



Success with your Early Years Research Project

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1 Considering your research question

Choosing an appropriate research question can be the make or break of your study. In this chapter we encourage you to consider whether your question is:

- Purposeful, with potential for a positive impact upon your own practice and, ultimately, the experience of children and families;
- In an area that really interests you;
- Ethical and morally appropriate;
- Focused – will you be able to collect data to support it?
- A question that can actually be answered.

But we also acknowledge that we do not always get all of these things right first time, and that sometimes, some way into a project, your question might need to change.



This chapter is linked to Chapter 2, as we need to not only consider what makes a suitable research question, but also why we are driven to explore that particular area. Chapter 2 looks at our motivations for choosing the topic of study and the knowledge that we are bringing to it. In this chapter we focus upon choosing a suitable research question. Does the area of research that you are considering engage and motivate you? Is there real purpose to the question that you are asking? Is the question answerable and will its answer in some way have a positive impact upon the child and their family?

A number of research texts actually overlook the formulation of the research question and go straight to approaches. It is taken as a given that you know exactly what it is that you are looking for. In reality finding a suitable question is an extremely problematic stage during research design. The formulation of an appropriate question is vital, and unfortunately this is something that can often be done hastily. The result



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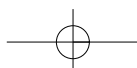
of this can be that when the student begins to collect (or worse still, to analyse) the data, they realise that they are unable to actually answer their original research question. In this chapter we look at a number of ways of avoiding this outcome.

Choosing a research question is inextricably linked to your choice of research approach, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. If you believe that there are definite answers out there to be found, then you will take a positivist approach to your research question. An example of this would be: 'What is the best way to teach counting in the early years?'. This suggests that there is one best way of teaching counting to be found and that numbers (or test results) can prove that. Of course, such a question precludes individual preferences and the huge range of contextual factors that can influence any given situation. As early years practitioners we tend, in general, to take a more non-positivist approach. Such an approach does not assume that there is one 'answer' which fits all situations, but that there is a whole range of views and opinions. This does not mean that we should not ask such questions, but that we should ask a question in a way that allows for variance and flexibility. So, in order to change the positivist question above to a non-positivist approach, a researcher might ask: 'What are some effective approaches to teaching counting in the early years?'. This approach allows a range of different possibilities and viewpoints to be explored.

At the heart of our question should be a desire to change things through expanding and deepening our knowledge and understanding. In McNiff's (2010) approach to action research she takes this one step further and specifies that the change should not be in 'things', but in us. Our desire should be to improve our own practice. The non-positivist type of question above has a number of benefits: the first is that it allows for variation in views and experiences within responses; and the second is it provides opportunity to value the views of the range of colleagues that the researcher might be working with. Reverend Astley (2011) highlighted the importance of us, as researchers, really *listening*. By sincerely doing this, as you seek to understand the other, it validates and honours their perspective. He adds that you give the gift of not only being heard but understood. By asking for the thoughts and feelings of others we are demanding a great deal, so we should remain aware of the responsibility that we have to value these.

Rather than seek a narrow answer, early years researchers will often collate a range of ideas and approaches from their research participants and use careful consideration of these to develop their own understanding and their own *practice*. In this way they use the data that they collect to construct a fuller understanding, this approach is known as a *constructivist* approach.

There is a range of questions to consider when deciding on the focus for your research, these include:



- Is it **ethical**? Or is there any possibility of it invading privacy or causing offence?
- Is it **purposeful** in that it will improve your understanding or your practice?
- Is it **specific and focused** enough for a small-scale project?
- Can the question that you have formulated **actually be answered**?

Although these may appear to be quite obvious elements, it is extremely rare for an initial question to effectively encompass them all. This is where the importance of discussing your question comes in. It is useful to discuss your question with peers; it is important that you discuss it with your tutor; but it is vital that you discuss it with your colleagues within the setting. Only by doing this can you be sure of the ethicality and purposefulness of your research.

It is normal for your research question to change as you develop a greater understanding of the area that you are looking into, but it is essential to establish a workable research question up front, so that you have 'a firm starting point for your research journey' (McNiff, 2010: 79). So, although you never know what obstacles you may face upon the way, or how your course may change, you need a clear view of the direction in which you are heading. Considering the points above will help with this. We will consider each of the areas in turn.

