

# 1 David Transcript Summary

## 0.04 (2 Type) What kinds of researcher are you?

David has a mixed methods background but now thinks of himself as a qualitative researcher. It became the right kind of fit for his PhD research. It was originally a quantitative study but the stats didn't give him a sense of what was going on, so the follow-on was qualitative. He enjoyed the richness of it.

## 01.51 (3, Changed, 4 First qual) What was the research about?

Initially it was factors affecting the spread of HIV/AIDS but it became about the peer and self-support for those who were living with or affected by it. He had already decided that it would be qualitative not mixed methods, even if the focus changed a bit, which he describes as a classic PhD thing. Similarly classic, he had one supervisor who was mostly qual and the other mostly quant. They asked different questions, but it being qual was never a bone of contention, as they had both done qual research and understood where it fit. They never said the sample size was too small. David used multiple methods, including diaries, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with approximately a couple of dozen people at government and service provider level as well as service users.

## 05.02 (4 First qual, Researching) Can you tell me a bit more about the data gathering?

Gaining access was difficult. Official letters and the like for the institutions but also the very different issue of trust with charities and services user, protecting their personal privacy. The research took place in Africa. The stigma of HIV/AIDS made it challenging too, both in terms of access and writing up. People didn't want to describe themselves in that way. Looking at the support systems rather than living with HIV/AIDS made it more abstract, but easier to engage people.

## 07.52 (4 First qual) Can you remember how long it took to access people to talk to you?

David can't remember, but he describes it as a dance and getting trust from people. It was pre-smart phone, so initial access was through the phone and then snowballing through contacts.

## 09.17 (23 You changed) What's changed? How have you changed since you first set out?

He thinks that whilst he started out thinking he could do research, if not very well, he definitely feels more confident. He has made mistakes but he been reflective and learned from them and got better. For example, how to get in touch with people, facilitating interviews, and writing up; being more grounded and realistic. During his PhD he thought he was going to create a new radical social theory that would change the world. He thinks he is better and communicating the minor contribution and connecting to the data, as well as presenting the data.

### 11.39 (24 Do differently) Is that about how you think or there are some practical things that you do that mean that you're thinking is demonstrated better?

Better thinking has created better tangible outputs, such as research papers. He feels grateful to have learned by writing with supervisors. He doesn't feel he was good at writing but has got better through writing with others, but also because he has been reflexive about that experience.

### 13.36 (24 Do differently) So if there was one thing that you could say I'd definitely do this differently now to when I first started out, what would that be?

Confidence in data gathering. David had a lot of concerns about data-gathering, ethics and confidentiality. Through experience he understands how to do that well, now. He is still conscious of doing good research and that everyone is happy with their part in the process; the commissioners, the researchers and the participants. He does not do it as experienced as a 'data grab' exercise.

### 15.31 (24 Do differently) Can you give me an example of how you do that?

David always sends thank-you cards after an interview. He also sends transcripts and research outputs, but because not everyone is interested or has time to read academic article, the card is just an acknowledgement of their part, even if there has been remuneration. He feels he wasn't good at saying thank-you in the past.

### 17.34 (25 Process favourite) Are there any parts of the research process that you really enjoy?

Definitely not writing-up. David gets excited about the planning, the questions and the opportunity to start talking to people, and the awkward reality of the real world hasn't hit. The other thing he looks forward to is having a good chunk of the data and can sit down and read it all together. Reading his diary or listening when he gets back from an interview or focus groups isn't as exciting as the bigger picture. When he has only got a couple to look back on he can't get a sense of a theme, but then something connects, and as more transcripts come in, they add to that.

### 21.08 (7,8 Teaching) Do you teach qualitative research methods now?

David has taught at university and now runs one-off workshops, and writes blogs and vlogs on methods. He calls it a weird kind of teaching, because the sessions are ad-hoc.

### 22.07 (10 Aspects) Which aspects of qualitative research do you teach?

David is interested in the process of research, and writes about the kinds of things he could find a reference for when he was writing-up papers. Practical aspects interest him more in teaching than the high theory; he reckons other people already teach and write about it, not always well, but the references are there. He likes under-reported things. The example he gives is the difference between sampling and recruitment, and how people confuse the two, or gloss over the difficulties in recruiting to a particular sample, and fail to tell the story of the difficulties. Who does and does not get spoken to is really important; it affects the findings and whose voice is represented in research. It's part of being reflexive about the reflexive process. Knowing these things is even more important when it's a small sample size.

