

Law in Children's Lives

Briefing for All Party Parliamentary Group on Public Legal Education



This briefing summarises the key findings of an exploratory study of children's understanding of law in their everyday lives.

We worked with children to create a digital game 'Adventures with Lex' as our research tool.

The game consisted of four everyday worlds; a school, a park, a shop and a friend's house.

The game gathered quantitative and qualitative data as children responded to law-related scenarios, situated in these four everyday worlds.

We conducted research with 634 children aged 8-11 years, from a range of backgrounds.

For more information see www.le.ac.uk/licl

The research was conducted by Dawn Watkins, Effie Law, Jo Barwick & Elee Kirk, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Secondary data analysis was conducted by Dawn Watkins, Nigel Balmer & Pascoe Pleasence, funded by The Legal Education Foundation.

STRONG CONCERN FOR GENDER EQUALITY

94% of children said 'No' it was not okay for only boys to be allowed on a school trip to the zoo.

Children's answers to this question not linked to gender.

LIMITED REFERENCES TO RIGHTS

Because girls have the same rights as boys - just because they are a different gender doesn't mean they should be treated any differently (Girl, Year 5)

NO REFERENCE TO UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

GOOD AWARENESS OF CONSUMER RIGHTS

64% of children would 'ask the shop keeper for my change' if not given correct change in a shop.

Because I am not going without change (Girl, Year 5)

Because it actually happened to me before and I asked for it back and they said 'Oh yes, I forgot' (Boy, Year 5)

CRIMINAL/CIVIL CONFUSION

30% of children reported that they would 'call the police' rather than ask for their change

Because he nicked my money, didn't he? He stole £4 off me (Boy, Year 5)

AWARE OF AGE OF CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY

64% of children correctly identified the age of criminal responsibility as 10 years old.

CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY MEANS PRISON

If he's over ten he will get sent to jail (Boy, Year 4)

If they are old enough, they will be taken to prison (Girl, Year 5)

UNSURE RE LIMITS OF POLICE POWER

16% of children answered that the police are allowed to hit children.

23% were unsure whether or not the police are allowed to hit them.



Children welcomed the opportunity to talk about law-related issues in this project. But they had very low expectations about their capacity to actively participate in decision-making in their day to day lives.

The government was seen as the most powerful influence on changes in school.

The head teacher was the next most powerful.

Children and their parents/carers were seen as the least powerful.

59% answered that children have no power.

Just 8.5% of children would contact the council themselves if the park was broken.

Because a child can't contact the council. (Girl, Year 4)

Because the council might not believe you and you might be a bit young to do it. (Girl, Year 5)

Because the adult won't be telling a lie, and the council might be thinking that the children might be lying. (Girl, Year 4)

4% would do nothing; *Because nobody would listen to you* (Boy, Year 5)



Where do we go from here?

Address the theory

Formulate a new, holistic theory of children's legal capability.

Create the framework

Work with children to create a framework of attributes of children's legal capability.

Work with children to create a robust pool of questions that measure all or some of these attributes.

Measure and improve through play

Work with children to create a range of game-based interventions (non-digital and digital) that will measure and improve attributes of children's legal capability.

Develop a specification of the process by which interventions like these can be created and implemented in other populations, e.g. developing countries.

