



DAY-IN-A-LIFE' MICROETHNOGRAPHIES AND 'FAVOURITE THINGS' INTERVIEWS

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Purpose

'Day-in-a-life' microethnographies and 'favourite things' interviews are methods for documenting and understanding everyday temporalities.

These methods were carried out to:

- Form part of an ongoing qualitative longitudinal study and archive of family lives, relationships and identities
- Capture children's everyday lives, understandings and practices
- Integrate data generated from both methods into multi-media documents that will be made public with the consent of children and families

'Day in a life' microethnography

For use in a revisit of a small sample of children and their families to create a narrative of a typical day, recording daily activities whilst also capturing what is often habitual and unspoken.

To build on insights generated from early 'day in

the life' observations when the same children were approximately two years old. These early observations were part of a 'day in the life' with the children's mothers designed to capture the 'work of motherhood' making it explicit and visible. In the process we were able to pay attention to our interactions with the children present and record the dynamics created by our presence in the relationship (Thomson et al. 2010).

To repeat and adapt the early 'day in the life' method to observe seven to eight year olds, capturing the structure and tempo of their typical day at home, school and in leisure or play activities using additional creative methods to capture sound and activity.

'Favourite Things' interviews

To repeat and adapt an object-based interview originally used with the child's mother and grandmother with objects representing their past and future. Asking children to share and talk about their 'favourite things' from the past and the present as a way of capturing biographical and developmental narratives of change over time in the context of new digital and social media.

Context

The making modern mothers study began in 2005 with a diverse sample of women expecting their first child. The study interviewed women before birth and documented their preparations for the baby and then followed a subsample of case study families over the next 18 months. This longitudinal element included interviews with grandmothers and partners as well as second interviews with mothers and babies. As outlined above a second stage of the study allowed us to follow a further subsample of the families for further research involving a 'day in a life' observation with mothers and now toddlers, and repeat interviews with grandmothers organised around objects selected by the women to represent their past and future. Our third stage of research, nine years on from the initial interviews with expectant mothers, follows many changes; children have grown, families have reconstituted, the socio-economic contexts in which they live has changed and the technological resources of the researcher have evolved rapidly.

Our two innovative methods have been adapted for use with different age groups and to make the most of new technological development.

Special Ethical Concerns and Safeguarding

Researchers ascertained whether the children would like to take part in the research by presenting information in age-appropriate child-friendly language (in the form of a letter sent to the child), giving them time to discuss the research with their parents beforehand (and refuse if they do not wish to participate).

The research involves an ongoing process of informed consent renegotiated verbally at the beginning and end of each encounter and at each stage of the research process. Formal written consent was gained from both parent and child.

All the researchers on the project had to obtain criminal record clearance before they could conduct the 'day in the life' observations in school.

Approval also had to be given by both parent and head teacher for the researcher to accompany the child to school. Similarly access to after school clubs was also negotiated with parents and club leaders. Due to the process of recording, both with photographs and sound, schools and clubs were asked to notify other parents in advance of the fieldwork of the nature of the research and the plans for an online record focusing on one child's typical day.

We are currently working with media partners to enrich the modern mothers interactive website with material from interviews with children from the families. This public record of the research is negotiated with children and parents as well as researchers to ensure that all parties are happy with the way that they are represented and the degree of anonymity afforded. We are clear with all stakeholders that complete anonymity is not possible in the context of this kind of research.

In an extension of the project we are currently using the methods with young people aged 12-15, using widely available media technologies in order to create both researcher-led and young person-led multi-media documents, which will be in turn be made public with the input and consent of young people.

Which Children

We have conducted six interviews and 'day in the life' observations with children aged seven to eight. Two of these children are girls and four are boys. They come from a mix of cultural, family and socio-economic backgrounds.

Before the 'favourite things' interview parents and children were asked to choose objects in preparation for the discussion. Researchers found that meeting children prior to the interview to build rapport and get to know the child, or carrying out the interview in two parts made some children feel more comfortable and enabled interview narratives to be elicited at the child's own pace.

Children were also given the option of having a parent present in the interview, and interviews generally occurred where the child felt comfortable sometimes in the child's bedroom, moving into other rooms of the house.

Some children were able to talk confidently about their objects, and articulate some quite complicated thinking about their sense of change over time. In cases where this felt more difficult the researcher shifted focus to the observance of play, non-verbal forms of communication and engaging in sharing activities (such as listening to music, or play) as a way of eliciting what is and was important to the child. These adaptive methods can also be applied to disabled children where verbal communication is limited.

As parents and researchers were already familiar with the 'day in the life' approach they could show and tell children what was involved.

Where children were happy to choose a school day for the observation we negotiated access with head and class teachers, following children over as much of the day as possible.

Who Carried Out the Research Using this Method

The research was carried out by a team of four researchers, all of whom have extensive experience in researching with children and young people of all ages, including disabled children.



The methods could also be adapted for use in child play therapy, personal and social education, advocacy and direct consultation with children and young people about their everyday lives (including disabled children and young people).

Some skill or experience in observing children and working with a range of communication methods would be recommended. Emphasis is on the researchers' capacity for creativity and adaption in relation to the child's age, understanding and communication. Ability to work with a range of audio-visual methods (photographs, audio recordings) is essential, as is ability to write clear and detailed reflective field notes which are also valuable for picking up non-verbal observation data and capturing the emotional dynamic within the interview.

