

Research Development Strategies

What do you want from your research study?

Extended studies independently undertaken are a real opportunity for you to take theories and concepts learnt in a more formal way within the classroom, and use them for an area of research that they direct, creatively design and manage themselves. In many, but not all, circumstances the research can be applied to a context, or organisational environment where theories can be related to some form of practice.

What do you want from your research? Identify **three** personal or professional objectives:

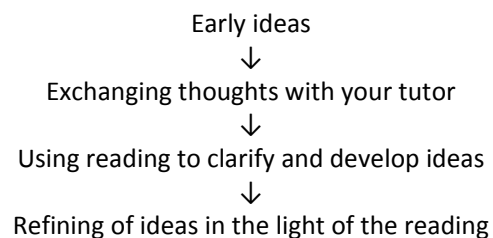
| |
|----|
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |

Task

Work with a small group of colleagues who are involved in some aspect of educational research. Using Post-It notes, identify 10 possible topics that would make a good educationally-based early years research project. Discuss each of the proposals you identify, and then, starting with what the group feels would make the best project first, stick the Post-It notes on a wall in order of priority.

Try not to start the research process with a pre-conception, from which you try to show what you think might be happening, is happening. You need to identify an area and genuinely move ahead with an **open mind** about what you might find.

It is important to bounce ideas off your tutor from the outset, to ensure that your thinking is on the right lines. This is particularly important during the early formative stages of your project as begin to translate your early ideas into some form of project plan.



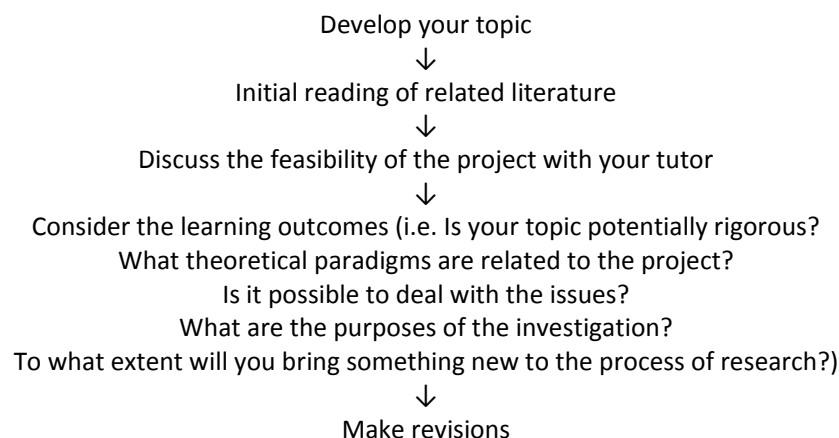
Research tips

At the very early stage of your project, **do not**:

- come up with an idea, and then assume all will be well
- fail to get to grips with the parameters of the issue by not doing any background reading
- forget that this is an educational research project that requires substantive analysis of an early years research issue
- allow your focus to be too broad, otherwise it may be difficult either to touch upon or analyse the data
- allow your focus to be too narrow, otherwise you may be searching for literature to support your analysis
- assume that the project is not going to be organic, and grow, develop and change as you work through it over the year
- fail to be flexible or fail to listen to advice
- think of something that simply describes theory rather than develops a project for analysis
- forget that the project should be focused upon theory with supporting exemplification through research methods such as a case study, rather than the other way around. Some of the worst projects that this author has marked have simply focused upon actions within organisations rather than theory itself.

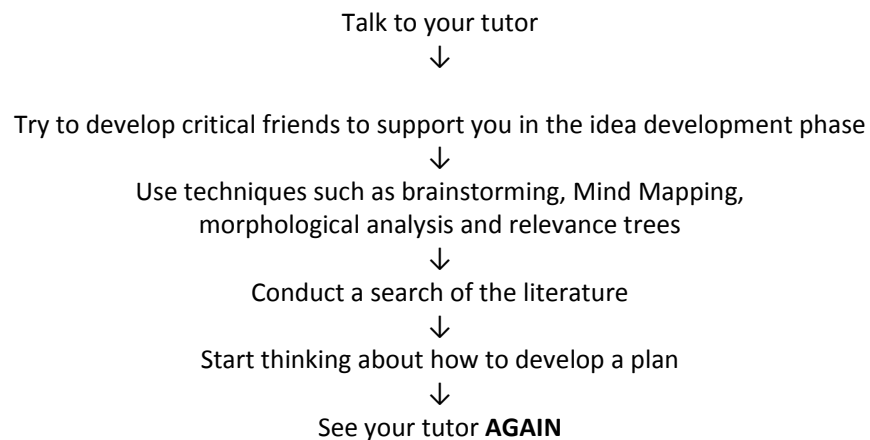
At this very early stage of your project make sure that you **do**:

- put your ideas down on paper
- discuss your ideas with other students
- use literature to identify, clarify and develop your ideas
- make sure that the literature you peruse is not only books, but also includes journal articles and the results of other research projects
- find out what sort of projects students have undertaken in the past
- try and find out what areas make good projects and what areas lead to poor projects
- think about your own needs such as what you feel might be useful for your own C.V., or areas that you are genuinely interested in, or perhaps even areas that you might not feel you are strong in and want to learn more about
- remember that, even after you have selected a topic or area of research, this might change or have to be fine-tuned as you read the literature
- think about planning your project and the timings you need for different elements
- remember that an important part of the project is your methodology and that it is necessary to refer to dialogue within these chapters as well as in other business research texts
- listen to the advice of your supervisor.



If you are completely stuck for a topic or an issue, then it may be useful for you to try to brainstorm ideas alongside friends. Diagrams can be helpful for doing this. For example, Hussey and Hussey (1997) talk about using Mind Maps as a way to 'show relationships in space or time'. A Mind Map is simply a creative form of diagram which involves jotting down various elements in a relational way to each other. It was Tony Buzan (1993) who developed Mind Maps as an efficient way of using the brain's ability for association. This notion of association plays a role in mental functions, and words themselves are no exception. The Mind Map uses every single word and idea with numerous links attaching it to other ideas and concepts.

To make a Mind Map, the starting point is in the centre of the page. The creator then works outwards in all directions, in a tree root like manner to produce an organised list. The Mind Map can be enhanced through the use of images, colour, outlining/emphasis, shapes, icons, codes, patterns, and links. This large amount of information, together with their associations, can stimulate the user to generate new ideas and associations that have not previously been thought of. They can also be used to organise and structure notes and ideas of the user.



So, what are your thoughts at this stage? Put your ideas in the box below and discuss them with your tutor.

References

Buzan, T., 1993. *The Mind Map Book*, London, Penguin.

Hussey, J. and Hussey, R., 1997. *Business Research: A Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students*, Basingstoke, Palgrave.