

What is “Applied” Qualitative Research? – A Few Examples 2014

By Neville Li Sept 8, 2014

In my work as a qualitative researcher, I remember times when I had to convince a room full of medical directors, physicians, statisticians and biomedical lab technical staff that qualitative research is rigorous and has implications to real world practice. Often this is met with skepticism and questioning glances from the audience.

Here, I have found four very recent “applied” qualitative research projects to illustrate the practical, applicable nature of qualitative research. They are from three disciplines – nursing, social work and education. Obviously, I am a strong proponent of using qualitative research results to improve the status quo in the real world, and I believe this is one way to realize the meaningful impacts of qualitative inquiries.

1. Title: Barriers to and Facilitators of the Acceptance Process for Individuals With Serious Mental Illness

Context: USA

Methodology: Grounded theory

Methods: 30 Semistructured interviews

Why it is chosen: This study uses grounded theory to reveal the barriers to and facilitators of the acceptance of mental illness at the micro, meso and macro levels. More importantly, there are concrete recommendations for facilitating clients’ acceptance of mental illness for clinicians to apply in their practice.

Full Citation: Mizock L, Russinova Z, Millner UC. (2014). **Barriers to and Facilitators of the Acceptance Process for Individuals With Serious Mental Illness.** *Qualitative Health Research* **24**(9):1265-1275.

Link: <http://qhr.sagepub.com/content/24/9/1265.abstract>

2. Title: Understanding the Needs of Food-Allergic Adults

Context: New Zealand

Methodology: Thematic analysis

Methods: 4 focus groups

Why it is chosen: This study has the specific goal of identifying the issues that impact the quality of life of adults living with food allergies. To go one step further, the authors recommend that service providers impose interventions targeting awareness and training on adaptation and coping skills for food-allergic patients.

Full Citation: Peniamina RL, Bremer P, Conner TS, Miroso M. (2014). **Understanding the needs of food-allergic adults.** *Qualitative Health Research* **24**(7): 933-945.

Link: <http://qhr.sagepub.com/content/24/7/933.abstract>

3. **Title:** Pre-implementation knowledge tool development for health services providers: A qualitative study of Canadian social workers

Context: Canada

Methodology: Thematic analysis

Methods: 1 focus group and 3 interviews

Why it is chosen: This project is different from many qualitative studies in which it has the specific goal of developing and modifying a tool kit for use by social workers at the outset. The results are used for developing Compassionate Care Benefit (CCB) knowledge tools for social workers to disseminate.

Full Citation: Dykeman S, Williams A, Crooks VA. (2014). **Pre-implementation knowledge tool development for health services providers: A qualitative study of Canadian social workers.** *Qualitative Social Work* **13**(3): 351-371.

Link: <http://qsw.sagepub.com/content/13/3/351.abstract>

4. **Title:** Participatory research in support of quality public education in New Orleans

Context: USA

Methodology: Participatory Action Research; thematic analysis

Methods: Focus groups and interviews

Why it is chosen: As a participatory action research (PAR), this study delves deep into the experiences of black communities in New Orleans and to engage them in ways to build a quality public education. PAR has an inherent goal of bringing about social change within the research process.

Full Citation: Johnson-Burel D, Drame E, Frattura E. (2014). **Participatory research in support of quality public education in New Orleans.** *Educational Action Research* **22**(3): 288-305.

Link:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09650792.2013.872576?queryID=%24%7BresultBean.queryID%7D#.VAw2vJUg9jo>

Postscript: Compiling a collection of “applied” qualitative research happened to be harder than I expected, and therefore this list is shorter than originally planned. Scouring through qualitative research journals in various disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, nursing, public health, health geography, clinical psychology, education, social work), it is not difficult to notice that some disciplinary traditions place a heavier focus on understanding the issues under question, while others have a specific goal of giving practice recommendations based on those findings. Dr. Sally Thorne has mentioned the different purposes between knowledge generation in some social sciences vs. health sciences disciplines in her book *Interpretive Description* (Thorne S. (2008). *Interpretive Description – Developing qualitative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press), and I incline to agree with her views.

This is only my personal opinion: in order to deepen qualitative inquiry as a solid, rigorous research tradition and to attract more internal and external funding, more work needs to be done with research questions originating from the real world and research outcome applied back to that real world. You may disagree with me, and I am totally all ears with and respect your perspectives.

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