**METHODS IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION: BASIC REVISION NOTES**

**RESEARCH CHARACTERISTICS OF EDUCATION**

**Research Characteristics** = aspects of the research issue/those involved/contexts that might make the research easier and/or more difficult. What makes this issue easier or harder to study (or both, more likely)? If you can identify some of these in your answer, you will gain extra marks.

What groups/settings are there in education? = pupils, teachers, parents, classrooms and schools

**You need to identify the** research characteristics **of the various groups and settings that are usually found in education. What makes them easier and/or harder to study?**

**1 PUPILS**

**(Note that pupils are from a wide age range – age, class, ethnicity, gender)**

 **Access -** know where pupils are = in the schools but gaining access to them for research is.

 More **vulnerable** because of their age = harder to study because affects questions asked and how you act towards them. But may be more naive and therefore honest.

 **Extra ethical concerns** = more easily damaged so need additional protection from harm. Can they give informed consent

 **Access: Gatekeepers** – parents, school, teachers, pupils, child protection laws.

 **Language capabilities** not as developed may not understand questions etc.

 The **attention span** of pupils is less than adults. Questionnaires/interviews have to be short.

 Young people have less developed **memories** - may not recall events.

 **Knowledge** - may simply not know what it is you are after - make up something instead.

 Tend to defer to adult authority or may ‘clam up’. May see researcher as a ‘teacher in disguise’.

Anti-school pupils might be very uncooperative with the researcher.

 Pupils are **not used to being researched/interviewed/observed.**

 **Impression Management** - try to manipulate the impression other people.

 Pupils influenced by **peer group pressure** = big pressure to conform.

**2 TEACHERS**

 Teachers = **vulnerable** - careers, mortgages, professional self-esteem etc. = protect themselves, the school they work in, their pupils so may not get full disclosure.

 They have a **legal and moral duty** of care towards their pupil = careful. Maintain pupils’ anonymity and not get ‘guilty knowledge’ about pupils, teachers or the school.

 **Access** is not a problem in terms of finding teachers but = busy people + not prepared to spend a long time in interviews etc. (Not a problem with being observed).

 **Timescale** issues – teacher’s lives determined by timetable.

 Teachers = strong **language capabilities** – can understand complex question.

 Teachers likely to have the **knowledge** that researchers are after - well-educated.

 Teachers are **used to being researched**/interviewed/observe so happy for a researcher to observe them. However, will have developed the skills to put on a show for the observer.

 Highly skilled at **impression management =** part of the teacher role.

 Professional code of conduct to follow and are unlikely to deviate from it under scrutiny.

 Getting **back stage** is not easy. Even the staffroom is not a fully back stage context.

 Teachers are subject to **peer group pressure** to conform.

**3 PARENTS**

 **Access** - lists of parents, their addresses but = unlikely these will be shared.

 Parents are **busy** but if research might benefit their children = keen to give their views.

 The **language capabilities** going to vary according to social class and cultural background.

 Sometimes parents are deferential to authority, sometimes not.

 Parents are keen to create **impression** of as good parents.

 Parents may have issues with a school or they may be overly-protective of the school.

 Parents **not used to being researched**. However, will be used to returning questionnaires.

 There are **ethical concerns** associated with the parental e.g. safeguarding their children.

 **Backstage** with parents tends to be the home = access to private spaces = difficult.

**4 CLASSROOMS**

 No problem identifying where classrooms are. However, the classroom is a protected space.

 Those in the classroom = **vulnerable**. Pupils especially, but teachers as well.

 The classroom is **spatially limited**. = small space, so observation is easy but observer can be seen – there is no hiding place, covert/unobtrusive observation is impossible.

 Classroom interaction = only two main roles to observe, that of teacher and pupil. So observation = limited to teacher-pupil interaction and pupil-pupil interaction.

 An additional adult in the classroom is going to attract attention = Hawthorne Effect.

 Researcher only to be able to observe a handful. This raise issues of **representativeness**.

 The classroom is a front-stage context = behaviour controlled by the teacher.

**5 SCHOOLS**

 Know where the schools are located are, but getting in to research schools is more difficult.

 Schools = very concerned about their **public image.** Headteacher = **institutional impression management**. Shows **vulnerability**.

 Schools= **data-rich,** access varies - personal data is unlikely to be handed over but some data is publicly available – schools are required to publish results, Ofsted reports.

 **Timescale** issues = timetable which is fixed. Meetings cycles are also fixed.

 Schools are **spatially** large and **organisationally complex**.

 Schools operate in a **legal** context.

**RESEARCH METHODS: BASIC REVISION NOTES**

**KEY IDEAS ABOUT RESEARCH METHODS**

**Research methods – Key concepts**

Reliability, representativeness and validity help assess the usefulness of a particular research method.

**RELIABILITY:** replicable, re-testing, common measurement, objective, scientific**.**

**REPRESENTATIVENESS:** Generalisable to a larger group from smaller sample, cross-section, proportionately similar**.**

**VALIDITY:** meanings held, authentic, measures what it seeks to measure.

**Structured research**: structured interviews, surveys/questionnaires, structured observation and official statistics = high in reliability and representativeness, low in validity.

**Unstructured research:** unstructured interviews, participant observation, personal documents = high in validity but low in reliability and representativeness,

**PRIMARY RESEARCH METHODS**

**Quantitative Research**: experiments (field and laboratory), structured observation, surveys (structured interviews and questionnaires).

**Qualitative research**: observation (overt, covert, participant), unstructured interviews.

**Primary research** can be: Covert – Overt Large-scale-Small-scale Researcher-led - subject-led Statistical-Descriptive Structured - Unstructured

**SECONDARY DATA**

**Quantitative secondary**: official statistics, existing quantitative research.

**Qualitative secondary**: public documents, personal documents (diaries, memoirs etc.)

**THE TWO METHODOLOGIES: POSITIVISM and INTERPRETIVISM**

**Methods** = research techniques used by sociologists. **‘Methodology’** = ideas behind the choice of method. Does the sociologist think quantitative or qualitative data is best?

The two methodological approaches in sociology are:

**Positivism/Quantitative** and **Interpretivism/Qualitative sociology**

Each of the ‘two methodologies’ is based on a set of assumptions about the nature of society, the most appropriate type of data to collect. This determines which research methods are chosen.

**Positivism**

Quantitative research and surveys, structured interviews, structured observation, experiments and official statistics.

**Positivism: main assumptions**

Social world has an objective reality, external social forces direct behaviour, seen in patterns in human behaviour, these show cause-and-effect relationships, need quantitative data.

**Impact on choice of method**

Need systematic, objective, replicable, statistical from experiments, questionnaires, structured observation and structured interview, official and other pre-existing statistics. These use fixed questions/categories convertable into Statistics; samples = representative.

**Interpretivism**

Qualitative research = participant observation, unstructured interviews and documents

**Interpretivism: main assumptions**

Social world has no single objective reality, each social actor/group defines ‘reality’ differently, aim = uncover meanings by going to the groups, qualitative data.