

What does it reveal?

You are analysing extracts from a qualitative interview study on social inequalities in education.

For each extract, annotate and answer:

For each extract, identify:

- What meaning is the participant expressing? (How do they understand their experience?)
- What social action is being described? (What are they doing, and what meaning motivates that action?)
- What follow-up question would help achieve verstehen? (What would you ask to understand their point of view more deeply?)
- Why is this data potentially high in validity? (Why might this give a realistic picture of the participant's lived experience?)

Stretch:

- How might a positivist criticise this evidence? (Think: objectivity, representativeness, subjectivity, reliability)

Extract 1: Interview with “Liam”, age 17, Year 12 student

“People think I don’t care because I don’t always hand homework in, but it’s not that simple. I get home and my mum’s at work until late, so I’m making tea for my little brother and trying to keep him settled. By the time he’s asleep, I’m tired and I just stare at the page. In class, when teachers say stuff like ‘you need to be more organised’, it winds me up because they don’t see what it’s like at home. I don’t ask for help either because I don’t want everyone thinking I’m making excuses. It’s easier to just joke around and act like I’m not bothered.”

Extract 2: Interview with “Aisha”, age 16, Year 11 student

“In science I actually know the answers most of the time, but I still hesitate before putting my hand up. The boys shout things out and if they get it wrong, everyone just laughs and moves on. If I get something wrong, I feel like people remember it. Sometimes I say things quietly to my friend instead, and then she says it out loud. Teachers say ‘be more confident’, but that makes it sound like it’s just my personality. It’s not just confidence – it’s more like you’re managing how people see you all the time.”

Extract 3: Interview with “Jay”, age 17, Year 12 student

“I wouldn’t say teachers are openly racist or anything, but sometimes it feels like they already have an idea of you before you’ve said much. If I’m talking with my friends and we’re loud, it gets treated like we’re being disruptive, but other people do the same and it’s just seen as messing around. After a while you start watching yourself all the time – how you speak, where you sit, even your face when a teacher talks to you. It’s tiring. Then when people say, ‘why are you so quiet in class discussions?’, it’s hard to explain that being quiet is sometimes me trying not to be read the wrong way.”

What does it reveal?

Extract 1: Liam

Meaning expressed by participant:	
Social action described:	
Follow-up question for verstehen:	
Why high validity?:	
Positivist criticism	

Extract 2: Aisha

Meaning expressed by participant:	
Social action described:	
Follow-up question for verstehen:	
Why high validity?:	
Positivist criticism	



What does it reveal?

Extract 3: Jay

Meaning expressed by participant:	
Social action described:	
Follow-up question for verstehen:	
Why high validity?:	
Positivist criticism	

Extension Tasks

Extension 1:

How might the identity of the researcher (class, gender, ethnicity, age, accent, teacher status) affect the answers given in these interviews?

Students should link to:

- rapport
- researcher bias
- reflexivity
- validity

Extension 2:

Write a short paragraph explaining how a positivist researcher might investigate the same issue instead (e.g. large-scale survey, structured observation, patterns in sanctions, attainment data).