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Delivery Guide

H180/H580

SOCIOLOGY

Theme: Research methods and researching social inequalities – Section A

April 2015

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Oxford Cambridge and RSA

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Delivery guides are designed to represent a body of knowledge about teaching a particular topic and contain:

- Content: a clear outline of the content covered by the delivery guide;
- Thinking Conceptually: expert guidance on the key concepts involved, common difficulties students may have, approaches to teaching that can help students understand these concepts and how this topic links conceptually to other areas of the subject;
- Thinking Contextually: a range of suggested teaching activities using a variety of themes so that different activities can be selected that best suit particular classes, learning styles or teaching approaches.

If you have any feedback on this Delivery Guide or suggestions for other resources you would like OCR to develop, please email resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk.

KEY

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AS Level only — AS Level content only

Curriculum Content

Section A: Research methods and researching social inequalities
In this section, learners are introduced to a range of methods and sources of data as well as the factors influencing the design of sociological research and the relationship between theory and methods. Learners are encouraged to consider the practical, ethical and theoretical issues arising in sociological research and to apply knowledge of research methods to the particular context of social inequalities.

Key questions	Content	Learners should:
1. What is the relationship between theory and methods?	Positivism: • patterns • trends • objectivity • value freedom • quantitative data. Interpretivism: • meanings and experiences • verstehen and empathy • rapport • subjectivity • researcher imposition • reflexivity • qualitative data. Key research concepts: • validity • reliability • representativeness • generalisability.	understand how social research is guided by theory. use these concepts in an evaluative way when considering the research process and methodological theories.

Curriculum Content

Key questions	Content	Learners should:
2. What are the main stages of the research process?	Key concepts in the research process: • factors influencing the choice of research topic • aims/hypothesis/research questions • primary data • secondary data • operationalisation • pilot studies • data collection • respondent validation • longitudinal studies • interpretation of data • the relationship between sociology and social policy.	consider how sociological research contributes to social policy.
	Sampling process	
	Sampling techniques: • random • systematic • stratified • snowball • volunteer • opportunity • purposive • quota.	understand the practical, ethical and theoretical factors influencing choice of sampling process. understand the advantages and disadvantages of random and non-random sampling techniques.

Curriculum Content

Key questions	Content	Learners should:
	Access and gatekeeping	understand how samples are accessed and the issues with access.
	Ethics	understand ethical considerations such as those used by the British Sociological Association and why ethical principles should be followed.
3. Which methods are used in sociological research?	Research methods: • questionnaires • structured interviews • statistical data (official and non-official) • content analysis • observations (participant, non-participant, covert, overt) • unstructured interviews • semi structured interviews • ethnography. Quantitative and qualitative data Mixed methods: • triangulation • methodological pluralism.	consider the uses of research methods in the context of social inequalities.

Thinking Conceptually

Approaches to teaching the content

The research methods component seeks to develop an evaluative understanding of the methods used by sociologists to research social inequalities. Students should be able to compare the methodological approaches preferred by both positivists and interpretivists using the key concepts of validity, reliability, representativeness and generalisability.

Within the teaching of the topic, students will benefit from having an extremely developed understanding of the four key concepts as these will be the basis of their evaluative comparisons between methods. Students should be able to give illustrative examples of research methods that may be higher in validity or reliability, and state why. As well as this, they should be able to explain why certain research methods and sampling methods may produce more representative and generalisable samples than others. Considerable focus should also be given to the research process and how certain elements can improve validity, reliability, representativeness or generalisability.

Common misconceptions or difficulties students may have

Students often find it difficult to understand the difference between validity and reliability, and therefore can struggle to see which methods and elements of the research methods process may increase either of these. Due to the confusion between these concepts, students can sometimes struggle to understand the different theoretical approaches to social research.

The mixed methods of triangulation and methodological pluralism can also cause some confusion for students. In particular they can often misunderstand the difference between the two.

Conceptual links to other areas of the specification – useful ways to approach this topic to set students up for topics later in the course

The first step when teaching research methods is to focus on the difference between quantitative and qualitative data. This naturally leads to an assessment of the differences between positivism and interpretivism. Focus should be given to the concepts of validity and reliability when assessing the differences between the two theoretical approaches as students often confuse or misinterpret these concepts, which can hinder their understanding of all research methods. Once a basic understanding of the theoretical perspectives has been established, focus should be given to the research methods process. Particular attention should be given to ethical issues related to research and the importance of operationalisation. It is also important to focus on the process of sampling and access to a target population, as well as the range of different methods used by sociologists to gain representative and generalisable samples.

