

## Conducting Interviews in Qualitative Social Science Research

### Types:

- *individual face-to-face* (choose non-shy participants willing to share)
- *telephone* (not ideal but used when direct access not possible)
- *focus group* (if time is limited, if interaction aids response, if solo participants hesitant)

### Benefits to capitalize on:

- Researcher controls line of questioning
- Historical context can be provided by interviewee

### Drawbacks to be aware of:

- Researcher's presence may introduce biased responses
- Responses are indirect (out of context from actual performance as in field observation) and may be filtered by interviewee

### Formulating/Asking Questions:

- Determine what kind information is needed before writing questions
- Keep questions open-ended, unstructured
  - tell a story about ....
  - trace ... back to the beginning ...
  - walk me through the process you experienced ...
- ask clear questions
- ask single questions
- Use few in number (no more than five)
- Memorize questions and their order (follow three stages)
  - establish interviewee background in area of research
  - details of present experience relevant to topic
  - meaning the current experience has for them
- Match level of questions and probes to ability of interviewee
- To get information you need:
  - allow for exploration but stay on track regarding themes of questions
  - assure you are well versed in the terminology and the background lit on the topic
  - Use probes
    - contradict
    - link
    - fake puzzling
    - challenge
    - encourage
    - acknowledge/show understanding
    - direct question
    - procure details
- Be a good listener
  - offer little advice and few questions
  - ask for details, clarification, examples
  - allow for silence while participant thinks

## **Making an Interview Protocol Form**

- About five pages
- Preamble
  - Heading
    - Study title
    - Time, Date, Place
    - Interviewer, Interviewee
  - Instructions (opening statements) to interviewee
    - release form
    - approximate length of interview
    - purpose of research
    - methods of disseminating results
- Questions
  - five issues relating to key research question and probes to follow responses
  - transition messages for interviewer
  - space to record interviewee responses
  - space to record interviewer reflections
- Closure
  - Write reminder to thank interviewee
  - assure confidentiality
  - ask permission to follow-up

## **Recording procedure**

Use audiotape

Lapel mic for interviewer and interviewee best

Arrange for transcription equipment/personnel ahead of time

Assure tapes used work with transcription equipment

Take hand-written notes in addition

Recognize difficulty of taking notes/listening/asking questions

Recognize that information will be lost/inexact

Use two researchers if audiotape not possible

## **Reference Resources**

[1-4]

1. Creswell, J.W., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 2nd ed. 2002, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
2. Creswell, J.W., *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. 1998: Sage Publications.
3. Berry, R.S.Y. *Collecting Data by In-depth Interviewing*. in *British Educational Research Association Annual Conference*. 1999. University of Sussex at Brighton.
4. Doyle, J.K., *Handbook for IQP Advisors and Students: Chapter 11: Introduction to Interviewing Techniques*. 2004, Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

DRAFT

**Interview Questions with Potential Probes**  
**Exploring Learning Factors During a Process Based Assessment Workshop**

1. Take me back through the history in your career that brought you to this institute.  
What types of professional development have you previously experienced?  
What is your background working with faculty in professional development?  
What is an area of strength or expertise for you in the science of learning?
2. Can you describe some details of what you have gained from this institute?  
What about your gains as a learner?  
Is this experience similar to your expectations?  
What is your previous learning experience in this type of environment?
3. Can you walk me through the personal learning process you have gone through as a participant in the institute?  
Have your feelings about doing assessment changed during the institute?  
How did you feel at the beginning, middle, and end of each day?
4. What factors most helped/hindered your learning during the institute?  
Why?  
How?  
Here is list of potential factors that may help you...  
What were some challenges you faced in the last few days here? Why?  
What activities gave you the most success in achieving your goals here? Why?
5. Can you describe a specific incident that sparked significant growth for you during the institute?  
How about growth potential?  
If no incident comes to mind, how about a task or exercise?  
Why was this incident significant?  
What will the future impact of this incident be?

## Interview Protocol Form

Project: Exploring Learning of Assessment during a “Process Based” Faculty Development Workshop

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Release form signed? \_\_\_\_\_

### Notes to interviewee:

Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research and in helping grow all of our professional practice.

Confidentiality of responses is guaranteed

Approximate length of interview: 30 minutes, five major questions

Purpose of research:

*For adult learners improving their assessment practice, what factors mediate in learning and performance improvements during a workshop?*

- i. What challenges do they face?*
- ii. What are the cultural norms for assessment practice?*
- iii. What are the challenges to transfer beyond the workshop boundaries?*
- iv. What are the motivations of the faculty?*
- v. What factors of the learning environment are important?*
- vi. How important is practice with feedback?*
- vii. What is faculty conceptualization of assessment when entering the workshop?*

Methods of disseminating results: ???

1. Take me back through the history in your career that brought you to this institute.  
What types of professional development have you previously experienced?  
What is your background working with faculty in professional development?  
What is an area of strength or expertise for you in the science of learning?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

2. Can you describe some details of what you have gained from this institute?  
What about your gains as a learner?  
Is this experience similar to your expectations?  
What is your previous learning experience in this type of environment?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

3. Can you walk me through the personal learning process you have gone through as a participant in the institute?

Have your feelings about doing assessment changed during the institute?

How did you feel at the beginning, middle, and end of each day?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

4. What factors most helped/hindered your learning during the institute?

Why?

How?

Here is list of potential factors that may help you...

What were some challenges you faced in the last few days here? Why?

What activities gave you the most success in achieving your goals here? Why?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer



5. Can you describe a specific incident that sparked significant growth for you during the institute?

How about growth potential?

If no incident comes to mind, how about a task or exercise?

Why was this incident significant?

What will the future impact of this incident be?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

- Closure
  - Thank you to interviewee
  - reassure confidentiality
  - ask permission to follow-up \_\_\_\_\_

## Conducting Interviews in Qualitative Social Science Research

### Type:

*individual face-to-face* (choose non-shy participants willing to share)

### ?Number

6-12

try for six during/immediately after workshop

3 interviewers

conduct two interviews each

three or six more (by telephone if necessary) as soon after workshop as possible

3 interviewers

conduct two interviews each

### ?Length

30 minutes or less

### ???Location

Separate room available in SUB?

ME conference room?

offices via telephone or in person?

### Interview Protocol Form

Standard for all interviews performed

### ???Recording procedure

Audiotape format

???Lapel mic for interviewer and interviewee best

???Single tape recorder device with one mic?

??? Recording device to use

Transcription

???Arrange for transcription equipment/personnel

???Assure tapes used work with transcription equipment

Take hand-written notes in addition

Use interview protocol

Single interviewer OK as long as audio recording devices working