DESIGNING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

SST 226: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
presented by: T.C. Sagandoy
Ideas, theories and concepts

In the natural sciences, there are **LAWS** of universal certainty. In the social sciences, there are no such laws. But social life operates within fairly regular, sensible **PATTERNS**.

**PATTERNS** are tendencies, representing typical and expected forms of action. One purpose social scientific research is to find the **MEANING** underlying these various patterns. This is accomplished by creating, examining, testing, and refining **THEORY**.

Ideas, theories and concepts

**THEORY** is the meaning that we assign to things that we observe in order to make sense of them. Theory can be defined as a GENERAL and more or less COMPREHENSIVE SET OF STATEMENTS OR PROPOSITIONS that describe different aspects of some phenomenon (Hagan, 2006; Silverman, 2006).

Theories are EXPLANATIONS that have general applicability. Theory might also represent ATTEMPTS to develop coherent narratives about reality or ways to classify and organize events, describe events, or even predict future events (Hagan, 2006).

CONCEPTS are symbolic or abstract elements representing objects, properties, or features of objects, processes, or phenomenon. Concepts may communicate ideas or introduce particular perspectives, or they may be a means for explaining a broad generalization.

To construct theories, we need the “basic building blocks“ (Turner, 1989 p. 5) called CONCEPTS.

Ideas, theories and concepts

Indistinct, unclear, or VAGUE DEFINITIONS of concepts CREATE OBSTACLES to the advancement of knowledge and science. SPECIFICITY is critical when conducting research. Therefore, an important part of developing SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC THEORY is to first DEFINE RELEVANT CONCEPTS that will be used in a given research process or project.


http://www.everythingsociology.com
Every research project has to start somewhere; typically, the starting point is an idea.
Ideas, theories and concepts

**theory-before-research model**

One begins with ideas (conjectures) and then attempts to disprove or refute them through tests of empirical research (refutation)

**research-before-theory model**

Research may suggest new problems for theory, require theoretical innovation, refine existing theories, or serve to challenge past theoretical assumptions

Ideas, theories and concepts

The Spiraling Research Approach

Selecting a Topic
Selecting a Topic

How do you select a topic for a qualitative research study?

The first place to look is your daily life—your work, family, friends, community. What are you curious about? What is happening or has occurred at work that puzzles you? Why are things the way they are?

A topic might come from the literature, especially previous research or theory in an area. Something you read in your association newsletter, a paper you write for a course assignment, or even leisure reading may be the source of a question that can evolve into a research study.

Theory might also suggest topics.

Hence, research topics most often come from observing and asking questions about your everyday activities. They can also come from social and political issues, from the literature on a topic, or from theory.

The Research Problem
The Research Problem

A PROBLEM in the conventional sense is a matter involving doubt, uncertainty, or difficulty. A person with a problem usually seeks a solution, some clarification, or a decision. So, too, with a research problem.

Raise a question about something that perplexes and challenges the mind.

What do I want to know in this study?

The thing you are curious about forms the core of the RESEARCH PROBLEM, or the PROBLEM STATEMENT. It reflects your particular THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK; more precisely, it represents a GAP IN THE KNOWLEDGE BASE.

The Research Problem

In crafting the research problem, you move from GENERAL interest, curiosity, or doubt about a situation to a SPECIFIC statement of the research problem.

Diversity in the classroom? Relevance of Social Studies? Online learning? Cultural preservation?

You acquaint the reader with what this TOPIC IS ALL ABOUT; you introduce KEY CONCEPTS, what has already been STUDIED WITH REGARD TO THIS TOPIC, and WHY IT IS AN IMPORTANT topic; that is, WHY ANYONE SHOULD CARE ABOUT IT.

The Research Problem

Narrow the topic, directing the reader toward the specific question you have. At this juncture you also point out the lack of information—the KNOWLEDGE GAP—with regard to this particular aspect of the topic.

