



The Voice of Children Initiative: Middle East Pilot 2006

Qualitative Survey Design and Methodology

This document groups the documents that formed the basis of the design and methodology used for the pilot qualitative survey conducted in Palestine in 2006:

1. Proposed Qualitative Research Methodology: Children's perspective on the impact of the school environment on their wellbeing.
2. Focus Groups – notes on methodology for the pilot qualitative survey in Palestine
3. Instructions to field workers drafted by Alpha International for Research, Polling and Informatics
4. The Focus Groups in Palestine – overview, target group and breakdown of groups held.

Proposed Qualitative Research Methodology

**Children's perspective on the impact of the school environment on their wellbeing
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Background

Within the overall vision, purpose, goals and values of UEF, surveys will be undertaken to promote education by all for the well being of children. The issue of well being is a highly complex one which touches on almost every aspect of a child's life. Given that the integrative and holistic approach to understanding the well being of children from their own perspective covers new ground, we will need to learn by experience, and build and refine our studies in a gradual and systematic way.

UEF defines well being as the actualization of the physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual potential. While UEF is working towards a deeper understanding of well being, as the surveys progress we hope to deepen and refine our definition and indicators. Researchers will be exposed to the UEF's current understanding of well being in order to be aware of parameters that may be important to ask children about. However, researchers will be trained to try to elicit material from children in the most open ended way possible so that their responses from children are minimally influenced by the paradigms with which UEF is working.

The purpose of the Voice of Children surveys:

1. To explore children's perspectives of the impact of the four learning environments (the education system, the health system, ICT and media) on their overall well being (do we want also to include the health system?)

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2. To learn from children what they believe should be emphasized and/or changed within the learning environments in order to better serve their well being.
3. To showcase the results of the surveys in ways that promotes Education by All for the Well Being of Children.
4. To develop more effective and relevant research methodology that can better engage children in soliciting their views on identifying/describing issues within the learning environment that can promote their well being.

In order to begin the research we suggest a series of pilot studies. We will do separate pilot studies for the education system and for media and ICT to provide adequate time to explore the perspective of children of the impact of each of these learning environments on their own well being.

The pilots will be designed to:

1. Provide maximum opportunity for us to learn what is on the hearts and minds of children in relation to the four (or three) learning environments.
2. Refine our concept through soliciting the views of children's well being,
3. Refine our methodologies for accessing information about the impact of the learning environments on children' well being.
4. Prioritize areas of well being that are most relevant to focus on in quantitative surveys taking into consideration the different factors such as cultures, gender, age groups and perhaps with different sectors of society.

Piloting the methodology with children in school setting:

The first Pilot study will focus on the children perspective of the impact of school environment on their well being. The pilot will focus on the following **key aspects** while conducting the Indepth interviews (individual and focus groups):

1. The overall sense of what is foreground in children hearts and minds in relation to the components/dimensions of the school environment.
2. The overall sense of what is foreground in the hearts and minds of participants in relation to the idea of well being. While working within a broad definition of well being, we will strive not to impose adult preconceptions or concepts on the research, and to be as open as possible to learning about the child's experience and understanding of well being through their own prisms.
3. The sense of the impact of the different aspects of the school environment on their own and others well being.
4. Their sense of what could be done differently within learning environments to better serve/promote their well being.
5. Their sense of the effectiveness of the methodology.

Proposed Methodology

Target groups:

The target population will be an equal number of boys and girls of 15 and 16 and if possible capture the views of (children 10 and 11 years old as they represent a critical development stage) in Ramallah who represent different types of schools (private & public sectors) and different intellectual capacities.

Methods of Indepth interviews:

1. Focus groups vs. individual interviews: It is not yet clear which will be most effective in working with ages 15 to 16 year olds or children 9-11 years old. We are concerned that focus groups may inhibit some of the participants especially dealing with sensitive issues. For example; adolescents are particularly concerned with peer opinion and we will be exploring information that can be sensitive regarding different types of feelings and experiences. It is also not clear what the impact of same gender groups or mixed gender groups will be on their responses.
2. In order to work with these questions, we will conduct two separate approaches at the first pilot :

First approach: Focus group interviews will be utilized with 8 groups of children to be selected as follows:

A. Six groups of children to be selected from private schools as follows:

- One group with male children age 11&12 years
- One group with male children age 15&16 years
- One group with female children 11&12 years
- One group with female children 15&16 years
- One mixed group (4 male and 4 female children) age 11&12 years
- One mixed group (4 male and 4 female children) 15&16 years

B. Six groups of children to be selected from public schools as follows:

- One group with male children age 11&12 years
- One group with male children age 15&16 years
- One group with female children 11&12 years
- One group with female children 15&16 years
- One mixed group (4 male and 4 female children) age 11&12 years
- One mixed group (4 male and 4 female children) 15&16 years

Second approach:

The individual child interviews. Interviews to be conducted individually with children to overcome the limitations of the peer influence that can take place utilizing the focus groups interviews.