Once all students understand the process of research, focus can be given to each individual research method. It works well to start by evaluating primary quantitative methods, such as questionnaires and structured interviews, focusing on the key concepts of reliability, validity, representativeness and generalisability. Make sure the students are given examples of social research that use these quantitative methods and ask them to apply the strengths and weaknesses they have learnt in relation to the key concepts. The same assessment

Thinking Conceptually

of qualitative primary methods should then be taken, again giving specific examples and assessing their strengths and weaknesses using reliability, validity, representativeness and generalisability. Finally, secondary and mixed methods can be assessed with comparisons made as to why sociologists would choose these methods over others. It is important throughout the teaching of research methods that students are given specific examples of studies which covers each of the methods.

Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
Positivism and Interpretivism In order to define the two theoretical perspectives, give students an example study from each perspective that assesses the same or a similar topic and ask students to pick out the differences between the two different perspectives. For example, use a summary of Durkheim's comparative method of official statistics and suicide and compare this to Jack Douglas' interpretivist perspective of suicide. After defining both sociological perspectives using examples, it is important to assess the students' understanding with a number of application tasks. One way to do this is to give students a number of concepts that they first have to work out whether they are either positivist or interpretivist. They then have to create a summary of each perspective using as many of the concepts as possible (**Student Resource 1** worksheet followed by teacher answers). Alternatively, students could colour code a number of statements to show that they are either positivist or interpretivist (**Student Resource 2** followed by teacher answers).	Student Resource 1 Student Resource 2
Operationalising In order for students to understand the significance of operationalising concepts for the validity and reliability of research, it is a good idea to give students a number of difficult concepts to operationalise. For example, encourage students to ask members of the class 'are you healthy?' and record their answers of either 'yes' or 'no'. Then get students to ask a number of indicator questions that may be better to show how healthy someone is. Once the answers are recorded, each student should have responses that do not necessarily match up. For example, students may believe they are healthy but answer no to a number of the indicator questions. This should highlight the importance of operationalising concepts. Other concepts that could be used include religiousness, job satisfaction or social class. The latter may have been discussed previously when introducing the idea of social class identity in Component 1, Socialisation, Culture and Identity, Section A. Focus should be given to concepts related to Section B of this unit, such as social class, gender, ethnicity and age inequality. For example, ask students to make a list of indicator questions for concepts, such as 'poverty' or 'sexism'.	

Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
Ethical issues Give students a number of possible difficult topics to complete a sociological study into. The aim is for the students to assess all the possible ethical issues that might arise if carrying out the research for real. Students could be directed to the British Sociological Association website for assistance in making their decisions, or a printed summary of the association's guidelines could be given out (http://www.britsoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx). Each scenario could actually relate to a real piece of sociological research where the students could assess the significance of completing sociological research which breaks ethical guidelines. This task could also be completed as a small group activity where each group is given a different scenario and must feedback their suggestions to the rest of the class.	Click here
Sampling methods A tried and tested way of getting students to understand the different sampling methods is to use sweets as participants. 'Smarties' or similar multi-coloured sweets work the best, as each colour can represent a different social characteristic. As individuals or in groups, give each student their own packet of sweets. On a handout list a number of sampling methods along with their definitions (these could be revealed one at a time) and ask students to record how they would use the method to get a sample of sweets from their packet (**Student Resource 3** worksheet followed by teacher answers). Once the students have a sample of sweets using each method: they should assess how representative the sample is and hence whether or not that method is useful to social research. Also, encourage students to think about when each method should be used by focusing on concepts, such as target population, sampling frame, access, gatekeeper, random and non-random. This activity can also work as a group or whole class task, using larger packets of sweets. Students could eat the sweets as a reward.	Student Resource 3
Questionnaires Give students an example of a poorly constructed questionnaire and ask the students to spot the different types of questions: closed, open, scaled and leading questions. Then encourage them to spot the problems with the questionnaire and why it may not produce valid or reliable data (**Student Resource 4** worksheet followed by teacher answers).	Student Resource 4

Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
Interviews Split students into four groups and give each group a different type of interview to conduct, from structured, semi-structured, unstructured and focus groups, with other members of the class or during free time with friends. Each group should be researching the same topic so that the results can be compared. Focus on giving students a type of inequality to research in school/college, such as sexism or racism. These topics will allow for quantitative and qualitative research to be collected from fellow students. Once the students have collected their results, they should be able to spot which interviews produce quantitative data and which produce qualitative data. In their groups, they should be encouraged to construct a list of strengths and weaknesses of their method by comparing their interview to others in the class. The strengths and weaknesses can then be shared on posters, leaflets or slides.	
Observations Give students examples of four different types of observations, the first aim is for the students to work out what type of observation the example is and then to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each and compare them. The examples could either be written summaries of classic observation studies conducted by sociologists, such as Patrick's Glasgow Gangs, Humphrey's Tearoom Trade or Barker's The Making of a Moonie. Alternatively, examples from television programmes could be given to support each type of observation. Some examples include: • The Secret Policeman, BBC Panorama documentary (BBC) • Big Brother, series 1 (Channel 4) • Donal MacIntyre's undercover investigations (BBC) • Educating Essex/Yorkshire/the East End (Channel 4) • Bruce Parry's Tribe (BBC) • Ross Kemp on Gangs (Sky).	
Assessing understanding of methods Give students a spider diagram of different primary and secondary research methods (**Student Resource 5**) and encourage them to highlight each method in one of two colours. Each colour should represent either quantitative or qualitative. Students should easily be able to identify which methods produce quantitative data and which produce qualitative data. Similarly the two colours could represent different theoretical perspectives or validity and reliability.	Student Resource 5

Student Resource 1 Positivism and interpretivism

See page 10

Task 1

Using the words in the box, highlight them in two separate colours, one for words associated with **positivist** research and one for those associated with **interpretivist** methods.

Correlations and causes	**Quantifiable data**	**Subjective**
Directly measurable	**Rigorous research**	**Scientific**
Causal relationships	**Interpretation**	**Feelings**
Natural sciences	**Durkheim**	**Reliability**
Meanings/experiences	**Detail/depth**	**Social facts**
Qualitative	**Validity**	**Verstehen**
Rapport	**Douglas**	**Social action**

Task 2

Check with your teacher that you have identified the correct words. Now use these to write a detailed summary of both the positivist and interpretivist perspective of sociological research. You must use each concept at least once and you must be able to explain them in relation to the theoretical perspectives.

Positivist

Interpretivist

Student Resource 1 Teacher answers

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Natural sciences	Durkheim	Reliability
Meanings/experiences	Detail/depth	Social facts
Qualitative	Validity	Verstehen
Rapport	Douglas	Social action

Student Resource 2 Positivism and interpretivism

See page 10

Each of the statements below reflects either a **positivist** or **interpretivist** approach. Identify which ones are which by highlighting them in different colours.

Sociologists should collect data that can be counted and measured.

Research should aim to offer a rich and valid understanding of the groups being studied.

Researchers should try to get into the minds of those they are studying and understand things from their point of view. They should use the verstehen approach.

Researchers should use methods that generate statistics, such as questionnaires, structured interviews, experiments and content analysis.

Jack Douglas

Sociology should be seen as a rigorous scientific method like the natural sciences.

Researchers should use methods that enable the research to gain an in-depth understanding, such as in-depth interviews and observations.

Non-numerical data is far more useful for really getting a valid picture of social groups and their behaviour.

Emile Durkheim

Humans often respond to their environment in a similar manner and therefore causal relationships can be identified.

Student Resource 2 Teacher answers

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Student Resource 3 Sampling

Task

Using the definitions of each sampling method, state how you would apply it to getting a sample of six sweets.
Once you have collected your sample, assess how representative it is in relation to your whole packet of sweets

See page 11

Sampling method	Definition	How do you use the method to get a sample of six sweets?	Does the method produce a representative sample? Why?	When would it be best to use this method? Why?
Random sampling				
Systematic sampling				
Stratified sampling				
Snowball sampling				
Volunteer sampling				
Opportunity sampling				
Purposive sampling				
Quota sampling				

