

LEAR 850

Qualitative Research Methods

University of the Cumberlands



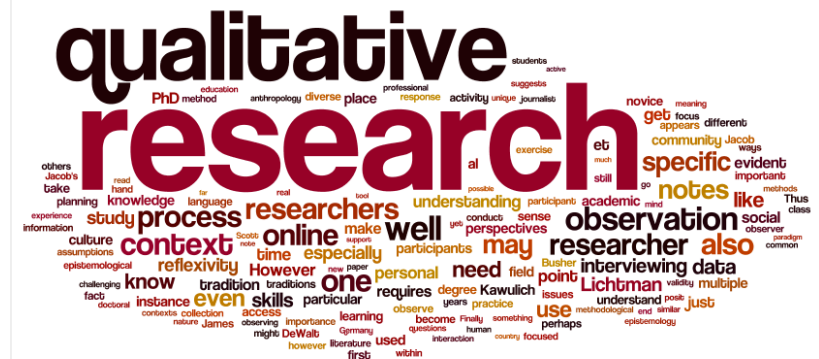
Week 1

Introduction & Key Features

Qualitative Research

What is Qualitative Research?

- In depth understanding into human behavior and reasons that govern that behavior (culture, society, group dynamics, personal values).
- Common in social sciences but also used in health (i.e. patient care) and business marketing (i.e. market research).
- Like all research, it is systematic inquiry.
- Rules for data collection & analyses.



When is Qualitative Research used?

- When important to understand the *meaning* that people place on events and activities.
- Seek to understand not just *what* people do, but *why* they do it, and what *meaning* it brings to those people in that context.
- Available data includes conversations, observations, diaries, video recordings, emails, letters, photos, and artifacts.
- Goal is to understand not easily quantifiable elements such as value systems, attitudes, cultural norms, motivations, aspirations, and lifestyles.

Where Does Qualitative Research Take Place?

- In naturalistic settings.
- Where phenomena or events are taking place.
- In the context of the activity or institution.
- Specific to the problem and issue being investigated.



Who Participates in Qualitative Research?

- Researchers come from many fields, whenever the lived experience of a group needs to be better understood.
- Participants include array of individuals or groups – whose perceptions need to be better understood
- Historically, techniques common to anthropologists and sociologists who seek to understand experiences, rituals, or culture of specific groups.
- Currently, widely used for evaluation of programs and services to understand perception of assistance or care.
- Includes growing research about online communities.

Why is Qualitative Research Conducted?

- To better describe or understand a group culture or lifestyle.
- To understand more deeply the lived experience of an individual or group with similar background.
- To uncover thoughts and feelings of human occurrences.
- To understand a phenomenon or event from the outlook of those who were involved.
- To go beyond one's own perceptions and understand the viewpoints of others.
- To use techniques not applicable for quantitative or statistical analyses.

How is Qualitative Research Conducted?

- Data collection often takes place in the field.
- Common forms of data collection include interviews (with open-ended questioning and in-depth probing).
- Observations directly in the setting and during activities being researched.
- Analyses of documents, diaries, emails, and other texts.
- Examination of photos, relics, video, and and non-text data.
- Analysis is a process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting meaning.



Summary

- Qualitative research is defined, in part, as being *essentially different* from quantitative and statistical studies.
- While varied in settings and populations, qualitative research always seeks to understand the *experience and perspective* of the participant.
- Research focuses on participants and activities of in a *specific context*.
- Goals are for *holistic and rich description* from which meaning is derived.
- *Words, pictures, & objects* are most often analyzed.

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Week 2

Premises & Approaches

Qualitative Research

Philosophy & Epistemology Underpinnings

1. Positivist (post-positivist) - reality or truth may be observed and measured. Scientific laws may be found. Post-positivism acknowledges reality may be relative but accepts scientific methods to distinguish plausibility.
2. Interpretive (constructivist) - multiple realities or perceptions of observable reality. Researchers can only construct knowledge and find meaning. Historical and cultural norms imprint on people's reality.
3. Critical research – since all thought is mediated by power structures, research needs to critique *status quo* and seek change and emancipation of those not in power.
4. Postmodernism- rationality and certainties of modern world no longer hold. There is no single truth, rather multiple realities that should be investigated.

