Revision

Education and methods in context

Joan Garrod

This exercise will help you practise the skill of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of particular sociological methods in the context of a specific research scenario, rather than in general.

A list of research topics is given below. For each, two methods are suggested. Working with a partner, list the strengths and weaknesses of each method for the research topic proposed. Remember that in real research, sociologists often use a variety of methods, but for the purposes of this exercise, just focus on each of the methods given.

Exercise

1. Differences in A-level subject choice by gender
   Method 1: Analysis of exam statistics from the Department for Education.
   Method 2: In-depth interviews with sixth-formers from a particular school.

2. Reasons for parental choice of preferred secondary school
   Method 1: Questionnaire sent to random sample of 100 parents of children in year 6 from four different schools.
   Method 2: Unstructured interviews with random sample of 20 parents of children in year 6 at a particular school.

3. Gap in achievement in English language skills at age 11 by social class
   Method 1: Non-participant observation of English lessons at a mainly working-class and a mainly middle-class school over a period of two academic terms, focussing primarily on pupils’ attention levels, behaviour and willingness/ability to participate in lesson.
   Method 2: Questionnaire sent to all parents of year 11 pupils at both schools asking questions about level of parental education, number and type of books in the home, whether children were read to when younger, number of hours per week children spend doing homework, reading, watching TV, playing video games, on social media sites.

Joan Garrod is a managing editor of SOCIOLGY REVIEW