

Interviews as a Research Method

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**Serendip: In Class/OutClassed: On the
Uses of a Liberal Education**

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Structure of session

- o Before you begin: defining the purpose of the interviews; locating your participants; ethical considerations
- o Conducting the interview
- o After the interview
- o Conclusion/questions

Before you begin

- o Defining the purpose of the interviews: class, but what else?
- o Is the purpose to gain insight/information/opinions?
- o Do you wish to test a hypothesis you have developed?
- o Do you simply want to capture a life history?

Locating your participants

- o Who is it you want to interview?
- o Did you want to capture different opinions or a more homogenous group?
- o Try to access a key contact – local union person, someone you know (snowballing method)
- o Provide potential interviewees with information sheets and be ready to answer questions

Ethical considerations

- o An information sheet explaining your research and giving contact details for you and your professors
- o A consent form explaining the research, how the information will be used and how your notes will be stored – will you destroy your notes after the assignment?

Marriage Ban in Ireland Information Sheet

This research is being conducted by Dr. Judith Harford, University College Dublin, and Dr. Jennifer Redmond, Trinity College Dublin and NUI Maynooth. We would like to include the voices of women teachers during the twentieth century who were affected by the marriage ban in the teaching profession. We are interviewing a number of women and will use quotations from the interviews in approximately two academic journal articles.

The interviews will last approximately one hour and will be recorded with a digital recorder. We can provide you with a CD of the conversation after the interview should you wish to have one.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any time. If you would rather not be identified (i.e. have your real name used) in the interview and article we are happy to agree a pseudonym with you. All of your information is considered private and confidential and will not be revealed by the researchers to anyone.

The interview will be conducted in a location of your choice. If you need any more information after the interview has been completed you can contact either one of us:

Judith Harford

Phone:

Jennifer Redmond

Phone:

If you would like any more information about either of the researchers we would be happy to provide you with a curriculum vitae and references.

The consent form

- o The consent form will ensure that *informed* consent is given by all the research participants.
- o The objectives of the interview
- o Details on the written assignment based on the findings/how the information will be used
- o The arrangements in place to ensure that participants will not be identifiable *if necessary*
- o The fact that all personal information obtained from or about the participant will be held in confidence and will not be revealed to anyone else

The consent form

- o The right of participants to ask questions if she desires
- o Procedures in place to ensure confidentiality
- o That participation is entirely voluntary and the right of the participant to withdraw from the study at any time
- o Information about the way in which the data collected will be analysed and presented assignments
- o Information on assignment, particularly who will view it and if it will have an online presence

Example of a formal consent form

I agree to be interviewed for the purposes of historical research on the issue of being a female teacher working in primary schools in Ireland in relation to the marriage ban for women.

I understand that by participating I agree to be digitally recorded. Excerpts from the recordings will be used in academic articles based on the research.

I will communicate to the researcher whether or not I wish to be identified by my real name or by a pseudonym and whether or not I would like a CD of the conversation.

I understand that I may withdraw my participation in this research **at any time**.

Signed: _____

Interviewee

Signed: _____

Researcher

Ethical considerations....

- o Need to decide the following:
- o (a) Will the interviews be made completely anonymous in the write up or will pseudonyms be used?
- o (b) Where/how will the interview take place? (may need a neutral venue)

Pilot interviews/ practising questions

- o Purpose is to test whether your questions work
- o Try to get someone similar to the profile of your future interviewees
- o Make notes during and after the pilot
- o Time your interviews so you can tell people how long it should take

Interview questions

- o Test whether the questions work best organised thematically or in a chronology (depending on your topic)
- o Be flexible in the interview – follow up interesting leads that the person suggests
- o A range of styles is best to avoid monotony
- o Think of questions that will avoid simple ‘yes/no’ answers

Interview questions

- o Be careful of closed vs. open questions and leading the people you interview e.g. “I think you would agree...”
- o What is the difference between these two questions?
 - ‘Tell me about your experiences in Bryn Mawr College’
 - ‘Tell me about your first impressions of Bryn Mawr College’

Interview questions

- o The basics always work well:
who/why/what/how/
when

Interview tips

- o Always tell people they can skip any questions they wish
- o Keep the language clear and simple and to the point: your job is to collect information and analyse it afterwards
- o Try not to interview people in pairs
- o Beware of “rehearsed narratives” – be prepared to interject
- o Pay attention to body language

Conducting the interview

- o Start by introducing the research and have an extra copy of your information sheet (your participant should already have this)
- o Have the consent form ready and stress the confidentiality aspects – give them time to read it
- o Get both of you to sign the consent form
- o Start taking notes after you have signed the form

Conducting the interview

- Clarify at the beginning what you have agreed with regard to anonymity and assure the participant of how you will achieve this
- Always run through the order/themes of the question to stop people wanting to tell you everything at once
- Verbally flag when you are shifting from one section to the next
- Clarify dates of key events and the age that people were when they happened for your analysis

Conducting the interview

- o Always leave space for people to make their points but direct them back to your questions if they go on tangents
- o Leave time at the end to ask if there is anything else that they wish to add or clarify
- o Thank the person for their time and clarify what is happening next

After the interview

- o **Make time directly after the interview to fill in the notes you have made**
- o **If you have agreed to provide notes/transcript to the interviewee, get them to them promptly**
- o **A second round of reflection after all the interviews are complete is often helpful to identify important issues**

Conclusion

- o Plan your time carefully
- o Have your documentation ready **BEFORE** you approach interviewees
- o Make sure you comply with ethical guidelines
- o Be completely honest with your participants
- o Make sure you follow up with interviewees as regards giving them recordings or transcripts or destroying notes

Questions?

Follow up queries?
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