The following children will be selected from **private** schools as follows:

- 4 boys age 10&11 years from a private school
- 4 girls age 10&11 years from a private school
- 4 boys age 15&16 years from a private school
- 4 girls age 15&16 years from a private school

The following children to be selected from government schools as follows:

- 4 boys age 10&11 years from a government school
- 4 girls age 10&11 years from a government school
- 4 boys age 15&16 years from a government school
- 4 girls age 15&16 years from a government school

The same groups will be selected from government schools in the northern districts of the West bank, four with boys and four with girls of age group . These participants will also be asked at the end of the interview about their reflections on the methodology as well as about the individual vs. group issue.

Key questions/aspects of the interviews with children

The First Part of the Interview (one hour)

1. Initially the participants will be asked in as open way as possible to sketch out the school system on a piece of paper with a request such as: “Think about your school environment, what are the different parts of it and try and draw a picture of it. The group of children will be given time to think what is in the school environment should be included in the map indicating the place, people and activities in each component. It does not have to be a realistic picture or a good drawing, just a schema of the different parts of the school environment and how they relate to each other”.

2. After each group of children finalizes the mapping exercise, the facilitator will put the map on the wall/or a stand in a way that can be shown clearly to all members of the group. The different elements of the school environment can include for instance: Teachers, class room, principal, school ground, cafeteria, breaks, classes, homework, computer room, music room, and sports ground, exams, etc. Our aim is to see what the child initially includes and excludes without being given such a list.

Then the facilitator asks children to express their feelings about the different aspects of the school environment,. This can be expressed in different ways, for example children will be given a set of emoticons, little faces with different emotions on them and different cartoon like gestures to indicate satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This will be used instead of numbers as values. The emoticons are child friendly and very familiar to children who use the internet as expressing different feelings. They will have a set of little stickers expressing different emotions and be asked to stick the emoticons that most reflect their feelings about that particular aspect of the school environment next to that aspect on the drawing. Eg: If they

feel good in the playground they can put a smiley there, if they associate it with anger they can have an angry expression there. Emoticons can have different shapes as follows:



We will try to prepare emoticons that reflect different values for the physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual well being, e.g. Physical – a little cartoon character of a figure showing different levels of physical comfort e.g. one exhausted, one energetic, one contorted, etc. 5 choices to indicate different levels of physical pleasure in that area... with question ...How does that aspect make you feel in your body (uncomfortable, tired, okay, pleasurable, great)

Emotional: facial expressions (sad, confused, frustrated, frightened, angry, happy, peaceful/satisfied)

Overall: thumbs up, thumbs down, so so, (etc.)

After putting the appropriate emoticons that reflect their choice, we can ask the following questions:

-What made you did you choose the type of emoticons for each of the components they drew on the chart/school mapping of its environmental components?

-How did this affect you?

- What are things you suggest to make this part of the school environment better for your learning, growth and well being? Or how would you like to see it different?

We will need to think of these in greater detail. The idea is to elicit a nonverbal and intuitive response - a gut reaction to the different aspects of the learning environment as a first step. Such an intuitive response will circumvent some of the usual cognitive sensors to tap into less conscious and more direct feelings. Once they have pasted these stickers onto the different aspects of their drawing, the researcher will be able to ask them questions about their choices that will bring the less conscious, intuitive responses to a more conscious articulated answer.

3. When this has been completed the participants could be asked to do another drawing of the school environment that takes into account the elements of the school that they had left out in the first drawing and give these pictures emoticons and explanations as well.

Whereas the first drawing is unguided in content regarding the different aspects of the school environment and thus reflects the most immediate or conscious picture in the minds and hearts of participants, the second picture where they are asked to include aspects left out

in the previous picture brings information about their feelings about the other dimensions of the school experience that we would otherwise not access.

