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Surprises and excitement: doing qualitative research in academic practice

27th June 2019
Professor Susan Smith, Centre for Learning and Teaching
Career timeline so far….

- NHS (9 years)
- Completed my Postgraduate degree
- Leeds Beckett University- Former Faculty of Health
- Interprofessional education joint lead
- Institute for Enterprise
- Completed my PhD
- Centre for Learning & Teaching (2011- to date...)
Surprises and Excitement and .... Failures
I have been thinking about ... (the 4 diversions)

• Livening up academic writing
• What makes excellent qualitative research for educators in academic practice?...real, tough rigour
• How emotion in the classroom should be central
• The Equality Agenda
Ethnographic Inquiry in Physiotherapy Research
1. Illuminating the Working Culture of the Physiotherapy Assistant

Susan Smith

Key Words
Ethnography, physiotherapy assistant, observation, interviewing, reflexivity.

Summary
This paper defines and discusses ethnography with reference to a qualitative study of hospital-based physiotherapy assistants undertaken by a physiotherapist.

The paper identifies the place of an ethnographic approach within qualitative research. The research process is described by focusing particularly on the emergent research questions, access, and the specific pitfalls of observation and interviewing in ethnographic fieldwork.

Qualitative Research and Ethnography
Quantitative sociological research has been criticised for failing to capture the true nature of social behaviour (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994) because it tends to reduce meanings to what is observable and to study people only in artificial settings (in the case of experiments). These researchers tend to extract themselves from the everyday social world and seldom study it at first hand. On the other hand, qualitative research, which has its historical roots in the social and human sciences, takes an interpretive, naturalistic, and comprehensive approach. It relies on the researcher's inference and is the appropriate methodological approach to the study of health and illness.
This research report provides an overview of the main findings from the student focus groups at the beginning and end of a module, undertaken on 50 first-year students on a BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy course. One of the module’s learning outcomes was to ensure the development of team working skills. This module and this research project echoed the aims of the Department of Health’s Meeting the Challenge, reflecting the government’s commitment to modernizing education for allied health professionals. An understanding of the roles of other health workers and developing team working skills is integral to educational culture in terms of preparing physiotherapy students to be effective practitioners who can work well with others.

Students discussed their experiences, challenges and coping strategies used while working together in a small group (n = 5) on a group assessment of a case study. Qualitative data were supplemented by the Team Reflexivity Questionnaire and consideration of the principles underpinning Belbin’s work...
Exploring the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Student Attainment Gap: What Did It Tell Us? Actions to Address Home BME Undergraduate Students’ Degree Attainment

Dr Susan Smith, Leeds Beckett University, UK

ABSTRACT
This paper explores work in progress on six key actions derived from a project exploring Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) student degree attainment at Leeds Beckett University (LBU). In 2014–15, in common with the wider national picture in higher education, at LBU there was a significant disparity between the percentage achievement of good degrees (Firsts and 2:1 classification) between the white students (64%, who comprise 84% of the total institutional student population) and the BME students (49%, who comprise 16% of the total institutional student population). This attainment gap existed across all the degree programmes after controlling for UCAS tariff points on entry. Indeed, it has been indicated in the literature that the degree
Diversion 1: More colourful writing
Dry, old text books
PHYSIOTHERAPY
A PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH
EDITED BY SALLY FRENCH
Male, pale, but certainly not stale
Encouraging the use of reflexivity in the writing up of qualitative research

Susan Smith

There is no set formula to guide researchers in writing up qualitative research projects. Much writing up of any research tends to eliminate the self-analysis of the researcher. This article analyses the author’s position in relation to the qualitative research process.

Reflexive research is defined as a method that fully embraces and exploits the subjectivity of the researcher. Increasing reflexivity of research can increase the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative data. In this article, examples from a qualitative study are used to illustrate how much of the reflexive self-analysis undertaken as part of the original design was lost in the study’s formal scientific write-up.

“......... Despite the most human of subject matter, our writing of qualitative research often fails. It can be conventional, formulaic and, sometimes, even stilted. Where can the potential of our qualitative work find place in our qualitative writing?”

Mitchell and Clarke (2018)
Even medics write more personally than educators

Sword, H. (2012). The road to academic success is paved with stylish academic writing. [online] Impact of Social Sciences. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/05/14/stylish-academic-writing/ [Accessed 4 Jun. 2019].
Diversion 2: Real, tough rigour
Credibility
Transferability
Dependability
Confirmability
Eight “Big Tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research

- Worthy topic
- Rich rigor
- Credibility
- Resonance
- Meaningful coherence
- Sincerity
- Ethical
- Significant contribution
How significant is your pedagogic research?

Theoretically significant

Heuristically significant

Methodologically significant

 Practically significant
Diversion 3: How emotion should be central in the classroom
Diversion 4: The Equality Agenda
Commuter students... an additional challenge on top of everything else

Research articles

The experience of commuting and living at home: how does it affect the engagement of BME students with the university and their learning?

Susan Smith
Leeds Beckett University

Context

In 2015, a Leeds Beckett University project explored the student attainment gap for good degrees for UK BME students in those live on our courses with the largest number of enrolled BME students in the University (Smith, 2017). In 2014-15, in common with the wider national picture in Higher Education (HE), there was a significant disparity between the percentage achievement of good degrees (Firsts and 2:1 classification) between the white students (64%, who comprise 64% of the total institutional-student population) and the BME students (46%, who comprise 16% of the total institutional-student population). After controlling for UCAS tariff points on entry, we confirmed that this attainment gap existed across all the degree programmes. Reasons for the attainment gap are complex, and multiple factors – structural, organisational, attitudinal, cultural and financial – are all of significance (Richardson, 2008a & b; Luke and Berry, 2011; Singh, 2011; Archer and Hutchings, 2000). Clegg, Steventon and Webb (2009) have discussed the social and...
The sticky campus
And finally.....
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