Common Approaches to Qualitative Fieldwork

- Basic qualitative research- used in applied fields. Researchers seeks to understand the meaning a phenomenon for those involved.
- Phenomenology- investigates how an experience transformed consciousness. Focus on the lived experience (and transforming results) of the participant(s).
- Ethnography-from 19th century traditions when anthropologists engaged in observation in the field to describe an unfamiliar society or culture. Focus in on thick description that conveys cultural meaning to the activities.

Basic Qualitative Research

- Basic qualitative research- used in applied fields. Researchers seeks to understand the meaning a phenomenon for those involved.
- Provides for range of qualitative investigations outside of structures of specific approaches.

Phenomenology

- Phenomenology- investigates how an experience transformed consciousness. Focus on the lived experience (and transforming results) of the participant(s).

Ethnography

- Ethnography-from 19th century traditions when anthropologists engaged in observation in the field to describe an unfamiliar society or culture. Focus in on thick description that conveys cultural meaning to the activities.



Narrative Inquiry

- Stories and narratives have been valuable resources for historical investigations. Now, narratives used to understand the meaning of the human experience.
- Contemporary uses include focus on gender, race, and linguistic influences of narrations.
- Used to analyze how texts and other resources seek to construct underlying ideas and construe reality.



Case Studies

- A qualitative case study focuses on complex phenomena within a bounded system (clear parameters) and identifies the different factors interacting within the case.
- To be a case study, the phenomenon must be inherently bounded (has natural boundaries).

Other Approaches

- **Grounded Theory** differs from other approaches in that its focus is to build substantive theory about real world situations. Methods rely on data being found similar and different through a constant comparative analysis process.
- **Autoethnography** uses the researcher's personal experience as data to describe, analyze and understand cultural experience and place self within a social context.
- **Mixed Methods** is an approach whereby researchers collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data. This usually demands checks across both forms of data and is often considered too complex for inexperienced researchers.
- **Historical method** is the collection of techniques and guidelines that historians use to research and write histories. It combines narrative analyses with a historiographic method for analyses.
- **Contemporary techniques** are ever growing and include network and mapping diagrams, art and visual analyses, and games.

Other Considerations

- It is valuable to review literature to better understand the nuances of specific approaches.
- Approaches may initially seem to overlap each other— important to carefully construct research questions to ensure appropriate approach.

Summary

- Qualitative research approaches developed from philosophical beliefs that human reality is more a perception (cultural, social, individual) than an absolute truth.
- There are both specific approaches and more general qualitative research methods.
- It is important to be well versed about an approach before committing to you.
- Qualitative research in general is focused on understanding how humans (individuals or groups) devise meaning from experiences.

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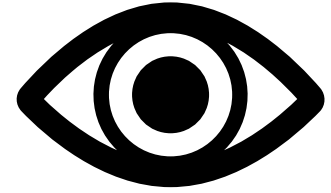
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Week 3

Tricks and Tools for
Successful Observations
In Qualitative Research

Naturalistic Observation



- Valuable for
 - How particular phenomena unfold
 - How groups interact or conduct an activity
 - How patterns of communication occur
 - How cultural events take place

Common Source for Data

- Takes place where the phenomenon of interest naturally occurs.
- Should be a first-hand encounter with the phenomenon.
- Researchers' presence in many settings does make a difference.
- Acting as inobtrusive “outsider” often not practical.



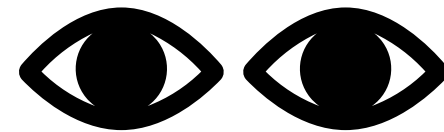
Conscious & Disciplined Observations

- Different from common everyday observation and interaction
- Careful systematic observer- selective attention (Wolcott, 1992)
- Focus of Study
- Pay attention (avoid distractions)
- Write descriptively
- Disciplined recording of field notes
- Separate important details from trivia



Observations Offer the Researcher:

- Overall impression of the setting
- Distinguishing aspects of the setting & activities
- Notice of what regulars might not due to routine, habit, blind spots
- What otherwise might not be recognized or spoken about
- Offers fresh perspective