Perhaps nothing in the literature addresses your question, or there may be some research but, for reasons you make clear, it is inadequate or flawed in some important way.
The Research Problem

Point out the lack of research related to the exact topic, and then problem statements often conclude with the statement, “The purpose of this study is to…” The PURPOSE STATEMENT is a restatement of the “gap” in the knowledge base.

Example: “The purpose of this study is to identify the embodied learning processes of martial arts teachers.”

The Research Problem

The purpose statement is often followed by a set of RESEARCH QUESTIONS. These questions reflect the researcher’s thinking on the most significant factors to study.

THREE OR FOUR MAIN QUESTIONS are usually a reasonable amount for a qualitative study, although you can have additional sub-questions for each of the main questions:

1. How do martial arts instructors recognize that embodied learning is taking place?
2. What are the steps or stages in the process of embodied learning?
3. How do martial arts instructors foster or promote embodied learning?

The Research Problem

In summary, the PROBLEM STATEMENT is a carefully crafted essay that lays out the LOGIC OF THE RESEARCH STUDY. In a thesis or dissertation, the problem statement comes after a section usually titled “Introduction to the Problem” or “Background of the Problem.” This introductory section can be any length but usually runs five to ten pages.

The problem statement is kind of a summary of this introductory section and can be as short as a half page—one or two pages being quite common.

Three important components to the problem statement: CONTEXT (topic of interest); identification of GAP in the knowledge base (what is not known that the research will address); and, SIGNIFICANCE of the study (urgency of addressing the gap/problem.)

The Research Problem: An example

EDUCATORS READING AND RESPONDING TO EMOTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Research in neuroscience indicates that emotional states are the starting point for all learning (Damasio, 1994a, 1999, 2003; LeDoux, 1996, 1999, 2002). There are thousands of states, each containing a unique mix of potential behaviors, feelings, and 16 emotions that can either enhance or impede learning. The literature in the fields of adult education and learning readily acknowledges that emotions influence the learning process (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985; Dirkx, 2001; Heron, 1999; Lovell, 1980; MacKeracher, 2004; Merriam et al., 2007; More, 1974), however there is surprisingly little research and/or literature on how this process plays out in the adult classroom. This study sought to understand and thickly describe the nature of the experiences of a group of adult educators and how they go about reading and responding to learners’ emotional states in practice.

The Research Problem: An example

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to better understand the practices of adult educators in reading and responding to emotional states exhibited by learners. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What indicators do adult educators use to read and determine emotional states?
2. What actions do adult educators take in response to learners’ emotional states?
3. What is the reasoning behind the actions taken?

The Research Problem: Another example

Growing numbers of older adults are placing increasing demands on medical services systems and, subsequently, will affect the future direction of health care policy. In response to the increasing numbers, costs, and health care needs of older adults, the medical establishment has changed patient-care policies. For example, managed care provider reimbursement policies have created incentives to move patients quickly through the health care system and have pressured physicians to limit office visit time for dialogue and health education. In response to these changes, health educators have been promoting an active role for patients in their own health care (Berman & Iris, 1998; Keller & Fleury, 2000; National Centers for Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion, 2002).

Context

Significance
The Research Problem: Another example

The importance of understanding factors contributing to health maintenance is especially relevant for older adults, as it is this segment of the population who are most at risk. Those older adults who have taken control of their health care are self-directing their own learning. However, little is known about how older adults are using self-directed learning to gain access to health information and how this information is affecting their health care.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of self-directed learning in older adults’ health care. The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

The Research Problem: Another example

1. What motivates older adults to take control of their learning regarding health care?
2. What health care behaviors are controlled by self-directed learners?
3. What contextual factors are controlled by self-directed learners?
4. What is the process of self-directed learning of one's health care?
5. How does self-directed learning affect one's health care?

What **TOPIC** is of **INTEREST TO YOU** that you could turn into a research study?

What are some of the things **WE DO KNOW** about this problem/topic from the **LITERATURE**?

