Transcript

Chapter 15: Working with Documents

What we mean by documents is all of those things that people leave behind in the course of their everyday or professional life. This might be things like letters, diaries, photographs, administrative records etc. And we really do recommend students think about how they can use these types of documents within their research.

Because one of the great things about documents is that they give you an insight into things as they actually happened and this enhances the ecological validity of your research because it means that you are less likely to colour data collection with your own hidden biases. Another major benefit of working with documents for a time-limited student research project is that you don’t have to do the data collection yourself and this potentially cuts out one of the biggest parts of the research process and that enables you to spend more time on analysis. But these two great advantages do come at a cost. Documents do not always enable you to do what you might like to - and this is why we say working *with*documents, because you really do have to work with what you’ve got. So it is a very good idea to familiarise yourself with any documents that you intend to work with. This will enable you to make sure that what you would like to do with your project is actually possible with the material you’ve got access to.

There are also different techniques that you can use to analyse documents. So it is also a good idea to familiarise yourself with the type of analysis that you want to undertake to make sure that what you are planning, again, is actually possible with the material you have got. So:

* Documents are really good because they enable you to gain an insight into life as it happens
* They can save a huge amount of time during the research process because it negates the need for lengthy periods of data collection
* But, you do need to familiarise yourself with the documents you intend to use and the form of analysis you intend to take. This will ensure that your project is actually realizable.­