

Qualitative Research Methods

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- Qualitative research collects **non-numerical** data such as words, images, and sounds.
- The focus is on **exploring subjective experiences, opinions, and attitudes**, often through observation and interviews.
- Qualitative research aims to **produce rich and detailed descriptions** of the **phenomenon** being studied, and to **uncover new insights** and meanings.

PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS

How the world works???

Paradigm: the underlying assumptions and intellectual structure upon which research and development in a field of inquiry is based (Kuhn, 1962, 1970)

Someone's philosophical orientation toward knowledge

MAJOR PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS/ RESEARCH PARADIGMS YOU WILL ENCOUNTER IN EDUCATION

Table 2.1 Four Worldviews Used in Research

<i>Postpositivism</i>	<i>Constructivism</i>	<i>Advocacy and Participatory</i>	<i>Pragmatism</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determination• Reductionism• Empirical observation and measurement• Theory verification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding• Multiple participant meanings• Social and historical construction• Theory generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political• Empowerment and issue oriented• Collaborative• Change oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consequences of actions• Problem centered• Pluralistic• Real-world practice oriented

SOURCE: Creswell (2003). Reprinted with permission of Sage Publications.

Also:

- Modernism
- Postmodernism

Why does knowing about philosophies of and approaches to knowledge matter in higher education generally and, by extension, in higher education research?



Another important philosophical debate to recognize in the context of education...



- **Do social structures determine an individual's behavior or does human agency?**
- **Structuralism** - emphasizes importance of cultural-structural-institutional and functional relations in language and society; "structure" influences humans' thinking and behavior.
- **Poststructuralism** - rejects universal truth; emphasizes differences, deconstruction, interpretation, and power of "knowledge."

Characteristics of Qualitative Research Designs



- Emic lens
- Researcher is data collection instrument
- Fieldwork – natural setting
- Inductive approach – theory building
- Focus on rich description

Ethnography

- Anthropological origins
- “The act of writing about people”
(Ethno = people ; graphy = writing)
- Foundational question: *What are the cultural characteristics of this group of people or of this cultural scene?*
 - Culture: shared beliefs, values, practices, language, norms, rituals, and material things that group members use to understand their world.



Example: Rhoads (1995)

- The purpose of this study is to highlight aspects of fraternity life that contribute to the ongoing marginalization and, in some cases the victimization, of women using critical views of culture and power.

Ideally, in conducting cultural research the ethnographer lives and works in the community for six months to a year or more learning the language and seeing patterns of behavior over time. I have worked as a student affairs professional for more than 11 years in the following areas of student life: residence life, student activities, academic and career advising, judicial affairs, student volunteerism and service learning, and athletics. From these experiences, I have worked with numerous student groups, including Greek organizations. Because of my previous involvement in student life and my work with various student groups, I was able to participate in fraternity activities right away without experiencing any communication difficulties.

Phenomenology

- Philosophical origins
- Foundational question: *What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon by an individual or by many individuals?*
- Researcher gains access to individuals' life-worlds (world of experiences)
- Search for invariant structures of experiences (called essences)
 - Results provide rich description and "vicarious experience" of being there
- Researcher brackets, or suspends, preconceptions

Example: Iwamoto, Creswell & Caldwell (2007)

- Research questions:
 - (1) What is the meaning ascribed to rap music by six ethnically and racially diverse Midwestern college students?
 - (2) What is the context in which they experience rap music?
 - (3) How can rap music be used to deal with everyday stressors, and how does it alter a person's mood?

Interview protocol:

- 1. When did you first start listening to hip hop/rap music?**
- 2. What was that experience like and what does hip hop mean to you (the impact it has made on you)?**
- 3. Who were/are your favorite artists? Please describe.**
- 4. What have you learned or gained from hip hop?**
- 5. What is negative about hip hop, and how do you deal with the possible negativity of the music?**

Grounded Theory

- Sociological origins
- Foundational question: *What theory or explanation emerges from an analysis of the data collected about this phenomenon?*
- Used to generate theory; theory tells "How" and "Why" and provides explanation.
- Can also test or elaborate previous grounded theory, but must constantly modify theory to fit new data.
- Grounded theory complete when theoretical saturation occurs (no new concepts emerge and theory validated).

Example: Renn & Jessup-Anger (2008)

- Research Question: How do first time, full time student affairs professionals experience their first year on the job?
- “Data analysis was ongoing. We followed a grounded theory approach, beginning with open coding of each month’s responses, moving into axial and selective coding to develop themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using a constant comparative strategy (**Strauss & Corbin**), we integrated emerging themes into subsequent prompts.” (p. 323).

Case Study

- Foundational question: *What are the characteristics of this single case or of these comparison cases?*
- Is eclectic:
 - Different concepts and theories used to describe and explain case.
 - Multiple methods of data collection used (interviews, observation, documents, questionnaires).
 - Final report: rich and holistic description of case and context

Example: Whitt et al (2008)

- The purpose of this study was to identify principles of good practice pertaining to academic and student affairs partnership programs.
- “Because there is little research specific to academic and student affairs partnerships, our research team sought methods that would enable us not only to **provide rich descriptions of the elements and impacts of programs within individual institutions but also to make comparisons across types of programs and types of institutions.** Therefore, we chose a qualitative case study design to achieve the detail, complexity, and “multiple perspectives” to accomplish our research purposes” (p. 237).

Discourse Analysis

- Linguistic and Communication origins
- “Talk about talk” - Studying the micro features of communication

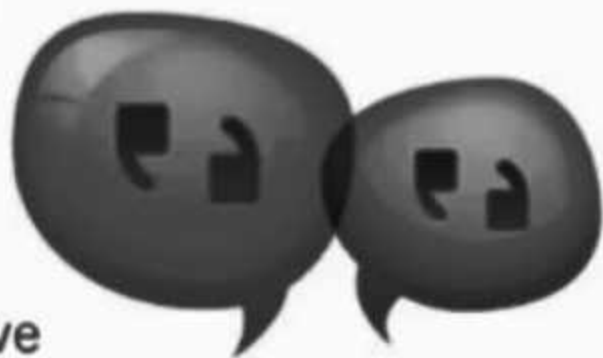


Example: Taylor & Morphey (2010)

- Research questions:
 - 1. Which of Breneman's (1994) liberal arts criteria recur within the mission statements of BCs?
 - 2. What does the use of these criteria indicate about the manner in which different types of BCs communicate to prospective students through their mission statements?
 - 3. How does Urciuoli's (2003) linguistic framework explain the communicative patterns found within the mission statements of BCs?
 - 4. What do differences between the U.S. News mission statements (USMS) and OMS suggest about the relative utility of these statements and Urciuoli's framework?

Generic Qualitative Research / Qualitative Description

- Basic, naturalistic, discovery-oriented descriptive studies
- Less interpretive and transformative of the data than designer approaches such as phenomenology or grounded theory
- “Eclectic design”



Example: Wolf Wendel, Ward & Kinzie (2009)

- Research questions:
 - What are the definitions of involvement, engagement, and integration?
 - How did each concept develop and evolve?
 - How are the concepts distinct?
 - To what extent do these concepts overlap?
 - How are the concepts used in research and practice?
 - What are the future implications for each of these concepts?
 - Why is it important to examine their use?

Thank
you