

Chapter 6: Case Studies

Case Study – Semi-structured Interviewing

Naila is interviewing teaching assistants in an SEN team in a large secondary school. She is trying to find out what strategies they think are most successful when working one-to-one with dyslexic children. Naila has a list of topics she wants to cover but her focus is on getting the teaching assistants to talk about their work with dyslexic children and their own views on what works for them. Naila asks some questions but she mainly listens, giving some prompts to move the conversation forward and asking for clarification when she needs it. The interviews are quite informal and relaxed. The teaching assistants comment afterwards that the interview process has helped them to clarify and understand their own approaches to this work and to make sense of some of the issues related to supporting dyslexic children.

Case Study – Improving Your Interviews through Planning and Preparation

Graham has decided to interview young people who attend a youth centre located on their estate to get feedback on the activities offered and to try and find out what sort of sessions and approaches would benefit the teenagers most from their own point of view. Graham has decided to attend some of the sessions offered to ask the teenagers face-to-face if they will be interviewed as he does not think a letter will get much response with this group. Graham has a consent form and further information that he goes through with any of the young people who respond positively to his request. They are also asked to get parental consent by taking the form home and getting a parent to sign. Graham realizes that he will have to ask a lot more of the young people than he actually wants to interview as some will say no before or after discussion and some will not get parental consent either because they forget to ask or their parents refuse.

Graham has also asked for and been granted permission to do the study by staff in the centre. Youth workers in the centre have given their consent and Graham has arranged with the manager to have a small room available at various times which he can use for the interviews. He has devised a semi-structured interview schedule which he piloted with two young people and then subsequently revised. This semi-structured approach gives some flexibility for the young people's views and opinions to emerge but also some structure to base the analysis on. Graham records the sessions with a digital recorder so he can listen and not have to take notes. Graham dresses neatly but casually and tells the teenagers about himself in terms of being a student and interested in youth work. He wants them to feel relaxed with him but he does not try to present himself as one of them. During the interviews he asks questions and prompts but tries in the main to listen and not talk too much. He uses attentive listening skills to convey interest and is relaxed, friendly and open in his manner.

Case Study – Using a Focus Group

Farah is interested in finding out about the impact of introducing an outdoor play area in a children's centre. She gathers together a group of participants for about 40 minutes. The group she has invited consists of a teacher, a health worker, a family support worker, an Early Years practitioner and the setting manager. Her questions focus on what the participants have noticed about how children use the area and if they have noticed any differences. She needs to listen carefully to what is said (though she is recording the discussion) and to ensure that only one person is speaking at a time. She asks for clarification if she does not understand something or if people are using expressions that she thinks others might not understand. She tries to summarize what has been said every now and then to ensure that everyone understands; this also helps to add to the reliability of her study. The participants state that they find the process a useful way to hear the views of others which they might not have heard before.

Case Study – Observing in a Nursery

Harry wanted to do some observations on practitioner behaviour in a nursery setting. His focus was on observing the extent to which the adults involved themselves in play with children. Initially Harry thought he would only have to get consent from the practitioners, but after discussion with his supervisors he realized he would have to secure consent from all the parents too as the children were part of the observations. When he did a pilot observation, Harry used a video camera to record the observation. However, the children were completely distracted by the camera and spent a lot of time asking Harry how to use it and if they could use it or look at the recording. Harry tried again using notes only, making himself unobtrusive and ensuring that he was a familiar presence in the setting before trying to observe.

Case Study – Learning Story Observation Schedules

Learning Story: Max Smith, 3 years and 2 months	
What was seen and heard?	Max approached the home corner and stood for about 2 minutes watching two girls playing with the cooker. The girls were role-playing making tea with one being mum and the other the child. The 'mum' noticed Max and said, 'Do you want to be the baby?' Max shook his head but didn't move. He stayed watching the girls for a few more minutes and then walked forward and stood at the table until one of the girls handed him a bowl and said, 'Eat up.' Max watched the other girl and copied her 'eating' out of the bowl.
What learning was noticed?	So far Max has not joined in play with other children since starting nursery 2 weeks ago. However, today he started to learn about social role-play through observing other children and copying them.
How can this learning be progressed?	Find out more about Max's interests and ensure role-play materials are available to meet these.

