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A House of Bricks: Module Paper 3 Quality Issues in Qualitative Research

Advanced Qualitative Research with Dr. Earle Reybold

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Abstract

Finding quality in qualitative research and battling the validity threat are at the heart of every research proposal and paper. Goodness, credibility, truthfulness and the dozens of other words used to describe the quality of a research paper are explored. Through readings and texts, the reader will gain an understanding of the importance of validating a research paper throughout all the elements of the project.

Decorating the Framework: Accenting Quality

As we rejoin the Trois-Petite Sus family on their exploits of home ownership we find the family recovering well from the blustery events of foul winds. We are encouraged to note the stability which has taken root in the construction of the arguments which these residences represent. After much exploration and research in construction materials like, straw (a research identity and foundation of research interests through philosophy and theory), sticks (design and methods of qualitative research) we now come within reach of good ground to build a house of bricks, and seek goodness in qualitative research.

Purpose

If my last paper looked to cement my understanding of qualitative research, the purpose of this paper looks to expand and decorate my conceptual framework by reviewing aspects of quality in qualitative research. One major part in this decorating process is to review what it means to be of good quality. This paper will cover many readings with regards to what quality might look like and even more words to describe what is essential to the lexicon that is quality.

Conceptual Framework

In my research area of interest of virtual environments to teach personal finance, I am looking for evidence of situated cognition as described by Brown et al. (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). This coupled with aspects of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978), students learn best and in safe surroundings in dealing with money in situated sessions with the use of a virtual environment.

In searching for meaning about what is quality one must first properly define the word.

What is quality?

In looking at the basic word quality, it is represented as a noun or adjective. As a noun the word relates to a social position or caliber of a selected item. I reflect this fits well with research studies and is acceptable to my views.

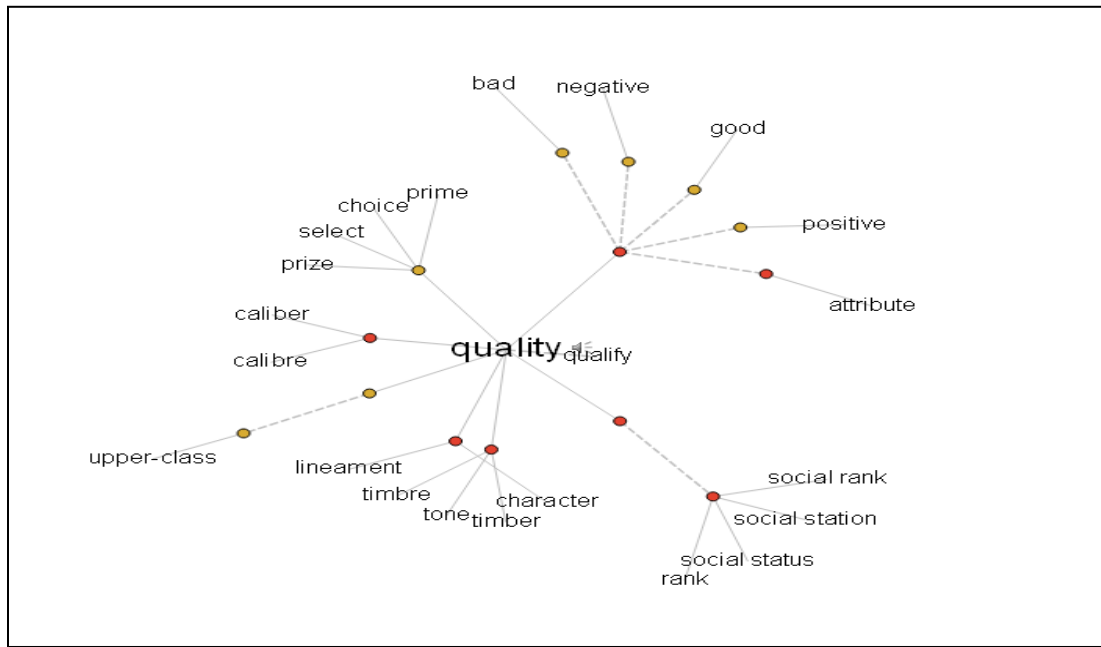


Figure 1 image from <http://www.visualthesaurus.com/app/view>

Quality as an adjective is best used when paired with something else. In looking at the diagram, the synonyms align themselves with different aspects of research design. The reader is free to place each word with their category of research design. As qualitative researchers, the best use of quality is when it is paired with other aspects of research tools. A researchers goal should be to create quality work. When identifying quality in the form of validity issues as mentioned by Maxwell, “validity is a goal” (2005, p. 105), researchers strive for an “objective truth” (2005, p. 106). Researchers should also see quality as their goal and using validity as a tool for such standards of quality. Maxwell continues with the importance of making validity part of the research design process as opposed to a final check of the work. In searching for this truth Maxwell has produces a validity checklist (pp. 110-113). In eight specific situations

Maxwell identifies tools to combat specific validity threats: Intensive, Long-term Involvement, Rich Data, Respondent Validation, Intervention, Searching for Discrepant Evidence and Negative Cases, Triangulation, Quasi-Statistics, and Comparison. Each of these tools can aid a researcher in adding credibility to the work. Not all strategies can and will be used with every method, but strategically placing, these checks and balances in a research project can strengthen the research, analysis and thus the conclusions. These methods will be examined further in the design section.

