Qualitative research: Making sense of lived experience and mobilising practitioner expertise.

Marjorie McCrory
School of Education; University of the West of Scotland
March 2014
marjorie.mccrory@uws.ac.uk
Overview of session

• An introduction to my research study

• Making a case for qualitative research: why investigate lived experience?

• Making sense of lived experience: mobilising practitioner expertise
My research study

• Experience of engagement in a professional community and transition from one professional community to another; focus on understanding processes of identity construction and development

• cross-disciplinary socio-cultural theoretical perspectives which explore the complex interrelationship between the “individual” and the “social” (e.g. Wenger, 1998; Stetsenko, 2011)
Why investigate lived experience?

- Practical relevance: enhance understanding of a particular experience within a particular institutional setting; potential impact on policy and practice; of interest/relevance more widely, in settings where similar issues arise

- Theoretical relevance: to extend and critique the existing literature on teacher and academic identities, and the broader socio-cultural theoretical literature

- Limitations? The findings of qualitative research of this kind are not generalizable; the point however, is to avoid the “aggregate person” of quantitative psychological research and to understand the nature of the relationship between social and individual processes
Group activity: generating and justifying qualitative proposals

Working in small groups:

• Generate an idea for a qualitative research study in an area which interests you in relation to guidance (think about the *why* and *how* of behaviour rather than the what, where or when...)

• How would you justify your proposal? How would your study enhance understanding? What might the practical relevance/impact be?
Making sense of lived experience: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

- validity: rigorous method vs. the “anecdotal”
- theoretical underpinnings; phenomenology and hermeneutics
- idiographic: case-by-case, in-depth interviews; engagement with transcript on multiple levels; detailed analysis (Smith et al (2009) suggest four stages)
- generates themes which are grounded in the context of the whole interview; comparisons across cases rather than generalisations
- moves from description to analysis; in “conversation” with relevant theoretical literature
The qualitative research interview: Kvale’s (1996) “quality criteria”

• extent of spontaneous, rich, specific, relevant answers
• relative length of questions/answers (short questions/long answers!)
• degree to which the interviewer clarifies meanings of the relevant aspects of answers
• degree of interpretation as the interview proceeds (interviewer attempts to verify his/her interpretations of subject’s answers)
• subject’s “story” hardly requires further description/explanation
Guidance and research: an unexpected link?

“Our research utilized in-depth interviews as we tried to understand the full story of the unemployment experience. One of the surprising findings was that participants often reported that the research interviews were more helpful than most of their previous counselling sessions. It was not our intention to do counselling, but apparently this type of qualitative research gathering contained within it some strong counselling elements. As I continued to be involved in qualitative research, I noticed the same dynamic developing in many other studies.”

Group activity: developing an interview approach

Working in small groups and referring to the handout:

• Consider how each of the skills associated with the person-centred approach may facilitate Kvale’s quality criteria for qualitative research interviewing

• What is missing? How would you ensure that the interaction was appropriately “framed”? 
Summary

• Qualitative research is valuable both in the development of theoretical and practical approaches, and in relation to policy.

• Guidance practitioners already possess skills which can be mobilised for qualitative research.
References


