

Recognising young people's expertise

This is one of the TRREEE principles guiding research with children and young people at The Open University. Projects which involve children and young people in the way research is designed and conducted can produce findings that surprise adults. When children and young people plan and undertake their own research projects, or work with adults to design research projects, children's own views and understandings of the subject of investigation are embedded in research processes. The results can mean that adults have better understandings of children and young people's experiences (Bucknall 2010) and also better understandings of the communities in which children live.

Projects involving children and young people can also challenge widely held perceptions about children's lack of competence to contribute to research. Adults can be sceptical of children and young people's abilities to contribute to, or to carry out research successfully, but this is not the Open University's approach to research with children (Link to OUR VOICES page). Key research competencies are social experience and familiarity with the issues under investigation. Children and young people's research competence can be seen as different to but not necessarily lesser than adult competence (Solberg [1996](#); Christensen and Prout [2002](#)). The unique lived experience of being a child may give added value to the conduct of research in matters which affect children.

There are many examples of children and young people showing high degrees of competence as co-researchers, carrying out research projects chosen by adults and also of research projects successfully chosen and led by children and young people of different ages and abilities (Kellett, 2010, 2011; Bucknall, 2009) Children and young people demonstrate understanding of robust research processes

including attention to ethical issues and high levels of sensitivity towards research participants. Children also select a wide range of topics to research revealing their wide and varied interests in the world. Some topics chosen may not register with an adult as being of interest whilst children and young people find them highly relevant. Engaging children and young people in the selection of research topics and the development of research questions can make research more relevant and better.

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