What is the **GAP** in our **KNOWLEDGE/UNDERSTANDING** of this phenomenon? That is, what is **MISSING FROM THE LITERATURE** on this topic? This is the **problem of your study**. (Although we know x, y, z about this phenomenon, we do not know . . .)

Take the “gap” in our knowledge and turn it into a **PURPOSE STATEMENT**. Complete this sentence: **The purpose of this study is to** . . .

What are the specific **RESEARCH QUESTIONS** that elaborate your research purpose?

---

Reviewing the Literature
Reviewing the Literature

The LITERATURE refers to the THEORETICAL OR CONCEPTUAL WRITING in an area (the “think” pieces) and the EMPIRICAL DATA-BASED RESEARCH studies in which someone has gone out and collected and analyzed data.

Claiming that there is NO LITERATURE ON A TOPIC can only mean that NO ONE THINKS THE TOPIC IS WORTH STUDYING, there is NO WAY TO STUDY IT, or, more than likely, you have searched too narrowly.

An investigator WHO IGNORES PRIOR RESEARCH AND THEORY risks pursuing a trivial problem, duplicating a study already done, or repeating others’ mistakes.

Reviewing the Literature

WHY REVIEW THE LITERATURE?

One function of the literature review is to PROVIDE THE FOUNDATION--A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK-- for contributing to the knowledge base.

Literature review can DEMONSTRATE HOW THE PRESENT STUDY ADVANCES, REFINES, or REVISES WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN.

Researchers can benefit from KNOWING HOW WELL certain DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES used in previous related studies may or may not have yielded meaningful data.

Reviewing the Literature

WHY REVIEW THE LITERATURE?

Previous research is often cited in SUPPORT OF THE WAY THE STUDY IS FRAMED, how CONCEPTS ARE DEFINED.

Previous literature can also be drawn upon to MAKE THE CASE that the PRESENT STUDY IS NECESSARY, URGENT, and IMPORTANT to undertake.

The researcher literally SITUATES his or her FINDINGS IN THE PREVIOUS LITERATURE, pointing out the exact nature of this particular study’s contribution.

WHERE TO PLACE REVIEWED LITERATURE?

INTRODUCTION, perhaps judiciously quoted from, to build the case for doing the present study.

Section or chapter often called the “LITERATURE REVIEW”, where literature is synthesized and critiqued

DISCUSSION of the findings of a study, found at the end of a research report, always contains references to the literature

Reviewing the Literature

HOW TO CONDUCT LITERATURE REVIEW?

- Conduct an OVERVIEW of the topic; IDENTIFY MAJOR STUDIES, THEORIES, ISSUES
- Check BIBLIOGRAPHIES, INDEXES, and ABSTRACTS that reference specific aspects of a topic.
- Decide which FULL-LENGTH RESOURCES SHOULD BE OBTAINED.

Reviewing the Literature

HOW TO CONDUCT LITERATURE REVIEW?

☐ Be scrupulously diligent about recording the full bibliographic reference. If you write down a quote, record the page number.

☐ Develop an annotated bibliography. This a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph. The annotation informs you of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited. (Engle, M., 2019, How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography: The Annotated Bibliography, p. 1.)

Reviewing the Literature

HOW TO CONDUCT LITERATURE REVIEW?

- Know when to stop reviewing the literature. Recognize that you have covered all of the relevant literature in the area. This is a saturation point.

Reviewing the Literature: A sample

Ways to write a literature review section. Few of the things you might try to do when writing yours are as follows:

Dispel myths. One of the myths of drug use is that we could eliminate it entirely if we had just the right policies and strategies. Yet, studies indicate that drug use is universal, across all sorts of times and places, under all regime types, and through all kinds of economic and social conditions.

Explain competing conceptual frameworks. Some drug use studies center on the issue of blame. Are the users bad people? Are their parents so? Have their schools failed them? Other studies look at control efforts, police budgets, the availability of treatment options, and enforcement policies. So, one set of readings is concerned with the problems of supply, while others are all about demand.

