Recording and transcribing your data

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Interviewing

If you are conducting interviews with your action research participants, you will want to find a suitable way of recording the interviews. It is possible to take notes while interviewing but it can be difficult to capture everything that has been said and it slows down and interrupts the interview process.

Many researchers make audio recordings of interviews. These are unobtrusive and easy to do. Permission is required from participants.

Interviews can also be video-recorded but video is more difficult to use and can be time consuming to manage effectively. Videos are more obtrusive than audios and are more likely to make participants feel uncomfortable.

An important aspect of making sense of your data is to turn your audio recordings into a text. Listen to your recordings and make notes. You will need to listen several times to get to know your data well enough.

Many researchers transcribe their interviews and produce a detailed text which includes everything that was said during the interviews. One of the advantages of transcribing is that it helps you to acquire an in-depth knowledge of your data, but it is an incredibly time-consuming task and it may not be realistic for you to transcribe your interviews in detail. Depending on your action research focus, it may not be necessary to transcribe everything. You may wish to transcribe excerpts that seem relevant or quotes which highlight an important point. However, if your research focus is on language use, you will need a detailed and accurate transcription using transcription conventions (there are plenty of examples of transcription conventions in the Applied Linguistics research literature). Your interest may not just be in the content of what was said but also the tone of voice, pauses, speaker emphases etc.

There are software packages and voice recognition programmes which can make the process of transcribing more manageable.

Observations

When using classroom observation as a data collection method, you will need a recording. As an action researcher, you can take notes during the observation, paying particular attention to the areas of interest to your research. Sometimes researchers prepare an observation protocol in advance, which includes points of focus. This can be especially useful if there are events that you wish to count while observing.

Observations can be video-recorded, and this can provide a wealth of visual data, showing participants' actions and behaviours but there can be problems with sound from videos. The position of the camera will also have an impact on the data that is captured.

The type of recording you decide on will depend on your action research purpose.

References

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