

Sound Library¹²³

Summary

In this process we use short audio recordings of local sounds to help the child communicate answers to our research question. The child listens to the sounds and selects sounds that help them answer the research question. This is a similar tool to the Photo Library however it provides audio prompts rather than visual prompts.

There is no one right way to do this process, you can be creative. The sounds are just a prompt to help the child talk or communicate about the questions. Choosing the sounds can lead to other activities that might be useful such as:

- Recording sounds of things the child wants to include or talk about,
- The child drawing or writing more about the topics of the sounds.

Equipment required

1. Audio recorder/player (with spare batteries)
2. Headphones.

Making a Sound Library

1. Think about all the areas of a child's life that are relevant to the research question. For example, consider: health, housing, play, social life (friends), family life, food and drink, education, safety, transport, holidays, work, communicating, culture, spiritual life and religion, money, animals, law and order, etc.
2. Travel around the local area and make short (e.g. 20–30 second recordings) of sounds that relate to the research question (considering a broad range of answers and areas of the child's life). Researchers or other children or adults with vision impairments are most useful in recording these sounds.
3. Organise the sounds onto an audio file (e.g. a CD, a digital audio file on a computer or iPad, or a tape).
4. Make a list of all the sounds in order. Give each sound a number and a title (e.g. 1. Cooking at home).
5. If possible, find sounds similar to local sounds on the internet. Usually, sounds recorded professionally and available on the internet are of a higher recording quality and have less disruptive background noise.

Process

1. Explain that you are going to ask some questions and that the child might like to listen to the sounds to help answer them.
2. Show them how the audio recorder/player works and demonstrate the headphones. Help them become comfortable with wearing headphones.
3. Practice use of the audio player and headphones with clearly recognisable sounds or music.

4. Ask the research question/s

- The child can answer this in any way they want, including telling you the answer. Offer the sounds as an option to help them answer. Explain that the child will hear some sounds which might make them think about the research question. Explain that the child can stop the sounds and talk about any that help them answer the research question. Go through the Sound Library slowly.
- Tell the child they can stop at any time and talk about as many sounds as they like.
- The child might like to listen to all the sounds first and identify them. The child might also want to comment on them (e.g. 'that sounds like my uncle's truck').
- You may need to repeat the question and ask the child if any of the sounds help them answer the research question.
- For each sound the child talks about, ask them to tell you about it, what it means to them, and why they have chosen it.
- Take notes of everything they tell you.
- Make a list of all the sound numbers (on your list for the Sound Library) they have chosen.
- Ask the child if they would like to listen to the sounds again. Repeat the process if they do.
- Be positive about the child's choices and what they are telling you.

Considerations

1. Ensure sounds are age appropriate. For example, a Sound Library for a teenager may be very different to a library for a five year old.
2. Ensure sounds reflect local context and experience of children.
3. Ensure equipment has sufficient power storage and is in working order.

Skills of the researcher

1. Be patient as there may be a repeated need to replay sounds.
2. Be comfortable with the technology (both recording sounds but also playing sounds and use of headphones).
3. If there isn't a researcher with a vision impairment as part of the team, consider engaging someone with a vision impairment to assist in thinking about and recording sounds.

Practice example

Luke is six years old with physical and communication impairments. As part of listening to the Sound Library, I played the music and Luke was so happy, smiling and shouting. I asked him what is the most important thing in his life and he was shouting and pointing in the direction the music was playing. The parents said he likes music since he is often left alone at the house and has nobody to talk with. Music is the only thing that makes him feel somebody is around. The music engaged him and we were able to ask the questions to which he could communicate his answers.