Clarity of Focus: The focus of your own work. You might, for example, explain the unique features of a symbolic interactionist approach to state that you are interested in understanding the meaning of the act (drug use) from the perspective of the user, and not from the perspective of parents or politicians.

Justify Assumptions. Drug use patterns are cyclical. The popularity of specific drugs rises and falls endlessly. By using government data on drug sales and arrests, you can back up your claim that declines in use of one drug are usually accompanied by increases in the use of others. Therefore, you might reject a local mayor’s claim that his own policies toward drug control are responsible for the recent decline in whatever drug is going out of favor.
Reviewing the Literature

Some criteria to consider in choosing literatures to cite

- Is the AUTHOR OF THE SOURCE AN AUTHORITY on the topic, one who has done much of the empirical work in the area, or one who has offered seminal theory upon which subsequent research and writing has been based? If so, that author’s work will be quoted by others and listed in bibliographies on the topic.

- WHEN WAS THE ARTICLE OR BOOK OR REPORT WRITTEN? As a rule, the most recent work in an area should be included in a review.

Reviewing the Literature

Some criteria to consider in choosing literatures to cite

- **WHAT EXACTLY WAS WRITTEN ABOUT OR TESTED?** If a particular resource or research study is highly relevant to your present research interest, it should be included even if the “who” and “when” criteria are not met.

- **WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF THE SOURCE?** A thoughtful analysis, a well designed study, or an original way of viewing the topic likely indicates a significant piece of literature. In historical or documentary analysis, the quality of primary and secondary sources is a major criterion for inclusion in the database.

Reviewing the Literature

Evaluating Web Sites

- **WHOSE WEB SITE IS IT?** Consider the authority and expertise of the author very carefully. Consider the credibility of the individual or group that is operating and maintaining the site.

- **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE DOMAIN?** Is this an official government Web site or that of a well-known and reputable organization? Is it operated and maintained by a private group that has a special purpose or motive for having the site and offering the materials you are considering?

Reviewing the Literature

Evaluating Web Sites

- **IS THE MATERIAL CURRENT OR DATED?** If the materials have not been updated recently, you may want to question how reliable a source it is.

- **CAN THE INFORMATION BE CORROBORATED?** Sometimes the material you find on a Web site seems odd or unusual, and further investigation suggests that it may not be truthful. When this happens, do not use it.

Look for two reports on your RESEARCH TOPIC using any search engine. Evaluate these reports using the criteria:

a. Whose Web site is it?
b. What is the nature of the domain?
c. Is the material current or dated?
d. Can the information be corroborated?

Reflect on your findings from both these reports and explain which one you think is more authentic.

LITERATURE REVIEW EXCERCISE

Theoretical Framework/Conceptual Framework
Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework “is any EMPIRICAL OR QUASI-EMPIRICAL THEORY of social and/or psychological processes, at a variety of levels (e.g., grand, midrange, explanatory), that can be APPLIED TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF PHENOMENA.”

Theoretical frameworks are the “LENSES” to study phenomena. Examples of what they mean by “lenses” to study phenomena might include “Vygotskian learning theory, micro-political theory, class, reproduction theory, job-choice theory, and social capital”

The theoretical framework is the UNDERLYING STRUCTURE, the SCAFFOLDING OR FRAME of your study. It consists of concepts or theories that inform your study.

The theoretical framework is derived from the ORIENTATION or STANCE that you bring to your study, and every study has one.


Theoretical Framework

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework may be defined as an END RESULT OF BRINGING TOGETHER A NUMBER OF RELATED CONCEPTS to explain or predict a given event, or GIVE A BROADER UNDERSTANDING of the PHENOMENON OF INTEREST – or simply, of a research problem.