Relationship between Observer & the Observed

- Rapport and level of comfort for naturalistic setting
- Types of associations vary by circumstance
- Typology of Relationships (Gold, 1958)



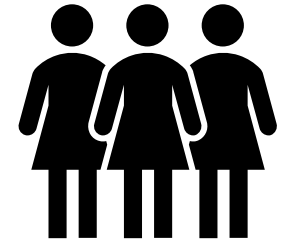
Complete Participant (& Observer)

- Researcher is also member of the group.
- Common among ethnographic studies-
- Advantages-
 - Does not disrupt natural activities
 - Insider information benefits interpretation
 - Willingness of some insiders to speak to researcher due to group membership
- Disadvantages-
 - Tradition of concealing research (questionable ethics)
 - Researcher bias



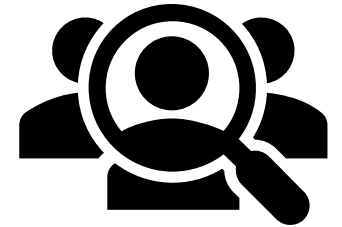
Participant as Observer

- Researcher is first a participant
- Investigative role is secondary to group
- Benefits-
 - Available for routine, regular data collection
 - Degree of familiarity to enhance interpretation
- Disadvantages-
 - Researcher bias more likely
 - Confidentiality and consideration of dual roles



Observer as Participant

- Researcher is first and foremost an observer
- Takes part, assists with activities
- Common in many settings (by default)
- Provides a short-term peripheral membership
- Benefits-
 - Observation and research is priority
 - Increases access to people, activities, and information
 - Reduces sense of researcher as burden to others in situation
- Disadvantages-
 - Observe and interact may reduce fieldnotes, information collecting



Complete Observer

- Either hidden from view or public setting
- Benefits-
 - Focus on observation and note-taking
- Disadvantages-
 - No insider information (act solely as outsider)
 - Demands focus for disciplined fieldnotes



Recording Observations

- Field notes may be onerous- write & observe at the same time
- Use video and photos and recordings as appropriate
- Caution with underaged, vulnerable participants



Fieldnotes

- Disciplined notetaking
- Preparation around focus of research (areas of interest)
- Highly descriptive
- Reflection at time and immediately after
- Commentary about setting, people, activities



Tools to Support Observations



- Guides- Incident Reports
- Details of Setting (building size, character, activities, interactions, seating arrangements)
- Map of setting
- Other Artifacts – graffiti, wet floor at entrance, posters on walls
- Photos
- Reflection during and after observations

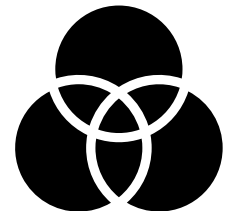
Online Observations

- Online communities as subcultures
- Groups with own language, communication, culture, experiences
- Participant and observer roles—avoid inappropriate lurking
- Often rich environments, strong communications, meaningful fieldwork online



Ensuring Credible Observations

- Researcher as Instrument
- Personal biases
- Familiarity
- Flexible and developing emphases
- Observations as one point of triangulation
- Triangulate many pieces of information (observations, interviews, documents, oral histories)



Summary

- Observation...
 - Is a commonly used fieldwork method for data collection.
 - Allows for differing levels of participation by the researcher.
 - Demands focus and discipline to record worthwhile information.
 - Requires rich description, both large view of setting and details of small features.
 - Compels reflection of personal biases, cultural unfamiliarity, & other issues.
 - Involves flexibility to refocus research as information is gained.
 - Is best when rich written description is complemented with drawings, photos, other guides to enhance data collection.

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Weeks 4 & 5

Fundamentals of Conducting Interviews

In Qualitative Research

Interviews

- Valuable for:
 - Capturing the perspectives of the participants.
 - Allowing for interpersonal contact and communications.
- Based on the assumptions that:
 - Perspective of interviewee/respondent is valuable.
 - Goal is for researcher to present the meaningfulness of experience from the perspective of the respondent.