Child's name: JG			
Date:			
Teacher:			
Strands	Goals	Learning story	
Belonging	Taking an interest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding an interest • Recognizing the familiar and enjoying the unfamiliar • Coping with change 	<i>JG built a tower with the bricks</i>	<i>JG played with the Lego bricks with D. He searched for and found some wheels and a base and said, 'I'm making a car.' JG added some bricks onto the base and said, 'This is where the people sit.' JG struggled to disconnect two Lego bricks but he didn't give up and used his teeth to pry them apart before separating them fully with his hands. JG carried on a conversation with D about his car using vocabulary such as 'wheels', 'bonnet', 'tyres' and 'exhaust'. After 10 minutes JG pronounced his car finished and began to roll it around on the carpet.</i>
Well-being	Being involved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paying attention • Feeling safe • Trusting others • Being playful with others and materials 	<i>JG paid attention for a sustained period</i>	
Exploration	Persisting when difficulties arise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting and choosing difficult tasks • Using a range of strategies to solve problems when 'stuck' 	<i>JG separated the bricks</i>	
Communication	Expressing and idea or feeling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate in a range of ways – for example, using oral language, gesture, music, art, numbers and patterns, telling stories, etc. 	<i>JG used lots of language to convey his ideas</i>	
Contribution	Taking responsibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to others, activities and events • Ensuring that things are fair • Self-evaluating • Helping others • Contributing to the programme 	<i>JG evaluated his work – 'It goes fast!'</i>	
Evaluation/What's next		Parents'/Child's comments	
<i>JG was really involved in his building. He demonstrated a lot of knowledge about the different parts of cars. Staff to introduce JG to some of the non-fiction books about cars, vehicles and transport in general.</i>		<i>JG's really interested in his dad's car at home. He's always asking questions about it and likes to sit in the driver's seat and pretends to drive.</i>	

Case Study – Observing a Play Situation

Jenna wants to observe how children who are playing in groups with the construction materials respond when another child tries to join the established play. She observes children in a nursery setting at times agreed with the manager and during these times she records incidents where this event takes place. Jenna makes a note of the children involved, the sequence of events, what is said and the time the events last. She also records how successful different children are at negotiating entry to the group play and how long this takes. As part of this she notes down the strategies children use to join in and the responses of the other children. Jenna starts to build up a picture of how children respond in this situation and what strategies work for children wanting to join the construction play.

Case Study – Using Narrative Observation to Gather Data

Maria wanted to observe the behaviour of children in a particular part of the playground where there were two benches to sit on. She wanted to know which children used the benches and for what purpose. Maria went out at breaks and lunchtimes and positioned herself near the benches and wrote down what happened there, who was involved and what they did. She focused on how long children stayed at the benches, what they did and the groupings they were in and how these changed and evolved.

Maria discovered that there was a core of older girls who 'occupied' the benches for the majority of breaks. Other girls came and went, sometimes 'hovering' nearby until invited explicitly or implicitly to join the core group. Only a few boys came near the benches or were invited to stay, although one group of boys frequently 'bated' the core group from a slight distance. Some specific individuals and pairs of girls were vociferously 'driven off' if they approached the benches by members of the core group who shouted at them and told them to go away.

Case Study – Time-sequenced Observations

Target child

Child: JG Age: 2 years 8 months		Date: 21/7/10	Time: 10.00	
Minute	Activity	Language	Task	Social
1	Construction play (Duplo). TC selecting bricks. SOL play within SG situation.	TC → A 'I building tower'	Construction play (Duplo)	(SG)
2	Moves round table to access new bricks	F → TC 'Hey! No!' A F 'We can share. Here you are F' (A passes new bricks to F)	Construction play (Duplo)	(SG)
3	Stands next to tower and watches other children	TC → A 'Can I have bricks?' A passes bricks to TC TC → G 'I making big tower'	Construction play (Duplo)	"
4	Returns to building	TC → All 'Look! Look at my tower!'	Construction play (Duplo)	"
5	Protects tower and pushes F away	F → approaches tower TC → F 'No! F. My tower!'	Construction play (Duplo)	"

Social codes

TC	Target child	SOL	Solitary
A	Any adult	PAIR	Two children together
→	Speaks to	SG	Small group of 3 to 5
(SOL)	A circle drawn around grouping indicates adult involvement	LG	Large group

