

Tips for Data Collection

1. DON'T RE-INVENT THE WHEEL.

Time is a precious commodity, so it's important to use it wisely. You don't want to create a data collection tool that already exists and participants don't want to complete something that they feel they have done before. For this reason identifying data sources that already exist, understanding what kinds of information is being collected with that tool, and determining how your data collection instrument is different or complementary is imperative.

2. KEEP IT SIMPLE

Participants will burn out if your data collection instrument is too long and then your data won't be as rich. Therefore, try to keep surveys to about a page. If you have open-ended survey questions, give enough space for them to respond and only ask 2-3 questions. Interviews should have 3-5 questions maximum. If you are video taping yourself or others to analyze that data, keep videos manageable – no more than 15 minutes. Let's face it - anything longer than that and you won't watch it.

3. STORIES MAKE GREAT DATA

When people think of data, they usually gravitate towards surveys and other quantitative data sources, but stories are an excellent source of qualitative data. When asking interview or open-ended survey questions, try to get your participants to provide specific instances.

4. ALIGN QUESTIONS WITH GOALS

It's important to make sure that your data tools are gathering information that is important to your inquiry question. If not, you are wasting your time and your participants' time.

5. ANALYZE WHILE YOU COLLECT DATA

Sometimes teacher researchers get so excited and curious that they continuously gather data and forget about the analysis process. Teacher researchers can become easily overwhelmed with the mounds of data piling up and become paralyzed in the process. It's important to analyze data as you collect it.

Most importantly have fun! Engaging in teacher research is one of the most exciting experiences. Enjoy the process and have patience with yourself.