Student Resource 3 Teacher answers

Task

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Sampling method	Definition	How do you use the method to get a sample of six sweets?	Does the method produce a representative sample? Why?	When would it be best to use this method? Why?
Random sampling	Every member of the target population has an equal chance of being selected for the sample.	Shake packet and drop six out, totally at random.	Yes – as all members of the target population have a chance of being picked.	Need a sampling frame
Systematic sampling	Every 'nth' member of the target population is selected for the sample.	Line up all sweets and pick every third/ fourth/fifth from the line.	Yes – all members have a chance of being chosen but may be biased based on 'nth' chosen.	Needs a sampling frame
Stratified sampling	Different subgroups in the target population are identified; then people are randomly selected from these subgroups in the proportion to their numbers in the target population.	Group sweets into colours/types and pick a proportionate amount from each group.	Yes – most representative of all methods as ensuring all groups are included in the sample.	Needs a sampling frame and knowledge of the characteristics of the target population.
Snowball sampling	One contact will recruit other contacts to get involved in the research.	One sweet will get other sweets to take part in the study.	No – biased as members of the sample will all be similar 'types' of people.	No need for a sampling frame. Good when researching deviant groups.
Volunteer sampling	When a sample is gathered through participants putting themselves forward to be studied. Respondents are found through advertising in a paper/shop window/ internet etc.	A few sweets will volunteer.	No – biased as the same types of people will volunteer to take part.	No need for a sampling frame, convenient method.
Opportunity sampling	The researcher uses a sample of people who are available at the time.	Sample the nearest sweets to you on the table.	No – people with the same/similar characteristics will be together.	No sampling frame needed, convenient method.
Purposive sampling	The researcher has a clear idea of the sample they want, they will pick participants that meet their criteria.	Deciding that only a certain type/colour sweet needs to take part in the study.	No – people are chosen on purpose because their characteristics match those needed.	No sampling frame needed.
Quota sampling	The researcher has a clear number of people they need to include in their sample based on certain characteristics.	Deciding that a certain number of a couple of the types/colours of sweets need to take part.	No – people are chosen on purpose because their characteristics match those needed.	No sampling frame needed.

Student Resource 4 Questionnaires

See page 11

Complete the following questionnaire and answer the questions on the reflection sheet after it. Think about any problems with the questionnaire and make a note of them as you complete it.

Questionnaire on dating

1. How many boyfriends/girlfriends have you had in your life?

0 1–5 5–10 10–15 15+

2. Do you think this is a lot?

---

3. How bad do you think it is for people to have had more than 15 boyfriends or girlfriends?

Really really really bad Really really bad Really bad Bad

4. When did you last go on a date?

In the last week In the last two weeks In the last month

5. What is most important to you when you are looking for a boyfriend/girlfriend?

Looks Body Personality Generosity

6. Why?

---

7. Have you had more boyfriends/girlfriends than your friends?

More Less Don't know

8. Do your parents know about your boyfriends/girlfriends?

Yes No Some of them

9. How old are you?

---

10. Do you plan on getting married?

Student Resource 4 Questionnaire reflection sheet

1. **'Closed' or 'Pre-coded' questions are questions that offer a range of fixed answers. The respondent has to choose from one of the options provided. Make a note here of the questions that are 'closed'.**

   _____

2. **'Open' questions are those that leave a gap for the respondent to answer with any answer they wish to. Make a note here of any questions that are 'open'.**

   _____

3. **Which questions on the questionnaire will provide quantitative data and which will provide qualitative data?**

   _____

4. **'Scaled' questions are those questions that ask you to rate your views/opinions/feelings on a scale. Which questions are 'scaled'?**

   _____

5. **'Leading' questions are those that may lead the respondent towards a particular answer. This would make the findings biased and lower the validity. Which questions could be considered to be 'leading questions'?**

   _____

Note down the problems with this questionnaire and the questions it is asking.

Student Resource 4 Teacher answers

1. **'Closed' or 'Pre-coded' questions are questions that offer a range of fixed answers. The respondent has to choose from one of the options provided. Make a note here of the questions that are 'closed'.**

   Numbers 1, 4, 5, 7 and 8

2. **'Open' questions are those that leave a gap for the respondent to answer with any answer they wish to. Make a note here of any questions which are 'open'.**

   Numbers 2, 6 and 10

3. **Which questions on the questionnaire will provide quantitative data and which will provide qualitative data?**

   Closed questions will provide quantitative data

   Open questions will provide qualitative data

4. **'Scaled' questions are those questions that ask you to rate your views/opinions/feelings on a scale. Which questions are 'scaled'?**

   Number 3

5. **'Leading' questions are those that may lead the respondent towards a particular answer. This would make the findings biased and lower the validity. Which questions could be considered to be 'leading questions'?**

   Numbers 2, 3, 4 and 5

Note down the problems with this questionnaire and the questions it is asking.