A researcher may opine that a research problem cannot meaningfully be researched in reference to only one theory, or concepts resident within one theory. The researcher may have to “synthesize” the existing views in the literature concerning a given situation – both theoretical and from empirical findings. The synthesis may be called a model or conceptual framework, which essentially represents an ‘integrated’ way of looking at the problem.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK is derived FROM CONCEPTS, in-so-far as a THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK is derived from a THEORY.

IDENTIFYING YOUR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Part of the struggle in identifying the theoretical framework in a qualitative study is that qualitative research is designed to inductively build rather than to test concepts, hypotheses, and theories. Because of this characteristic, many mistakenly believe that theory has no place in a qualitative study.

Another point of confusion is that the terms theoretical framework and conceptual framework are often used interchangeably in the literature.

“ATheoretical research is impossible.” A theoretical framework underlies all research. Theory is present in all qualitative studies because no study could be designed without some question being asked (explicitly or implicitly). How that question is phrased and how it is worked into a problem statement reflect a theoretical orientation.

IDENTIFYING YOUR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

 WHAT IS YOUR DISCIPLINARY ORIENTATION? This disciplinary orientation is the lens through which you view the world. It determines what you are curious about, what puzzles you, and hence, what questions you ask that, in turn, begin to give form to your investigation. (See Sitwala, 2014)

 REVIEW THE RELEVANT LITERATURE. Your question takes you to some of the literature, which sends you back to looking anew at the phenomenon of interest. In trying to shape the problem, you go back again to the literature, and so on. In essence, you carry on a dialogue with previous studies and work in the area.

SAMPLE SELECTION: Unit of Analysis
Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique in which the researcher selects samples based on the subjective judgment of the researcher rather than random selection.

Sample Selection: Purposive

PURPOSEFUL/PURPOSIVE SAMPLING is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned.

“The logic and power of qualitative purposeful sampling derives from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of specific cases: information-rich cases.”

Sample Selection: Purposive

To begin purposive sampling, you must first determine what selection criteria are essential in choosing the people or sites to be studied.

Decide what attributes of your sample are crucial to your study and then find people or sites that meet those criteria. The criteria you establish for purposeful sampling directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases.

Sample Selection: Purposive

TYPES OF PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING

“A TYPICAL SAMPLE would be one that is selected because it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest.

“Using a profile of the average or typical high school graduate, any who fit this profile could be included in a typical purposeful sample.”

Sample Selection: Purposive

TYPES OF PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING

A UNIQUE SAMPLE is based on unique, atypical, perhaps rare attributes or occurrences of the phenomenon of interest.

“With regard to high school graduates, you might select one who has become a professional athlete.”

Sample Selection: Purposive

TYPES OF PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING

MAXIMUM VARIATION SAMPLING is made up of extremes or is chosen to ensure a wide variety of participants.

“Maximum variation sampling of high school graduates would involve identifying and seeking out those who represent the widest possible range of the characteristics of interest for the study.”

Sample Selection: Purposive

TYPES OF PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING

CONVENIENCE SAMPLING is just what is implied by the term—you select a sample based on time, money, location, availability of sites or respondents, and so on.

“A convenience sample of high school graduates might begin with your own teenagers and their friends.”

Sample Selection: Purposive

TYPES OF PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING

SNOWBALL, CHAIN, OR NETWORK SAMPLING is perhaps the most common form of purposeful sampling. This strategy involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you have established for participation in the study. As you interview these early key participants, you ask each one to refer you to other participants.

Sample Selection: Purposive

TYPES OF PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING

“THEORETICAL SAMPLING is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges”

Sample Selection: Two-Tier

TWO LEVELS of sampling are usually necessary in qualitative case studies. First, you must select the case to be studied. Then, you will need to do some sampling within the case.

For example, if your interest is in programs that are successful in addressing learning disabilities, you would establish criteria for what constitutes a successful program; then you would select a program that meets those criteria. This program would be the case. One of the criteria might be that you want as much variation as possible; hence you would be employing a maximum variation sampling strategy in the selection of your cases. You might seek out programs that are successful in a wide range of socioeconomic neighborhoods or that address a wide range of disabilities or grade levels.
Sample Selection: How many?

