Qualitative methods in health literacy research in young children
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Background
In health literacy research in children the use of qualitative methods is lacking though literature is emphasising the importance of child involvement in research for reasons such as enhancing child participation, better knowledge of their views and priorities, effective action, and self-evaluation of researcher’s effectiveness. Consequently, it only seems plausible to employ qualitative research methods more frequently to health literacy research with children.

Methods
We have conducted 19 focus groups with primary school children (N = 104, 8-11 years old) in the urban area of Bielefeld, Germany. We have applied Mayring’s (2015) method of qualitative content analysis. Following this criterion, we have selected the material, built the coding frame, divided the materials into coding units, tested the coding frame, evaluated and modified the frame, performed the main analysis, and interpreted the findings. Feedback loops ensured the reliability.

Results
We gathered evidence on health literacy, conditions influencing health, and meaning to health communication and information. Surprisingly, children have a very complex and in-depth understanding of health that goes much beyond biomedical models, individual-centred concepts and normative assumptions, and specifically includes well-being, mental health and many aspects of health promotion, which they associated with good health. Social and digital skills seem to be important capabilities, and so are positive attitudes. Parents act as surrogate interfaces in health communication with the health sector and together with physicians they are associated with trustworthiness.

Conclusions
Children are a reliable source to inform researchers on how they make sense about specific concepts. The findings will improve future health promotion and health literacy research as well as it will allow for more profound and nuanced understanding of child health literacy and they can be useful to inform research, policy and practice.

Key messages:
- Children are a valid and reliable source to inform researchers on how they make sense about specific concepts in context of health. Findings will useful to inform research, policy and practice.
- The focus groups permitted rich discussion of different issues in health that allow detailed, unique, and personal accounts, which improve our understanding on many issues in health literacy research.