Case Study – Using a Qualitative Questionnaire

Richard is interested in the experiences of being a male worker in Early Years settings. In theory, he could send his questionnaire to every man in the country who works in Early Years. Given the scope of his dissertation, he does not have the time, resources or desire to do this, so he must select a sample from this population. He decides to select a group of men who work in settings in Sheffield. This is because he knows most of them and he believes that they will be supportive of his efforts. He tries to get in touch with as many of them as possible because he takes into consideration the number of responses he is likely to get, and how much time he has to spend in analysing the results. He realizes that analysing data always takes more time than he thinks it will. When he sends out the questionnaire out, he lets people know how long it will take them to complete and thanks them for taking part. He feels that personalizing the form will make people feel more engaged with his work.

Chapter 6: Ideas to Use

Ideas to Use – Qualitative, Open-text Questions

What sorts of games do you play with your child?

Are there any other comments you would like to make? (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

What do you think are the three most important things that education should do for pupils and why?

Chapter 6: Points to Think About

Points to Think About – Using Interviews in Qualitative Research

- The interviews are recorded and presented descriptively not numerically;
- The interviews are focused on particular events;
- The interviews explore participants' views and experiences of those events.

Source: Kvale and Brinkman, 2015.

Points to Think About – Planning Interviews

Interviews require careful planning to ensure they are successful and that the data gathered is what is required. Some of the questions that you need to consider include

- How will you gain access to the participants and are there going to be any ethical issues which may impede access?
- What are the ethical issues around consent and confidentiality and how will you handle these?
- Where will the interviews take place and will this be the best venue for ensuring that your participants are comfortable and relaxed?
- What sort of interview are you going to conduct and is this approach right for your study and the participants involved?
- How long will each interview be?
- How will you record each interview and could this influence the outcomes?
- How will you present yourself as the interviewer?

Points to Think About – Getting the Most Out of Your Interviewees

- Use prompts, probes and follow-up questions to elicit further information or to seek clarification.
- Use affirmative noises such as 'mmm', silence or non-verbal signals such as nods, glances and 'quizzical looks' to encourage people to say more or keep going.
- Paraphrase what someone has just said to you as a means of checking with them that you have understood something correctly.

Source: Denscombe, 2014.

Points to Think About – Running Focus Groups

- You will need to find a suitable room, ideally one where there are no distractions, where it is quiet and where there is enough space for people to be able to interact.
- You will need to find a time when people are available to talk, one which will cause your participants as little inconvenience as possible. This could prove quite difficult if, for instance, you are researching in a busy environment, such as a school.
- You will need to keep your principal research question in mind. This will be the *focus* of the group, and will help you to produce a list of topics which will form the basis of the discussion.
- It is unlikely that you will be able to be highly structured in your approach because you never quite know where the conversation will lead. Like any other conversation, there will be pauses and times when people will speak over each other.
- You will need to think about your role as the facilitator (sometimes referred to as the moderator) in the group, it is a crucial role requiring a number of well-developed interpersonal skills, such as listening and behaving in a non-judgemental way. It will also require a degree of confidence and it might be a good idea to pilot this approach with a group of friends first so that you can practice:
 - letting people know why you are there and the purpose of the session;
 - managing a group and asking questions in ways which will keep the conversation flowing;
 - probing for meanings;
 - ensuring that everyone who wants to gets a chance to speak.
 - listening not just for the content of the conversation but also the feelings, contradictions and tensions (Grudens-Schuck et al., 2004).
- You will need to think about how best to record the proceedings. You could take notes, you could audio record or you could video record the discussion(s). With smaller groups it is easier to recognize individuals' voices; with larger groups this can become quite confusing. Video recording might be the best option but not everyone likes the idea of being videoed which could reduce the number of volunteers that you get.

Points to Think About – Planning Observations

- What will you observe and why?
- How many observations will you do? Will you be observing on a number of occasions over time or will they be one-off snapshots?
- Who will the participants be?
- Have you got consent from any gatekeeper(s) and all possible participants?
- How will you record the observations in ways that are effective and detailed but not intrusive?
- Will you use a predetermined observation schedule or adopt a more open narrative recording style?
- Will you be a participant or non-participant observer? How will you minimize your impact on the observed situation?
- How quickly can you write up/transcribe your observations?
- How will you analyse your observation data?
- How will you tackle the threat of bias or preconceived assumptions? Will your observational data be compared to other data gathered through different methods? Could you ask participants if they think that the observation influenced their actions?

