IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING

Workshop Module for

Transdisciplinary Understanding and Training on Research –
Primary Health Care  (TUTOR-PHC)

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In-depth Interviewing
TUTOR-PHC Workshop Module

Objectives

- to explore some of the research problems, purposes and questions that might be addressed by in-depth interviewing.
- to acquire knowledge of the strengths, limitations, techniques, potential pitfalls and outcomes of this data collection method.
- to obtain practice in developing a semi-structured interview guide for facilitating the in-depth interview process.

Reading Assignments


Tasks

Week 1 – Discuss readings on qualitative interviews.
Week 2 – In two teams, generate semi-structured interview guides to address the question, "What is the lived experience of personal growth through formal graduate education?"
Week 3 – Respond to the interview guide developed by the other team, give feedback on the guide, and reflect upon the interview experience.

Discussion Summary

Number of participants: 5
Total number of messages: 68
Number of facilitator posts and comments: 27

Week 1 – Original Facilitator post

Hi Sheri, Lisa, Bridget, Onil and Liz. Welcome to this workshop. I’m looking forward to our teaching and learning exchanges. Will talk to you soon!- Carol

The following questions are posed to facilitate discussion of the reading materials:-

1. Why might a researcher choose in-depth interviewing as a data collection method?

2. What approaches might one use to conducting in-depth interviews? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these options?

3. To ask a question is to shape an answer. Discuss some of the considerations one might make in deciding what questions to ask, when, in what order, and how? (For example, one consideration might relate to what, when, where, and how to seek information about the interviewee’s demographics.)
4. In addition to what questions are asked and how they are asked, what are some of the other issues to which an interviewer should attend in conducting interviews?

5. When are focus group interviews appropriately used? What are some of the unique features of a focus group interview? How do focus groups differ from group interviews?

6. What are some of the ethical issues associated with in-depth interviewing and how might they best be addressed? What are some of the similarities and differences between in-depth research interviews and therapeutic interviews?

**Number of participant posts**: 13  
**Facilitator comments**: 11  
**Sample comments**:

- Hi to everyone, and congratulations on the excellent critical thinking and application of past experiential learning that has created such great teaching and learning synergy here! Sorry I’m responding a day late – had to go to out-of-town faculty retreat yesterday so am just getting to this! Building on the great contributions here, I have some thoughts to add for your consideration.

  Onil: While asking the question shapes the answer, the great thing, as you’ve discovered, is that if we have rapport with our interview participants, they often are forthcoming well beyond and around and away from our question- hence the importance of “artform” as well as “technical merit” in conducting the interview, and the artform is largely subjective and non-verbal.

- Liz – I do hope that by now the computer challenges I sorted out for you – you have my full understanding on this front – I actually hate the computer, although I appreciate its potential in connecting me with all of you.

**Week 2 – Facilitator posts and comments**

**Week 2: Creation of an In-depth Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

The assigned research question is: “What is the lived experience of personal growth through formal graduate education? With due consideration of the assigned workshop readings and any other you’ve found, as part of one of two research teams, you will create a semi-structured interview guide for collecting data to answer this research question. Each workshop participant is expected to:

1. compose a minimum of one and maximum of 3 potential questions for your team’s interview guide by the end of day 2, taking care to avoid redundancy and overlap with questions already posted;
2. from days 3 – 5, create a more polished semi-structured interview guide from the list of questions thereby created. Refine: the degree of open-endedness of questions; the quality of each question in terms of sensitively eliciting personal human experience; the comprehensiveness of the list for fully exploring this lived experience (by changing the wording of individual questions, adding probes, or, if absolutely essential, adding one or two questions); the ordering of the questions in the list; making any other
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changes you believe help to refine your shared semi-structured interview guide.
3. As you enter changes on Days 3 – 5 discuss the refinements you are proposing, exploring concerns or issues with each other.

Number of participant posts: 19
Number of facilitator comments: 8

Sample comments:

- Hi everyone – great work! First, Bridgit and Sheri: Bridgit – your logical positivist/objectivist roots are showing in your reflections. A few questions to encourage critical reflection: Can we feel about anything until we know what that thing is? What kinds of assumptions does “affect them down the road” make? Is “the experience of being a grad student” the same as “the experience of personal growth through graduate education”? Does “lived experience” all come from outside, such that one is “affected” by it? Having raised these questions, though, I must say I am impressed that you have very diligently dispensed with your “roots” in crafting your questions for the interview guide. Your #1 creates I context for exploring personal growth – a very well done question indeed – gets at human needs and motives, which of course are very much a part of one’s lived experience, either consciously, sub-consciously or unconsciously. Your #2 gets at the nature of personal growth – again, very nice. Your number 3 has that process orientation that recognizes that life, and therefore, lived experience, is an ongoing process that is dynamic and constantly changing so can best be captured through exploration of its unfolding. Great work!

