

# What is Creative Interviewing?

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# What are creative interviews?

- Interactional communicative exchange (rather than a heavily interrogative, question and answer style). 'Conversations with a purpose' (Burgess).
- Informal, conversational (no clip boards and tick boxes). Not just questions and answers.
- Tailored, customised, thematic (not fully scripted, not a numbered sequence of questions). Not a rigid structure. Not standardised.
- May involve one interviewee/interviewer, or several

## What are creative interviews? – Why *creative*?

- May involve observation and exploration of verbal and non verbal dimensions - material, spatial, environmental, non-human, embodied, sentient and sensory (eg visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory), and their intersection.
- May involve doing more than talk – eg ethnographic style, doing things, making things, taking pictures, filming, photo and object elicitation
- May be conducted in and through a range of locations – staying still, moving/walking/travelling.
- Encouraging creative thought about what count as data, what interviews can (and can't) do
- Encouraging (critical) thought about creative interviewing activity that goes beyond dialogue

# What are they for? When would you use them? What kind of data and knowledge can they produce?

- Interpretive understandings. Processes, nuances, richness, meanings, experiences, dynamics, connections, complexity. 'Why' and 'how' questions. Also, nuanced understandings of 'what'.
- 'Real life' resonance.
- Investigative epistemology – interested in actors' perspectives and experiences; situational and embodied knowledge.
- Knowledge as situated and contextual (rather than abstract and universal).
- Knowledge as constructed and created, not simply collected
- Knowledge of the particular. Generalisations achieved through understanding processes in the round, rather than a representative logic.

# How do you decide who to interview? And where? And when?

- Think about data sources – perspectives, interactions, situations, knowledge. Which are relevant for your research? Whose perspective or experiences or narratives or knowledge do you need? Which contexts, situations, interactions?
- Theoretical or purposive sampling and selection. Not usually random/statistical sampling, not least because you won't be generating standardised data from individual sampling units

# How do you prepare for and conduct them? Asking questions

Key message –

Don't produce a numbered script of questions in a tightly structured sequence

# How do you prepare for and conduct them?

## Research questions and interview questions

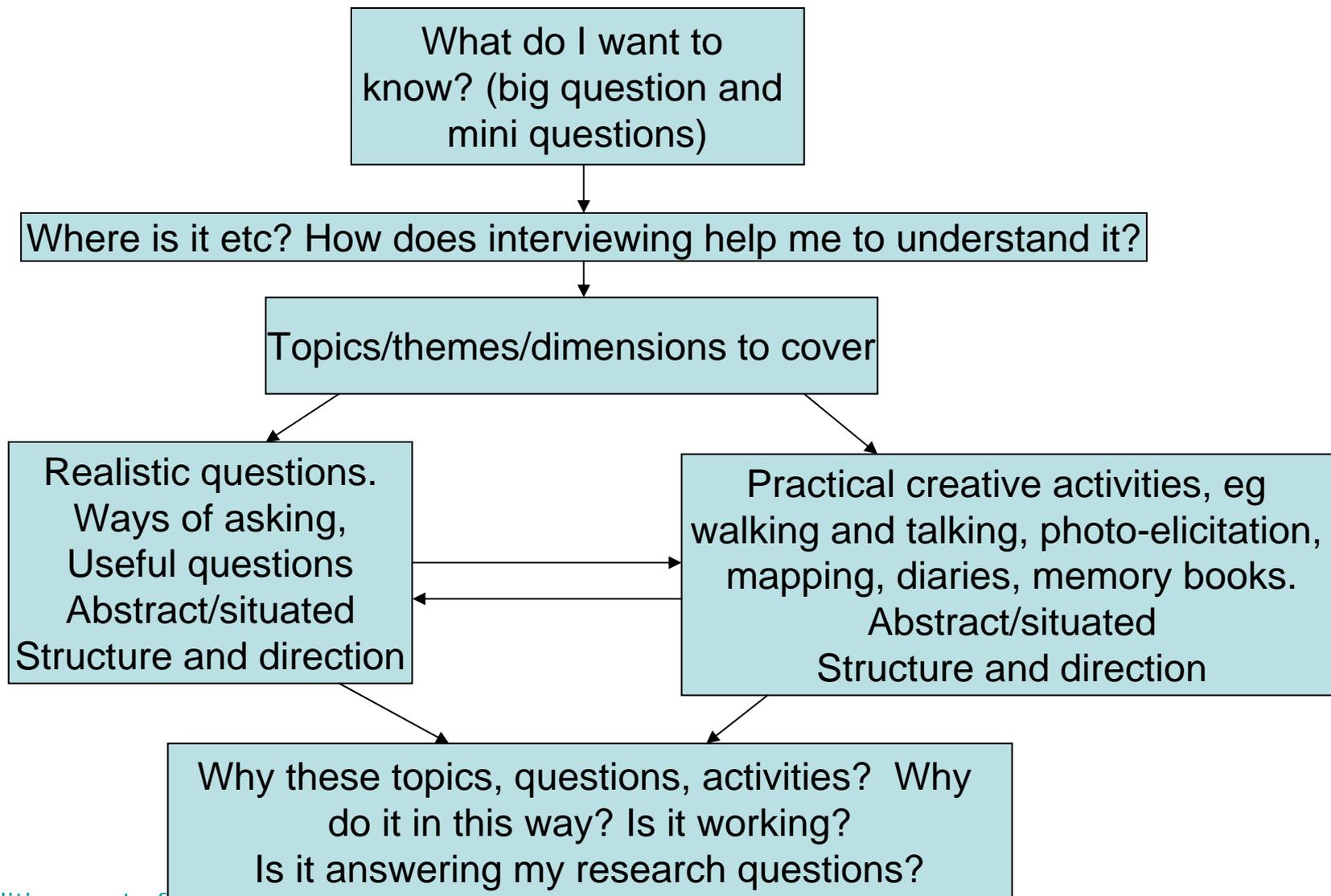
- Your big question(s) – the thing you really want to know about
- Your mini questions, or components of the big question – parts, areas, dimensions, instances of the big thing
- Therefore, topics, themes, areas, dimensions to cover somehow
- Ways of covering them, eg realistic/useful questions, practical creative activities. THINK about what kinds of data these will yield.
- Openness to things you hadn't thought of, ways of seeing and interpreting that you hadn't predicted.
- Match all of these with your epistemological and ontological assumptions ('why cover this?' 'why do it in this way?')
- Importance of piloting to assess whether interviews are producing data/knowledge that addresses research questions

