

Philosophy with children: facilitating children's voices on childhood

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Increasingly there is a search for participatory research methods that work to ensure children's authentic voices are heard. In this presentation we will propose that Philosophy with Children might be employed as a research method that facilitates children's participation and voice in research. Further, it may also impact positively in children's wider participation and engagement in recognising children's agency and conceptual autonomy. We will discuss the advantages of using philosophical dialogue as a method for collecting data and will also consider challenges that arise from using Philosophy with Children as a research tool. In discussing the challenges and opportunities afforded by such a method, the presentation will draw on two studies to exemplify the approach. One study explored what kind of society children want to live in, and the second is an on-going international study that aims to explore children's conceptions of child/childhood. We will also suggest that using Philosophy with Children might be considered as addressing the need for rights-based approaches to research as in affording children ownership of the dialogue it does not assume children as deficient in their capacities and it recognises children's particular perspectives on the world. In addition, we will suggest that using a philosophical approach to gathering children's views might offer a deeper insight into their thinking of and understanding about the world.

Elements of the approaches used in the study will be discussed in order to gauge the strengths and limitations of using practical philosophy as a means of gathering data in subsequent analysis. In juxtaposition to the Philosophy with Children approach discussed, we will comment briefly on the use of an alternative research method, Nominal Group Technique, which was also used in the first project. In comparing the two approaches we aim to show where Philosophy with Children may provide richer and deeper evidence when seeking children's views.

While the presentation will not share the findings of either of the projects mentioned above, the approach taken in using Philosophy with Children as a research method, relates strongly to the findings of the initial project and the goals of the Children's Voices on Childhood project.

In using Philosophy with Children, it will be proposed that, while there may be some limitations in using the approach, it takes account of children's voices in research; it affords opportunities to explore children's conceptual thinking and the application to 'real life'; it allows children to have ownership of the topic under consideration; and it potentially leads to addressing children's status in wider society.