### 27.08 (11 Teaching) What do you most enjoy about teaching?

David enjoys the feedback and other indicators that people have engaged, such as emails and thank-yous after an event. But David does not class himself as an educator and feels amateurish as he's

never had formal training. He thinks that many Universities don't provide their staff with quite as much as they should, but teaching on set programmes year-after-year does provide a lot of feedback, which he has never had. His university posts were always research-only, so he now finds it weird that his career has gone to teaching more than he researches.

### 28.52 (Identity) So let's go for the formal identity, you found it weird. Is that because it's impacting on your identity as a researcher, or is it something else?

David still sees himself as a researcher, and he never planned for his career to take the direction that it has towards teaching. Having not done any research for a couple of years he concludes, having now reflected on it, that he has a false sense of identity. No-one has asked him in a while what he does, but if they had he would have said qualitative researcher. The session is interrupted by technical difficulties with sound. When asked what he would write on an insurance form, he says 'Researcher', but is now experiencing some existential doubt.

### 34.09 (12 Challenge teaching, Researching) With the teaching, what do you find challenging?

David claims to be lazy and so doesn't like the planning and prep of teaching, even though he loves planning for research. Teaching is a performance; research is a process. He agrees that research is a performance too, but he is not the primary performer. The interviewer is just like a side-kick in a film who asks questions so the star can explain the plot. A researcher is there to facilitate the talk.

### 36.41 (14 Students difficult, 9 Who) What do your participants find difficult about qualitative research?

There is a great deal of variety in David's participants, making it hard to generalise. Those with a quantitative background seem nervous of not having a set-formula for the best method to use, and having to discover it for themselves. There isn't even a best way to do an interview or a focus group. David thinks that the students think that they lack the time and mental energy to make those decisions for themselves, and he seeks to encourage them to get to the stage of experimenting and learning from that. He thinks they want a text-book that tells them how, rather than 'just go out and play and learn how to do it by yourself.' The challenge is getting people to understand that it's ok for things to go wrong and learn from that.

### 29.06 (16 Cautionary tales) Do you use stories or cautionary tales to help with that?

Yes. David likes to use personal or funny stories of what went wrong, because it wakes them up, but it's also easier for them to engage with. David tells of a time when the batteries in his Dictaphone ran out and he had no spares, and no back-up. The interviewee thought it was hilarious and came up with solution of taking the batteries from the TV remote, but David was embarrassed and thought he looked very unprofessional. David had been frantically writing notes up to the point of the interviewee's suggestion. He feels he has become good at taking notes and listening, but the recording has more nuance.

#### 42.55 (17 Avoid sharing, 24 Do differently) Do you have a story that you're willing to tell now that you wouldn't tell students face to face?

Nothing specific, but David says that there are things that he has done as part of the process that he wouldn't do now, like fail to tell people where he is when he's in people's homes. He wouldn't be recommending that to students now, as he doesn't want to put people at risk.

#### 44.53 (16 Cautionary tales) Cautionary tales?

Be aware that people running services, CEOs and what-not, are very savvy speakers and used to being interviewed. They may say things to present themselves as how they wish to be perceived, rather than being true. They can turn the flow of conversation to their advantage. Students need to be ready for that. We talk to a lot of people who are not important but they know, and they may not have an ulterior motive, but speaking to amicable professionals can mean that you are charmed and don't follow-up with piercing questions and then it affects how you can analyse or make use of the data.

#### 48.07 (27 Advice) What advice would you give to your neo-phyte researcher-self?

David reflects that he thought himself to be smarter than others and was going to change the world through his research. What he has learnt is the importance of collaboration and learning from others and advises to keep your ego in check. He is very grateful to all his supervisors, project PIs and research participants. The learning has been a constant journey of learning from others. He has changed his attitude from 'I will change things' to 'those things will change me'. He advises new researchers to be open to those things early.

#### 50.01 (28 Voice, Identity, Becoming, 18, 19 Common Paradigm) Is there anything that you would be particularly keen to say?

David had been thinking before the interview about how when he finished his PhD he has wanted to be a qualitative researcher and how having to pay the bills and find jobs meant that it was mostly mixed-methods jobs. He thinks that there are still not that many jobs on pure qualitative research projects. He believes having statistical training on his CV got him jobs, where he ended up doing qualitative research as well. He had to become a mixed-methods researcher for the job market. He felt that projects had been good, well-designed projects, but he wanted to the qualitative stuff and had to do the quantitative stuff as well. He felt that he should take the good jobs even though they were not pure qualitative and he gets it when students say they want to do qualitative work. Contributing to research in the end was more important than the method.

David comments that he feels that qualitative research is the under-dog and he like fighting for the under-dog. There's a lot of funding for STEM, and you can earn more in academia if you have a stats background.