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Applying Knowledge of Qualitative Design and Analysis

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### Abstract

This study compared and contrasted two qualitative scholarly articles in relation to their research designs. Their designs were analyzed by the comparison of research references and research specific vocabulary to describe how various research methods were used. When researching and analyzing qualitative scholarly articles, it is imperative to understand how research designs can be the same, but their methods of analysis can differ depending on the study, and how vocabulary describes the research being conducted. The course instructor provided two qualitative articles which were analyzed by research references provided by the student. A literature review of the two articles and that of the research references were conducted to provide a more in-depth explanation of the research designs. Analysis revealed that even though both articles shared the same research design, various analytical techniques that are used can produce different perspectives of the results.

### Applying Knowledge of Qualitative Design and Analysis

When a study involves a personal relationship with its participants over an extended period of time for the purpose of observing and gathering data, this type of study would be considered qualitative. Qualitative designs show diverse perspectives, (a) social justice thinking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, as cited by Creswell, 2009); (b) ideological perspectives (Lather, 1991, as cited by Creswell, 2009); (c) philosophical stances (Schwandt, 2000, as cited by Creswell, 2009); and (d) systematic procedural guidelines (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, Creswell, 2007, as cited by Creswell, 2009). Inductive methods of reasoning and data analysis help to build patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing data into increasingly more abstract units of information (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

Qualitative research, a design method, has distinct characteristics. The researcher, to some degree, becomes part of the culture being studied as he or she talks directly to the participants, observing their behaviors within the participants' context (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Data is collected in the natural setting of the participants who experience the issue or problem. The researcher triangulates between interviews, observations, and documents in collecting data (Creswell, 2009). The "emergent design" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 393) (as cited by Wiersma & Jurs, 2009), or "working design" (Smith & Glass, 1987, p. 259) (as cited by Wiersma & Jurs, 2009), is an initial plan for research that cannot be tightly prescribed but may change after the researcher enters the field. The researcher describes what he or she sees, hears, and understands, and, therefore, is considered an interpretive field (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Holistically, the researcher develops complex pictures of the problem, reporting multiple perspectives or realities, therefore, sketching a larger picture that emerges (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Two articles, Hill (2002), and Fetherston and Kelly (2007), were analyzed to determine if

they had these qualitative characteristics and to understand the author's similarities and differences when using qualitative research.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The design characteristic that Fetherston and Kelly (2007) used in their study was a grounded theory. Students participated in a conflict resolution course where students wrote in their portfolios, and shared their experiences as they developed and learned peacemaking skills. The inductive approach was used to gather data through multiple qualitative techniques over a long period of time to develop a theory (Fetherston & Kelly, 2007). Data was continuously collected to confirm or challenge any initial findings to build a theory that is grounded in the data, and was compared with other components of other data to determine similarities and differences (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

In Hill's (2002) study, the ethnography design dealt with the discovery of a culture's essence and its unique complexities in order to understand its interactions and setting. LeCompte and Schensul (1999, as cited by Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010) believed that a culture refers to the attitudes, knowledge, values, and beliefs that influence the behavior of a group. In order for Hill to understand the service delivery in his study and if it can benefit the culture being studied, the most appropriate analytical technique to gather data was to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews and observations of teenagers to determine their views of what they think is missing in providing them help.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Training in Focus Groups**

In order to obtain the most authentic data from various youth groups, the analytical techniques that Hill's (2002) researchers used involved being trained by experts of these groups

on how to disguise themselves as they investigated, observed and communicated as actual members of these groups without being caught. Van Mannen (1988, as cited by Hill, 2002) attended training at a police academy so that his presence in squad cars would arouse little suspicion from the officers that he accompanied on the job. Hill became a volunteer at a shelter for homeless women and their children to gain their trust so that he could conduct interviews and reveal their experiences of homelessness. Hill and Wright (1998, as cited by Hill, 2002) acted as life-skills consultants to incarcerated juvenile delinquents at a religious-affiliated rehabilitation facility to have a legitimate reason for interviewing inmates.

