

Training of Interviewers – How Researchers and Professionals Have Worked Together In The UK

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2. Official Inquiries/Reports

In the UK in the 1980s the media, the government, and the police realised that in interviews with victims, witnesses, and suspects only limited amounts of information were being obtained and some of this was mistaken. In response to this the government commissioned three very substantial reports

- the 'Lord Devlin Report' on eye-witnessing/identification errors;
- the 'Lord Clyde Report' on child witnesses/victims;
- the 'Royal Commission Report' regarding suspects and false confessions.

3. No Guidance Yet Available

Up to the mid 1980's almost no substantial guidance (based on relevant research) was available anywhere in the world to police on how best to conduct interviews with suspects. Behavioural science researchers, such as psychologists, had ignored this topic and police forces were, anyway, very suspicious of 'outside' researchers who seemed to do little other than criticise the police.

4. The 1984 'Police and Criminal Evidence Act'

In response to the report by The Royal Commission, the government introduced the 'Police and Criminal Evidence Act' which (among several things) required that from 1986 all police interviews with suspects be recorded (e.g. by audio or video/DVD).

And in response to the report by the 'Justice Piggott Committee' the government indicated that from 1992 interviews with children that might lead to criminal proceedings should be video recorded.

5. Benefits of Recording

One of the several enormous benefits of tape/video/DVD (i.e. electronic) recording is

investigators not only (i) to have a very comprehensive record of what took place (that note-taking can never achieve) but also (ii) later to examine how good/poor their interviewing was (and to learn from this.)

6. Interviewing suspects

In the few years after the 1986 introduction of tape recording of interviews with suspects, a small number of research studies analysing interviewer performance were conducted either by police officers as part of their PhD studies (e.g. Williamson; Pearse) or on behalf of government agencies (e.g. Baldwin; Evans).

7. A very important research finding

In a study conducted in the late 1980s Baldwin found that in only 20 of the 600 interviews that he examined did suspects “change their story in the course of an interview. In only nine of these cases was the change of heart attributable to the persuasive skills of the interviewer, and even here only three involved offences of an γ seriousness... . The great majority of suspects stick to their starting position - whether admission, denial, or somewhere in between - regardless of how the interview is conducted”.

8. A Similar Finding

Pearse (a senior detective) and Gudjonsson also noted (in their study of interviews conducted in 1991) that rarely did suspects in their interviews change from denying to admitting the offence.

They contended that “suspects enter a police interview having already decided whether to admit or deny the allegations against them” and that police interview techniques have minimal effects on whether an admission occurs.

(This contention has been shown to be incorrect by later studies by a variety of researchers.)

9. 'Accusatory' Interviewing

Also in the late 1980s Moston, Stephenson, and Williamson found that in the majority of several hundred taped interviews the police spent little time, if any, trying to obtain the suspects' accounts of events. Instead they accused the suspects of the offence and asked for their response to such accusations.

Moston et al. noted that typically suspects were straightaway accused of the crime and informed, early on, of the evidence against them. They found, not surprisingly, that when the evidence was strong confessions were more likely. When the police evidence was not strong the suspects soon became aware of this and, understandably, did not confess.

10 (of 20). The First Relevant Committee

In light of these research findings Williamson (a senior officer in the London Police – who later became ‘Head of The Murder Squad’) decided to set up an Advisory Committee to determine what knowledge might be available to help _{im} prove the interviewing _{of} suspects.

He invited on to this committee not only several experienced detectives (some of whom were trainers) but also a few psychologists who had previously successfully worked on improving police training on related topics (such as (i) Stephen Moston and (ii) myself, for example, on ‘Human Awareness Training’).

This Advisory Committee produced some (unpublished) extensive documents.

11. The 'PEACE' Approach

The research studies that I have so far mentioned all concerned interviews conducted before a major change in police interviewer training occurred in England and Wales. Indeed such studies brought about the change.

