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Protocol 129

Name of the protocol: Analyzing qualitative data

Sources: ‘Reader actieonderzoek, Fontys Lerarenopleiding Tilburg’, Rutger van de Sande & Maud Slaats.

Purpose of the tool:

The tool describes how qualitative data can be analyzed.

materials:

Qualitative data (e.g. video or audio recordings, written text, etc.)

Time:

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Roles:

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Process:

Part of doing practitioner inquiry is collecting data. Data can consist of numbers (‘quantitative data’) but in most cases your inquiry data will have a different form, for instance video recordings, written statements, descriptions of situations, etc.. (‘qualitative data’). This tool is aimed exclusively at analyzing *qualitative* data.

1. Selecting what is relevant

At first glance, you will probably realize that not all of your data are relevant or helpful in answering your research question(s) or in exploring your wonderings. It is therefore important to review your data and make sure to select only the parts of your data that (potentially) contribute to answering your research question. When you are dealing with audio recordings of a conversation for instance, you can do this by selecting, and then writing down or typing, relevant fragments. Make sure however that it is still possible to understand the context and scope of each individual fragment. Because of this, it is sometimes necessary to add some remarks to a fragment to make this clear. Please beware however to never change the original data itself. When you have finished this step, you will have a selection of fragments.



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2. Reviewing the fragments

Review all the fragments you have selected in step 1 once more. By doing this, you will get a better general overview of your data. In most cases, you will notice that going through your data already triggers ideas about how to categorize or structure them. Undoubtedly, some fragments will be quite similar and others can be contradictory. This is not a problem but merely indicates differences, e.g. between students or colleagues.

3. Arrange the fragments

Based on what certain fragments contribute to answering the research question, you group them into categories. These categories largely arise from your view on the data fragments that you selected and reviewed. It is also possible that, while reviewing the fragments, a certain educational model you heard or read about in the past, and that really seems to fit the data, comes to mind. You could then use this model to make categories.

4. Label the categories

Now you have the fragments you selected, structured in categories. The next step is to label the categories. Sometimes this makes it necessary to rearrange some of the fragments into new categories. In the end, you will have a limited number of categories, each containing interrelated data fragments.

It is possible at this point that some of your categories are so similar that it would be better to merge them into one new category. Or maybe it is the other way round and you can decide to break up a single category into two or more.

Two comments to these steps:

- In a lot of cases it is inevitable to create a category labelled something like 'other fragments'. After creating such a category it can be very tempting to put a lot of fragments that you are not entirely sure about, into it. The challenge is however to leave this category as small as possible. If you feel that it is necessary to place a lot of fragments into the 'other fragments' category then this is a sign to review and optimizing your entire structure of categories.
- It is also important to make sure that you don't end up with too many (e.g. more than 10) or too few (e.g. only one or two) categories. If you have too many categories, each of them will logically only contain a small number of fragments. It is also harder to report about this. If you have a very limited number of categories, the categories tend to be too broad. In that case it is better to break up categories.

Debrief:

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