

Transcript of video clip: Creative Interviewing

Jennifer Mason, November 2010, 7 minutes. Video available at

http://www.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/realities/av/creative_interviewing/

It's like qualitative interviewing but with an extra twist, I think, so with qualitative interviewing you are very unlikely to have a structured list of questions which you have to ask in a kind of order, so it's conversational, it's usually thematic so you won't have the structured list of questions but you will have a series of topics that you

want to discuss at some point, it will be tailored to the person or people that you are interviewing. You'll try to listen to what they're saying and then come up with subsequent questions which follow up on something they've said so, again, rather than imposing your structure you're trying to get to grips with the key issues as they relate to that person that you're interviewing.

The creative twist to all of this is partly to think about the other aspects that you're interested in, other than the talk and the text that can be produced from that, because often we transcribe these kinds of qualitative interviews. So usually with creative interviewing you're interested in the environment, the sensory elements of the interview interaction, other things that are going on at the time. One of the other things you can do in creative interviewing is to actually produce something other within the interview apart from the interview interaction itself. You could, for example, work with people in an interview setting on a family tree, or you might chart their local neighbourhood and their experience of the neighbourhood, and you could add to that, incidentally, if you're doing a walking interview by walking around the neighbourhood, perhaps taking pictures at various different points.

The consequence of that is that in a creative interview you accumulate a whole range of types of data: you might have visual data, you might have things that you've created, you've drawn, you've constructed in some way, you'll also have ethnographic kinds of observations, you'll have observational material from the interview itself, maybe from some of the context before and after the interview. Very often we'll also record the interview, at least the audio elements of the interview, you can also record it with a video camera as well, of course. So that you can produce a transcript if you want or you can have a video recording, so there's a range of types of data that can emerge from a creative interview.

Preparation is all, and it's very difficult for a creative interview, it's actually much easier to go and interview somebody with a structured questionnaire, you can simply read the questions and note down the answers. With a creative interview you have to do a lot of work in advance to think, what is it you're trying to get at? What are the research questions you're trying to pursue? What kinds of things do you want to get people to talk about or to be doing if you're creating things with people in the interview. You need to be very clear about what those are, so you need to do some work on your research questions and then refining those into questions that you can use to steer the interview conversation or the interaction so that you get people talking about the right kinds of things.

The other thing that you need to do is to think about how you can tailor the interaction to the person or people that you're interviewing, and that's where a structured interview usually won't work because the person you're interviewing may have some experiences but not others that other

people would have had. You need to prepare yourself to be ready to go with the person on the tour of their life or on whatever it is that you're interested in, but that they have experience of.

One needs to be careful not to get carried away with the idea that it would be fun to do lots of drawings, take lots of pictures, because you can end up doing these things for the sake of it, rather than thinking, well, would that actually really help with the research question that I'm trying to investigate? So I think it's important when thinking about which creative methods should I use to think, well, what actually is it that I'm trying to get at, and will it help if I ask people to draw a picture of that, or will it help if I spend a long time charting their local neighbourhood with them or looking at maps with them or going for a walk with them? Often it does, but these things are actually very time consuming as well and you can get yourself into a situation where you produce a lot of data which may be interesting in a way, but isn't exactly on the topic or the theme that you were trying to pursue. I think the key to working out which creative methods should I use is to think, what might be relevant and what might spark the right kind of conversation or interaction to help me to pursue those themes that I'm interested in?

Analysing data that comes from creative interviews is challenging but also exciting and interesting, as you'll gather, because you have a whole range of types of data. It's very unstructured so for people who are used to having structured or numerical data it can be quite scary actually, because you maybe have transcripts, you have audio recordings, you may have visual data, pictures and diagrams and so on!

The key message I would give is to think, what question am I trying to answer and to use the question to follow lines of enquiry across your data, you will also want to use a kind of case study approach as well, where you would actually draw together all different kinds of data that you have around a particular case, and a case could be a person, it could be a particular situation or event or set of experiences, could be a whole range of things, and you would draw together the different sources that you would have around that.

There are a number of skills that you need to develop to do Creative Interviewing and I won't try and list them all now but I think, most important are the kinds of skills for normal social interaction. You need to be able to ask questions in an interested way, you need to be able to relate those in your mind to the themes that you want to investigate and follow up with people, so you don't just ask any random questions of course, but you try to think about what kinds of things that you really want to know, but most importantly, you need to be able to listen, you really need to develop your listening skills, this is important whether or not you're tape recording your interview because with a creative interview you don't have a structured set of questions, so you ask a question, you need to listen carefully to what the person says you can pick up a thread from that to follow up and to use in your next question. It's very important to do that. If you don't do that it appears rude because it appears that you're not listening and it also means you get very disjointed data so you'll end up talking about something and then you'll shift on to a completely different topic and then you'll remember that you want to go back to the previous topic and so on. So listening is the most important skill.