

Literature Review on Research Methods Used by Youth¹

1. Qualitative/Ethnographic Methods

- Qualitative methods encourage exploration and generally refrain from a priori judgments. As a result, youth bring a fresh perspective to interpretation of findings. Qualitative research offers an advantage of personalizing the research process, but only if evaluators are empathetic.
- Ethnographic research offers youth the benefits of addressing themes of diversity and learning about diverse cultures within their communities. As a result, ethnographic research can incorporate a range of educational and social goals. Ethnographic tools such as the use of participant observations, dialogue journals, and oral histories can become effective vehicles for youth to transmit knowledge

2. Key Informant/Systematic use of an expert judgment method

- The use of key informants offers the researcher flexibility in conceptualizing who is to be considered a key informant on the subject content being studied. Key informants are often individuals who are exemplary within a community and therefore wield influence in shaping opinions. These individuals are important to involve in a research study because of their influence to demand change once results are reached. This method is relatively low in labor-intensive to implement. Furthermore, it provides youth with an immense degree of latitude in determining with whom they feel best matched in conducting interviews. This method allows youth to develop a clear set of criteria of who should be included in their study.

The YTF used this method before when they worked with community committee members. Through the community committee members, the YTF was able to learn more about the bigger projects that were being undertaken to improve nutrition and physical activity in the community. They were able to exchange ideas and the YTF worked on projects that contributed data to the bigger projects of the community committees.

¹ Delgado, Melvin. *Designs and Methods for Youth-Led Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2006.

3. Focus Groups

- Focus groups are in-depth, qualitative interview with a small number of carefully selected participants. Unlike the one-way flow of information in a one-to-one interview, focus groups generate data through the give and take of a group discussion. It allows people to share what they think and why they think the way they do. Focus groups with youth, and led by youth, can generate perspectives often missed with a one-to-one method. Focus groups do not need to be formal. By allowing the youth participants to eat or move around a bit will make them more comfortable.

The YTF conducted focus groups in their 2006-2007 project “Food on Wheels”. Focus groups allowed them to get more in-depth information about the reasons behind the nutrition and physical activity choices of students. Through focus groups the YTF was able to learn about the circumstances each student is in, their likes and dislikes, their thoughts about health, and how all these things contributed to their purchases at canteen trucks.

4. Community Mapping

- Community mapping serves four goals: to understand the physical, sociological, and cultural aspects and values of the human world; to identify the areas that exhibit a degree of unity; to explain why things are where they are; and to identify points of strategic opportunity for positive social action and policy development. Mapping can offer a wealth of information for youth and their communities. Youth are provided with an opportunity to see their community through a different set of lenses—one that stresses assets rather than deficits or vice versa.

The YTF used this method various times. In their project “Where and Why are Youth Eating Fast Food”, community mapping provided a visual of the number of fast food restaurants near the schools and the proximity of fast food restaurants to the schools. Having this map contributed to the YTF’s understanding of why youth ate fast food so often. The Corner Store Project made use of this method by scouting out all the corner stores near schools in order to observe the purchases of middle school students. The YTF also used community mapping in their 2008-2009 project “There’s Always After School...” when they scouted out all the playgrounds near the after school programs that the students might use for physical activity.

5. Delphi Technique

- The Delphi Technique stresses participation across a wide spectrum of people. It does not require face-to-face contact and takes into account a range of factors, such as funding, timing, age of participant, and communication abilities. It serves as an excellent initial step in helping to develop a focused research agenda with specific questions.

6. Surveys

- Surveys allow youth to tap into the voices of community residents, youth as well as adults. The Great Lakes Epicenter put forth a set of nine recommendations for using the survey research method:
 - i. Keep the questionnaire as simple as possible as far as reading level, defining terms, and avoid technical terms and abbreviations.
 - ii. Make the questionnaire easy to code.
 - iii. Start out with a few lead questions to give the participant to feel more comfortable.
 - iv. Collect the needed information only and keep it as short as possible.
 - v. Don't expect the participant to recall information from a previous question.
 - vi. Make the questions as clear and specific as possible.
 - vii. Have the questions follow a logical flow, going from general to more specific and grouping like questions together.
 - viii. If possible, derive the survey from other surveys that have already been tested, used, and validated to save yourself some work and also allowing later comparisons to other groups.
 - ix. In multiple choice questions, always offer exhaustive options including "no opinion" or "don't know."

Surveys are another method that has been used various times for YTF projects. They were used in "Where and Why are Youth Eating Fast Food", "Hey, How do You Feel About Physical Education", and "What You Do Starts in the Middle". Surveys allowed the YTF to gather the information they wanted to know quickly. The surveys were succinct and to the point, which made them easy to fill out, and made the data that was collected easy to organize.