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Purposes of Research Program Transcript NARRATOR: In this program, Dr. Patton explains and provides practical examples of five purposes for research, basic, applied, summative, formative, and action research. While all are legitimate and important purposes for research, basic and applied are most often used for thesis and dissertation research. MICHAEL QUINN PATTON: One of the important contextual considerations in engaging in research as a scholar-practitioner is to understand the different purposes that inquiry can serve. And that inquiry determines who the audience is, what the standards are going to be for judging the quality of your work, and has implications for how you conduct the inquiry because it determines the standards that you're going to attempt to meet as you do high-quality research. Different purposes serve different audiences and different needs and are judged according to different criteria. So let's review what some of those purpose distinctions are so that you can position your work within a particular purpose and know what the audience and what the criteria are that come for that audience for judging the quality of your work. I'm going to distinguish five different purposes and take you through the implications of those. I think it's helpful to distinguish basic research, which is aimed at how to understand the way the world works, from applied research, which is understanding a problem and the nature of that problem. That's distinguished from what we call summative evaluation, which is figuring out whether or not an intervention that's trying to solve a problem is working. We distinguish that from formative evaluation, which is trying to improve that intervention aimed at solving a problem. And we distinguish that from action research, which is aimed at a very rapid response to a very immediate problem with quick turnaround. So five kinds of purposes-- contributing to basic knowledge about the world, basic research; understanding a problem, which is applied research; deciding if an intervention works, which is summative evaluation; deciding how to improve an intervention while we're doing it, which is formative evaluation; and solving a very specific problem in the here and now, which is action research, research to take immediate action. Let's take an example and work through the implications of those purposes for both quantitative methods and qualitative methods. Because this is not a methodological distinction. This is a purpose distinction. You can use quantitative or qualitative methods to study any of these purposes. And indeed, you can use mixed methods to study any of these purposes. So these are purpose © 2016 Laureate Education, Inc. 1 Purposes of Research distinctions. When you're doing basic research, you're trying to understand how the world works. So let's say that we're interested in the general field of addictions. And we want to know as a basic researcher what's the nature of addiction. How does it happen in the brain? What physiological changes occur when a person is addicted? What are the patterns that lead them to get addicted? We're simply studying addiction. We're trying to come up with perhaps a theory of addiction or test a theory of addiction. If people experience certain childhood patterns, they're more likely to be addicted. If they have certain genes, they're more likely to be addicted. But we're just understanding addiction. Now, we want to move to applied research. We see addiction as a problem, and we want to understand the nature of the problem. How does addiction affect people's lives? What are they able to do and not able to do? How does it affect their relationships? How does it affect their job? How does it affect their skill? How does it affect their decision making? What's the nature of the problem? What happens in the workplace where people are addicted? Let's understand quantitatively how many people have a certain addiction. Qualitatively, how do people recognize their addiction? Do they recognize their addiction? What helps people recognize their addiction? What happens in an addiction system, a family system as an addicted system? Quantitative data may involve applying some family measurements that have been developed about family harmony, family stability. Qualitative study of applied research would involve interviewing family members about how their family is affected by a person who is addicted to alcohol or drugs. But we're trying to understand the problem. Why do we want to understand the problem? Well, usually because we want to try to solve it in some way. We want to fix it. We want to do an intervention. Our most common form of intervention is a program, a program that helps people overcome their addiction-- a chemical dependency treatment program; a program for people who are addicted to pornography; a sexual addiction program; people who are addicted to food; weight reduction programs. Let's take chemical dependency. Basic research tells us how the brain and the body and the mind responds to addictive behaviors. Applied research tells us how that addiction affects people's lives, why it's a problem for society and for families. Now, we've got an idea about a program-- a 12-step program or a behavior modification program. And we want to see if that program works. Well, now, the purpose of that research is what we call summative evaluation. Summative evaluation takes its name from the idea of a summit or summing © 2016 Laureate Education, Inc. 2 Purposes of Research things up. It's an overall judgment. Does this work? Does this particular model reduce people's addictions, help them deal with their addictive behavior, become sober, stop eating badly, stop looking at pornography or engaging in sexually addictive behavior? Does it work on whatever the outcomes are? If you're studying the effectiveness of a model, of an intervention, of a program overall, you're involved in summative evaluation. And that purpose is to decide to continue the program, to expand the program; should government fund it; should foundations fund it; should insurers pay for it because it's been demonstrated to be effective? That's summative evaluation. Now, before you get to summative evaluation, you want to be sure that you've worked out the bugs in that intervention. You get feedback from the people going through the