Ethicality

The ethical issue may appear to be quite a straightforward one, but students can often be unaware that their question could cause offence to someone or could be deemed obtrusive. For example, many students are very interested in parenting approaches. Dealing with problem behaviour, the frequency with which parents read with children and how much the child is allowed to use electronic games at home are the types of areas that students have brought to me as potential research areas in the past. Although there is no denying that these are really fascinating topics, there are two problems. The first, as Flick (2011: 23) points out, is that 'Answering the research question should lead to some sort of progress' which I am not convinced would be the case with the above topics. The second is that they are an ethical quagmire in terms of making judgements about parenting skills. When Roberts-Holmes (2011: 28) asks the question 'What do I want to change by doing my research?' the focus should always be upon our own, or our setting's, improvement; we should not have changing the practices of others as our main priority. This is neither ethical nor achievable. As early years practitioners, our focus should be on our practice within the setting, and interaction with parents within the setting can be a facet of that, but it is not appropriate for us to delve into what happens in the private, family home.



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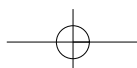
When considering a question, you should ask yourself 'What will it be helpful to find out more about, whose views would it be useful to hear, and how could this knowledge have a positive impact upon practices within their setting?'. So instead of 'How often does the average parent listen to their child read and how is that related to the child's progress in reading?', we could ask: 'How can our setting positively promote sharing story books as a fun and bonding activity for parents and children?'. The focus changes from what parents do, to what we can do to support children and their families.

In the earlier examples there is also the problem of the researcher appearing to 'judge' what others do. This is another ethical trap which should be avoided within your research. Finding out from people is very different to making judgements about people. The whole concept of practitioner research is for us to learn more about the practice in which we are developing our professionalism. Research should not be used as an excuse to stand in judgement of others, but to find out as much as possible about their reasons, motivations and restrictions, and by doing so attempt to find ways to negotiate these issues within our own practice. Seeking the views of colleagues in your setting on your research area will hopefully prevent this pitfall. MacNaughton et al. (2001: 3) state that:

The best research will always involve close, ongoing collaboration between those who plan the research, those who carry it out, those who participate in it and those for whom the results have an impact.

Respect for those involved in your research is paramount. There is a strong intrinsic motivation when first embarking on research to want to find out if something is being done 'properly'. But does anyone really have the final say on what 'properly' is? One person's view on using the outdoors 'properly' is very different to the next person's. It is for this reason that terms such as 'How well is...?' or 'How effectively are...?' should be avoided, as we are really not in a position to answer such queries with any validity. Silverman (2000: 198) presents a beautifully tongue-in-cheek picture of this approach, whereby 'Under the remit of divine orthodoxy, the social scientist is transformed into philosopher-king (or queen) who can always see through people's claims and know better than they do'. This approach should be avoided at all costs. What is far more appropriate is to collate the views of others on areas that we are interested in and to explore these views, as it is likely that colleagues with greater experience in such situations will have a very different perception of the circumstances to you. It is important that you gain as much as possible from the extensive knowledge of *practice* that your colleagues in settings have, and reflect on this in relation to the *theory* that you have acquired.

The type of questions that students decide to research will often be along the lines of 'How well is cultural diversity celebrated in nursery?'. In order to eliminate the implication of judgement on the part of the



researcher it is useful to add that this is from a certain perspective, practitioners or parents for example. Or if the plan is to gather empirical evidence then something like 'How can cultural diversity be celebrated in nursery?' would take the stance of a more appreciative inquiry, looking for examples of good practice rather than assessing effectiveness. This would be ideal to carry out in collaboration *with*, as opposed to *on* your setting. Finally, a question like 'What approaches are taken to celebrating cultural diversity in nursery ... and what barriers still exist' indicates that the researcher is looking for positive examples but is aware that there are still areas for improvement. This provides a challenge for the researcher to use their evidence to consider the ways in which these barriers could be overcome.

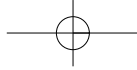


Ethicality has far more to it than just permission letters, as you will find in Chapter 3. It is all about the stance that we take when we carry out our research – and that starts with the formulation of the research question. It is important that we approach a study with humility and with the desire to learn from the experience, skills, knowledge and understanding of others. How will you make sure that your research question reflects such an approach?

