Situated ethics in participatory research with young people

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Ethics and research with young people

- Increasing recognition of the importance of listening to children and young people:
  - UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – right to participate and express own views (esp. article 12).
  - Conducting research *with* young people – participatory forms of enquiry.

- Process ethics – 'rules' of conduct (Gallagher 2009).
  - Informed consent
  - Protection from risks
  - Anonymity and confidentiality – data protection
  - Incentives and rewards

- Situated ethics and 'critical reflexivity'– on-going considerations and the ethics of everyday moments.
  (Horton 2001; Ebrahim 2010).

Empowerment, young people and health

- Close-focused 'ethnographic' enquiry on empowerment and young people's health (Spencer 2013).

- Young people aged 15-16 years old (n=55):
  - Purposive sample based on age, gender and social position (based on school cohort system).

- Data collected through focus groups, in-depth interviews and participant observation over a period of 6 months.

- Field work sites included the school and surrounding community settings – local parks, town centre, music and sports events, roller disco, school prom.

Situated ethics and participant observation

- Building relationships – getting 'too close'?

- Standing back, or joining in?

- Breaking the rules and 'taking sides'.

- Revealing the Self?
  - Looking good – fitting in or reproducing dominant power relations?

Building relationships

- Building trust and rapport – getting 'too close'?

Kelly: When I first saw you, I felt like I knew you…like you, I felt you weren't judging me, that's why I's thought I've always known you and I can talk just talk to you…(Bronze group).

- Sharing personal stories – friendships and families.

- Aligning with different groups of young people – peer influences and potential for 'favouritism'.

Standing back, or joining in?

- School context – ambiguous position
  - Expectations from teachers
    - Issues of note-taking – 'surveillance' by teachers (and other young people).
  - Expectations from students
  - When expectations from teachers and young people conflict.

I help Aaron and Jake wash up as the lesson is nearly over. Aaron tells me not to wash up and does it himself. Later he is told off by the teacher for not doing his own washing up, but he argues back, saying that he did do it. The teacher doesn't believe him and accuses him of lying…(Field note, Healthy living lesson).

- Dancing and playing sports – young and fun, or embarrassing adult?

Breaking the rules and 'taking sides'

- Inconsistent application of school rules – fairness and injustice.

- Answering back? Challenging teachers and other adults
  - Sent out of lessons for causing 'disruption'.

- Talking and eating in class.

- The responsible adult?
  - Negotiating, or shutting down, possibilities for empowerment?

Revealing the Self? (Coffey 2002)

- Dealing with personal questions
  - Assumptions about age and my own personal opinions
  - When to correct assumptions
  - Reinforcing power relations?

- Looking good? Appearance – what (not) to wear
  - Aligning with particular groups of young people
  - Gendered surveillance processes – social events, school prom.

  The girls comment on what others are wearing and frequently look people up and down…Melissa then comments on my top and hair and asks whether I have bought a new dress for the school prom…
  (Field notes, Friday evening, 16th Birthday party).

Attending to situated ethics in research with young people

- On-going and potential unanticipated ethical considerations in participatory research – how to (not) act in the moment;

- Research Ethics Frameworks have a tendency to focus largely on the research process (i.e. informed consent, protection from harm, confidentiality and anonymity);

- Less attention to ethics as an on-going social practice (Christensen and Prout 2002).

- Possible epistemological significance of ethical moments and implications for power relations.

- Critical reflection on 'ethics in research practice' – situated ethics.
  - Development of research ethics frameworks and training.

References

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