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Issues in Conducting Qualitative Research

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Who am I: Revealing the “human instrument”*

- Area: Social foundations of education (multicultural, social theories, philosophy, policy & law)
- Fields: Educational Studies; Teacher Education
- Scholarship: yoga and mindfulness in education
- I teach qualitative research
- I do qualitative research in schools
- I do yoga (included daily meditation in the last year)
- I teach yoga once a week to adults on campus (free, open-level)

# What do I mean by qualitative research?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Paradigm</th>
<th>Qualitative: What does x do?</th>
<th>Quantitative: Does x do y?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Participants</td>
<td>not randomly selected, purposeful, snowballed</td>
<td>Random assignment or whole set (class)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus of the Study</td>
<td>Study of the whole; examines the breadth &amp; depth of phenomena from the perspective of participants; natural context</td>
<td>Specific variables studied; may test a specific hypotheses; examines phenomena under controlled circumstances</td>
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<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Subjectivity; declares &amp; uses bias as a strength</td>
<td>Objectivity; attempts to control for bias</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Identify patterns, features, themes</td>
<td>Identify statistical relationships; measure changes pre/post treatment</td>
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<td>Results</td>
<td>Local, partial; not generalizable; may be suggestive of similar populations</td>
<td>Specific; generalizable to other populations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Report</td>
<td>Narrative report with contextual description &amp; direct quotations from research participants</td>
<td>Clinical report with correlations, comparisons of means, &amp; statistical significance of findings</td>
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Qualitative Designs for School-Based Yoga Program Evaluation

• Qualitative Case Study (Yin, Stake)
• Critical Grounded Theory (Charmaz)
• Generic Qualitative Inquiry (Lichtman, Merriam)
  – No research questions from the onset
  – No philosophical assumptions
• Feminist (cooperative) multi-layered design (Tisdell & others), researchers include:
  • External evaluator (university-based educational expert)
  • Director (org. leader, training and content expert)
  • Yoga Educators (content specific trainers)
  • Participants (content-specific teachers)
Methods, Analysis, Results

– Methods
  • Observation and self report questionnaires, survey, analysis of communications (emails, journals, field notes)

– Analysis
  • Reading, coding, memoing, conferencing, member-checking
  • Simple Excel spreadsheet for data-keeping, arranging, organizing

– Results
  • Descriptions of demographics
  • Report of frequency and quality of activities
  • Description of participants and researchers actions and responses
  • Narratives (stories) build around themes that emerge from the whole (vignettes, essays, portraits)
  • Thoughts, suggestions, questions
Why use qualitative research in yoga-based school programs?

- Control, even predictability, may not be possible
- Does not require specialized training; easy to involve teachers and grad students
  - Yogis are appropriate/preferred human instruments for measuring yoga as a phenomenon
  - Teachers are appropriate/preferred human instruments for measuring school phenomena
- Reduced concern over fidelity of implementation
  - usually don’t assume this with human beings; thick descriptions present the complexity of teaching practices, student behaviors and classroom interactions
- Small numbers; no random sampling
- You can make the coding and analysis as simple or complex as you like
- No need to hide bias; can be overtly political; partners with advocacy
- Excellent exploratory tool to plan, guide, and focus more traditional or scientific research
Challenges Related to Qualitative Research

• **Complicated Ethics**
  - Quality depends on the relationship between researcher & researched
  - Requires “fluid” research goals*
  - Representation (Whose voice gets amplified? Whose story?)
  - Delivering bad news
  - Responsibility to participants; complicated allegiance

• **Time Commitment**
  - Strength in working in teams but multiple points of view to consider.
  - Multiple rounds; iterative analysis

• **Funding**
  - Hard to get govt. money; scientific, controlled research is privileged
  - Some indep. funders prefer small, qual.
  - Grants usually run out before the full story can be compiled
  - Donating time as service

Advancing Qualitative Research

• Support educator professional authority
• Support educator action research
  – Profession Development
    • Leadership, Curriculum Supervisors
    • Ed Studies Scholars
  – Teacher Education
• Adopt alternative language to tell your stories - scholarly inquiry; program evaluation
• Weave qualitative research (human stories) with policy & advocacy
• Develop customizable models, share
• Publish in qualitative and education journals and non-peer reviewed periodicals and bulletins
• Providers – get an academic partner (PhD)