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| **METHOD - DEFINITION** | | **ADVANTAGES/**  **SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHODS – SUMMARY TABLE**  **USES** | **DISADVANTAGES/**  **LIMITATIONS** | **EXAMPLES**  **EDUCATION** | **MiC**  **ISSUES** |
| **OBSERVATION (P. 206-217)** | **PARTICIPANT**  **OBSERVATION**  Unstructured. Natural situation, observer participates – usually covert – enter ‘meaning world’ | * Favoured by interpretivists –rich qualitative ’real world’ data – based on subjective insights, ‘verstehen’ (empathy). * **Covert** – natural behaviour – valid esp sensitive issues * **Overt** – reduced moral & ethical issues, easier to record, can question openly * Flexible - New insights * Access to ‘hidden’ worlds e.g. delinquent groups. | * Rejected by positivists – unreliable (can’t replicate) & unrepresentative. Also ignores structural context. * **Overt** – Observer effects * **Covert** – note taking & going native * Getting in, staying in, getting out esp covert * Time, money, involvement, stress * Highly trained / skilled observer with appropriate characteristics * Objectivity - observer bias – over-involvement, selective reporting * Changing behaviour – researcher effects * Small-sample. Can’t generalise * Ethical issues – deception, consent, privacy, confidentiality, welfare – legal & moral duties. | * **Willis** (1977) Anti-school subculture. * **Ball** (1981) – Overt participant observation of a comprehensive school * **Wright**(1992) – Ethnic stereotypes in four primary schools * **Hargreaves** ((1967) As a teacher observed effects of streaming and labelling. * **Fielding** – Students acted as researchers | * Only a limited number of roles – resticted e.g. teachers pupils, caretaker – many have restrictions – physical – age, gender, ethnicity and educational qualifications educational * Difficult to get time / privacy for recording * Ethics – special issues – related to age group and context – potential harm if info sensitive info revealed. Also need to protect school in marketised economy. |
| **NON-PARTICPANT OBSERVATION**   * May be **covert/overt** * May be **structured / unstructured** | * **Overt/covert** – as above * **Structured** – preferred by positivists –Quick, cheap, less training, generate quantitative data – easier to replicate, analyse, compare * **Unstructured** – Preferred by interpretivists – More valid, qualitative data, giving access to meanings. | * **Overt/covert** – as above * **Structured** – Rejected by interpretivists – lacks validity, categories controlled, ignoring meanings, * **Unstructured** –Rejected by positivists More time consuming, more training required, harder to analyse & compare data. Difficult to replicate | * **Flanders** (1970) - US classroom analysis using Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories FIAC * **Keddie** (1991) – Observed staff meetings and classes. | * Schools are structured environments – easier to develop effective behavioural categories e.g. FIAC * Teachers are practised performers – e.g. Ofsted * Children may be particularly vulnerable to observer effects * Gatekeepers – e.g. teachers, heads may control who is observed. * Schools unique |
| **SECONDARY**  **SOURCES** | **QUANTITATIVE**  1.Statistics – Official - Data gathered Gov & official bodies and non-official.  2. Existing sociological research | * Preferred by positivistis – ‘social facts’ * Free * **Official** - Large amounts of data – representative, allow comparisons over time, standardised collection & measures | * Rejected by interpretivists – socially constructed – lack validity. * Marxists – Official statistics represent the interests of Capitalism * Not specific to aims – collected for different purpose * No control over collection | * **Gilborn** (1995) – school policies, LEA guidelines, minutes of staff meetings * **Gerwirtz et al** (1995) – school brochures & prospectuses * **Hey** (1997) Used notes passed in class to understand friendship patterns * **Lobban** (1974) – Content analysis of gender roles in reading schemes. | * Accountability means official data accessible e.g. league tables. * Issues of equality & achievement shared by Gov & Sociologists * Official definitions e.g. league tables – vary over time * Errors & Bias – e.g. present schools, gov, individual in a good light ref. marketisiation * Access |
| **QUALITATIVE**  1. Documents – public, personal & historical  2. Existing sociological research | * Preferred by interpretivists – more authentic, rich qualitative data esp personal. * Positivists can analyse using content analysis * Historical can allow study of patterns over time | * Rejected by positivists –esp personal can’t generalise, unrepresentative, open to interpretation. * Problems of assessing authenticity esp historical * Validity – may be written for a specific purpose |