

# Reasons for Undertaking Qualitative Pedagogic Research

Paul Orsmond  
Staffordshire University

# Rationale

- Teaching tutors should contribute to the educational research literature – we are the practitioners therefore we need a say.
- Very little is known about learning in higher education. When did you last talk about learning.....with anyone
- We need a voice in policy setting within Universities
- So do you have a voice?

# A Few Thoughts

- Work with someone
- Seek guidance from other disciplines
- Find someone who is happy to listen and challenge what you are saying
- Investigate what excites/stimulates you.
- Don't wait for funding
- Don't wait for your University to take an interest

# Thoughts on Gathering Background Learning

- Read the literature
  - Bioscience
  - Capability
  - Primary educational literature
  - Books from many disciplines
- Conference – Oxford Brookes
- Use the Centre for Bioscience/HE Academy site
- Locate your University research co-ordinator
- Locate groups within your University who are not mainstream
- E-mail researcher – test out your ideas

# Qualitative Research

- Most of us engage in some form of qualitative analysis – module feedback forms – radio/television – others
- Answer questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning cf to quantitative studies which emphasis the measuring and analysis of the causal relationship between variables, not processes.
- You need qualitative and quantitative analysis to get the richness out of the data.

# Qualitative Research

- Qualitative Researchers stress:
  - Socially constructed nature of ‘reality’
  - The intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being studied
  - Situational constraints that shape the study – ethical
  - Value–laden nature of enquiry
- We use to do quantitative then one day we thought ‘why don’t we ask the students’.

# Shifting to Qualitative Research

- Early papers were mostly quantitative comparison between marks (topical at the time) and looking at individual criterion (not done at the time)
- Results were interesting informed practice
- Added a simple questionnaire (seemed really adventurous at the time)
  - What was most challenging?
  - Would you like more peer-assessment?
  - Will you use criteria more in further studies?

# Shifting to Qualitative Research

- Later papers use information we just couldn't get through quantitative studies alone – but required a mix.
- What we were interested in was the qualitative ways in which students experienced/understood/conceptualised assessment and feedback (phenomena) but not the feedback itself.
- Phenomenological studies.



# Using Qualitative Research

- **Phenomenological** description must include:
  - Adequate description covering complexity of situation
  - Report contradictory/irrational experience
  - Show how people come to see (perception) things as they are

# Using Qualitative Research

- **Phenomenography** description must include:
  - Our experience of variation in the various focus of investigation – variation in experiencing understanding of feedback among students allows us to discern
  - Partial description and because variations in how phenomenon experienced must include a range of individual experiences.

# Reliability and Validity

- All research methods involve interpretation and hence is subjective
- Validity – Coherence and Plausibility
  - Is there enough evidence to interpret and make claim No loose ends (features of the material that do not fit the explanation you are offering)
  - Show the interview outcomes of the text are justified in the questions asked
  - Human element required
- Plausibility - how do you know whether your claims make sense of the material?
  - Discuss your analysis with others
  - Present the actual data to others
  - Allows the reader to judge and challenge if necessary

# Reliability and Validity

- Reliability
  - Representative sample to allow a generalisation of the data
  - Consistency of your claims
  - Familiarity with a topic and issue of personal 'scholarship'
- The more interviews become rational and calculating the less valid they are.

# Closing Thoughts

- Qualitative research is a different world – just different depends on you.
- Richness of data needs to be considered
- Students are humans and lecture rooms are not laboratories
- You get a ‘snap shot’ of what's happening
- Still need strong experimental design and honest interpretation.