

# The interpretation of data



Producing the data in a form that was easy to take in at a glance had been a priority throughout the data collection process and so presentation was not a separate activity. The data had been word processed on first collection so that the data could easily be categorised and presented in a range of different ways by cutting and pasting activities. Initially a table was produced for each class (Appendix A is an example of this). This had the questions to the right of the table and the three children's responses in columns to the right.

Then all of the children's responses were collated in the same format to get an overview of positive/negative responses to each question (Appendix B). This enabled further sorting by ability groupings, gender, and ethnic origin. Data was deleted from Appendix B as appropriate (Appendix C is an example of this) and summaries of any salient findings written. The information from Appendix B was then used to do a quantitative analysis (Appendix D), with a commentary running alongside describing the qualitative findings.

Finally, Appendix D was scrutinised with regard to the quantitative and qualitative data relating to the school improvement categories. The Interpretation of Data I found this to be the most daunting element of Miles and Huberman's analytical process. My fears of bias and subjectivity initially froze me into inaction. However, I was aware that continual reflection on the data collection had been essential from the beginning and had already involved some interpretation at each stage, no matter how minimal.

I, therefore, tried to convince myself that this was not a separate, discrete stage, but a natural progression and a bringing together of all the

information. My main anxiety was Miles and Huberman's expectation that 'a practical theory or model would be constructed to fit the situation which had been researched'. I knew that my study would develop an approach (which would change in line with circumstances and priorities), and not a definitive model or theory of school self-evaluation. I was concerned that 'an approach', relying on qualitative evidence might not be sufficient to validate the project.

I returned to my initial data on the responses from the full sample and firstly looked for quantitative data within each dimension. I was very surprised at the amount of data that could be analysed in this way and this gave me the confidence and a firm base from which to approach the qualitative analysis. The findings from these are reported upon in (haven't yet numbered sections)\_\_\_\_\_. External Perspective Within this research project there has been much discussion around the need for objectivity because of the subjective nature of such a study.

It was, therefore, very important to gain an external perspective by the involvement of people outside the school. Therefore the data shown in Appendix B, the responses of the whole sample, were given to the school's ex-deputy Headteacher and ex-literacy subject manager. These two teachers left the school eighteen months ago, due to starting families, but both still do regular teaching within the school. They were asked to take on the role of 'critical friend' to review the data and the quality of the questioning.

I felt they were well placed to do this knowing the school and its character and yet no longer being personally involved as class teachers. They had also

taken leading roles within the school whilst in Special Measures when 'critical friendships' were first developed within the school. They were, therefore, accustomed to being both critical and challenging. The school's primary adviser had also agreed to act as a 'critical friend' and data had also been given to him but, due to the restrictions on his time, he was unable to give feedback within the time-scale.

Two weeks after the data had been given to the former colleagues a separate meeting with each 'critical friend' was arranged. They had each written notes regarding the questions themselves and a summary of what they felt were the pertinent issues emerging from the children's responses. These formed the basis of our discussions, along with the sharing of my own summaries and early findings. I found it very helpful to receive their external views as they each challenged and in some cases reflected my own initial 'theories'.

The meetings also gave the opportunity for the data to be probed with more rigour and with less sensitivity than was possible with present teaching staff. Having received their feedback I then reflected on my initial findings in line with their perceptions and adjusted my thinking where I thought it appropriate. Highlights from Data The full results from the analysis are shown in the appendices. The purpose of this section is to pick out the main highlights.

This section, therefore, contains only some of the responses that gave me particular insights into the children's 'inner world' of school (Cullingford, 1991) and those that either challenged or confirmed my earlier perceptions. I

was very surprised and pleased at how confident and relaxed all the children were during the interviews. I felt that this was a very encouraging indicator of the children's self-esteem and self-confidence. Although the data was analysed by looking at different ability groupings, gender and ethnic origin I was very pleased to note that there were no significant differences highlighted within these groupings.

It seemed from the data that these groupings within the sample felt well supported liked school and were happy to come. The only difference was that in the Participation section, in the question relating to whether the children preferred to listen or join in with discussions, the two children who said they would prefer to listen were in the less able grouping. I, therefore, felt this was a very positive result. Regarding the sample as a whole, although being mindful of the small scale of this, I was very reassured by 89% saying they liked school and the very positive reasons given as to why they did.

Examples of these reasons are: 'teachers are really nice and we do fun things', 'because there is always someone there to help you'. The two children who said they did not like school gave the following reasons: 'you have to work hard after playtime' 'because I don't want to get out of bed. Like it when I get there because you do fun things'. I was also pleased that 83% of the sample said they felt happy to come to school (15 children out of eighteen) with the other three saying 'usually' but not when they were feeling either sick or tired.

It was interesting that, whilst all the children said they felt they could talk to a teacher if they had a personal worry, only 78% of the sample (14 out of the 18), felt happy to ask a teacher if they were 'stuck' in their work. One girl said she would be scared the teacher might tell her off. The two other children from this class in the sample said they would probably ask a helper rather than the teacher because the teacher was usually busy. The teacher when looking at this data was very surprised and concerned about the children's responses and I feel she received a very powerful message.

There were also lots of very positive responses from her children to soften the issues highlighted by the data. Fortunately, everyone in the sample agreed that it was important to behave well although a very high percentage of children (67% of the sample) said that sometimes other children stopped them from doing their work. Eight of these children had good strategies for dealing with the disruption, the others said they would tell the teacher. By probing further, I found that the disturbance was in the form of sometimes other children chatting to them and no one seemed unduly worried by this.

The majority of the children (94% of sample) knew the school rules. One boy in Reception said he did not know these. 56% of the sample said that children kept them the rules with 28% of the sample saying that children usually did. One boy said 'lots of children fight'. Luckily this was not mentioned by any of the other children but would need to be investigated further with a wider sample of children. All of the children in the sample seemed to have a clear sense of what behaviour was expected and were aware of the consequences if they were to behave badly.