# How do you prepare for and conduct them? Asking questions

- Work out and try out an introductory/starter question
- Don't ask too many questions at once (because people will struggle to answer)
- Avoid inviting people to generalise unless you are sure you want this/it is useful. Better usually to ask about real experience.
- Don't plunge straight into questions that ask people to analyse or evaluate something, say how something differs from something else etc. Best to start interviews and topics simply, asking for descriptive answers. Avoid asking 'why' too soon in the proceedings.
- Develop a stock of questions that will help you get the context and elaboration you want, like 'how did that come about?'
- Open questions, or those asking for a story or biography, can produce long daunting answers (but they can be very worthwhile) that can be hard for you to follow up.
- Listen to what people say (and sometimes what they don't say, or only imply) and pick up threads that relate to your research questions to ask about next. Make notes so you can 'store' issues to come back to later.

## How do you prepare for and conduct them? - Getting people to do 'creative' things

- Will they want to do it? Will they be embarrassed? Feel they lack the skills?
- How will you focus? Importance of focus and relevance.
- What do you want from them/what might they give?
- How much time relative to value?
- How will you segue into and out of them?
- How will you analyse? How will you handle the data? How much will there be, of what kind? What logic of comparison will you apply?
- In general - beware the allure of glitzy and novel techniques just for the sake of it.



# How do you create data from them? How do you deal with the data?

- Think about what counts as data. Not just answers to questions, eg:
  - The interaction
  - Talk and other sounds and noises
  - Silence and what is not said
  - Fieldnotes
  - Non-verbal elements
  - Pictures, diagrams, things created
  - Visuals, audio, text (eg transcripts)
- How do these reflect on the thing that you are interested in? What is their capacity as data? How do you need to handle them?
- Systems for storing, assembling, retrieving your different forms of data – manual indexing systems, CAQDAS software, preparation of case study files

# How do you analyse and interpret data from creative interviews?

- Cross sectional coding and indexing of data – to create ‘bags’ of data on key themes for further interpretive work. Easier with text based data eg transcripts. Can use pictures and audio. Note - these are not variables or typologies
- Conversation, discourse or metaphor analysis – close examination of words and gestures
- Case study, narrative or ethnographic analysis – focus on holistic stories, weaving together various forms of data
- Thinking critically about what ‘creative materials’ represent
- Connecting the parts – eg textual, visual, auditory, things made, places and contexts. This can be a challenge!
- Reflexivity and thinking about how the ways in which the data were generated are part of the story
- Importance of creativity and imagination
- Following analytical questions and themes through the data
- Audit trails and being systematic

# How do you write, present and disseminate from creative interview data?

- Making a convincing argument - weaving different data into your story, your argument. Showing how you have tested your assumptions and ideas, tried out alternatives
- Always relate this to key aspects of research design, eg research questions, sampling, context
- Situate your argument in a dialogue with existing theory/research
- Making clear the connection between the data you choose to include, and the rest – is this example typical? pivotal? contrasting? Push yourself – why have you chosen this piece of data? Don't just cherry pick, or leave the reader with the impression that you might have done
- Non conventional forms of dissemination – including online journals that allow video clips, sound bites

# Confidentiality and ethics

- Close, detailed, tailored interviews can produce very sensitive data.
- Anonymisation can be challenging. Multidimensional data – pictures, sounds, words.
- People need to be carefully informed because they may be expecting more of a questionnaire/structured style interview. Right to withdraw at any time. Need for researcher to exercise a situated approach to ethics.
- SRA codes of practice for research ethics and the safety of social researchers [www.the-sra.org.uk/ethical.htm](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/ethical.htm) [http://www.the-sra.org.uk/staying\\_safe](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/staying_safe)
- BSA guidelines on ethical practice [www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/)

# Creative interviewing – what qualities, skills and experience do you need?

For the interview itself – social skills

- Making yourself understood, articulating clearly
- Listening, interpreting, understanding
- Observing, seeing, hearing, sensing
- Balancing talking, listening, and silence
- Managing social interactions
- Thinking and acting strategically and situationally (in relation to your research questions)
- Remembering, recording
- Handling equipment, and materials
- Auto critique, and make sure you practice!

# Creative interviewing – what qualities, skills and experience do you need?

For analysis, writing and presentation

- An organised, systematic approach. Capacity to be calm in face of masses of data
- Creativity, insight, imagination – interpretive approach
- Readiness to check and test your own assumptions, look for both substantiation and refutation

END

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