“In purposeful sampling, the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus **REDUNDANCY** or **SATURATION** is the primary criterion”.

Design for a research project is literally the plan for how the study will be conducted.

Designing Projects: Consider these

- What types of information will be gathered and how will it be measured?

- Where will the research be undertaken, and among what group or groups of people (questions of site, setting, and sample)?

- Will you do a single data-collection strategy or to combine several strategies (data triangulation)?

- Once you have the data you want, how will you use it to answer your question?

- Will you undertake the study alone or with the assistance of others (multiple investigator triangulation)?

Designing Projects: Consider these

- Will the study be framed by a single overarching theory or by several related theories (theoretical triangulation)?

- How much will the project cost in terms of time and money, and how much can you actually afford?

- Are the data-collection strategies appropriate for the research questions being addressed?

- What will the data (physically) look like once they have been collected?

Designing Projects: Consider these

- How will the data be organized and analyzed?

- Once you select a data-collection strategy, say field observations, when do you start?

- Once you have begun, when do you stop?

- Should you include interviews along with your field observations, even though you did not originally plan to do so?

Designing Projects: Consider these

- Sketch out the entire research project in an effort to foresee any possible glitches that might arise.

- After the project has begun, if you find that concepts have been poorly conceived, that the wrong research questions have been asked, or that the data collected are inappropriate or from the wrong group of people, the project may be ruined.

- Consider whether ethical standards and safeguards for subjects’ protection are adequate. You must make certain that subjects will be protected from any harm.

Data Collection and Organization

Recognize the importance of advance planning before beginning the data-collection process. Consider the following:

- Will raw data be audiotape cassettes that result from long interviews?
- Will the data comprise dozens of spiral notebooks filled with field notes?
- Will the data be in the form of photographs or video recordings?
- Will they entail systematic observational checklists or copies of files containing medical or criminal histories?
- Could data actually be the smudges left on a polished counter or glass display case?
- Just what will the research data look like?
What do you do with the data to organize them and make them ready for analysis?

A clear and working storage and retrieval system is critical. In this way, the study can, in principle, be verified through replication. The main concerns are as follows:

1. A system that ensures high-quality accessibility to the data
2. Documentation of any analysis that is carried out
3. Retention and protection of data and related analysis of documents after the study has been completed

DATA STORAGE, RETRIEVAL, AND ANALYSIS

THREE CONCURRENT FLOWS OF ACTION IN DATA ANALYSIS

DATA REDUCTION. Qualitative data need to be reduced and transformed (coded) in order to make them more readily accessible, understandable, and to draw out various themes and patterns. As the project continues, further elements of data reduction will occur (written summaries, development of grounded themes, identification of analytic themes, consideration of relevant theoretical explanations, etc.).

DATA DISPLAY. Data are presented as an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusions to be analytically drawn. This may involve TABLES of data; TALLY SHEETS of themes; PICTURES showing the flow of connections among concepts; SUMMARIES of various statements, phrases, or terms; and similarly reduced and transformed groupings of data.

CONCLUSIONS AND VERIFICATION.
After the data have been collected, reduced, and displayed, analytic conclusions may begin to emerge and define themselves more clearly and definitively.

Verification is actually a twofold consideration:

1. Conclusions drawn from the patterns apparent in the data must be confirmed (verified) to assure that they are real and not merely wishful thinking on the part of the researcher. (Retracing the various analytic steps that led to the conclusion)

2. Verification involves assuring that all of the procedures used to arrive at the eventual conclusions have been clearly articulated. (Another researcher could potentially replicate the study)

Once the research project has been completed, it is not really over. Research, then, is not complete until it has been disseminated.

- Reports submitted to appropriate public agencies or to funding sources
- Informal presentations to colleagues at brown-bag lunches
- Formal presentations at professional association meetings
- Published reports in one of a variety of academic or professional journals.