

# Chapter 1: Case Studies

## **Case Study – Refining Your Question**

Sandra, an education studies and psychology undergraduate, completed her research proposal form and took it to her dissertation supervisor for discussion. The form stated that the theme of Sandra's dissertation would be children with special educational needs (SEN). Sandra's supervisor pointed out that this was a truly colossal area of enquiry and that Sandra would need to sharpen her focus in order to develop a project that would be achievable given the time and resources at her disposal. After further discussion over the subsequent fortnight Sandra eventually decided on the following, much more specific and manageable title, 'ADHD: A case of atypical child development'.

# Chapter 1: Checklists

## **Checklist – Evaluating Web Materials**

Look for clues to the worth or relevance of web materials:

- Are you looking at personal web pages offering opinion pieces? A person's name/nickname in the URL could be a clue.
- Are you looking at a commercial site? Could they be trying to sell you something and might this affect the content of the site?
- Is the author/organization identified and contactable?
- Has the author/organization produced other materials in this or other media?
- Are you looking at material from recognized and generally more respected domains? Codes such as gov, org and edu in the URL could be a clue.
- Are the country codes in the URL appropriate for your purposes?
- When was the site/material last updated?
- Are there any links to other sites or corroborating materials?

## Checklist – Research Risk Assessment/Safety Check

1. Will your data collection take place on campus?  
☐ Yes (**Answer question 5 only**)  
☐ No (**Complete all questions**)
2. Where will the data collection take place? (**Tick as many as apply if data collection will take place in multiple venues**)  
☐ Own house/flat  
☐ Residence of participant  
☐ School  
☐ Business/voluntary organization  
☐ Public venue (e.g. youth club, church)  
☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
3. How will you travel to and from the data collection venue?  
☐ On foot  
☐ By car  
☐ Public transport  
☐ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3a. If appropriate, outline how you will ensure your personal safety when travelling to and from the data-collection venue:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. If you are carrying out research off-campus, you must ensure that each time you go out to collect data you ensure that someone you trust knows where you are going (without breaching the confidentiality of your participants), how you are getting there (preferably including your travel route), when you expect to get back and what to do should you not return at the specified time. Please outline below the procedure you propose to use to do this:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Are there any potential risks to your health and well-being associated with either (a) the venue where the research will take place and/or (b) the research topic itself?  
☐ None that I am aware of  
☐ Yes (**Outline nature of potential risks below**)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

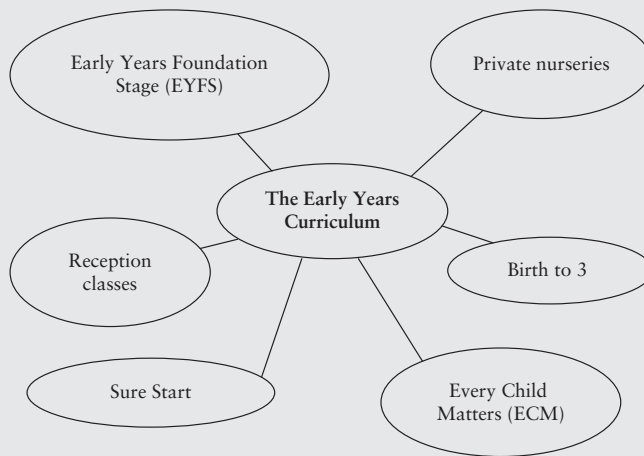
Source: Adapted from SHU, 2009a.

# Chapter 1: Ideas to Use

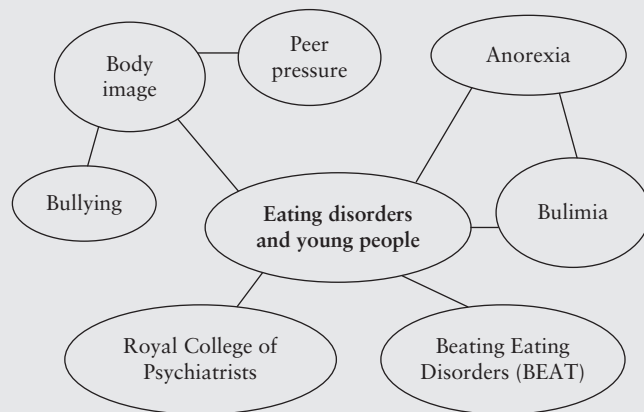
## Ideas to Use – Using Concept Mapping for Initial Searching

Concept mapping keywords, names and concepts can help you to search electronic databases and/or the internet.

