

Social Research Methods

A



Presentation by Imagine More

NOTE This document is intended to be both an accompaniment to the presentation, and a guide to presenting it yourself if you desire. If you would like clarification on any point, or additional information, please email us at youthdesignstudio@imagine-more.org. Also, if you end up presenting this (or any part of it) yourself, please let us know how it goes!!

Beginning: Have audience do **Question Activity**. Each question is asked to a different person.

Youth Design Studio Presentation

Social Research Presentation

First of all!

What is social research?

Our students will be using it to identify and address a challenge in their community.

How might it relate to you?

How might you use it?

Why are you here in this course? What are you trying to get out of it?

No matter who you are, YOU are a designer, and social research will help you identify the challenges in your life, gather information about them, and reveal possible strategies to address them.

In Youth Design Studio, one of the first modules we'll teach is how to do social research. The first question our students will have to ask themselves is who is their community? This might sound obvious, but who a community is is not always clear.

§ Doesn't necessarily mean a geographical area. A community could be united by the job they do, the place they work, a common culture or ethnicity, a shared interest/hobby/lifestyle - even an online "community" is a community

Community Activity

What community are we in now? Where are we?

Who is the community of the Wynberg Girls' High School?

[students, teachers, administrators principal, parents, security people, cleaning staff, groundskeepers, office staff, etc.]

Each will have a different perspective on the community, experience of the space, etc.

Take one photograph that you think describes this community

Think about things like who you think this community is and how they use this space?

Discuss pictures, share with person next to you. Share with group.

Hopefully this got you thinking about who community is and how they relate to a space. And how different communities relate to different spaces, and how this is different from your teaching spaces and your community.

§ When conducting your own research, make sure all groups/ethnicities/ages/genders/jobs are represented

Thinking about community is just the first step to conducting good social research.

- **The Question:**

Start with clear idea of what challenge or question(s) you are trying to find out more about. Get together with your team and come up with a concise, one-sentence summary of the question you're trying to address.

§ Process leading up to this can be significant - the "question" is not always as clear as you think it is

§ Try phrasing optimistically

§ Teacher question: (bad) How do we keep our students from falling asleep in class?

(good) How might we redesign our classrooms and teaching styles to keep students more engaged on a daily basis?

§ Student question: What challenges are our community members dealing with on a daily basis?

§ Possible audience activity: ask them to brainstorm what kinds of questions they or their students might want to address?

- **Record Keeping**

§ Decide how you will record your data: use recording devices? Write down all your notes? Keep them on paper, or on your computer, or both? Etc.

§ Advantages/disadvantages of recording devices

° Make things easier to remember (and quote), but put people more on their guard, and some people might have problems with videos

° If you decide to record, make sure people are okay with it first, explain to them what it's for

° Everyone has different preferences, figure out what works for you. My preferred method: concentrate fully on the conversation, take very few notes (just to remember the flow of the conversation), and then go home and write everything down that I can remember, IMMEDIATELY. Julie's preferred method: voice recording device, plus similar follow-up writeup with impressions, everything she remembers about the interview.

- **Ethics & Safety**

§ You need to think about your privacy policy.

§ Are people going to be quoted?

§ Are interviews going to be anonymous? (in which case you need a way to secure your notes and/or code them with numbers instead of names, and keep the names in a secure place)

§ How will you make sure that your information doesn't get out?

§ If you're recording, what will you do with the recordings?

§ Be clear with your respondent about why you're doing this research, how they'll be involved, whether they'll be quoted (or ask them if they are ok with being quoted), etc. If there could be legal repercussions, put all these things in writing and have respondents sign it.

§ Safety

§ Make sure you are interviewing in a safe place, with someone you trust, with a partner if that makes you more comfortable, that someone knows where you are if you're alone

§ **MAKE SURE STUDENTS KNOW THIS**

- Types of Research

§ Interviews

§ There are a lot of ways to conduct interviews, and as you do more of them, you get a sense of what works best for you, and of the things you get out of different kinds of interviews

§ Written surveys can generate a lot of data with relatively little effort on your part; however, the data you receive will be relatively shallow (especially if respondents must put their names on the survey). This is good for easily-expressed opinions, and demographic information like family size, ages, address, etc. Some can be assessed with a survey only if they're not value-laden: in some places, things like income, health issues, drug use, sexual/reproductive issues, and others are things that people may not report truthfully, even if surveys are anonymous.

§ Group interviews are good for getting a general sense of things, the status of a community, big issues, general traits

° Games: a variation on group interviews. Give people a scenario, and tell them to draw it, build it, make it with paper, other materials, etc. Great if you're designing a thing (eg. A product, a space).

° Online: Facebook, Twitter, etc. conversations/exchanges are more tech-savvy examples of group interviewing, and definitely useful.

§ Individual interviews are great for getting more personal, in-depth information (most people will say more alone than they'll say around other people). This is probably the best/highest quality information you'll get, but they are time-consuming, tough if you need a LOT of data.

§ Observation and Participatory observation

§ This is basically just hanging out with the people you're researching, and doing what they do.