Then in England in 1992 the Association of Chief Police Officers (and the relevant government ministry) mandated that all training in interviewing follow what they call the 'PEACE' approach. This approach was developed by a team of experienced detectives who made use of the documents produced by the preceding Advisory Committee (plus other items).

This team spent around a year drawing up a new training (i) philosophy and (ii) training programme. They sent drafts of their documents to some psychologists (including myself) for comment.

This 'PEACE' training course and its underlying philosophy (which contains much research-based psychology - Milne & Bull, 1999) was deemed to be so important that two booklets outlining this approach were in 1993 sent to all police officers in England and Wales (n = 127,000).

12. Interviews With Children

Around the same time (i.e. around 20 years ago) a Government committee (which was set up to advise on how to more effectively to allow young children to give evidence/testimony in criminal proceedings) produced its recommendations. (In the UK in criminal proceedings usually all witnesses have to attend the trial to give their evidence.)

The major recommendation of this committee was that earlier (video-recorded) interviews with children (conducted by specially trained police officers and social workers) be admissible as the child's evidence-in-chief if the judge decided that the interviewing had been of an appropriate standard.

13. The 'Memorandum of Good Practice'

To help decide what this 'good' standard of interviewing needed to be, I as asked by the government to draft (by reference to the available **research**) the relevant guidance document (which needed to be rather lengthy).

This was entitled 'The Memorandum of Good Practice On Recorded Interviews With Child Witnesses For Criminal Proceedings', which has an extensive section on how such interviews should be conducted, especially the order of the four main phases of

1. establish rapport
2. only then obtain a 'free narrative'
3. only then asks questions (i.e. open questions not closed or leading questions)
4. Closure

14. The Davies et al. report on MOGP trained interviewers

In 1993 the 'MOGP' training began (in what we now know was a 'cheap'/ineffective way).

A few years later Professor Davies was asked by the relevant government ministry to assess the quality of the interviewing in these video recorded interviews.

He found that the interviewing contained some positive aspects, but it was of a poor standard regarding

1. 'rapport' development (being weak/rushed)
2. the 'free narrative' phase (being too brief)
3. 'closed questions' (too many asked)
4. 'closure' (very little).

15 (of 20). Improved Training and Selection

In the light of his finding the training was improved (e.g. more resources were put into such training and only 'good' interviewers were allowed to conduct interviews with children – tier/level 3).

(The 'Memorandum' and its updated successor – called 'Achieving Best Evidence' – is now used in many countries around the world including Malaysia. To see a copy of ('Achieving Best Evidence' search for this on 'Google'.)

16 (of 20). Evaluation of PEACE-trained interviewers of suspects

With regard to the interviewing of suspects, in the mid 1990s I was asked by the Home Office to identify any skills gaps in 'specialist' police interviews (e.g. of suspects in serious cases) conducted by PEACE trained, experienced investigators.

17 (of 20). Weaknesses

Even in the more skilled interviews some skills were ***not that often present***, these being

- appropriate use of pauses and silences
- avoidance of using closed questions
- flexibility
- empathy/compassion.

18 (of 20). Strengths

However, in the less-skilled interviews some skills were often present, for example

- not releasing all information at beginning
- absence of (i) inappropriate interruptions. (ii)

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These are skills that seemed to have been absent in earlier studies (i.e. of interviews conducted prior to the PEACE training being introduced).

19 (of 20). Training Improved

In the light of studies like the one I have just described (and our subsequent studies of tape recorded interviews with suspects), the training and selection of 'high' skill interviewing positions has been further improved in line with relevant psychological notions/theories (which have to be based on peer-reviewed publications in quality research journals – says ACPO).

20. End

In recent years the positive and productive relationship that we in the UK have worked hard to develop between researchers and the police/professionals has continued to flourish and now is extremely good indeed.

(For example, only a few months ago the Association of Chiefs of Police set up a new national committee regarding how best to obtain identification evidence/information from