Research Series Session 3: Qualitative Data Analysis

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Introduction to data analysis

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Introduction

From the introduction to qualitative research...

- Important to remember that this data is just as good as qualitative data, it is just another kind of information.
- The purpose of exploring questions in a qualitative manner is to give us data that we might not be able to get from quantitative methods alone.
What about validity?

- In qualitative research, the use of multiple methods is called triangulation, which is an alternative to validation (Flick, 2002).

- Elements such as the “methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers”, when combined, form a strategy that can add greater understanding to any inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
What about Generalizability?

- In qualitative research, generalizability is not the same as in quantitative research.
- Instead, transferability is the degree to which the results of a qualitative design can be transferred to other contexts.
- The researcher, through explicit description of the assumptions and context, can insure good transferability of the research findings.
Personal history is an important factor:

- The researcher brings a set of values to the analysis of qualitative data, specifically, the perspective shaped by their “class, gender, race, culture, and ethnic community” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pg. 21).

- The research analysis, then, is affected by the lens that the researcher uses to analyze the data.
Qualitative Data Analysis

Analyzing the data...but first...

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Our assumptions

Methods that are being used:

- In most cases, Student Life staff will be using one or more of the following qualitative methods:
  - Focus groups
  - Structured interviews
  - Semi-structured or unstructured interviews
  - Document analysis
- If you would like to use other methods, please let us know, that’s why we’re here as well.
Setting the stage...

Whatever method you are using, however, all of these pointers apply:

• For good transferability and triangulation to happen, the researcher must do the following (before and during the study):
  ▪ Provide an understanding of assumptions
  ▪ Define the context explicitly
  ▪ Have good field notes
1 - The researcher should be clear about where they are coming from

- Will you be using Student Development theory to frame your study?
- Will the mission of your office guide your framework for understanding (examples?)
- By being clear about where one is coming from, questions that arise can be more effectively answered when conducting the study and analyzing the data (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006).
Define the context explicitly

2 - Context matters:
- If you have data without a context, would it make sense to people besides you if they saw the data later?
- From a longevity perspective, data that is placed in context might be able to capture student change (for example) better than data alone.
  - For example, student A has an issue their freshman year with their roommate. Student A has the same issue with their roommate during their sophomore year, but the context has changed.
Have good field notes

- **3 – Have good field notes...**
- Field notes help with the application of theoretical frameworks, assumptions, and help capture the context.
  - Was a certain student exhibiting thinking in line with Kohlberg level 4 thinking (for example, using theoretical framework)?
  - Was there something about the room that might have hindered all students speaking (were you in a public library for some reason)?
  - Did students who seem to know one another sit near each other, and perhaps support the points of one another?
Anaylsis is the next step.

• “The purpose of analysis is to uncover findings that lead to a new and increased understanding. By spending a great deal of time listening and reading the text, “parallel trajectories” (Mishler, 2000, pg. 129) emerge that are coded, placed into categories, or used to create themes as determined by the methodology.” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, pg. 128).
Data analysis (from last presentation)

Impressions post-focus group

• The scribe and moderator should debrief right after the group, if possible.
  ▪ Krueger (1998, pg. 50) has a good list of questions:
    • What are the most important themes or ideas discussed?
    • How did these differ from what we expected?
    • What points need to be included in the report?
    • What quotes should be remembered and possibly included in the report?
    • Should we do anything differently for the next focus group?
Data Analysis (continued)

Analysis of qualitative data is very complex

• However, that’s why we are here – to help
    • Categories should be exhaustive
    • Mutually exclusive
    • Sensitizing
    • Conceptually congruent
• As Jones et. al state, interpretation of the data arises from the refinement of these themes.
• To be clear about this, they argue, researchers must make a differentiation between REPORTING and INTERPRETING.
• So what’s the difference?
Interpreting versus reporting...

The important point to remember is that interpreting is not merely a rephrasing of the text. That is not to say reporting is not alright sometimes, but for an in depth study, interpreting is ideal.
Interpreting is neither right nor wrong but...

Can it be supported?

- Needs three elements for “good support”:
  - Credibility
  - Plausibility
  - Applicability

- For student life, the applicability aspect is probably most important, but that is not to say that credibility or plausibility are any less important.
Applicability...the fruit of analysis

How will your study help the Student Life knowledge base?

• Questions like this one should guide the recommendations your study makes.
• Connections to practice and relevance to students are always good starting points.
• Can these findings be tied to the larger university context (i.e. one university?) Beyond the university context?
“Qualitative research that exemplifies goodness must be an important part of the assessment, research, and evaluation efforts taking place on college campuses, linking [our work] to student learning and offering directions for continuous improvement. Including qualitative research is important not because it might be “trendy” but rather because good qualitative research brings voice and insight forward for all constituents living in complex phenomena, including underrepresented people and their experiences. Using good qualitative work to demonstrate effectiveness allows institutions to realize their mission more fully” (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, pg. 458).
Qualitative Data Analysis

Conclusion(s)

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Main points:

- The way you analyze will be guided by your research question, as well as the theoretical framework you are using.
- Interpreting is different than reporting, and both have their places.
- Context and applicability are very important and central to data analysis.
Questions?

- We are here to help, and would love to help you construct your protocols or analyze your data when you have collected it.
- Remember also that we have digital recorders that student life offices can use.
Presentation Title

Upcoming Presentations

Daniel Newhart
Assistant Director
Upcoming Work

Quantitative Research Series

• Session 4 – Introduction to Survey Research (Feb. 18th, 1:00-3:00 p.m., RPAC Dave Griner Room)
• Session 5 – Statistical Analysis and Survey Research (Apr. 15th, 10:00-12:00 p.m., RPAC meeting room 2)
• Session 6 – SPSS application (May 13th, time, location TBA)
Qualitative Data Analysis

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