Purpose

All of the studies that we look at in the course of this book have a very clear purpose in terms of the writers' own development. They sit very well within Roberts-Holmes' (2011: 29) advice to 'Be selfish' and 'Choose a topic which will be of benefit to your career'. They are both meaningful and worthwhile. Unfortunately some areas, as I've already mentioned, although very interesting, do not have such potential for impacting upon practice. One example that students are often attracted to, is healthy eating. This is another area where there is a tendency to make judgements about parenting skills, as it all too often falls into the 'monitoring what is in children's lunch boxes' approach. It is really important to remember that the focus of any study should be to provide us with an opportunity to improve our own practice and consider how we can improve the experience for children in our care. MacNaughton et al. (2001: 15) suggest that by ensuring that we undertake meaningful research 'it has some chance of making a difference to how we understand and practice our work with young children'. Monitoring the number of parents who provide unhealthy lunchboxes is not a way to do this.

Of course this topic, like most, could be made purposeful with the right approach. An important aspect of this process is to see 'what others have said and done in your area' (Roberts-Holmes, 2011: 31) through reading. As Roberts-Holmes (2011) points out, your focus could very well alter on



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consideration of existing viewpoints and discussion with others. As a result of her studies one student reasoned that her day-care nursery was providing their children with the vast majority of their nutrition for the day, and because of this she wanted to research healthy eating in order to provide the children with the best diet possible. This time there was no judgement of parents involved, just a desire to improve practice within the setting for the best outcomes of the child. She made the topic of healthy eating purposeful to her practice.

Already I hope you are beginning to see what is needed to make a research question as clear, focused and 'answerable' as it can possibly be. Cohen et al. (2007: 81) refer to this as *operationalisation*, whereby a general idea is translated into a 'specific, concrete question to which specific, concrete answers can be given'. Flick (2011) suggests that in order to test the appropriateness of a research question one should consider what possible answers to it might look like. If the question can be answered with 'very' or 'not very' then it probably needs slight rewording. Openings such as 'In what ways ...?' or 'What are some of the approaches to/benefits of ...?' give far greater scope for exploration and are far more meaningful.

Specificity and focus

Another difficulty when developing a research question is making sure that you are able to answer the question within the limitations of a very small-scale study. For example, many students are interested in the topic of using the outdoor area within early years. This often results in questions along the lines of: 'What benefits are there to using the outdoor area within the early years?'. Of course this is a vast topic and would result in a very superficial study if the student attempted to answer the question as it stands. MacNaughton et al. (2001) suggest that after thinking of a broad topic you should then divide it into sub-areas. Within those sub-areas there will be those factors that interest you more than others and those that are more meaningful than others. By doing this, less suitable areas can then be eliminated and an area can be chosen to look at in depth. Some examples of more specific questions that could be asked within the topic of outdoor play include:

- What are parents' perceptions of the benefits of outdoor learning activities?
- How can the outdoor area be used to support language development/numeracy skills?
- What are some of the ways that the outdoor area can support the development of social skills?
- What are children's perceptions of learning activities outdoors?

All of these questions could be specific and purposeful, but only if they are suitable for the context in which they are taking place. It could be that you



have noticed that parents at a setting have misconceptions of the value of learning activities outdoors, meaning that they are reluctant for their children to participate. Without discovering what the perceptions of the parents actually are, the setting would not be able to provide them with the necessary information to tackle those misconceptions. It may be that you have noticed that children who are struggling with their communication (or numeracy) skills become less inhibited when involved in activities outdoors. How could this sense of freedom be used to maximise their development? And so on. I hope you see that by making the question more specific it can more directly relate to the needs of individual settings and their children and families. Mukherji and Albon (2010) urge students to discuss their areas of research interest with colleagues within the setting to see if they are able to pinpoint a specific area that needs further development. The more valuable and purposeful the research is to the setting, the more support you will gain in carrying it out.

One of the many reasons that the studies chosen for use in this book were successful was because there was a very specific focus and purpose to them. Harriet, for example, asks: 'How important is home corner role play to support children's social development in a culturally diverse context?'

She writes:

The intention of this project is to investigate how the 'home corner' of an early childhood setting, used for the purposes of role-play, impacts on the social development of young children. This research, presented as a case study, focuses on the 'home corner' of one predominantly multicultural early years setting in a mixed nursery and reception class of an inner city primary school. As a result of consultation with the lead practitioner of the early years setting, it became apparent that the children aged two to five years originate from various parts of the world; namely Asia, Europe and the UK and speak a combination of languages; often with English as a new or additional language. This age phase has been selected for the research sample because as Rogers and Evans (2008) indicate, the ability to engage in pretence with peers is prominent between the nursery and reception phase, also reflecting personal observation in previous experience within the field of early childhood.