The second part of the interview (one hour)

In the second part of the interview participants will be asked to close their eyes and to allow one incident that happened at school to come up in their minds and then to share that incident with the interviewer. This exercise will draw out narratives of incidents that are prominent in their minds for all sorts of reasons. By analyzing the narratives of the participants in terms of common themes and patterns we hope to be able to get a sense of some of the areas of preoccupation for the children that are worth paying attention to.

Once they have shared the story, the interviewer will ask them more specifically for incidents that reflect a full range of experiences in order to learn about what aspects of the school environment they associate with different feelings and why.

This section is thus based on stories that the children tell in response to open ended questions such as:

- ❖ What do you remember as some of the most pleasurable/rewarding incidents for you at school?
- ❖ Were there any incidents where you felt frustrated, if so what? How?
- ❖ Were there any incidents that made you scared, if so what? How?
- ❖ What do remember as some of the most meaningful/rewarding experiences at school? How?
- ❖ What are some of the incidents that made you angry? How?
- ❖ What are some of the activities at school you found most interesting or do you most look forward to? Why?
- ❖ Children can be asked if they want to add other experiences/incidents that had positive or negative impact on their overall wellbeing.

As you can see the questions have been phrased in different ways. We need to think of the most appropriate phrasing for each question. We may also need to prioritize and choose only a few out of all of these questions.

The third part of the interview related to children perception on the methodology (30 minutes):

After the interview about the impact of the school environment on the well being of children, the children will be asked questions on the methodology of the interview itself.

The children will be explained the purpose of the whole interview process within the context of UEF and asked to help us think how we can access the information that will be most effective in understanding the impact of the learning environments on children and what they think should be done differently in the educational system.

-What do think of this exercise? What did you like most about this meeting that allowed you to express your views adequately and freely?

-What things did you not like that prevented you from expressing your views freely?

-What suggestions you have so we can allow children to express their views more freely?

-What are other things to add or change to make this exercise more enjoyable?

Recording children's responses:

Two researchers will be conducting the interviews, one poses the questions and facilitate the session as ion the guidelines and the other researcher will observe and record responses, observations of children responses and dynamics. Also, the other researcher will write his/her comments on the methodology in terms of the dynamics, drawing exercise, clarity and relevance of the questions, children responses, time needed, and the Indepth of information gathered. These comments and notes will be shared with the facilitator of the interview and finalize the comments in order to be shared with the principal investigators. After such discussions, recommendations will be put forward to improve the methodology.

Audio and video taping:

This can be done after getting the approval of children and their families. It is recommended that we at least audio tape and viseo tape one session at least in order to observe the whole process for improving the methodology. This should not in anyway jeopardize the ability of children to express their views freely.

Further guidelines for the training will be prepared later to prepare the interviewers field guidelines in a more detailed and specific way.

Suggestions regarding the researchers

The survey described here is a qualitative one which touches on the inner world of the participants. One would need highly skilled interviewers who are familiar with being able to elicit information from children in empathic ways, to be able to listen actively, reflect back material and ask open ended questions, give a sense of the relevance and importance of what the participant is saying with minimally influencing the content. We suggest psychology or social work students, one male and one female with extensive experience in this type of active listening.

We suggest that the researchers will go through a training process where they will have an opportunity to practice the full interview process and receive feedback and to develop the field guidelines. They will also need to be trained in the concept of well being in order to be able to ask relevant questions that tap into the five dimensions. Further guidelines will be incorporated to ensure high quality Indepth interviews with target children.

February 2006

FOCUS GROUPS –notes on methodology for the pilot qualitative survey in Palestine

Number of FG proposed for the pilot stage:

6-8 groups

Choice of countries:

MENA pilot

Some questions to reflect on upstream:

1. What do the participants get from it? Why should they accept to participate?
2. What does the school get out of it? (if the entry point is schools)
3. Who will have access to the country reports?
4. Could extracts of the discussions be put on the web so that participants can see their participation? (see below on authorisation for recording)
5. How can young people participate in the reporting?

Groups:

1. 10-15 children / teenagers maximum (10-12 better size for interaction)
2. Need to discuss the entry point(s) for constituting the groups: schools, clubs, Foundations that work with the right age-group, other?
3. If it is via schools then the size of the group raises the question of how to constitute groups:
 - a. Half a class?
 - b. Voluntary group?
4. Age: the age suggested at the meeting in Ramallah = 14/15 years olds (grade 10) which raises questions for the organisation of the groups. Adolescence is an age when it is not always easy to work with mixed groups of boys and girls if you want them to express themselves openly. Single sex groups may not be ideal either as the gender focus may come out too strongly, or that may be desirable. It needs discussing. We could mix and have both mixed groups and single sex. We maybe need to consult someone who works with teenagers, other than teachers, on this issue (e.g. Andrew McDowell)?
5. Alternative: younger age group – end of primary??