Common Types of Open-Ended Interviews

- Individual Interview

- Usually researcher and respondent

- Highly structured (standardized questions)
 - Semi-structured (interview guide with somewhat structured questions)
 - Unstructured (open-ended questions, flexible and exploratory)

- Focus Groups

- Several respondents (limited)

- A group with common experiences
 - Play off each other to elaborate answers
 - More difficult to develop rapport, elicit answers, or keep focus
 - Best for topics related to everyday life, not overly personal/sensitive



In-Depth Interviews in Qualitative Research

- Semi-structured or Open-ended using:
 - Introduction and familiarization at beginning to develop rapport.
 - Protocol forms to help focus questions.
 - Open-ended questions (to avoid yes/no answers)
 - Interaction between interviewer and interviewee
 - Consideration/adjustment by interviewer to elicit in-depth answers.

Online Interviews

- Increasingly common
- Use of Skype, Zoom, Facebook, other avenues
- Issues of:
 - Social media & privacy & confidentiality
 - Verbal and facial expressions
 - Synchronous and asynchronous discussions
 - Comfort levels of participant
 - Working technology



Good Questions

- Key to a successful interview
- Pilots recommended to practice and refine questions
- Careful wording- sensitive to emotions, experience
- Kinds of questions:
 - Background & demographics
 - Experience & behavior
 - Opinion and values
 - Feelings
 - Knowledge
 - Sensory



Other Leading Questions

- Hypothetical questions- *what might you do if?*
- Devil's advocate- *but what about the fact that?*
- Ideal position- *If you were in charge, what would you do?*
- Interpretive question- *Could it be that?*

Probes & Follow Up Questions

- Explorations to
 - Seek more information (what, when, who)
 - Delve deeper (you seemed hesitant to discuss...)
 - Understand emotional response (you seemed to really enjoy working with...)



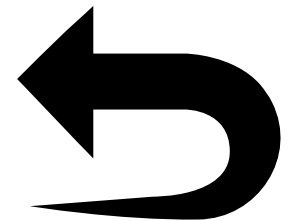
Interview Guide/Protocol

- Essentially a list of questions
- Specific to the focus of your interview
- Use as checklist to ensure crucial questions are asked.
- Use for follow-up questions (probes)
- Use for general ordering- from introduction and rapport building, to heart of interview, to ask respondent to add whatever they wish at end.



Progression/Stages of Interview

- Beginning: rapport building, basic demographics and background.
 - How long have you worked here? How long have you been the CFO?
- Middle: heart of the interview, asking questions for more information and clarity, probing.
- End: conversational (not focused on you), ask respondent to add any additional information
- End: ask to phone or email for additional clarity as needed.



Recording and Transcribing



1. Note-taking during interview (answer to questions).
2. Audio recording highly recommended (delete after interview for class activities, follow IRB regulations for dissertations).
3. Line by line transcriptions (number each line) highly recommended.
4. Currently, many major software applications available. Not required for small research projects. Text, photos, video analyses.
5. Many researchers value time to review by hand information to develop categories.
6. Best means to get a handle of responses. Time consuming activity.

Analyses & Write Up

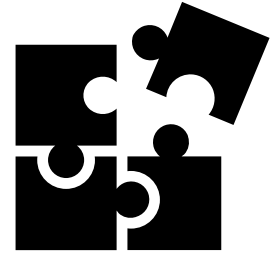


- Organizing by categories.
- Categories may vary- emotions, actions, setting, retrospectives.
- Use of tables and diagrams to organize and illustrate major categories.
- Review, relate to major focus of study, and use categories to develop and write up findings.
- Writing up findings- should include exemplary quotes from interviews.

Ethics & Sensitivity Considerations

- Follow protocols developed by University concerning permissions, uses, and archiving of data.
- Be aware of emotional upheaval or sensitive questions.
- Allow flexibility in interview focus, but steer away from inappropriate gossip or other sharing.
- Preserve confidentiality- name changes, anonymity of respondents.
- Avoid interviews with minors and other vulnerable persons.
- Notify and ask guidance if troublesome information arises.