§ Shadowing people in their jobs/homes, pitching in

§ Observing public places and how people use them

§ Learning about an activity by learning to do it

§ Document with photographs

§ Learning about a group of people by becoming one of them, for a short period of time, as much as possible. Sit in on a class, co-teach a class, volunteer in the office, etc.

§ No matter what form(s) of research you choose, just be aware of whose perspective you're getting, who has a voice and who doesn't, and the limitations of the method you're using.

- The Semi-Structured Interview

§ This means you have some questions that you brainstorm beforehand and use to guide your interview, but let the conversation lead where it leads

§ Ideally, meet people in a place where they're comfortable, like their home or workplace, or if you're working with a group, in a relaxed public place like a park

§ Generally good to start with concrete things, questions with easy answers - name, occupation, where the person lives, etc.

§ Broaden, get into more open-ended questions that require a bit more explanation, and let the person talk if they want to. Prompt them with short additional questions, let the conversation flow. You never know what you'll find out!

§ Be aware of possibly sensitive issues, and questions biased toward certain gender, age, culture, socioeconomic status, etc.

§ Discuss earlier question activity

§ What are sensitive issues/taboos here?

§ Is a question likely to be answered differently by men and women? By differently aged people? By different cultures? Etc.

§ DON'T ask leading questions: ones that suggest an answer, or suggest that one answer may be more correct than another.

§ This requires you to examine your own biases/assumptions

§ Examples:

§ Bad: Do you agree that the school board should spend more money on arts education rather than sports?

§ Better but not Good: Do you think that the school board is spending its money efficiently?

§ Good: What are your opinions about how the school board spends its money?

§ Coming up with good, non-biased, non-leading questions is an iterative process, and one that you should do with a team

§ Turn complicated questions into "for instance"s

§ Questions about future or hypothetical behavior ("what would you do if" questions - usually about risks, money, tradeoffs, other future situations) can be complicated, because it's hard to respond in general terms about something you might do. It's better to break them down into concrete choices.

§ Example: You have a choice of two phones. The first one costs R2 000 and comes with no guarantees. The second one costs R3 000 and comes with the guarantee that if it breaks within 2 years, you will automatically get a new one. Which one do you take?

§ **Financial Activity** with pieces of paper. For each question, the participant separates the pieces of paper into groups, according to what they would do with the money/resource that that paper represents.

° You EARN R5 000. Each square of paper is R500. How many do you:

1. Save
2. Spend on necessities (food, household, transport)
3. Spend on non-necessities

° You WIN R5 000. Each square is R500. How many do you:

1. Save
2. Spend on necessities (food, household, transport)
3. Spend on non-necessities

- IMPORTANT:

§ Note what people DON'T say. Every time they say something, they are consciously not saying something else. What they DON'T say can tell you a lot about taboos, gender roles, problems, anything that they could get in trouble for, and other things that are hard to talk about.

§ Be able to adapt

§ If one strategy, interview type, or question isn't working, be able to move on to another!

§ Don't feel like you're limited to one research method: feel free to use more than one! You can get new and different information from a different method - the more methods you try, the more you can see of the bigger picture.

§ DON'T get too attached to anything: not your challenge, not your ideas on how to solve it, not your interview questions.

§ The reality of social research is that as you conduct it, your new understanding of your interviewees, your context, and your original assumptions may change your perception of the challenge itself

§ Example? You might start out with the challenge that your school doesn't have enough money to implement the programs it needs. But during your research, you might realize that the school has enough money, and it's just not using it effectively; or that there could be other programs you could implement. Have to keep re-examining what you think the challenge is

- What does this look like in an actual class?

§ Essentially: exactly the same, but we'll teach it with less complicated language.

§ Youth Design Studio: students will determine who their community is, question their] assumptions about those people, and then decide what question(s) they want to address. They'll decide the best way to go about answering that question: individual interviews, group interviews, observation, participation, or some combination of these. They'll record their data, then come together and discuss what they've found out. They'll use this information to determine what the main challenges are in their community and how they might go about addressing them.

- Data Analysis

§ Note coding: main themes/keywords

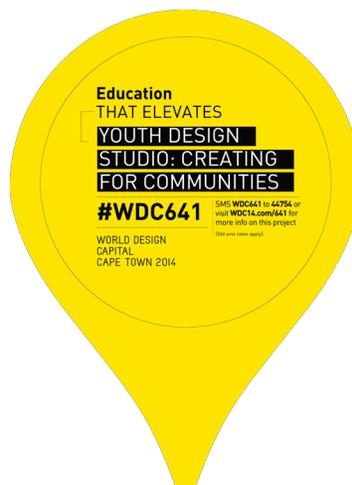
§ If you're conducting more than a couple interviews, you will end up with a LOT of notes. To make these notes more useful, generate a list of main themes, keywords, and ideas that are relevant to your challenge

§ Then go through and underline/highlight examples of these themes/keywords, and note (in a separate color) in the margins which theme/keyword the example corresponds to. Makes it easy to go back to a particular part of a particular interview

§ Quantitative/qualitative analysis

§ Highlighting main ideas/insights

§ Basically this is a whole other lecture, so let us know if you want to know how to do these things, and we'll help you!!



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