Setting up groups and authorisations:

1. Depending on the country, if we are going through schools we will have to see if direct contact with the school is possible or if it is obligatory to make official contact first through the relevant administration. For schools it is almost certain we'll need authorisation. We need to be aware of what procedures are necessary in each country.
2. Do we need parental authorisation if the meetings are recorded?
3. We will need to negotiate with the school (or other organisation) when and how the group will take place.
4. We will need official letters in all local languages presenting UEF, the purpose of the focus groups and uses to be made of the results.

Organisation of the group:

1. The organisation of the room is important so there is space where the group can sit in a circle and all see each other. What contingency plans if only classrooms are available?
2. Is there an optimal time of day? Does it matter?
3. Length of the meeting – 2 hours maximum.

Moderators:

1. 2 moderators per country who should work together as a team. They should be experienced in leading groups but do they need to have experience of leading groups of young people? On the other hand it is possible to choose moderators who are experienced in working with teenagers but not necessarily in the areas we're focusing on (youth leaders/workers).
2. It would be best if it is the same team that moderates all the focus groups in one country for continuity and coherence.
3. For each group one person leads and the other takes notes/records.
4. N.B. The contract should stipulate that all reports and material produced are the property of the UEF.
5. Question: Is the capacity to draft correctly in English a necessary condition to be a moderator, or could reports be translated?

Process Guidelines for moderators:

These will be “reminders” about moderating groups and to ensure a certain level of coherence:

1. Welcomes/introductions
2. Ensuring even participation
3. Bringing people in
4. Moving the topics forward
5. Overall length of meeting
6. Ending the meeting
7. Recording the discussion:
 - a. Should we have all the FGs recorded? Audio or video? Tapes are longer to use for reporting but it may be important to have access to what the group members said. Audio is less intrusive but the video is more evocative and has more potential after for films/use on internet. Will recording have any effect on the ease with which the group members express themselves?
 - b. Does video need a higher level of authorisation than just taking notes?

Content guidelines:

(To be drafted once the indicators decided)

Reporting:

1. We will design a common format for everyone to use

2. For each focus group – a written report following the common format in the language used in the group (+ the recorded material). These reports should be submitted within one week of the meeting.
3. Report for each country to be drafted in English. These reports to be submitted within 2 weeks of the final FG meeting.
4. The cross-country report will be drafted by the core team in English.

Reporting format:

Will depend on the content guideline but:

1. Space to note the key points/ highlights the moderators wish to emphasise
2. Should the structure of the report follow the order of the topics? We need to discuss this aspect. There are advantages in following the flow of a discussion as the introduction of new topics may be influenced by the flow of the discussion. However, for comparative purposes, following the order of the content guideline has other advantages. This is not an issue about academic methodologies but about what suits our purposes while being credible and having something which is useable.
3. Final section – suggestions of discussion points to be taken forward and/or for more exploration.

Package of documents to be prepared by the UEF:

1. Official letters in local languages requesting authorisation
2. Presentation of the UEF (paper and PDF of the leaflet + brochure)
3. Presentation of VoC (PDF leaflet)
4. Process guidelines
5. Content guidelines
6. Reporting format
7. UEF “thank you letters” for after to groups – to the schools etc and to the individual participants
8. Other?

All these documents should be available in hard copy, PDF and some of them on the UEF website.

January 2006

Instructions to field workers drafted by Alpha International for Research, Polling and Informatics

Objectives of the study: To listen to the voice of children, and their opinions of the impact of the external environment - media and the Internet – on their psychological, social and physical wellbeing, by asking the students to give their opinion of their experience in the past years of study.

This study is the first of its kind in the Arab World, a beginning in collecting data on students' opinions, in order to use that data in future studies.