Materials Needed and Qualities of the Setting

- It is desirable that the child is comfortable and familiar with both the setting for the 'favourite things' interview and the 'day in the life'
- It is desirable, although not always possible, for the 'favourite things' interview to be carried out in a relatively quiet and private space within the home. Researchers may need to consider how they would negotiate the presence of siblings and other family members if they felt it would disrupt the interview
- It is desirable to negotiate consent with all gatekeepers to follow the child for as much of the day as possible in both home and school
- Ideally the researcher would have access to a range of recording devices. An audio recorder and a camera to record the 'favourite things' interview and short samples of sound and photographs for the 'day in the life'

Application of Method, Including Involvement of Children in the Research Process

In our research children were encouraged to present objects within the 'favourite things' interview and narrate them (as above). Whilst it may be possible for young children to collate and record images of their 'favourite things' (for example on camera phones or Ipad as many were doing anyway) we would suggest that the process of eliciting or recording narratives and observations would need to be made with a researcher.

In the 'day in the life' interviews researchers concentrated primarily on observation, using photographs as aides-memoires and, as a new development, collecting sound recordings including both the ambient sounds of particular settings (such as streets and classrooms), specific sound effects (such as the school bell and electric pencil sharpener) and recording accounts; for example a guided tour of the playground and children's descriptions of particular school practices. In addition children were also encouraged to participate by engaging in a shared project of noticing and recording sound and prompting photographs of different objects or scenes. These three sources (sound recordings, field notes and images) are integrated into the multi-media documents that will be made public with the consent of children and families.

In addition children and their parents will take part in a final feedback interview where segments of data from the 'favourite things' interview and the 'day in the life' will be presented in a workbook format. Children's responses to what we recorded would then become part of the analysis and interpretation of data.

Time Needed

For each 'favourite thing' interview we would recommend a two-hour visit, preferably with additional time allowed to meet the child and build rapport if necessary. Following the interview we would suggest the researcher allows approximately two hours for the detailed record of field notes.

For each 'day in the life' where possible we would suggest spending a whole day with the child from the



point of sitting down to breakfast to the evening just after dinner. This enables the researcher to capture the full structure of the day. Following the 'day in the life' we would suggest the researcher allows approximately three to four hours for the detailed record of field notes.

How to/ The Process of Conducting the Research and Using the Information

'Favourite Things' Interview

1. Design your interview schedule.
2. Source appropriate audio visual equipment to record and photograph.
3. Pilot interview schedule and activity.
4. Send introductory letter to child and family inviting them to select favourite objects in advance of interview.
5. Talk through with child and parents the purpose of the project, the online website and issues of consent, confidentiality and anonymity.
6. Ask the child to show you round his/ her bedroom and the location of favourite objects.
7. Ask the child to select one or more objects for discussion from the past or the present – maximum 5 objects (approx. 5-10 minutes).
8. Encourage the child to show you how the object/s from the past works, and reflect on how they would have played with the object, when they would have played with it, where and with whom (approx. 15-20 minutes).
9. Involve the child in presenting the object/s for photographing (setting up the scene) and introducing the object/s and its importance for the audio recording.
10. Encourage the child to show you how the object/s from the present works and reflect on how they play with the object, when they would play with it, where and with whom (approx. 15-20 minutes).

11. Photograph the child's room and all 'favourite thing' objects with the child's consent.
12. Field note reflections are made following the interview, including a list of photographs and their importance.
13. Transcription and analysis of audio data in conjunction with analysis of visual data.

'Day in the Life' Interview

1. Send introductory letter to child and school.
2. Arrive at the child's house for observation and recording.
3. Follow the child's typical day, recording via field notes and using photographs and sound as an aide-memoir to the day (6-8 hours).
4. Field note reflections made following the interview including a list of photographs and their importance (3-4 hours).
5. Transcription and analysis of audio data in conjunction with analysis of visual data.

Dissemination

1. Development of multi-media documents that will be made public with the consent of children and families.
2. A final feedback interview where segments of data from the 'favourite things' interview and the 'day in the life' will be presented in a workbook format.
3. Transcription and analysis of audio data in conjunction with analysis of visual data.

Reflection, Adaption and Other Applications

Children tended to choose many objects in their 'favourite things' interview and in narrating these provided rich accounts of personal change providing insights into the ways in which they perceive and mark time and processes of development.

The 'day in a life' observations proved to be an effective way of capturing the feeling and pattern of a typical day, and working with media experts we were able to create a multi-media website that animated these days.

For a case study example see: www.modernmothers.org interactive website showcasing 'day-in-a-life' microethnographies.



Photographs and field notes

"When Monica opened the door I was met by 2-and-a-half-year-old Lucien's direct eye contact. [...] Lucien immediately invited me into his play, narrating his trains. He told me that the bridge had 'collapsed' and I remarked on what a good word that was. While I played with him Monica was on her mobile to a friend and it transpired that she was setting up a visit to a drop-in group. I briefly explained what I wanted from the day – to come along with her, to see how it goes, to take pictures as we went along as aides-memoires to help me write up notes later. Monica seemed comfortable with the plan and I got my camera out to show Lucien and together we took a picture of his train set."

"The room is full of other major Lego constructions. Lucien plays with the van, shows how the interior works, the faults in

the design. While in his room we talk about play. If his friends come over they tend to play in his room. He explains that he is not the kind of boy that plays online. He is 'calm and quiet' he explains. His mum doesn't like him spending time on his Play Station and he doesn't understand why. His mum thinks that his dad becomes a kid when he plays on it. Lucien wants to stay a child, he is in no hurry to grow up. He likes to play. But adults also have freedom. They are allowed to go fast. He maps his life so far in terms of speed: starting with buses, moving on to trains and now cars. He expects that next time I see him he will be into jet fighters. I check whether this is all linked to future careers? No, it's about now. He wants to stay a kid." [field note, Lucien, favourite thing interview 2013]

References

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