In mentioning the term 'role-play' throughout this study, I refer to Hughes' Typology of Play (1996, cited in Lindon, 2001: 43) with a definition of role-play as: 'ways of exploring daily activities and actions,' alongside Featherstone and Cummings (2004) reference to role-play involving imitation and adopting the 'role' of another. By using the phrase 'home corner,' I propose

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the area dedicated to role-play in the focus setting which is resourced as a miniature domestic 'home' scene for children to play a multitude of predominantly 'family' roles. The research question also implies 'social development' as a central element of the study and for the purposes of this project, this is intended to suggest an array of social features that children acquire and use in their role-play. The EYFS (DCSF, 2008: 24) outlines one of six areas of learning and development as 'personal, social and emotional development,' referring to children in the social sense as acquiring: 'a positive sense of themselves and others; respect for others' and 'social skills,' of which a combination will be explored.

The certain emphasis of the research question on role-play and social development as well as the chosen setting to carry out the study is motivated by personal, professional, and current political issues. I have observed a variety of richly resourced role-play areas on practice in early childhood settings where children have generally appeared very enthused and engaged in such activity. With this in mind, I have always contemplated the impact that role-play has on the developing child, thus, this has stimulated my choice of research.

A further reason for focusing on children's social development for this study is due to its crucial place within children's school integration. For example, Marion (2000: 20) informs that typically a child in their first year of school is at a level where they are equipped to cope with: 'several peer relationships' and if at this age children are unable to connect with others, children may grow despondent. In this respect, social aspects of children's development appear of paramount importance to their emotional wellbeing which is of vital concern to a practitioner of the early years with children's welfare at the heart of their professional values. The importance of early social development also has a major impact on developing into future adults. This is supported by Marion (2000: 18) who argues that: 'The whole basis for young children and adults living and working together is founded on good relationships. This is clearly necessary for any successful community.' This statement advocates that positive association between individuals which ultimately requires a suitable level of social skill is a requirement for the presence of a cohesive society in which people can work alongside each other effectively.

Many students are interested in investigating role play, but Harriet included three specific criteria within her research question in order to narrow her focus. First, she specified the type of role play that she was interested in, showing her awareness that there are many different types. Secondly, she specified a certain area of development, social, rather than trying, as many students do, to look at the whole range of development. Finally, she specified the particular context (where the research is being carried out) as one which was culturally diverse. Not only does this enable Harriet to be far more concentrated when considering the type of data that she will collect, but it also narrows down the scope of her literature review. This, as you will discover in Chapter 6, will be a huge help to her.

Although there is no necessity to list the 'aims and objectives' of a project explicitly, it is useful to clarify them implicitly, as Harriet has done. While clarifying her objectives she also clarifies her research terms, for example what she means by the 'home corner', aware that the same term can hold different meanings for different people; MacNaughton et al. (2001) state that this type of explanation is vital to any research project. Under the umbrella of role play she teases out her main areas of interest: the displacement of children entering settings from different cultures and how role play can be used to help their integration into the social customs of their new culture, as well as providing an enjoyable vehicle for them to develop their social skills and relationships with peers.

Similarly, although Emily's research study, 'A snapshot of change and policy development in one children's centre: issues for consideration', was in danger of becoming wide and unmanageable due to change and policy development being sizeable areas for discussion, she skilfully narrows down the scope by stressing that she is only observing one children's centre and for a limited range of time (in this case seven months). The concept of taking a 'snapshot' of a development, by sitting it within a limited time frame, is a useful one. By using this approach Emily is able to focus on the events of a limited period of time in depth, rather than feeling that she needs to include every eventuality within the discussion. We shall discuss Emily's approach to her research further in the next chapter.



When you decide on an area that interests you, think of its many components. For example, if you were interested in the topic of play, you might be interested in: definitions of play, parent and practitioner perceptions of play, imaginative play, role play, adult-initiated play activities, social development through play, risky play ... the list is endless. When you think that you can begin to narrow it down to one area, then begin your reading and discuss your ideas with your peers and colleagues. By reading what authors have to say about the topic and by discussing it with others, specific points of importance and areas suitable for further investigation will begin to crystallise.

Can it be answered?

