the school before writing to the local education authority. This is more courteous from the school's point of view.
(Mike Gallagher, University of Edinburgh)

Gaining consent of children (and parents)

Write a clear information leaflet.
(Priscilla Alderson, Professor of Childhood Studies, University of London)

Don't make consent forms and letters for children and young people or parents/carers long and complicated. Talk through ethical and consent issues face to face as well as giving out written information.
(Susan Elsley, Head of Policy and Research, Save the Children)

Make explicit (e.g. in the form of a Statement of Intent) at the outset of a project with children what it is that you wish to achieve, and why.
(Bianka Atlas, Legal Research Counsel to the Principal Family Court Judge of New Zealand)

Get children and young people to pick their own pseudonym to maintain their anonymity.
(Susan Elsley, Head of Policy and Research, Save the Children)

In institutional contexts (e.g. schools): (i) do your very best to negotiate informed consent, whilst (ii) recognising that this will almost certainly be completely impossible under the circumstances. Consent is not a very meaningful concept in situations where children's compliance is compulsory by law.
(Mike Gallagher, University of Edinburgh)