Qualitative Research Methods

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Education 504

Characteristics
- Natural Setting
- Direct Data Collection
- Rich Narrative Descriptions
- Process Orientation
- Inductive Data Analysis
- Participant Perspectives
- Emergent Research Design

Interactive Inquiry
- In-depth study using face-to-face techniques to collect data from people in their natural settings
Interactive Modes of Inquiry

- **Ethnography**
  - Description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system
  - Involves prolonged field work
  - Focuses on mundane details of everyday life
  - Final product is a comprehensive and holistic narrative description integrating all aspects of group life and its complexities

Interactive Modes of Inquiry

- **Case study**
  - Examines a case in detail over an extended period of time
  - Employs multiple data sources
  - The case may be an individual, program, or event
  - Cases may be selected for their uniqueness, not generally for representativeness
  - Provides a detailed description of the case, an analysis of themes, and researcher’s interpretations

Interactive Modes of Inquiry

- **Phenomenology**
  - Describes the meanings of a lived experience
  - Researcher collects data on how individuals make sense out of their experiences
  - Typically involves in-depth interviews
  - Enables readers to more fully understand the concept relating to the experience
Interactive Modes of Inquiry

Grounded Theory
- Develops “dense” concepts related to a particular phenomenon
- Primarily uses interview data collected through multiple field visits
- Goal is to specify the historical and social conditions that influence the phenomenon of interest

Critical Studies
- Assumes that knowledge is subjective
- Researchers view society as structured by class, status, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation
- Begin with a commitment to expose social manipulation and oppression and to change oppressive social structures

Noninteractive Inquiry
- Analytical research that investigates historical concepts and events through analysis of documents
Qualitative Research Methodologies

Qualitative Techniques

- Data are collected in the form of words rather than numbers
- Provides detailed narrative descriptions, analysis, and interpretation
- Data are analyzed inductively

Participants/Sample

- Purposeful sampling (Ethnography)
- Internal sampling (Case Study)
- Those who have “lived the experience” (Phenomenology)
- Those who are able to provide significant contributions to the theory being developed (Grounded Theory)
Data Collection Methods

Participant Observation
- Participating in naturally occurring situations and writing extensive field notes about what occurs.
- Data collection does not address a specific hypothesis, but explanations are derived inductively.
- Researchers are careful to document their levels of involvement.
- Researchers learn from their own experience in the setting as a result of having spent so much time there.

Levels of Researcher Involvement
- **Participant Observer**: Researcher creates role for purpose of study.
- **Insider-Observer**: Researcher has formal role in organization.
- **Interviewer**: Researcher establishes role with each person interviewed.
- **Participant-researcher**: Researcher establishes a dual role for purpose of the study.
Field Observation

- Direct accounts of everyday social action and settings in the form of field notes
- Field notes are detailed descriptions of events, people, actions, and objects in the setting

Descriptive Fieldnotes

- Portraits of the subjects
- Reconstruction of dialogue
- Description of physical setting
- Accounts of particular events
- Depiction of activities
- The observer's behavior

Reflective Fieldnotes

- Reflections on analysis
- Reflections on method
- Reflections on ethical dilemmas and conflicts
- Reflections on the observer's frame of mind
- Points of clarification
In-Depth Interviews

- A conversation with a purpose
- Generally very open ended
- May rely on a general interview guide, but not precisely worded questions for every interview
- Interviewee is encouraged to provide in-depth discussion of areas of interest
- Often recorded, then transcribed

Documents and Artifacts

- Documents are records of past events that are written or printed (notes, letters, diaries, internal papers, student personnel files, etc.)
- Artifacts are material objects and symbols of current or past events, groups, persons, or organizations (mascots, diplomas, artwork, award plaques)

Establishing Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research
Promoting Validity in Qualitative Research

- **Extended Fieldwork**
  - Data are collected over a period of time

- **Low Inference Descriptors**
  - Use of descriptions phrased very closely to the participants’ accounts and researcher’s field notes

- **Participant Feedback**
  - Feedback and discussion of interpretations and conclusions with participants

Promoting Validity in Qualitative Research

- **Triangulation**: when different sources agree, information is corroborated
  - **Data**: use of multiple data sources
  - **Methods**: use of multiple methods
  - **Investigator**: use of multiple investigators
  - **Theory**: use of multiple theories and perspectives

Promoting Validity in Qualitative Research

- **Peer Review**
  - Discussion of conclusions and interpretations with others, including discussion with a "disinterested" peer who can provide insights as well as play devil’s advocate

- **Negative Case Sampling**
  - Locating and examining cases that disconfirm expectations and tentative explanations
Promoting Validity in Qualitative Research

- Reflexivity
  - Self-reflection and critical awareness on potential biases and predispositions

- Pattern Matching
  - Predicting a series of events that form a pattern and then matching that to the actual results

Reliability

- Deals with degree of accuracy of observations (agreement between observations and setting)

- Enhanced by the use of supporting documentation (field notes, recordings, agreement of others in same situation etc.)

Now let’s try it!