Roberts-Holmes (2011) suggests that you should 'think passionately with your heart and strategically with your head' when designing your research. Make sure that it is something that excites you, but make it manageable. I have lost count of the number of times that I have had to point out to students that their question cannot actually be answered. Some examples are below; see if you can work out what makes the questions impossible to answer with any validity:

- How important is superhero role play in boys' development?
- What influence does a daily exercise programme have on children's ability to learn?
- Which is more beneficial for children's development – free-flow play or structured activities?

There is a link between all of these questions, and that is the concept of development. How easy is it to measure a child's 'development' within a short period of time? This is a somewhat ethereal concept comprising numerous factors encompassing the child's physical, social, emotional and conceptual development. Speech, cognition, emotional awareness and dexterity are all a part of this. All of these questions imply that the researcher will be able to somehow measure the impact of their particular area of interest upon the child's development. Of course, this is impossible due to the numerous variables which impact upon a child from day to day. It may help to specify the area of development that you are focusing upon. But then consider this, if, for example, you chose to focus upon the social development aspect of boys' superhero role play, would the role play be the only interaction influencing the child during a 'typical' day? There are so many other interactions that the child encounters, with parents, practitioners and peers, it would be foolhardy to suggest that just one aspect of that were influencing the child's development. The other problematic aspect that all of these questions embed is that they all involve numerous variables. It is difficult for scientists within laboratory conditions to 'prove' cause and effect, because there are always anomalies, it is all but impossible for a student to do so within a setting. All of these questions could be reworded to produce something that is closer to being answerable, here is an example:

- In what ways can superhero role play aid boys' social development?

Rewording this question has done two things: it has removed the notion of measurement (how important) and opened up the scope for seeking out positive examples. The researcher would still need to clarify that they were not attempting to present *all* of the ways that superhero role play might benefit boys, just those that they had observed or been made aware of through discussions. Another important action that the rewording has done is to narrow the area of development down to the 'social'. This means that the researcher can be far more specific in their literature

review, observations and data-gathering. As it happens I still discouraged one student from pursuing this area of interest because of the very simple reason that it would be extremely difficult to collect any empirical data (you will find out more about types of data in Chapter 6). Although she could have reviewed literature and asked for the opinions of colleagues, she was not guaranteed to collate any further (observational) data without manufacturing a situation. What if the child/ren chose not to partake in superhero role play during her two weeks of observation? Would she tell them to do it? And then would that still be role play? This was a case where the question was actually a little too specific, and asking something more open-ended, such as 'What types of role play do boys engage in and how could these be used to support their social development?', may have been more beneficial. Can you see any way of making the other two questions more answerable?

Flick (2011: 24) states that 'research questions define not only what to study and how, but also which aspects of an issue remain excluded'. If it is not specifically mentioned within your question, then there is no necessity for you to cover it. Do not be tempted to take the 'kitchen sink' approach to research where you want to record everything of interest. Keep focused on your specific question and you will be able to explore it in depth, asking 'how' and 'why' questions rather than superficially presenting a breadth of information.

Can I change my question?

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, at the outset of any journey it is helpful to have a fixed destination (McNiff, 2010), especially if your time is limited. Consulting literature and asking others' advice, particularly that of your colleagues, will help you to pinpoint the direction that you would like your research to take. Starting your research with a clear question will help you to achieve your goal within the set time. It will not eliminate all obstacles in your path, and it may have to be changed slightly, but it will give you a firm starting point.

MacNaughton et al. (2001: 9) comment that we need to be aware 'that sometimes the question that we start off with isn't the question that we end up researching, and that's okay'. Leanne certainly found this to be the case. She discovered that her focus of interest gradually altered during the course of her study. In her abstract she says:

This independent study tells the story of an investigation that I carried out in my setting related to child initiated learning. I discuss why I believe child initiated learning is important in a reception class. I focus on the views of practitioners and children

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in the setting and compare these with current policy and relevant literature.

Research question

How can I improve my knowledge of child initiated learning and feel more confident facilitating it in a reception class?

When carrying out this study I originally had two aims:

- To improve my own knowledge and understanding of child initiated learning
- To develop more confidence to facilitate it in the classroom by listening to the views of colleagues, children and relevant literature.

As the study developed my focus changed to:

- How can staff ensure that they provide time for observations to be carried out on a regular basis in order to inform planning and 'tune into' children's interests?
- Can early years practitioners initiate change and improve outcomes for children through a work based inquiry?