- Lisa: a great start for your group! You’re absolutely right – you are venturing into the territory of exploring very subjective, very individualized human experience with a view to eliciting the interviewees’ unique experiences, so yes, you absolutely have to let them define it. In fact your questions have to be open enough so that they can say, “my lived experience of personal growth through grad educ. Is that there is none!” One would hope that no one has such an experience, but they may have – one never knows!). You’re first question is a good start. It enables the interviewee to tell you what they mean by personal growth. It also assumes that personal growth is a process – in fact, the “how” question even opens up the possibility that personal growth is a social interaction process. Your social worker skills are apparent here! A psychology major might ask “What has been your experience of personal growth?”

Week 3 – Original facilitator post

Week 3: Critique the Shared Semi-Structured Interview Guide from the Perspective of Interviewee

1. Any time between Day 5 of Week 2 and the beginning of Day 2 of Week 3, administer the semi-structured interview guide to members of the other team. Answer each of the questions the other team administers to you, as their interviewees, in the order presented, through critical reflection on your own lived experience. Jot down the key points you make in your answer to each question. Ask yourself:
   ∙ How did I as an interviewee experience the nature of these questions and
the process of answering these questions?
  · What refinements might I make to the nature and process created by this semi-structured interview guide?
  · What have I discovered about my experience of personal growth through formal graduate education?
  · What themes and patterns, if any, appear across my answers?
  · Does my data advance my understanding of this lived experience? If so how? If not, why not?
  · What applicability, if any, might my understanding have to others who might share in this human experience?
  · What modifications to our semi-structured interview guide might have enhanced the data I’ve elicited through this exercise?

2. On or before the end of Day 2, using your own answers to the bulleted questions above, share your critique of the semi-structured guide with other workshop participants on-line. Discuss the critiques of other workshop participants. Consider whether your guides have elicited new understanding, to what depth, and what further refinements you might make to the guides. Ask questions, discuss further concerns and any other points you’d like to address about in-depth interviewing.

Number of participant posts:  17
Number of facilitator comments:  7
Sample comments:
  o Great critical reflection Sheri! Your observations about potential refinements and teh advantages of f2f interviewing are very astute. Yes, Gp z gave interviewees a framework that promoted greater breadth and depth of critical reflection on personal growth and I think it's clear from the data elicited, that did enrich data directly related to personal growth in teh context of pursuing grad education. I fully understand everyone's need to keep their responses short and to the point- obviously data of this nature are very personal, and I previously did not have people post their answers to interview questions for that reason. This year, I took the risk of taking all of you through this journey of posting and reflecting - I hope it has not been too intrusive and that the learning returns warranted the self-disclosure! By the end of your contributions this wk, I will need feedback from all of you on this- did seeing the data elicited from your semi-structured guides allow you to gain more in-depth understanding of in-depth interviewing or not? Sheri, your comments here suggest to me that you did learn more. Yes, probes can be very directing - normally, they are included and directed only if and as teh interviewee's data warrant further probing. It is much more responsive and more interactive in f2f interviewing, and therefore hopefully experienced by the interviewee as less intrusive and directing. Nevertheless, they are still "directing" - this is what makes the data as well as the final findings "intersubjective". Thanks for sharing these important insights Sheri.
  o Hi again everyone. Each of these on-line workshops is a unique journey, and I'm wanting to make sure you are getting your expectations for learning about in-depth interviewing met. As you're noted, my style is to try to facilitate your learning from your own experience, but this leaves me uncertain as to whether I'm meeting your needs. If you have any specific questions about in-depth interviewing, please ask them directly in the next day or two and I will
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do my best to help! - Carol

Participant Feedback
Average workshop rating (1=poor, 5=excellent): 4.7
Sample comments

Comments related to the instructor
[The instructor] was excellent. Well organized. Very clear in where she wanted to take us. Used very practical hands-on to lead to conceptual understanding.

The most useful part of this workshop was
Doing the actual interview guide. This practical example was helpful to me because I can read the concepts on my own. Putting into practice was an entirely different matter. Very quickly I learned what I knew and what I needed to learn.

Suggestions for improvement
I had three problems with this workshop. 1. I found the timeline very short, especially when doing the actual guide and trying to work within a group. 2. I personally had great trouble opening messages in WebCT . . . 3. I found it extremely hard to follow the threads once we split into two groups. I almost think it would be better to have two separate workshops once the two groups are formed. I know at one point my comments were not read by the instructor, probably because they were in a different thread. Not sure how to solve the problem entirely because sometimes people started new threads. Also instructor wanted to respond to both groups which of course doesn't fit into one groups’ thread or the other others.

This workshop module was offered in June 2005. For more information, please contact the TUTOR-PHC program manager at tutor@uwo.ca.