Summary



Interviews are:

- A primary data collection method in qualitative research.
- Based on premise that perspectives of respondent provide meaningful information.
- Requires preparation of questions and flexibility during interview.
- Often open-ended to provide data about perceptions.
- Usually transcribed in its entirety and carefully read and re-read to develop categories of responses.
- Developed into findings by organizing, diagraming, and/or listing major categories (codes).
- Written up to explain the categories and include exemplar quotes from the interview.

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Week 5

Researcher as Instrument, Reflexivity, & Reflection

In Qualitative Research

Researcher as Instrument

...the researcher is considered a research instrument– because data flows through the researcher.

...in observation and in-depth interviews, it is the researcher who defines important information and reflects on the meaning of the data.

...in analyses (indexing and categorization) it is the researcher who reflects on and develops meaning from the data.

Example

- Observations-

I noticed that once the teachers blew the whistle, they expected the third graders to immediately get in line.. even if that meant bale off still-moving swings or jumping from the tops of the slide. Speed was the issue, not safety? The only kids yelled at were those that were slow to line up.. Billy was largethan most in his class jumped off the top of the slide, almost on top of a little girl walking by and then pretty much kicked dust in the face of another boy... but no teacher reacted to that. Two girls talking and walking not running to line up were called out by name and asked to hurry up. By my watch that was about 45 seconds after the second of three whistles.

Interview

In margin comments:

She just seems to almost sigh and hang her head a little, then gave what seemed a sad laugh when I asked about how the P. E. teacher worked with her students (new immigrants, non-English speaking). She did not directly criticize anyone by name. Just again mentioned how it was difficult enough helping these students, but without school-wide training she did not see how many teachers understood what these kids did and did not understand.

Reflexivity

...is the process of reflecting on yourself, the researcher, to provide more effective and impartial analysis.

...it involved examining and consciously acknowledging the assumptions and preconceptions you bring into the research and therefore shape the outcome.

...none of us are detached, objective observers.

...positionality (the stance or position of the researcher in relation to the context/community of the study) will be improved through reflexive field practice and contemplation of individual stance.

Example

After interview-

I think I had been so pleased about how unexpectedly candid the other interviewees had been, I was taken aback a little when Mr. Smith really gave very perfunctory answers. I had to quickly adjust my style and for almost every question I had to have follow up questions ready. Just to get some superficial answers.

I did notice, that when I spent more time allowing his to highlight how he did administrative tasks, he was more animated.

Practical Tips for Reflexive Research

- Make notes and be aware of personal emotions/biases especially around emotive/sensitive subjects.
- Include another interviewer or what someone else listen to interview to check perceptions.
- Allow enough gap between participants to unwind, transcribe, consider interview outcomes.
- Use member check, other tools especially when responses or reactions are not what you expected—double check for inappropriate assumptions on your part.
- Reflect on your own and the respondent's emotional state that day. Make allowances for feelings.
- When writing up findings reflect on how you interpreted what you heard.
- Consider how you conducted the interview (too much about you?). Your body language? Your facial expressions? Record and review.
- Make changes! If the process is not working, the questions are not quite right, you are influencing outcomes with your own gestures... adjust! That is an essential aspect of reflexive research... improvement.

Reflection

While reflexivity involves immediate, dynamic, continual self-awareness. Reflection is “thinking about” something the event.

...conducting qualitative fieldwork changes the researcher. Through reflexivity, researchers can acknowledge how changes are made in the research process.

...personal reflection allows researchers to acknowledge how the research process brought about changes in themselves.

...reflection is not just a self-observed practice. Rather, it is a crucial cognitive practice that increases self-awareness, better understanding of others, and active engagement in the research process.

Summary

Researcher as Instrument:

- Qualitative fieldwork is not simply about collecting data.
- Fieldwork requires intensive interaction with the environment and/or people.
- Qualitative fieldworkers are the conduit by which data is collected and analyzed.

Reflexivity:

- Therefore it is important to be flexible and considered to improve researcher's role.
- It is equally important to understand how one's own biases & world view influence data interpretation.

Reflection:

- At its best, qualitative fieldwork is a process of improved data collection(reflexivity) and self-awareness and cognitive suppleness (reflection).
- This required the research to think about how fieldwork went after the fact.

