**Undertaking Positivist Research**

Exercise 1.2 in Chapter 1 of the book by Opie and Brown (2019) asks you to consider the research you might carry out to find evidence to support or reject the theory that ‘*The more girls there are in a mixed English class, the worse boys perform*’.

This template may be of help to you in jotting down your thoughts when thinking about what positivist research you might carry out to gain evidence to support or reject this theory. Although you are considering a specific case, issues you come up with are likely to arise when trying to design any similar activity.

Start by designing research which you think might provide some evidence to support or reject the theory and then consider how you have addressed the questions that are posed.

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| Suggested research design | | |
| *Jot down your thoughts about the research design you might use:* | | |
| Questions | Notes | |
| 1. *What criteria have you used to identify the different classes of mixed gender which will form your research sample? How many classes do you think you would need to look at to give some validity to your findings?* | |  |
| 1. *Whilst there are ‘types of schools’ on what basis have you selected the school(s) you will use? Are you going to focus on one type, if so what will this do the validity of your results? If you focus on just one type, how many schools do you think you need to look at? What other variables do you think you need to try and cater for, even if just using one type e.g. geographical locations, Ofsted outcomes, exam results etc.* | |  |
| *Given the ability range within and between classes will vary, how are you taking this into account?* | |  |
| 1. *What other key variables have you considered which might influence your findings, e.g. teacher influence, parental support, access to other reading material, historical enthusiasm for reading, age?* | |  |

What this exercise has set out to do is not dissuade you from ever considering this type of research, but to try to make you aware of the kind of things you need to consider when undertaking positivist research. Not only this, but if we remind ourselves of the typical timescale for undertaking your project, then this will impact upon the amount of data you will be able to collect.

The book does offer an example of an arguably successful piece of positivist research carried out (see Chapter 8) but it was carried out over a year and raised ethical issues. The book also notes other statistical tests (see Chapter 13) which could be linked to positivist research and these are offered as ‘possibilities’.

You might like to repeat this exercise but with a theory of your own which takes a positivist research approach and discuss your notes with others.

Opie, C. and Brown, D. (eds) (2019)*Getting Started in Your Educational Research: A Student’s Guide to Design, Data Production and Analysis*. London: Sage