It is not until near the end of the study that we find out why Leanne changed the focus of her study, but it is clear through her final bullet point that the process of carrying out a piece of research has been instrumental in transforming her views. At points throughout her study Leanne has included reflections on the sections that have gone before. After analysing her data she reflects on what she has learned through that process. She says:

Reflection part 2

This section of my inquiry reflects on the process by explaining what I learnt both personally and professionally about my issue after gaining insight from other practitioners and children. Swozdiak-Myers (2007) informs us that reflections are influenced by individual philosophy and personal beliefs. These principles are what prompted me to investigate this issue at the beginning. The study has enabled me to create a story based on real life ongoing practice. This has been enhanced because others have been able to participate in my study.

This inquiry has improved my understanding by making me aware that there are three types of child initiated activity and that self directed learning is associated with children showing

interest, having ownership, choice and engagement in activities to enhance their learning and development. Looking at it from the lens of my colleagues has highlighted that we need to have a meeting to discuss and make all practitioners aware of the different forms of child initiated learning.

Space and time for interesting and fun activities should be provided in order to facilitate self directed learning. Carrying out regular observations provides vital opportunities to observe children's interests and cater for their individual needs. Appleby and Andrews (2012) say that reflective thinking leads to reflective learning. By reflecting on this issue, reading the literature and looking at it from my colleagues' lens I have discovered that we do not observe enough. Other practitioners share the same view. As a team we need to decide what reflective action needs to take place in order to make improvements.

I have learnt that the balance of child initiated activities depends on the practitioners' pedagogical approach which changes depending on the context, child and staff. Therefore when I am in my role as a teacher I will need to use my own judgement and knowledge of each child to assess the children's individual needs from observations. This will give me more confidence in deciding what the appropriate balance should be. Discussions with colleagues enabled me to learn from their advice and experience. My study kept evolving, McNiff and Whitehead (2009) point out that my research question and thinking will be refined as my analysis deepens due to reading, reflection and discussion. After evaluating my issue from different lenses the focus has changed to:

How can staff ensure that they provide time for observations to be carried out on a regular basis?

This demonstrates that my story is ongoing. This research inquiry has generated more questions that can lead to more investigations being carried out to further improve aspects of practice.

We often fail to make clear to students that with research you are venturing into the unknown; as McNiff (2011) has stressed, we are not travelling toward a set end-point, but stepping off a cliff and seeing what happens. And this is what should make it exciting, because each and every piece of research is unique; there are no right or wrong answers. Moustakas (1994: 65) comments that 'No scientific discovery is ever complete' and adds that 'The beauty of knowledge and discovery is that it keeps us forever awake, alive, and connected with what is and with what matters in life'. Leanne certainly demonstrates this connectedness in her research.

Key points from the chapter

It is likely that your time dedicated to your research project will expire long before your research journey seems 'complete'; as any good research should leave you brimming with new questions. But I cannot reiterate enough that time dedicated to an achievable research question before you set off on your journey will be time well spent. Have a look at the questions below, which comprise the titles of the studies explored in this text. Consider how far your thinking has moved on during the course of your engagement with this chapter, and see if you could have improved upon any of these questions.

- How well are children's needs met in hospital? (Catherine)
- How important is home corner role play to support children's social development in a culturally diverse context? (Harriet)
- Understanding the development of literacy skills within the early years – the creation of a supporting setting/parent partnership documentation. (Samantha)
- A snapshot of change and policy development in one children's centre: issues for consideration. (Emily)
- An investigation into working in partnership with parents and involving them in shaping services within a Sure Start children's centre. (Nikki)
- How can I improve my knowledge of child initiated learning and feel more confident facilitating it in a reception class? (Leanne)

Further reading

Flick, U. (2011) *Introducing Research Methodology. A Beginner's Guide to Doing a Research Project*. London: Sage.

Flick discusses how looking forward to the types of data that we might collect can help us to consider the appropriateness of our research question.

McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2011) *All You Need to Know about Action Research*. 2nd edn. London: Sage.

McNiff and Whitehead encourage us to see our questions as open ended and as a means of discovering future areas of research.

MacNaughton, G., Rolfe, S.A. and Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2001) *Doing Early Childhood Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

MacNaughton et al. encourage us to consider the impact that our research might have upon the settings within which we are working.