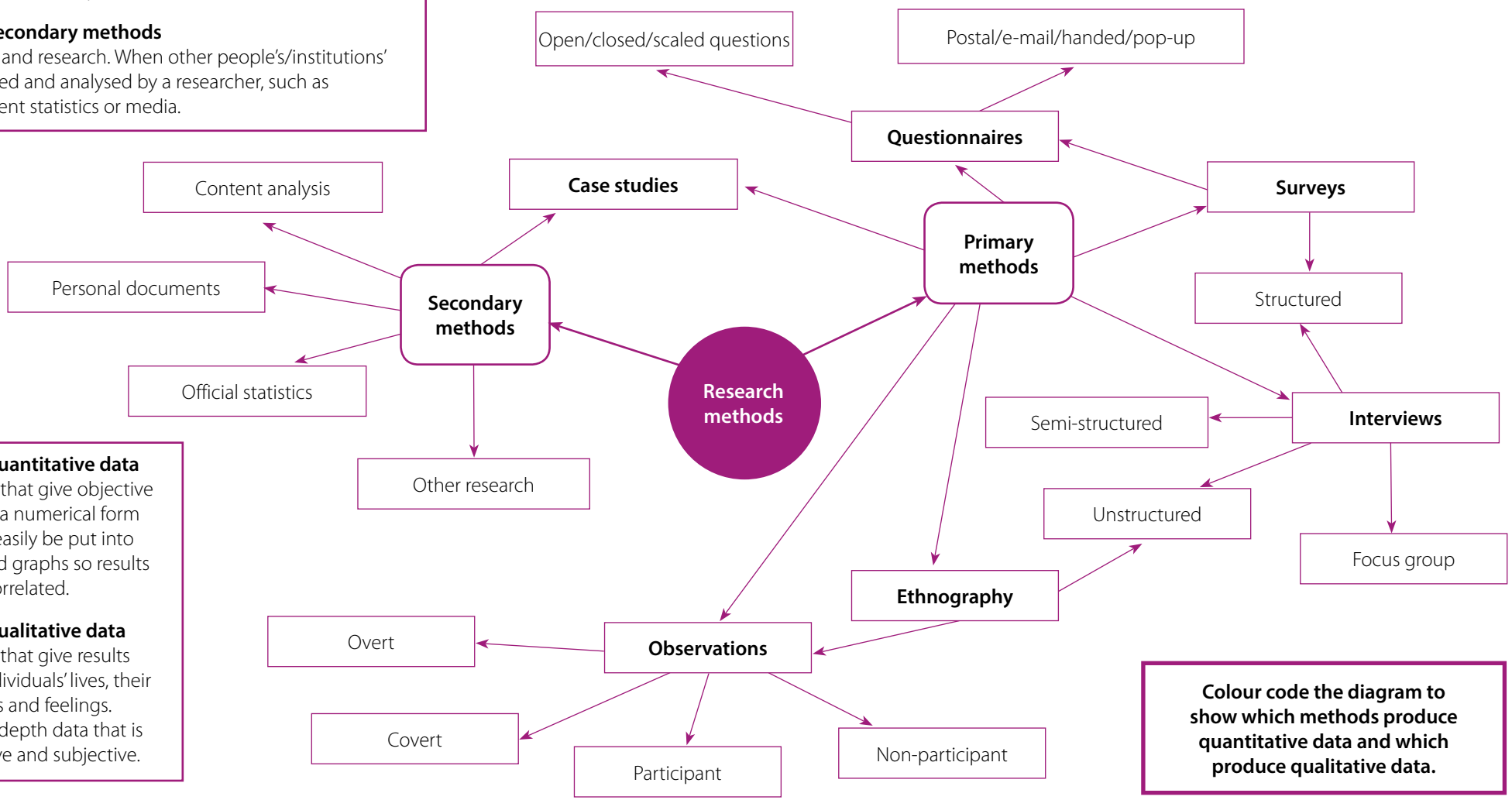
- Leading questions
- Order of the questions
- Instructions – can you circle more than one?
- Consent and no explanation of what the research/results are for
- Number of options for closed questions is limited
- People reluctant to fill in open questions on a questionnaire

Student Resource 5 Assessing understanding of different research methods

See page 12

Define primary methods
First-hand research. A method carried out directly by the researcher, such as questionnaires or observations.