### Searching for material on the Early Years curriculum



### Searching for material on body image and eating disorders



## **Ideas to Use – Simple Strategies to Make Your Dissertation Project Easier**

1. Use a word processor from the outset rather than typing up lots of handwritten notes.
2. Save your work regularly and back up your files.
3. Create a 'spare parts' file to store ideas, phrases, vocabulary and text for future use.
4. Be prepared to draft, redraft and edit; the best written dissertations have been worked on over time, crafted, amended and tinkered with.

# Chapter 1: Points to Think About

## **Points to Think About – Selecting a Topic That is Relevant**

Selecting a dissertation topic that is relevant in some way will help you to maintain the momentum over an extended period of time.

- Imran was studying to become a primary teacher. He opted to focus his dissertation on children who have English as an additional language (EAL). The choice was professionally relevant as it linked in well with ongoing national educational debates and as it might prove useful when applying for jobs.
- Mark's education studies dissertation focused on adult education in Sheffield since 1945. One of his mandatory education studies modules that year was titled 'History of Education'. His choice of dissertation had relevance in that it would allow him to make some connections between the two assignments and benefit from a potential overlap of academic sources and ideas.
- Helen's choice of dissertation theme as part of her childhood studies degree centred on the experiences of two families with children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. This was a topic dear to Helen's heart as she was the parent of a child with Down's Syndrome and had considerable first-hand experience of some of the issues that the move towards greater inclusion could throw up for children, their parents and schools.

## **Points to Think About – Research Methods**

Examples of research methods often used in undergraduate dissertations include

- questionnaires (featuring a wide range of question types including closed, open-ended, multiple choice and scaled);
- interviews (including structured, semi-structured, formal, informal, individual and group approaches);
- observations (participant and non-participant, natural and formal);
- document/content analysis.

# Chapter 1: Recommended Reading and Further Sources of Information

- Bell, J. (2014, 6th edition), *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education, Health and Social Science*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2011, 4th edition), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Greetham, B. (2009), *How to Write your Undergraduate Dissertation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Guide to Undergraduate Dissertations in the Social Sciences*. <http://www.socscidiss.bham.ac.uk/research-question.html>
- Smith, K., Todd, M. and Waldman, J. (2009), *Doing Your Undergraduate Social Science Dissertation*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Thomas, G. (2009), *How to do Your Research Project: A Guide for Students in Education and Applied Social Sciences*. London: Sage.
- Walliman, N. (2014, 2nd edition), *Your Undergraduate Dissertation: The Essential Guide for Success*. London: Sage.
- Successful Dissertations: An Introduction to the Process of Enquiry and Research*



# Chapter 1: Reflective Tasks

As a result of reading and/or experience, what broad research themes are you considering?

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For each of these what sub-themes emerge?

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What is interesting or intriguing about any of these sub-themes? What questions could be asked?

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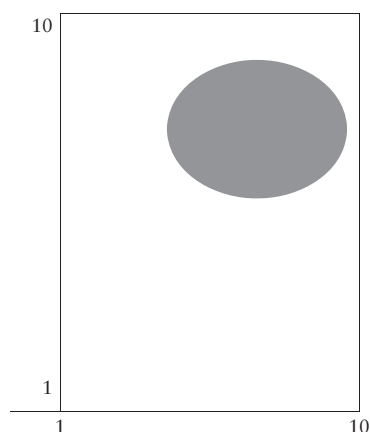
Why would answering any of these questions be of interest or use? What might be learnt/gained either by you or by others? For example:

- Is it a chance to test a theory in a real-world setting?
  - Is it an area where not much research been carried out previously?
  - Is it a chance to try out a particular methodology or data-collection methods?
  - Will it repeat a previous piece of research but in a new/different context?
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## Plot your ideas for research questions in the box

(Those that fall in the top right quadrant may offer you a better chance of success)

How realistic / manageable / practicable / feasible  
are your ideas? (10 = very; 1 = not very)



How knowledgeable about / interested in  
them are you? (10 = very; 1 = not very)

# Chapter 1: Summary of Key Points

- Dissertations are characterized by extended study and high levels of student autonomy.
- Getting your research question right is vital and it can take time to refine your original ideas down to something that is focused and manageable enough to be feasible.
- Every dissertation is unique but all will require the ability to engage in extensive reading, to deal with methodological considerations, to carry out data collection and analysis as well as drafting and editing throughout the process.
- Your dissertation supervisor is your most valuable resource, use her/him wisely.
- If you are planning fieldwork with human participants you may need to carry out a risk assessment and to take steps to ensure your safety.