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One More Step in Childhood Research Discovery. A Review of Doing Mental Health Research with Children and Adolescents. A Guide to Qualitative Methods

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Abstract

In “Doing mental health research with children and adolescents. A Guide to qualitative Methods” (2014), Michell O’Really and Nicola Parker present a highly practical guide to conduct qualitative research with children what extremely easy to follow. The authors show a research process step-by-step with special attention to communicative, ethical and legal issues. The guide is provided by overview of the theories, the importance of research for evidence construction, and most popular qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. In the last chapter, authors discover the successful practice of knowledge dissemination.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Childhood Studies, Mental Health Research, Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Liza Polukhina at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow for her motivated consultation and inspired atmosphere.

One More Step in Childhood Research Discovery. A Review of *Doing Mental Health Research with Children and Adolescents. A Guide to Qualitative Methods*

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In “Doing mental health research with children and adolescents. A Guide to qualitative Methods” (2014), Michelle O’Reilly and Nicola Parker present a highly practical guide to conduct qualitative research with children what extremely easy to follow. The authors show a research process step-by-step with special attention to communicative, ethical and legal issues. The guide is provided by overview of the theories, the importance of research for evidence construction, and most popular qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. In the last chapter, authors discover the successful practice of knowledge dissemination. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Childhood Studies, Mental Health Research, Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

In their book, Michelle O’Reilly and Nicola Parker present a highly practical guide to conduct qualitative research with children what extremely easy to follow. The book contains 15 chapters divided into four rather typical parts for a methodology guide: “Theory and background,” “Getting started,” “Data collection,” and “Analysis and writing-up.” The main advantage of this book is a clear and coherent systematization of the social researcher experience who apply qualitative methods. Those who planned to conduct such kind of study as the part of their master's or doctoral thesis will be happy to realistic and consistent advice of this book, which invariably leads them to a goal. Reading each chapter, one can found that the text is full of tips from practical literature review to communicating with different people participated in the research and finally strategies to dissemination new knowledge.

In the first part “Theory and background,” the authors present the main theoretical approaches, but the main argument in favor of doing a new research is its practical orientation - to collect evidence for actual social work with children and working for policy improvement. The first part provides many examples of why qualitative evidence is important for practice and policy. The authors pay special attention to the literature review, critical notes and its role for formulating an appropriate research question.

The book gives new impetus to the development of social science methodology. The thematic focus is so relevant today, because representing children’s view is focal point in the development of the childhood studies. Moreover, the authors focus on children and adolescents with specific mental issues, which may be innate or acquired during adolescence, for example, due to the consumption of drugs or alcohol. That is, subject of the study are social minorities, which because of their position in society have a low self-esteem, and their voices have not often been taken as important for the decision-making affecting their lives (Morrow & Richards, 1996). The authors explain step by step how to access children through the many layers of gatekeepers and to create a comfortable environment for children and motivate them to express their opinion, disclosing their identity. The chapter on ethics defines four key principles – autonomy, justice, beneficence and non-maleficence. Developing these issues, the authors discuss informed consent and the right to withdraw, presenting a sample assent form for young people and for their parents; power and coercion/inducement in the interview situation as well as during the communication before the data gathering; safeguarding and

debriefing, which helps to ensure that the child is comfortable when a researcher leaves him or her.

In chapters 8 and 9 there are useful tips and examples for writing a child-friendly interview guide or questionnaire and motivating children during conversation with participatory methods, including: drawings, photographs, poetry, glitter pens, emoticons, vignettes, story-telling, games and so on (p. 138). Internet methods of recruiting and data collection, which could be asynchronous and synchronous, presented in detail in chapter 11. Discussing ethical issues the authors reveal how to form a cooperative relationship with the organization where the data are gathered, and how a researcher can cope with the duality of their social roles, clinical and research. Internet data collection raises special ethic issues, including unauthorized secondary use of personal information (Zimmer 2010), confidentiality and anonymity of online data and relationship to networks that can restrict access.

The authors develop a communicative approach to the research process, focusing on issues of interpersonal interaction in different social contexts that determine the success of direct data collection and analysis. The authors see research not as the result of the closed community of academics sitting in an ivory tower, but as guided everyday communication. They describe methods that apply to collecting and analyzing data, and explore the institutional setting and how to access subjects for data collection. The authors don't overlook the micro-micro-practices and the micro-rules that determine the success of the study, which also speaks of the practical orientation of the book. For example, describing the conduct of the field, the authors note: «Remember if you have a virus then you could infect the child which may be serious if they already have a chronic condition. Regardless of how inconvenient to you or how minor your illness you should rearrange data collection when you are feeling better» (p. 97).

Along with the many advantages of this book, the methods could be more fundamentally classified. For example, in the section on observation there are only four types, and it is not quite clear what the bases of the classifications are. Perhaps it would be better to give some dimensions of classification, which can determine the type of observation respectively.

In spite of these minor issues that is a very inspired and useful book. The guide is easy and pleasant to read. There are a lot of tables, examples, tips, case examples, incuts with definitions of key concepts and forms of activity that visualize and illustrate the main narrative, giving a starting point for further methodological reflections. Overall, reading the book charges desire to do research, and the feeling that it must be a success. There is every reason to hope that this book will be another incentive for the development of research in the field of childhood and child development features.

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Author Note

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