Define secondary methods
Second-hand research. When other people's/institutions' data is used and analysed by a researcher, such as government statistics or media.



Define quantitative data
Methods that give objective results in a numerical form and can easily be put into tables and graphs so results can be correlated.

Define qualitative data
Methods that give results about individuals' lives, their meanings and feelings. This is in-depth data that is descriptive and subjective.

Colour code the diagram to show which methods produce quantitative data and which produce qualitative data.

Student Resource 5 Teacher answers

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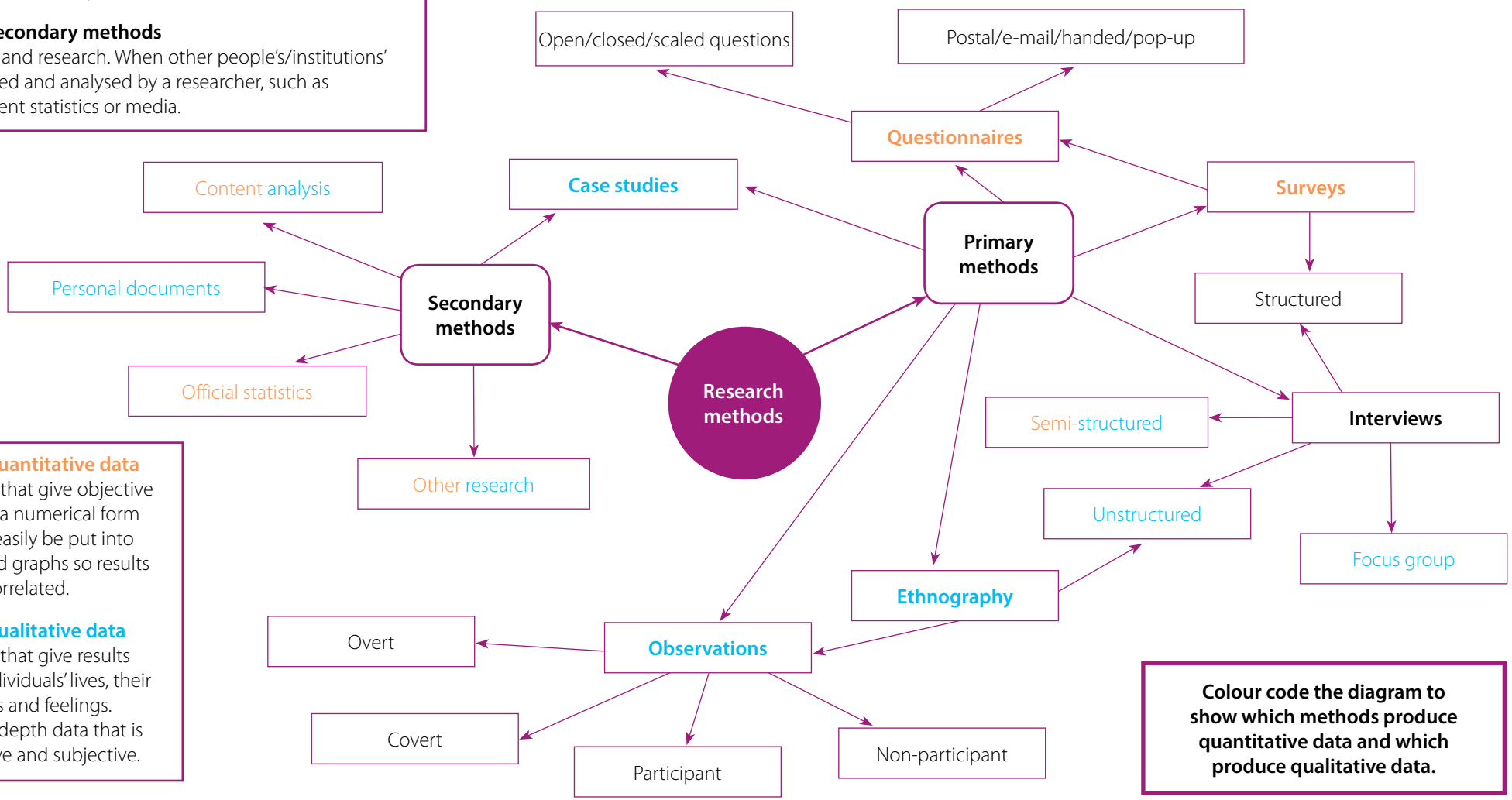

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