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Weeks 6 & 7

Analysis & Write Up of Findings

In Qualitative Research

Browse Transcript(s) to Index or Code

- Step 1: Initial browse
 - Quickly browse transcript(s)
 - Note impressions- comments in margins most common
- Step 2: Reread
 - Read line by line to familiarize yourself with text

```
1171 Interviewer:
1172 So you were in Morocco. How long?
1173
1174 Julian:
1175 Oh yes, we go on a holiday, but mostly not during summer
1176 vacation, but some time in between when I have lectures
1177 and when I cannot work because of a break in production of
1178 if I have to wait because I get three-month contracts and
1179 when they run out I have to wait a week until I get another
1180 one. So it is always a bit last-minute. And if the account is
1181 okay, well, I mean that I can take some money off (laughs)
1182 without the bank complaining. That's how we did it in October.
1183 too.
1184
1185 Interviewer:
1186 So how long were you away?
1187
1188 Julian:
1189 For two weeks.
1190
1191 Interviewer:
1192 Two weeks, that was relaxing.
```

Label Relevant Words, Phrases, Sentences

- Step 3: Indexing or Coding

- Label relevant words, phrases, sentences, actions, activities, or concepts.
 - Review of repetition
 - Mark anything unexpected or surprising
 - Mark what the respondent indicated as important
 - Something relates to theories, literature, other information you already have about topic (anticipated in full research projects).
 - Another reason you think is relevant.

- Code many phenomena and phrases
- Consider carefully your own biases
- Best to *stay close to the data*

Example

Friday, 13 April 2018 11:35 PM

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Fusce laoreet dictum nibh sit amet congue. Aliquam in dolor vel ligula vestibulum rhoncus. Suspendisse tellus ex, euismod et enim vitae, tempor malesuada massa. Curabitur congue lorem sed est scelerisque hendrerit. Curabitur pulvinar, neque in ultricies porttitor, purus lorem ultricies felis, ac imperdiet ex ligula ut erat. Aliquam vestibulum et nibh eget tincidunt. Phasellus vitae efficitur ipsum. Vestibulum tincidunt ligula ultricies nisl dapibus, eu vestibulum ipsum viverra. Curabitur nec faucibus nisi. Vestibulum eleifend lectus vel eros gravida condimentum. Mauris sollicitudin eget felis quis feugiat. Aliquam vitae dui congue, hendrerit quam eget, sollicitudin mi. Vestibulum vitae metus vel massa bibendum lacinia. Maecenas rhoncus diam libero. Nullam sagittis, lectus nec varius congue, tortor odio aliquam odio, non congue dui metus in velit.

Sed gravida erat quam, eget condimentum tellus consectetur vel. Pellentesque eget afficitur canien in maximus leo. Proin eget scelerisque ligula id nectium. Aenean

Researcher Interpretations

- What is highlighted depends on researcher selection.
 - Researcher as instrument
 - As the vessel to collect the information
 - As analyzer in deciding what is relevant to label
- Methods
 - Superficial (frequency, interest)
 - Conceptual (larger relevant themes, scientific background)
- State Reasons
 - Researcher must state how decisions were made (and why) in write up



From Codes to Categories

- Step 4: Bring several codes together to create categories/themes.
 - Group together in meaningful manner.
 - When combining some codes may be left behind.
 - This is process of:
 - Deciding which codes are most important.
 - Considering many elements of the transcript.
 - Considering processes, emotions, activities, concepts.
 - This is a step of conceptualizing and analyzing the data beyond just the words on the page

Labeling Categories

- Step 5: Label categories based on connections and groupings
 - After grouping codes, then create the category
- Example: Writing the qualitative research course:
 1. Improving class materials
 2. Class Preparation
 3. Student Outcomes