Criteria of the Study:

1. To ensure a homogenous group (socially, economically, and environmentally)
2. Approval of the student and his/her family to participate
3. Neutrality of researcher towards the student's views
4. Workshop venue that is convenient for the student and conducive to his/her thought process
5. A circular workshop sitting area
6. Give enough time for the student to settle in
7. Ensuring participants' privacy, and confidentiality of information
8. Introduction of participants
9. Building confidence between the researchers participants
10. Documenting, recording, and photographing of at the initial stage of the meeting
11. Taking notes of participants' differences of opinion
12. Posting and emphasizing of the group's views on and the board by the researcher
13. The researcher writes his remarks on the methodology used in the meeting
14. 14 Writing the final and detailed report within 24 hours

The Workshop Procedure:

1. After the introduction, introductions, and confidence-building, we ask all participants as a group to define their school environment during their years of study, by drawing on paper, without any suggestions from the researcher.
2. The most important part of the drawing is the first recollection of participants, and the first thing we ask them about
3. After the group has finished drawing, the researcher hangs the paper in front the students, comments on its contents; then asks them if they have forgotten anything that they want to add (the researcher can mention examples if he/she heard participants had nothing to add, and participants may write anything they wish)
4. Then the researcher asks participants: What do the contents of the drawing mean (the environmental elements)? This may be classrooms, playgrounds, parks, teachers, evaluations, school services. In other words, how the class affects the students positively (their life, physical being, future, development, feeling of safety, self

5. All other questions follow the same pattern, positive and negative effects, pertaining to other components of the drawings.
6. The observer must pay attention to the students' body language and document it.
7. The researcher asks participants about aspects affecting the school environment, such as the study time schedule, the length of attendance, the distance they travel to their school.
8. The researcher asks participants for suggestions, requests and recommendations; what irks students in school and what they like, how it affects their lives, and how to make them happy. The idea is to understand how the student would change the school environment if he/she were the decision-maker; what he/she would add or remove.
9. The researcher asks the participants' view of the meeting: appropriate timing and length of session, if it was boring, difficult, if it was good, how it could be improved in the future, and how it could be developed.

Questions which can be used in the group:

- ✓ Meaning of school environment;
- ✓ What your school means to you;
- ✓ What you think of the school curriculum? And what you think of the school grading system;
- ✓ Students' relationships with teachers inside the school regarding a) discrimination between students, b) respect of students by teachers, c) language used by teachers;
- ✓ Whether students feel safe (physically, psychologically, and emotionally) in the home, in the school, in the street to school and the street in general;
- ✓ Whether they are satisfied with themselves? Why?
- ✓ If they were the school decision-makers, what would they do?

Qualitative survey focus groups in Palestine:

There were 12 focus groups of boys and girls each with 6 to 9 participants in the 10th grade, aged approximately 16 years old. The participants came from governmental and private single sex and mixed schools from all areas of Palestine. Each group was interviewed for approximately three to four hours.

The Focus Groups in Palestine

Overview:

Prior to starting the students' selection process, six interviewers from different psychosocial sciences backgrounds, with experience in conducting focus group interviews, were recruited and trained for one day on the methodology. Following this, the trained interviewers who were assigned different schools, then explained the purpose of the research to the school management and clarified the selection criteria. Then, the school principals allowed the interviewers to visit 10th grade classes in order to inform them about the purpose of the research. They then asked those students interested in participating in the focus groups to sign up on a voluntary basis. The first 8-10 volunteers were then considered to join the study. A final list was prepared and the students on the list were asked to solicit the permission of their parents to participate in the study. 12 focus group meetings were completed in the period from March-April 2006. The average duration of each focus group meeting was approximately three hours.

Target Population:

The study targeted 10th grade students aged 16 years attending government and private schools. Students were selected from schools distributed in different regions in the West Bank and Gaza. The criteria for selecting students for participating in focus groups included the following:

- 10th grade students in government and private schools.
- Students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Students willing and interested in participating in the study.
- As much as possible, the selection took into consideration children that have different levels of school performance.
- Approval of children's parents.

The research team decided that conducting 12 focus groups was sufficient for the purpose of piloting the qualitative study and to gain better understanding of the issues. The students who participated in the focus groups were selected from the West Bank and Gaza Strip to cover the different sectors (one focus group from private school and one from mixed private school and two from government schools in Ramallah, 3 focus groups selected from girl government and one from private schools in Tulkarm). In Gaza, five focus groups were conducted and selected as follows; two from boys, two from girls' government schools and one from mixed private school as shown in table (1).

Table (1) Distribution of focus groups by district, gender and sector.

District	Gender	Sector	# of Focus Groups
Ramallah	Male	Government	1
Ramallah	Female	Government	1
Ramallah	Mixed	Private	1
Ramallah	Female	Private	1
Total			4
Tulkarm	Female	Government	3
Tulkarm	Male	Government	1
Total			4
Gaza	Male	Government	2
Gaza	Female	Government	2
Gaza	Mixed	Private	1
Total			5
Total FG.			12