

METHODS IN CONTEXT LESSON ONE – HANDOUT

ACTIVITY 1:

Item C

One impact of in-school processes on student experience is the formation of pupil identities. Processes such as setting and streaming can lead to pupils reacting in different ways. Further processes, such as the curriculum and the policies and procedures of the school can also influence pupil's identities, while the interactions with teachers and with their peers can also influence a pupil's understanding of their own identity.

Sociologists often use unstructured interviews to conduct research inside school settings, but they are not without their limitations. Pupils and teachers may not wish to take part in interviews for a variety of reasons. However, they do provide researchers with an opportunity to develop a rapport with those they are interviewing.

Applying material from item C and elsewhere, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using unstructured interviews to investigate the impact of in-school processes on pupil's identity formation (20)

WHAT issue are we investigating?

HOW are we going to do the research?

WHO are going to be our research subjects?

Now highlight "hooks" in the item that relate to the the WHAT, HOW & WHERE

Using the hooks identified, make some quick notes on how they either:

- a) Explain the formation of identities
- b) Can be developed further into strengths or limitations of the research method

ACTIVITY 2:

What else might influence identity formation?

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Using the different concepts discussed, identify problems you may face in researching these. Some things to consider

- the sensitivity of topic
- would schools want these topics to be discussed?
- would pupils be aware of these processes?
- what are the implication for teachers?

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ACTIVITY 3:

What other strengths and limitations are there?

STRENGTHS	LIMITATIONS

ACTIVITY 4: (Complete online)

ACTIVITY 5:

How might teachers react to being interviewed?

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What types of pupils might be interviewed?

Working-class pupils	
Middle-class pupils	
Minority-ethnic pupils	
Male pupils	
Female pupils	

ACTIVITY 6: (Complete online)

ACTIVITY 7:

MAKE IT BETTER: Band 3s to 4s

One strength of using an unstructured interview is the ability to ask further questions due to its flexible nature. The researcher can ask follow-up questions if something interesting is revealed.

MAKE IT BETTER:

A limitation of conducting research into identity formation is that schools may not allow researchers access to the school as the issue could be seen as negative.

MAKE IT BETTER:

A limitation of researching pupils is that parental consent would need to be required as they are under the age of 18.

MAKE IT BETTER:

MAKE IT BETTER: Band 4s to 5s

A strength of using unstructured interviews to investigate identity formation is that the interviewer can develop a rapport with those being interviewed and this might make them feel more at ease and open to responding. This is particularly useful with pupils, such as those in anti-school subcultures that might see the interviewer as a teacher in disguise and therefore be less likely to disclose any information.

MAKE IT BETTER:

One issue with researching identity formation would be the potentially sensitive nature of some of the concepts being discussed. Issues such as labelling, sexual harassment and racism can be seen as sensitive topics. When conducting interview, the interviewer needs to be highly skilled in order to ask these questions in an appropriate manner and not cause any psychological harm to those being interviewed.

MAKE IT BETTER:

Highlight the WHO, HOW and WHAT in this Band 5 paragraph:

A further issue with using unstructured interviews to investigate identity formation is the role of the gatekeeper. Knowing that issues such as bullying, setting and streaming, racism or harassment might cause negative identity formation, headteachers or teachers might put forward students that have had positive experiences in the school. They may put forward students from pro-school subcultures that are likely to answer questions about how they feel school life has shaped them in a positive way. As unstructured interviews allow for follow-up questions, these students may be more likely to be honest in their praise of the school to unexpected questions, and therefore give a positive view of identity formation in the school, rather than a negative one that may be portrayed by students in anti-school subcultures.