

You will probably find that one of the licensing schemes covering photocopying in schools will provide sufficient cover for your work. Local authorities have an agreement with the Copyright Licensing Agency to cover photocopying in their schools and many independent schools operate similar agreements.

If you are not certain that your school is covered by a Copyright Licensing Agency agreement, ask your school's administrator or contact the Copyright Licensing Agency for clarification (the address is on the page which follows the title page of this book).

The selection of appropriate documents, deciding what questions to ask of documents, and problems of access need to be considered at an early stage in your work as they will affect the kind of information you collect and how you are able to use this. Try to make some preliminary decisions about these points before reading the rest of this section.

2.3 Using documents other than classroom resources

I mentioned above that a document, in the sense I'm using in this section, means virtually anything written down: local or national policy statements, government or LEA reports, examination board reports, newspaper articles, school brochures, schemes of work, minutes of meetings, letters, etc. Documents are a useful source of information about something you are not able to observe for yourself – perhaps events that occurred outside your own school, or before you began work on this project. In this case, they may provide a social or historical context for the work you wish to carry out. Documents may present a particular viewpoint – perhaps the 'official' view of a committee, or parents' views – that you wish to compare with information from another source. Documents may also be plans, or statements of intent (a lesson plan or a policy statement) that you can draw on alongside observations of practice.

Whatever kinds of documents you are interested in, it is important to bear in mind that they are not complete and impartial accounts of events. They may be deliberately designed to argue a certain case. Even when they seek to present a factual account they must necessarily be selective. You may be interested as much in what is not said as in what is included in the document.

Making notes on documents

The most common way to use documents is simply to read them, noting down points of interest. Such notes will be relatively open-ended: your scrutiny of the documents will be guided by your research questions, but you won't have a pre-specified set of points to look out for. This sort of open-ended examination will provide qualitative information.

When making notes on documents it is important to distinguish between your notes on the *content* of documents, and any *comments* or *interpretations* that occur to you. A colleague said that she saw the value in this when watching someone else take notes at a seminar: he made two columns for his notes – a lefthand column for what the speaker said and a right-hand column for his own response:

I now do this when making notes on documents, using two colours – one for noting the content and the other for my responses and interpretations. It's like

having a dialogue with the document. It's helped me become more critical in my reading and it also helps me relate what I'm reading to my research interests.

It's possible to draw on qualitative information in a variety of ways in your final report: you may wish to provide an account of relevant parts of the document in your own words, or to quote selected extracts, or to quote longer extracts, or the whole document if it is short (e.g., a letter) – perhaps subjecting this to a detailed commentary.

Example 2.2 comes from a published account of a study of English teaching. The researchers were interested in what constitutes the English curriculum in secondary schools, and how this varies between different schools. As well as carrying out classroom observation and interviewing pupils and teachers, the researchers examined the English syllabuses in use in several schools. In this extract, one of the researchers, Stephen Clarke, begins to characterize the different syllabuses.

Example 2.2 Using documents: the Downtown School syllabus

6 Downtown School syllabus espouses a 'growth' model of language and learning and is concerned to show how different kinds of lessons in reading, writing and speaking can work together, each having a beneficial effect upon the others and leading to a broad improvement in language competence by pupils:

The development of language will arise out of exploration in reading, writing and speaking.

The actual content items to be learnt comprise a traditional list of writing skills such as spelling, paragraphing and punctuation, as well as speech skills, but these are not to be imposed on pupils in a way that would make them seem an alien or culturally strange set of requirements:

The aim should not be to alienate the child from the language he [*sic*] has grown up with, but to enlarge his repertoire so that he can meet new demands and situations and use standard forms when they are needed, a process which cannot be achieved overnight. 9

(Clarke, 1984, pp. 154–5)

Assigning information from documents to categories

content analysis

It is possible to examine the content of documents in a more structured way, looking out for certain categories of information. This method of examining documents is sometimes known as 'content analysis'. It provides quantitative information. Many studies of the media have involved content analysis. Researchers may, for instance, scan newspapers to see how often women and men are mentioned, and in what contexts. They may categorize the different contexts – reports of crime; sport; politics, etc. It is then possible to count the number of times women, and men, are represented in different contexts.

It is unlikely you will wish to subject educational documents to a quantitative analysis, but this method is mentioned here for the sake of completeness. Quantitative analyses have frequently been applied to classroom resources (see below).