### **Triangulation**

Even though both articles used different research methods, both used triangulation to compare their various data sources. Fetherston and Kelly (2007) used (a) marks, attendance, and demographic characteristics; (b) pre- and post anonymous surveys; (c) pre- and post interviews; (d) analysis of student portfolios; (e) researchers' field notes, memos, meeting records, e-mails of researchers' observations and experiences of the class; and (f) student interactions. While using similar techniques, Hall (2002) used (a) formal meetings three times a month for 3 years; (b) minutes from these meetings; (c) researcher's handwritten notes; (d) handouts from various speakers; (e) unstructured/semi-structured interviews; and (f) final reports by the Crime Commission of the state of service delivery, the Ad Hoc Committee on the new service delivery model, and the Oversight Committee on implementing the model.

### **Analysis**

Both articles used various technical characteristics in their analysis. Hill's (2002) data appeared dependable where his analysis explained how his data was collected and analyzed. Step 1 created an understanding of different perspectives of public and private constituencies

interested in fostering this partnership. Step 2 summarized divergent perspectives. In step 3, themes were identified and developed that best captured the evaluation. Step 4 developed relationships among themes to be explored in order to develop comprehensive understanding of public-private partnership.

On the other hand, Fetherston and Kelly (2007) focused their analysis on the journeys their students took through the course, the different trajectories and destinations reached, and the reasons for those differences. As their study encompassed 12 weeks, 3 hour sessions a week, their data would most likely constitute as credible due to training that prepared them, and how they collected their data. Their study began negatively as the energy within the student to student group work seemed disorganized. The conflict course was new, different, unexpected, and challenging. But as the program progressed, groups began to open up for transformative learning. According to Lincoln and Guba (1983, as cited by Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010), there appeared to have been evidence of catalytic authenticity as there could have been stimulated action to improve student education.

### **Results**

Hill's (2002) research revealed both positive and negative outcomes of their study. A majority of the homeless youths who entered the program were able to be screened to determine if they needed the service. Almost half of these youths met the criteria for the program and continued to secure safe housing. On a negative note, a bottleneck occurred at the point of entry to the system where only a third received assessments to determine their needs. Some youths were unaware of, or confused about, how to secure follow-up services. News of the findings resulted in facility managers expressing defensive remarks. Some youths had criminal backgrounds where they had warrants, and businesses were harboring them as fugitives. Reports

confirmed that youths were using shelters to avoid being detained. Drug use increased after introduction of the new system since funding for drug treatment never materialized.

Unlike the previous study, Fetherston and Kelly (2007) were able to categorize their results into four “clusters of learning experiences” (p. 272). Cluster 1, “not getting it” (p. 272), revealed students’ limited understanding of the subject as well as resisting engagement. Cluster 2, transitional/challenges, revealed that students were beginning to understand what was expected of them. In cluster 3, “getting it”/change (p. 273), students were feeling a sense of achievement of knowledge and understanding. Cluster 4, transitional/disruptions, revealed that students captured a sense of being close to transformation but not completely.

### **Initial Critique**

#### **Research Questions**

Both articles did not provide exact research questions, but did explain the direction of their research. Hill’s (2002) research examined the service delivery system for homeless youths that was created by a public-private partnership between the business community, nonprofit service providers, and governmental entities of Portland, Oregon, but no services were found for these teenagers. Fetherston and Kelly (2007) tracked students over a given period of time to understand the students’ experiences of learning and the possibilities of transformative learning through a conflict course.