program. They say, well, I don't like that so much, or let's add that piece. I worked with a well-known chemical dependency program that has groups. It has individual therapy. They have things that people read. They have a part of the program that helps people deal with their relationship with a higher power, helps them deal with each other. They have a part where family members come in. They have all these different components. There's a lot to organize. There's a lot to fit together. Formative evaluation is about how to fit those pieces together, how to make them work. What kind of readings do people like? How often should family members come? What should they do when they come to the program? How do you facilitate people in the program interacting with each other? What kind of facilitation skills are needed? What helps people get through the program? Where are they likely to hit a wall? How can we anticipate and help them anticipate about week 10-- about day 10, you're going to hit a wall. We know that from looking at lots of people. Here is how we can help you get through that wall. That's formative evaluation. It comes from the metaphor of clay, of forming, of making it better. So formative evaluation is forming the model, forming the intervention to get it ready for summative evaluation. And the idea of the program itself came from applied research. And understanding that problem came from basic research. So where does action research fit in? Well, action research is a way of solving a very specific problem. So let's say we've got our addiction program, our chemical dependency program, and we notice that young people are dropping out. Middleaged people stay. Older people stay. But young people really don't like this program. We want to increase attendance of young people. © 2016 Laureate Education, Inc. 3 Purposes of Research We quickly do interviews with those young people. Why did you drop out? What turned you off here? Try to solve that specific problem of dropout. That gives you immediate action within the context of a here-and-now problem. It's rapid turnaround. You don't have a high level of proof. You're not trying to do big-time science. You're trying to get reasonable evidence. People said this is why they're dropping out. That seems to make sense. Here's what they suggest we could do about it. Solve the problem. See if the solution works. With formative evaluation, you're primarily trying to help staff look at what they're doing to improve the program, give them feedback-- because staff in a program can get in their own heads, determined to do the model their way. Getting them feedback about what works and doesn't work from the perspective of people in the program helps them open up. And they're going to apply their own criteria. Does this make sense? Do they believe in the data? Do they believe in your sample? They're the users of formative evaluation. With summative evaluation, it's the people who fund programs-- the policymakers, the government people who would decide whether or not to fund this, foundation executives and program officers, third-party payers. They're going to look at that evidence, and they're going to say, are enough people getting helped to justify continuing to fund this program. Not everybody gets helped. No program works for everybody all the time. So the criterion becomes how many people have to get help to what level to call this an effective program. With applied research, you're primarily dealing with planners, with program designers, with policymakers who are trying to understand the problem better. What really is this problem? Why do people get addicted? How does addiction affect their lives? And they are looking for the quality of evidence, do you really understand the problem. Do you understand it in systems terms? Do you understand it for this particular population? Let's say that, we know a lot about the problem for white middle-class people. Well, can we use that data on people of color? Can we use that data for black people? Can we use that data for young people, because it's mostly middle-aged people? And so they're going to say, well, I don't believe that data applies. I want to deal with people of color who are poor, and your data is all from middle-class people. What's the problem for people of color? You've got to have a different kind of evidence. You've got to make sure your sample responds to them. Whether you're doing testing data that's quantitative or interviews that's qualitative, make sure that the sample is a relevant sample for the people who want to intervene. © 2016 Laureate Education, Inc. 4 Purposes of Research With basic research, you're trying to basically understand how the human being works or how the social group works. And there again, your primary audience is going to be scientists, other researchers, people who publish in refereed journals, who have standards of what constitutes-- both within a quantitative experimental tradition and a qualitative tradition or a mixed-methods tradition-- high-quality research within those traditions. And you would be submitting articles to journals that publish basic research and that have standards of evidence. Well, that begins to formulate some basic knowledge about how human beings are that we can run through that cycle. A comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and acting on the world as a scholar-practitioner would put all of these parts together within a total field so that it's got a foundation of basic research. This is how the world is. This is the nature of the problem that we're interested in from applied research. Here are some programs, models, interventions that are trying to solve that problem and how they work. Here are ways that we've improved those programs and continue to improve them as new populations come along-- immigrant populations, people who speak English as a second language, who haven't been in this kind of program before. How do we make it work for them? And we watch for specific problems that need to be solved here and now. It may take a survey of them for quantitative data-- get client satisfaction, do openended interviews. These are not methodological distinctions. They are purpose distinctions. And knowing the purpose of your research becomes really important to be able to do an inquiry as a scholar-practitioner that actually meets that purpose. © 2016 Laureate Educat