Approaching Qualitative Research through Interviews

A Common Core-Aligned Lesson Plan to use in your Classroom

Author


The lesson

This lesson helps students carefully read informational text so that they can develop effective interviewing skills. This lesson is part of a larger project where student interview community members regarding a chosen social issue.

The goal of this lesson is to help students develop confidence in their research abilities so they are able to find meaning in their qualitative research and connect with other people in their community who have experienced their social issue. As members of society, we need to strengthen our interpersonal communication skills so we can understand one another and develop empathy for others. Through this process, students will also gain insight into how their community works, and how their chosen social issue is affecting their community, which will make them more prepared to influence social change.

Students will be able to

- Distinguish between structured, unstructured, and semi-structured types of research interviews.
- Choose a research method that will serve as the design for their own qualitative research interview with community members.
- Use these research techniques identified from the text and apply them as part of their research in order to deeply understand community-based issues as part of a larger Community Inquiry Project.

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**Common Core Standards and Instructional Shifts Emphasized**

Shift 1: Balancing Literary and Informational Text - Students read a true balance of informational and literary texts.

Shift 4: Text-based answers - Students engage in rich and rigorous evidence-based conversations about text.

Shift 6: Academic Vocabulary - Students constantly build the transferable vocabulary they need to access grade-level complex texts.

**Here’s what you do**

**Resources Needed:**
- The following text: [http://www.academia.edu/746649/Methods_of_data_collection_in_qualitative_research_interviews_and_focus_groups](http://www.academia.edu/746649/Methods_of_data_collection_in_qualitative_research_interviews_and_focus_groups)
- A piece of paper to take visual notes
- A student-drawn bubble map
- Pens and highlighters

**Time:**
1-2 hours

**Instructions:**

1) **Class Discussion:** I begin the lesson by asking students to revisit WHY they chose their social issue, since this lesson takes place a couple weeks into the unit, and some students may have become somewhat unmotivated at this point. I have them remind themselves silently why they chose their social issue as a research topic. After a minute or so, I have them turn to the person next to them and share why they chose their topic and why it is meaningful to them. During this time, I circle around and listen to parts of students’ conversations to check for understanding and ensure appropriate participation.

2) **Reading Nonfiction Text:** I then explain to students that the next part of our research project will be selecting people in our community who have experienced our social issue and interviewing them.
I hand out the article we will be reading to gain more information about qualitative research.

Understanding academic vocabulary: Before students begin reading, you can have them skim through the text and highlight or underline unfamiliar words. Then, individually or as a class, you can have students look up the unfamiliar words and replace them with similes that they are better able to understand. You can add these unfamiliar words to a class word wall and revisit them during future lessons to reinforce acquisition of new vocabulary.

Close reading and answering text dependent questions: I call on a student to read the first paragraph about different types of qualitative interviews. After they finish, I ask students text-dependent questions, such as “How many types of qualitative interviews are there, according to the article?” or “What is the first type of qualitative interview mentioned in this article?” When a student gives an answer, I ask them where in the article they found that answer, and have them direct their classmates to the part of the text where the answer is found. I, then, ask all students to put their finger on the evidence in the text or highlight the answer. This ensures that everyone is following along and can understand how their classmate arrived at the correct answer.

I have students draw a bubble map on a blank piece of paper, and as we read through the text about the three types of qualitative interviews as a class (continuing to call on students to each read a paragraph), I have students take notes on the criteria for each type of interview. I stop and ask text-dependent questions frequently, such as “What is a structured interview, according to the article?” As students share criteria describing that type of interview, I ask them where in the article they found that information, and have them direct their classmates to the part of the text where the information is found. Once everyone has found where the information is located in the text, I ask students to add that answer to their bubble map so they can access this information later.

An example of some criteria students may identify from the article about structured interviews are:

1) predetermined questions
2) little or no variation in responses
3) no follow up questions
4) quick and easy to administer
5) limited participant responses
6) not a lot of “depth”
Once we have read about all three types of qualitative interviews and taken notes together as a class, I ask students to choose which type/types of interview they think would be most appropriate for their research project. I ask students to share which type of qualitative interview they chose (structured, unstructured, or semi-structured) and to tell the class why this method will be most appropriate for their research. There is no right or wrong choice, and students are free to choose whichever approach will work best for their interview process.

3) Use Text to Create Criteria for Good Interviews:
Having chosen the type of interview they wish to pursue, we skip further down in the article and read about what makes a good interview. For this part, I have students read with a partner, and work with their partner to identify criteria of what makes a good interview from the text. Each pair of students will take notes on a separate bubble map that they will create. I tell students that this bubble map will serve as a checklist for them while they are working on preparing for their interview, and they can check themselves according to these criteria. For example, if a good qualitative interview should “have open-ended questions,” “be conducted in safe areas that are free from distractions,” and “be conducted after the interviewer has established rapport with the person they are interviewing,” then students will write this information down on their bubble map and use this information to set up a good interview. They will do the same for qualities and characteristics of a good interviewer, such as “open body language,” “nodding,” “smiling,” “listening attentively,” etc.

4) Self-assessment: Once students have added these criteria to their bubble map, I ask them to put a star next to two things on their list that they think will be easy for them as an interviewer. For example, a student may select “building rapport” and “listening attentively” as their two strengths when it comes to interviewing. Then I ask students to choose an area from their list that may be challenging for them, and put an exclamation point next to it, as something to really focus on. This serves as a mini self-assessment that allows students to check in with themselves in terms of how prepared they are to go out and collect research as a qualitative interviewer.