NUR 1024 – Foundations of Qualitative Inquiry
Dr. Denise Gastaldo, (original date fall 2008; revised summer 2015)

Elements for writing up a qualitative methodology chapter in a doctoral dissertation (once the study has been concluded)

A good methodology chapter tells the story of the study – the key and decisive moments in the development of the study, which have influenced the production of the final study structure and results presented. The reader should be offered enough elements to be able to achieve a critical understanding of how the data was generated and interpreted. The researcher should also be critical of the study, pointing to its strengths and limitations. The goal is to describe the research process in its complexity, however keeping a clear and relatively concise style.

Elements to be addressed in the chapter (the content may be presented in a different order):

1. Study methodology and theoretical congruence
   - Explain why a qualitative study is the best methodology to respond to the research question(s);
   - Explain how the theoretical framework shapes the study through the links between ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions;

2. Brief literature review on the design selected (e.g. generic qualitative research, grounded theory, ethnography, participatory action research)
   - Discuss classic and recent publications regarding the potential and limits of the design selected;
   - Depict the particular use of this design in your study;

3. Study context and location (for studies based exclusively on document analysis, consider the documents' historical location)
   - Description of the social actors, cultural practices, norms, policies or any other element that is of significance for the study;
   - Present your strategies to have access to the field and to the people who are participants in the study;
   - Explain why was the study conducted in this place (it can be a virtual place, such as a website) ;

4. Researcher's positionality (many of these issues can be presented in another chapter, like in the introduction, or later, in the rigour section)
   - Describe the role for the researcher in this kind of study (e.g. in qualitative research the researcher is the main research instrument for data generation and analysis);
   - Explain the researcher's personal and professional understandings of the subject, reasons and motivations to undertake the study, and how these factors influenced this study;
   - Describe how researcher and participants' different and similar positions and power relations impacted the development of the study;
   - Address particular issues in relation to this study (e.g. preparation for fieldwork, how gender, race, class or age impacted interviews);
   - Present the trajectory/transformation experienced by the researcher throughout the study (e.g. crisis, skills, difficulties, insights);
   - The researcher should not tell "her/his life story" here, but rather focus on aspects of the study that have been shaped by her/his positions;

5. Participants or sample
   - Justify your sample selection (e.g. a set of documents, a group of people)
   - Describe the intentional, theoretical or purposive sample (socio-demographic characteristics and other relevant information)
   - Present inclusion and exclusion criteria;

6. Strategies for data generation (traditionally called data collection)*
   - Describe methods selected (e.g. interviews or focus groups) and explain how they were used in this study; add the interview or observation guide to appendix;
   - Describe phases in the data generation process and strategic decisions made (e.g. entering the field, meeting with key informants, first interviews)
   - Explain how the context and kinds of interactions established between the researcher and participants have allowed some data to be produced (or not);

7. Data analysis
   - Describe as part of the analytic process how the data was transcribed and describe how it was transformed into the results (general elements in this process and particular strategies that shaped the results);
   - Present in appendix the codes, subcategories and categories generated (or equivalent process utilized) to support the analysis and theorization presented in the results chapter so that the reader can follow the analytical strategies employed;
   - Explain how the analysis was shaped by inductive and deductive processes, illustrating how the empirical data "speaks" and how the theoretical "lenses" frame the analysis;
   - Depict the strategies employed to verify the quality of the analysis (e.g. data analysis was verified by another researcher who is knowledgeable about the study context and theoretical framework; this can also be described in the next section);

8. Study rigour
   - Present which strategies were utilised throughout the study to verify the quality of the information generated referring both to the epistemological and methodological rigour of the study (coherence of the links between theory and methodology and articulation between methods, ethics, etc);
   - During the study, keep a methodology log, listing all the decisions taken and reasons for those, but in the methodology chapter just present the ones which have impacted the study in an important way (reflexivity as a strategy for rigour);

9. Ethics
   - Show ethical challenges and strategies adopted as they evolved throughout the study (ethics as process can be described in several parts of the thesis);
   - Describe the process of obtaining ethics approval and put in appendix the REB letter(s) of approval of the research project;
   - Explain how the confidentiality and right to leave the study at any time was maintained through the study and present in appendix the consent form;
   - Comment how risks and potential benefits of study participation were managed;
   - If a participant had a significant health problem (physical, emotional or social), indicate the referral system to health or social care;
   - For sensitive issues, provide additional ethical strategies employed in the study (e.g. studies with children, refugees, etc);

10. Potential and particularities of the study
   - These can be described in distinct parts of the methodology chapter, however if they are presented at the end, this section should include elements such as field work occurrences that changed the original data generation plan or how the data may be transferable to other contexts.

* The idea of "data collection" was originated in positivist thought; it assumes that data exists a priori and that the researcher can simply "gather it or pick it up", like in a harvest.

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