Like Maxwell, Patton (2002), in chapter 9, tiers his validity through all the processes of proper research. However, Patton also believes quality depends on the criteria (2002, p. 542). This criteria, he goes on to say, intersects with the audience to give creditability to the researcher and their work. Just as his other chapters contain, there is again the buffet style of quality terms and actions. This snack counter offers vocabulary for every type of researcher. The lexicon of quality research is bountiful and still growing, and Patton offers all sides of scientific research criteria for reflection. With regard to this copulation of quality ideas, I would support and apply this approach as a method to use. Intertwining the different concepts of quality throughout a study supports the research and its conclusions. This support structure of validly checks through a project reinforces the solid foundations the study was built upon. To return to the housing construction metaphor, to strengthen the already firm building tool of concrete, builders add wire mesh inside the substance to give the slurry something to grip tight too. This concept of firm supports at each level of a research project helps deter validity threats.

Willis (2007), in chapter 6, touches briefly on validity by the section titled Situated or Contextual Understanding. Not Truth is the Purpose of Research (2007, pp. 188-189). He vaguely discusses and belittles the concept of the positivists attitude of valid generalizability and

takes the stand of as qualitative researchers our “goal is to understand a particular concepts” (p. 189). Willis’ lack of information on the quality of qualitative research is made up for in his idea of multiple techniques in methods and epistemologies. His ideas of internal validity come from using other sources to authenticate meaning. This ideal is heavily supported in the majority of the texts and lessons learned sport an attitude of consistency, and validity throughout the whole research design process.

Design

Location, location, location is a homeowners mantra and should become that for researchers as well. In every home owning situation finding the best area to reside is strategic for a good long-term investment. Even the best built home located in a flood plain, will eventually be worn down and washed away. The same can be said for a research project. Having aspects of worth with in a project is not enough to ensure an attack on the quality of a paper. Taking steps to strategically place checks for validity throughout a research project at every level of the research design can strengthen arguments against attacks.

For much of the readings I have synthesized the process of keeping validity throughout a research project is a priority. This idea will always begin with preceding literature. Identifying other authors who found success with an audience can lend aide to the credibility of that researcher. Using that creditability as a corner stone will help form solid foundations in the design process. As in home buying, a great real estate agent can make or break the home buying experience. Like our agent, a literature review can steer our thinking and validate concepts from previous research. Gaining the creditability by aligning thinking with established projects lends creditability to the researcher. Sustaining that creditability will come from the other sections of the proposal.

There are different reasons to purchase a house and property, and the first and most basic is investment. To buy to increase one's income value or to purchase a home is to reside in the home and raise a family. In comparison to the research process, we do research to add to the knowledge base or because we are interested in a topic. Our research questions and research relationships become the building blocks for our proposals and projects and imbuing goodness into these sections will fortify the support structures for the weight of analysis.

Many texts cite negative case analysis as a validity check (Patton, 2002) (Glesne, 2011) (Maxwell, 2005). While performing the literature review, identify the previous works of others for situations which are converse to thoughts or theories to which the researcher is aligned this also helps eliminate that threat. Not every style home is right for every person, just as not every method is right for a particular study.

Methods and Good Housing Design

As we learn from our heroes of the story, choosing a house take good research and guidance. With our research study, one can apply the same efforts to produce quality and this quality of good is what scholars have been debating. Willis (2007) speaks of multiple perspectives in the creation of a project and to be prepared to receive them when the paper is reviewed. Being mindful of other perspectives can offensively prepare a paper for such validity threats.

The most common issues of validity are combated with roughly eight categories. Along with Maxwell's list as states above, others like Glesne (2011) have categories of validity issues. This following is a basic list as stated in her text. (Glesne, 2011): Prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, clarification of bias, member checking, rich, thick description and external audit.

Gleason's differences include a, clarification of bias, debriefing (defined as a more reflective and intimate review and input of the work) and her external audit of notes, journal and coding schemes. These differences are a bonus to an already well developed list.

The methods section is where many of the validity techniques come into play. The data sections, specifically collection and analysis can employ a majority of the techniques, Such as, prolong engagement, member checking or respondent validations are specifically tailored to data collection. This allows the researcher to collect ample amounts of data and then to verify their analysis with their participants.

During the analysis section of the paper, many more techniques make an appearance like Gleason's clarification of research bias "reflecting on your own subjectivity" (2011, p. 49) is a way of heading off the validity threat before it can be called out. Clearly stating a bias and attempting to work through the analysis with your bias in check will offer credibility and lessen an attempted threat. Another strong validity indicator comes across in the use of thick, rich description. This technique, of careful collection and presentation of information through descriptive narrative, can demonstrate to the audience an immersive perspective of activities being observed. While other techniques can cross all the boundaries of a proposal. The use of triangulation, defined by multiple methods, sources, or perspectives to target for validity, can be used throughout and entire projected proposals design, beginning with a literature review and ending with an analysis.

My research area of interest is learning in context and transference with regard to learning with simulations and especially virtual environments. Through my conceptual framework, and methods like interview and observation, I want to explore learning about money in a situated simulated environment. To begin my review of literature and gain credibility by

building off the work of Dalgarno and Lee (2010) which is to identify the specific characteristics of virtual environments and their relationship to learning, and to add to the creditability of virtual environments as educational tools I look to the work of Dede and his associates. I seek to engage these same ideas to a virtual environment dedicated to personal finance and employ the strategies of combating validity threats. With this research I hope to be able to contribute to curriculum of personal finance.

Conclusion

Of the numerous texts one can collect regarding research methods and concepts, I have 1 book on quantitative research, and 7 on qualitative research and no matter what text you look through or what word used to defines quality all these books say the same thing. Doing quality research is a must. Many differences have evolved about what is quality research look like and many authors have placed emphasis on certain methods or concepts which they feel are important for research to be of quality. But what they all share is the idea of a strategic and systematic approach of scrutiny and reflection throughout all the areas of research. Building a sound proposal from the foundational research questions, through the support structure in methods and design to the roof of analysis and conclusion. This house of bricks will stand the test of time.

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