

## RESPONSE

### REPORTING ON QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: EVOLVING ISSUES AND CRITERIA

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A look at recent nursing research in Canada in our two national publications, and also at national, regional, and local nursing research conferences shows a major shift from more hard-nosed, purely quantitative approaches toward more context-embedded, qualitative methods of enquiry. The preceding paper is an example of this trend. Nursing is not alone in this shift. It is seen in other professional disciplines, such as education, as well (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

Like our early efforts at experimental and descriptive research, we have borrowed our methods from other disciplines. It took time to develop a body of nursing knowledge that built on, and refined for our use, the theories and methods needed to deal with quantitative nursing data. This body of nursing literature is now expanding to include more theory and methods of qualitative inquiry (Glaser and Strauss, 1966; Knafl and Howard, 1984), but it is still immature and incomplete.

There are many controversies and issues behind, and generated by, this shift. For example, are these dichotomous approaches, or is there a continuum of qualitative through to quantitative approaches; is one method generally better than the other for nursing problems; can these methods be blended as some have recommended (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Sieber, 1983), or will the epistemological ecumenicalism dilute the effectiveness of both approaches; and are there some types of problems, situations, researchers, phases in the development of a theory, or patients who lend themselves better to one method over the other? I suspect a consensus will emerge in time that views the two families of approaches along a multifaceted continuum or matrix with both having relevance for nursing research. The necessary methodological directions as to when which type of approach is best suited to various research situations and the people involved are even now beginning to emerge.

As this evolution takes place, what can we do to communicate more clearly our qualitative research findings? Criteria for the presentation of quantitative studies, from the statement of the problem and review of the literature, to the discussion of findings and conclusions, can be found in a wide variety of texts and journals. However, qualitative researchers, understandably, have

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tended to reject these criteria because the specifics do not fit their work. Nevertheless, the concepts behind such criteria are applicable. For example, the purposes of qualitative studies tend to be more diverse; such as developing baseline data for future research, providing a descriptive base for practice, developing a concept, or generating a theory (Knafl and Howard, 1984). The purpose is stated in a more narrow quantitative style which is an uncomfortable fit with the qualitative nature of the study. The purpose of the paper above seems to be to develop a concept for clinical use with the parents of hospitalized chronically ill children, but is not stated as such.

Methods and analyses also require clear descriptions for a research report, because the specifics of how these are performed are highly varied. For quantitative data collection and analysis, the terrain is well marked, and indeed we have developed almost a shorthand to communicate this to each other. In qualitative studies, the procedures and thought processes used must be made more explicit. Qualitative reporting conventions are scant at present. This lack of guidelines is reflected in the scattered methods reported above. A parallel occurs in the reporting of analysis procedures. This is further confounded as analyses probably occurred more in concert with data collection than ordinarily is the case in quantitative work. This paper, like many others, struggles to make the data collection procedures clear.

The crux of the concern over the methods portion of the article is the internal validity of the conclusions, i.e., how did the author collect and record her data, how did she get from what must have been a mountain of data to her conceptual conclusions? At what point was "double bind" first considered, and what were her decision rules or points as to whether or not it truly fit her data? How, when, and in what way did her previous experience and thinking come into play? This author is not alone in grappling with these issues (Trend, 1978). The nursing research literature lacks a body of clearly defined methods for drawing valid meaning from qualitative data (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

Rich use of raw data to lend validity to a report is a hallmark of qualitative study and is well used above. Quantitative researchers might consider this reporting strategy which has been lost in our rush to be concise and objective.

Looking into my crystal ball, I suspect criteria for reporting qualitative research will emerge first and be used along with, but separate from, existing quantitative criteria. However, the fundamental principles behind both sets of criteria are very similar and they probably will merge as we become more comfortable as nurse researchers, in using, reporting, and reading a variety of research methods.

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