Clarifying language

Consistent definitions

Examples

Outlining major tasks

Alignment with text

Defining weekly assignments

Student learning objectives

Reading the text

Activities by students

Write Up: Methods

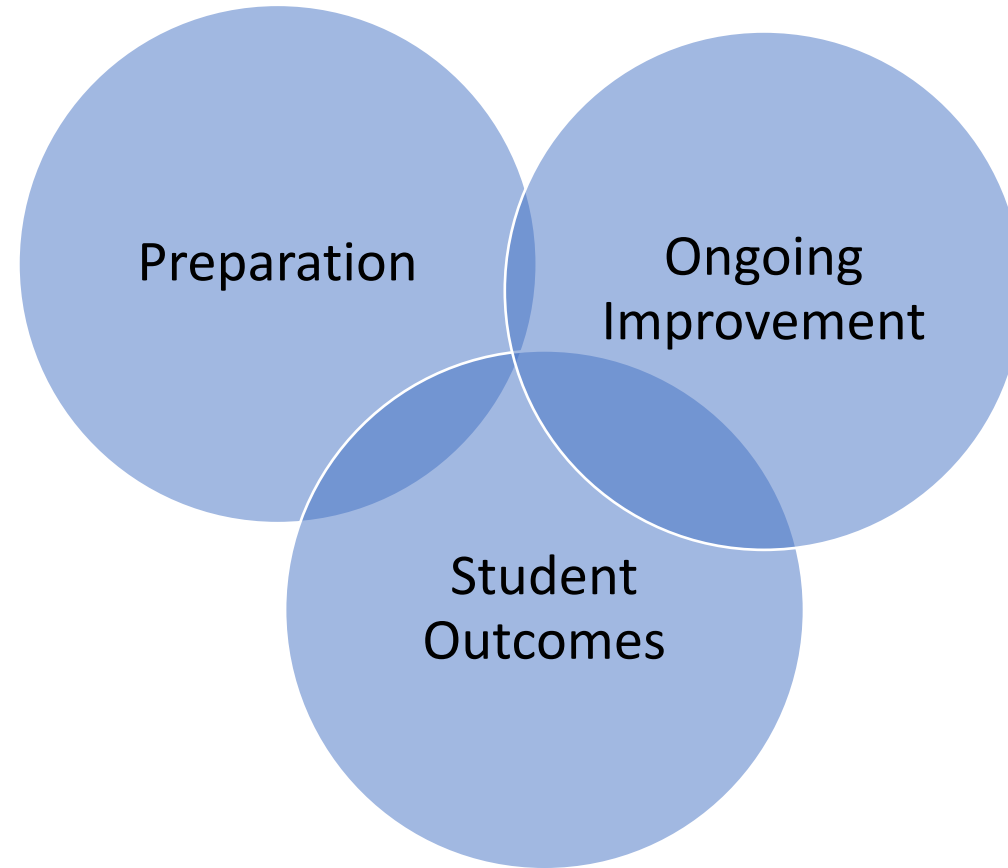
- Step 6: Writing up methods.
 - Specify how selections were made to develop codes and categories.

Write Up: Results

- Step 7: Write up results section.
 - The category labels and their connections are the results of the analysis.
 - Provides new knowledge from the perspective of the participant
 - Place in the Results section of your paper.
- Use a neutral voice that describes these categories.
 - Include quotes and clear examples
 - Use subheadings for categories or other means to guide the reader
- Other optional analyses:
 - Are some results more important than others? Hierarchy of findings?
 - May want to diagram findings

Figure: Ongoing Processes of Class Development

Showing relationship among major activities and considerations



Write Up: Discussion

- Step 8: Write up the Discussion.
- This section is where you can present your interpretation and discuss the results.
 - For research projects this will relate to literature in the field.
 - May include concepts or theories.
 - May also include other relevant information
 - From connections to current events, to surprising information, to discussions of concepts like resiliency, corporate structure, family dynamics... whatever you feel is relevant to the project.

Summary

- Analyzing and writing up the text data is a process with several steps:
 1. Browse the transcript.
 2. Read and reread the transcript.
 3. Group words, phrases, sentences into codes (indexing).
 4. Combine codes into categories (themes).
 5. Label categories for relevant connections. This involves analyzing for larger concepts. Also possible to diagram these connections into larger themes.
 6. Write up the methods section. Here, the researcher acknowledges their role as instrument for collection and interpreter for analysis.
 7. Write up the results section using a neutral voice. Here, the researcher describes the results based on the coding-categorizing-recategorizing process.
 8. Write up the discussion section. Here, the researcher generally refers to theories and scientific research found in the literature. Also, the researcher may present other discussions based on the findings.