Qualitative Methods

ARL Service Quality Evaluation Academy

Austin, TX

May 29-June 2, 2005

Colleen Cook

Sterling C. Evans Library

Texas A&M University

What do we mean by qualitative methodology?

* The observer/researcher inseparable from the study
* Consists of a set of interpretive practices that tries to make sense of a cultural context
* Data sources, including: field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self
* Study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them

From where do qualitative methods come?

✦ Beginnings in Sociology: 1920s and 30s in the "Chicago School;" in Anthropology: in the studies by Boas, Mead, Benedict, Bateson, Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Browne, and Malinowski

✦ Through seven moments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001)

✦ Today: influences of poststructuralism and postmodernism from textual studies

What are the differences between qualitative and quantitative research?

* Multiple realities, not a single one "out there" to be discovered
* Value laden, subjective rather than objective
* Seeks closeness with the actor through interviewing and observation, rather than abstract relationships
* Inductive rather than deductive
* Samples purposeful chosen for diversity rather than random
* Thick descriptions rather than crisp and terse background information
* Comfort with contradictions, ambiguity
* Representations: ethnographic prose, historical narratives, first-person accounts, still photographs, life histories, biographical and autobiographical materials rather than mathematical models, statistical tables, graphs, third-person narratives

What data are collected by the qualitative researcher (researcher as bricoleur, montage maker)?

* Case studies, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts, statistics that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.
* Inherently multimethod in focus: triangulation

What methods are used?

✦ Ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, deconstructionism, ethnography, interviews, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research, participant observation

The Research Process

1: The Researcher as a Multicultural Subject
- ➤ history and research traditions
- ➤ conceptions of self and the other
- ➤ ethics and politics of research

The Research Process

2: Theoretical Paradigms and Perspectives
- ➢ positivism, postpositivism
- ➢ interpretivism, constructivism, hermeneutics
- ➢ feminism
- ➢ racialized discourses
- ➢ critical theory and Marxist models
- ➢ cultural studies models
- ➢ queer theory

The Research Process

3: Research Strategies

- study design
- case study
- ethnography, participant observation, performance ethnography
- phenomenology, ethnomethodology
- grounded theory
- life history, *testimonio*
- historical method
- action and applied research
- clinical research

The Research Process

4: Methods of Collection and Analysis

- ➢ interviewing
- ➢ observing
- ➢ artifacts, documents, and records
- ➢ visual methods
- ➢ autoethnography
- ➢ data management methods
- ➢ computer-assisted analysis
- ➢ textual analysis
- ➢ focus groups
- ➢ applied ethnography

The Research Process

5: The Art, Practices, and Politics of Interpretation and Presentation
- ➤ criteria for judging adequacy
- ➤ practices and politics of interpretation
- ➤ writing as interpretation
- ➤ policy analysis
- ➤ evaluation traditions
- ➤ applied research

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.20)

Establishing Trustworthiness: A Comparison of Conventional and Naturalistic Inquiry

Criterion	Conventional Term	Naturalistic Term	Naturalistic Techniques
Truth value	Internal validity	Credibility	Prolonged engagement Persistent observation Triangulation Referential adequacy Peer debriefing Member checks Reflexive journal
Applicability	External validity	Transferability	Thick description Purposive sampling Reflexive journal
Consistency	Reliability	Dependability	Dependability audit Reflexive journal
Neutrality	Objectivity	Confirmability	Confirmability audit Reflexive journal

Adapted from Lincoln & Guba, 1985.

Summary of Techniques for Establishing Trustworthiness

Technique	Results	Examples
Prolonged engagement	Build trust Develop rapport Build relationships Obtain wide scope of data Obtain accurate data	Length of time in the field Avoiding premature closing
Persistent observation	Obtain in-depth data Obtain accurate data Sort relevancies from irrelevancies Recognize deceits	Purposeful, assertive investigation
Triangulation	Verify data	Using different or multiple sources (interview notes, videotapes, photos, and documents), methods, or investigators Absence of data
Referential adequacy	Provide a "slice of life"	Unobtrusive measures such as brochures, catalogs, yearbooks, photos, memos, etc.
Peer debriefing	Test working hypotheses Find alternative explanations Explore emerging design and hypotheses	Formal or informal discussion with a peer

Summary of Techniques for Establishing Trustworthiness (continued)

Technique	Results	Examples
Member checking	Test categories, interpretations, or conclusion (constructions)	Continuous, formal or informal checking of data with stake-holders such as at the end of an interview, review of written passages, or the final report in draft form
Reflexive journal Thick description	Document researcher decisions Provide data base for transfer-ability judgments Provide a vicarious experience for the reader	Daily or weekly written diary Descriptive, relevant data
Purposive sampling	Generate data for emergent design and emerging hypotheses	Maximum variation sampling that provides the broadest rang of information based on relevance
Audit trail	Allow auditor to determine trustworthiness of study	Interview guides, notes, documents, notecards, peer debriefing notes, journal, etc.

Adapted from Lincoln & Guba, 1985.

The Audit Trail

	Index Card	Photos	Artifacts B: Base D:District S: School C: Calendar A: Annuals N:Newspaper
I. A Rich History (p.44)			
A. Location of the base/the TAJ	IA,IB	4,5,6	B1
B. Base description/access	IB	6	B1
C. Base housing description	IB,IC		
D. History of the base		B1,D2	
E. Mission of the base/Education of personnel	IE(1-3)		A(1,2),D2,P32
F. History of the school district/funding	IF(1-2)		N(34,35,41)
II. The High School (p.47)			
A. Perimeter Road	IIA	7	
1. Description	8,9		
2. Stadium	8		
3. Trees	IIB(1-2)	10,11,14,80,81	A(1-5,12)
B. Campus description	IIC(1-6)	65,66	
C. High school office description/secretaries		67,68	
D. Teachers/ lounge description	IIE	15-18,24-28	
E. Patio area description	IIF	30-44,49	
F. Main classroom building description/display cases			
		2,90	
III. The Principal—"Do what's best for the kid!" (p. 51)	IIIA2(1-2)		
A. Physical description	IIIA2(1)	2,90	
1. "Conservative"	IIIA2(2),III		
2. "Clean-cut"	A3		
3. "Honest"	IIIA4	2,90	
4. "Country Gentleman"	IIIA4	2,90	A16
5. "Western-cut clothes"	IIIA2(1)	90,92	
6. "Never having a hair out of place"	IIIA6(1-2)		
7. "Trim"			

Excerpted from Skipper, 1989.

Grounded Theory:

1. The aim of grounded theory is to generate or discover a theory.

2. The researcher has to set aside theoretical ideas to allow a 'substantive' theory to emerge.

3. Theory focuses on how individuals interact in relation to the phenomenon under study.

Grounded Theory:

4. Theory asserts a plausible relation between concepts and sets of concepts.

5. Theory is derived from data acquired through fieldwork interviews, observations and documents.

6. Data analysis is systematic and begins as soon as data is available.

Grounded Theory:

7. Data analysis proceeds through identifying categories and connecting them.

8. Further data collection (or sampling) is based on emerging concepts.

9. These concepts are developed through constant comparison with additional data.

Grounded Theory:

10. Data collection can stop when new conceptualisations emerge.

11. Data analysis proceeds from 'open' coding (identifying categories, properties and dimension) through 'axial' coding (examining conditions, strategies and consequences) to 'selective' coding around an emerging storyline.

12. The resulting theory can be reported in a narrative framework or as a set of propositions (Dey, 1999, pp.1-2).

The End