Points to Think About – Gold’s Continuum of Participant/ Non-participant Observation

- complete participant
- participant-as-observer
- observer-as-participant
- complete observer

Source: Gold, 1958.

Points to Think About – Think About What You Want to explore

Your questions must enable you to gain data for what you set out to explore. There is no point asking about 'physiotherapy in a specialist school' if you are interested in 'the role of the school nurse', in spite of the occasional overlap between the two.

Keep things simple

The Plain English Campaign suggests that an expression such as '*High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning process*' might be replaced by '*Children need good schools if they are to learn properly.*' (www.plainenglish.co.uk)

Don't muddle up the issues with multiple questions

The question 'How can we improve students' attendance and writing skills?' is in fact two questions.

Points to Think About – Writing and Testing Your Questions

Comprehension and interpretation of the question being asked – Will your participants understand the words of the question and be able to work out what information you are looking for?

Retrieval of relevant information from memory – Are you asking for simple factual information and/or deeply held views which participants can usually remember and articulate quite easily?

Integrating information into a summarized judgement – Are you asking about more complex matters (e.g. feelings, attitudes, events that happened some time ago)? This may take more thought on the part of your respondents and the responses may be less precise.

Reporting judgements using the means offered – Will your participants be able to write down their answers in their own words (e.g. using open-text boxes or spaces)?

Source: de Leeuw, in Alasuutari et al., 2008, p. 316.

Chapter 6: Recommended Reading and Further Sources of Information

- Bell, A. (2007), 'Designing and testing questionnaires for children'. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, vol. 12, no. 5, pp. 460–9.
- Chioncel, N. E., Van der Veen, R. G. W., Wildemeersch, D. and Jarvis, P. (2003), 'The validity and reliability of focus groups as a research method in adult education'. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol. 22, no. 5, pp. 495–517.
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- Folque, M. A. (2010, 2nd edition), 'Interviewing young children', in Mac Naughton, G., Rolfe, S. and Siraj-Blatchford, I. (eds), *Doing Early Childhood Research: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gauntlett, David (2015), 'The LEGO system as a tool for thinking, creativity, and changing the world', in *Making Media Studies: The Creativity Turn in Media and Communications Studies*, New York: Peter Lang.
- Grudens-Schuck, N., Lundy Allen, B. and Larsen, K. (2004), *Focus Group Essentials*. Iowa: Iowa State University. <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/pm1969b.pdf>.
- Jupp, V. (2006, 2nd edition), 'Documents and critical research', in Sapsford, R. and Jupp, V. (eds), *Data Collection and Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Mukherji, P. and Albom, D. (2010), *Research Methods in Early Childhood*. London: Sage.
- Oppenheim, A. N. (2001), *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*. London: Continuum.
- Roberts-Holmes, G. (2014), *Doing Your Early Years Research Project: A Step by Step Guide*. London: Sage.
- Rose, G. (2016, 4th edition), *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. Maidenhead: Oxford University Press. www.ncrm.ac.uk.

Chapter 6: Reflective Tasks

Ginny is thinking of researching language development in a nursery in a socio-economically deprived inner city primary school. She wants to know what teacher and teaching assistant strategies are used to promote children's talk and whether these are effective.

What sort of data-gathering method or methods would be of most use to her in answering her research question?

What might be the difficulties of conducting data gathering using this method or methods?

If you suggest more than one method, what order should the data be gathered in, and why?

Chapter 6: Summary of Key Points

- Every data-collection method has its advantages and disadvantages and you must make a decision about which approach is the *best fit* for your dissertation in terms of gathering the data you need to answer your research question.
- Qualitative data-collection methods tend to produce very rich and complex data which while fascinating can be very hard to process and to analyse.
- The chosen data-gathering methods need to fit with the overall approach of the study and if more than one method is used these need to complement each other.
- Semi-structured interviews and focus groups are important data-gathering methods in qualitative studies.
- Observations and qualitative questionnaires are also useful tools but may need to be supplementary to other methods such as interviews to get sufficient data. Creative methods can be challenging, but offer the opportunity to get very rich data.
- Careful planning is the key to ensuring high levels of validity, reliability and trustworthiness using qualitative methods.