What Does Method Matter in Applied Qualitative Research?

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Co-sponsored by IIQM and ATLAS.ti
Introduction

- Registered Nurse
- Professor, University of British Columbia
- Associate Editor, Qualitative Health Research
- Editor-in-Chief, Nursing Inquiry

Sally Thorne, RN, PhD, FAAN, FCAHS
A Methodological Journey


Dr. Joan Anderson

Phenomenology

Dr. Jan Morse
Primacy of Location

- Discipline
- Training
- Conceptual Orientation
Nursing
Context for the conceptual understanding of a system in which all parts interact and are meaningful to one another.
Commonalities and Differences

- Context for understanding the nature of scientific claims about human health status, health experience and health care delivery
Experience and Ideas

- Context for coming
to know what we
know and the basis
upon which we know
it within an applied
practice profession.
The Nature of Knowledge for Nursing

- Processual
- Systematic
- Flexible
- Infinitely Adaptive
The Evidence Imperative

The “Truth Claims” of our Era
Clinical Epistemology

Pattern Recognition

Infinite Variation on Pattern

Realism

Objectivity

Idealism

Subjectivity

Fact

Intuition
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Philosophy/Psychology</th>
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<td>Ethnography</td>
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<td>Grounded Theory</td>
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Confronting Resistance

- Health science community
- Social scientist colleagues
- Grant reviewers/journal editors
- Paradigmatic thinking
Methodolatry

“slavish attachment and devotion to method”

“a preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told.”

Rule-Alignment
Methodological Rigidity

1986:
The problem of rigor in qualitative research.

1993:
Rigor or rigor mortis: The problem of rigor in qualitative research revisited.
The Entrée: Tabula Rasa

“Nothing is known...”
Narrative Imperative

“My study participants speak their truth...”
Researcher Role Abdication

“The data speak for themselves....”
The Meaning of Meaning

“My journey.....”
The Primacy of Abstraction

“The overarching metaphor....”
The Convenient Exit

“Saturation was achieved...”
Truth Claim Grandiosities

Lachrymal validity

Adulatory credibility
Theory in Applied Qualitative Research
Epistemological Differences

Social Science

Applied/Health Science
Social Science vs Applied Health

Discovering laws and principles
Discerning human universals
Solving health problems
What Theory Privileges and What it Obscures
The Fallout of Borrowed Theoretical Tradition

- Losing the disciplinary grip
- Manipulating language signifiers
- Discrediting the field with fuzziness and irrelevance
Emancipation of Applied Qualitative Methodology
Venturing Beyond Description and Theorizing
Bringing a Clinical Angle of Vision into the Evidence-Based Context

- Counter the limits of conventional science
- Capture experiential phenomena
- Expose patterns in complex experience
- Categorize commonalities and variations
- Expand critical reflection on context
The Explicit Contribution of Applied Qualitative Science

- That which science misses/misunderstands
- That which defies quantification
- That which behaves in ways that cannot be regularized
- That which changes outside the context of its natural complexity
Applied Qualitative Methodology
The Next Generation
Interpretive Description

- Derived from NURSING epistemology
- Borrows the best of technique from conventional (social science method) without taking along the theoretical baggage
- Uses theory as a tool, not as the ultimate purpose
Strategic Design Logic → Intelligent Science
Corrective to Inherent Limits of Measurement and Generalization
Gap Filler
Illuminator
Variance Interpreter
Challenger
Humanizer
Not just theorizing…

Or fighting for a higher position on the evidence hierarchy…
But moving toward integration, synthesis and application