

Data Entry Procedures

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The children's papers

As each questionnaire was processed, the first step was to enter any answers written by individual students on separate sheets of paper onto the main questionnaire from that school. In cases where a school returned two or more copies of the questionnaire, one was randomly selected as the master for that school, and the data from the other(s) was transferred to that one copy. In this way, one copy of the questionnaire for each school was prepared which contained all the data supplied by that school. Any individual sheets and any extra questionnaires were fastened together, labelled with school name and reference, and filed in a box in case they needed to be referred to at some later stage.

The data files

A separate Excel file was created for each of the questions in the questionnaire. This file contained the basic data for the school (Ministry of Education number, name, decile rating, map reference) and then columns for each of the possible responses. Since we did not know the responses in advance, the response columns were ordered randomly, with a new one created when a new answer was given. Each answer was given a number, and the appropriate number (or numbers) were entered against the school in the Excel file.

In each file, there was a column for Ø responses, which was used both when the school recorded no response for a particular question, and when they recorded no response which was of interest, e.g. when they supplied only answers which used the words of the question. There were also cases where the answers supplied appeared not to answer the question. These were coded as no response, and the questionnaire itself was annotated if necessary to explain why no response had been recorded. This was done to enable fairly speedy revisiting of these questions if need be.

Data entry

Data entry proceeded at very variable rates, depending on the number of answers to any particular question, the number of previously unrecorded answers, and the total number of possible answers to a given question. The quickest questionnaires were processed in about 45 minutes. The slowest questionnaires (from schools which had sent responses from up to 9 classes, often with individual answer sheets from significant numbers of students) took 2-3 days to complete. A key listing the Excel column letters and the number assigned to them was prepared to enable high numbers to be located quickly and accurately, e.g. answer no. 136 was found in column EK. This was very necessary, since for some questions, there were well over 100 possible answers.

The response master

To facilitate the coding of answers on the questionnaires, a master copy of the questionnaire was prepared, which listed the answers and the number codes. As

new answers arrived, these were given a number and added to the response master.

At this stage, a relatively detailed coding was used, to save the necessity of returning to the originals as far as possible. Thus 'Hi' and 'Hi bro' were given different codes, although ultimately, there was the strong likelihood that these would either be separated into Greeting + address term, or treated as one instance of the same greeting.

The school questionnaires

Alongside each answer on the school questionnaire the appropriate code for that answer was written. This was done principally to facilitate data entry, so that only one task was done at a time (determine the appropriate code for a particular answer; create a new code if necessary and record it on the master; add a new code to the data file if necessary; enter the appropriate codes for the school in the data file). However, it also ensured that if questions arose about the comparability of answers with minor variations, they would be readily findable on a return search through the questionnaire.

The questionnaires were filed by the Ministry of Education reference number, to ensure rapid retrieval if necessary.

The time period involved

The first questionnaires arrived in October 1999. The data entry began as soon as the first questionnaire arrived. It was the major task undertaken by the research assistant over the following months, and was completed during February 2000.