#### **Measurement and Instrumentation**

As their instrumentations were similar in technique, their approaches were different. Hill’s (2002) researchers blended in with their samples which allowed them to observe and interview their participants without being caught as an outsider and contaminating their own data. The researchers wrote notes as they observed their subjects’ behaviors as they interacted with society. Blending into these groups also allowed researchers to interview their groups,

what their lives consisted of, what improvements could be made in the participants' lives, and how these improvements could be implemented. As they used similar techniques, Fetherston and Kelly (2007) used (a) marks, attendance, and demographic characteristics; (b) pre- and post-anonymous surveys; (c) pre- and post-interviews; (d) analysis of student portfolios; and (e) researchers' field notes, memos, meeting records, e-mails of researchers' observations; (f) experiences of the class; and (g) student interactions.

### **Validity processes**

Both articles displayed validity processes in order to conduct their study. Hill's (2002) research suggested that the use of ethnography to examine service delivery had increased significantly in the past 20 years. Arnold and Price (1993, as cited by Hill, 2002) used ethnography to explore the complex relationship between white-water rafting experiences and consumer levels of satisfaction. Celsi, Rose, and Leigh (1993, as cited by Hill, 2002) conducted an ethnographic study of the skydiving subculture and its impact on the voluntary consumption of high-risk services. Hirschman (1992, as cited by Hill, 2002) investigated the use of a 12-step program service (e.g., Narcotics Anonymous) by addicts through her weekly attendance at two different chapters.

Fetherston and Kelly's (2007) grounded theory research is an example of Charmaz's (1990, 2000, 2005, and 2006, as cited by Fetherston & Kelly, 2007) and Clarke's research (2003, 2005, as cited by Fetherston & Kelly, 2007) while avoiding the more positivistic and traditional forms of grounded theory found by Glaser and Strauss (1967, as cited by Fetherston & Kelly, 2007), and Strauss and Corbin (1990, as cited by Fetherston & Kelly, 2007).



**Sampling procedures**

Each article revealed varying details in how their sample was selected. Hill's (2002) research included the population of Portland, Oregon, and its sampling size included (a) homeless families; (b) runaway adolescents escaping physical and sexual abuse; (c) throwaways discarded by their parents or guardians; (d) youths abandoning foster care; and (e) children who grew up on the streets. Van Mannen (1988, as cited by Hill, 2002) attended training at a police academy so that his presence in squad cars would arouse little suspicion from the officers that he accompanied on the job. Hill (2002) became a volunteer at a shelter for homeless women and their children to gain their trust so that they would reveal their experiences of homelessness. Hill and Wright (1998, as cited by Hill, 2002) acted as a life-skills consultants to incarcerated juvenile delinquents at a religious-affiliated rehabilitation facility to have a legitimate reason for interviewing inmates.

Fetherston and Kelly's (2007) research revealed minute detail of their sample. Their study included 82 registered students on the course, but of this sampling, only 71 portfolios that were turned in were actually used for the study.

**Ethical considerations**

It was inferred in both articles that their subjects were treated humanely. It seemed he (Hill, 2002) took every precaution as he took a chance in working with his participants. They were trained to blend in with the population in hopes to gain the trust needed to make the needed observations. It was not explained as to what would happen if his cover would be blown or how he would regain the trust to continue with his study. It appeared that Fetherston and Kelly (2007) threw their students into an environment forcing them to interact with each other during a conflict course, observe any evidence of transformative learning that may take place, and how

they may proceed through this process by using alternative teaching methods (cooperative learning methods and reflective portfolios) as a catalyst. This method seemed to have produced a number of behavioral considerations as these students reacted in various unexpected situations, from feelings of calm to anxiety.

### **Conclusions**

Even though both articles began with a qualitative method, no two articles are the same as their research can proceed in different directions based on their study. Both articles began with different designs, grounded theory and ethnography. An initial critique revealed both articles began with a research question, but no hypotheses. Instruments for both articles consisted of observations, interviews, and field notes. Samples used were either unspecified regions of a major city or a classroom setting of unknown age and location. Both articles showed respect towards their participants as no harm was done. Students' behaviors were not influenced before the study was conducted as well as their names were not mentioned to protect their identities.

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