



Is there any wonder why I have to chuckle at myself? I find that for most of my life, I have done things backwards! I became a Nurse Manager, a Director of Nursing Services, then I pursue a degree in Leadership, next I begin a new profession as a Nursing Professor and yes, once again the Leadership Competencies assist me in gaining new information regarding teaching and learning, funny isn't it that I could even survive without all that knowledge.

Now, as I begin to look at a metaphor, I can not help but think of one of the most beautiful seasons, the fall, ahh yes, once again, I have waited until the fall of my life to color my world with new meaning. Why did I not take that opportunity in the Spring of my life, so perhaps I could enjoy all this knowledge and information and share with so many in my profession? I can not live thinking of regrets, but, understand that if I am still hanging on the tree and until I fall, I can still give and share the beauty of this experience with all those who watch with intrigue.

What is qualitative research? To me it is like a fall leaf, do you realize that the tree's leaves are orange and yellow even in the summer? Most leaves contain the pigments of all the colors, but it is just that the pigment chlorophyll is so much stronger than the other pigments, xanthophyll (yellow) or carotene (orange) that are natural to the tree's leaves. So it is with qualitative research, you see the story, the information is right there in front of us, some themes more obvious than others, it is the responsibility of the researcher to examine the components, uncover that which is perhaps hidden through keen observation, through the use of our senses and study and make sense of this truly remarkable phenomenon. Just as the color is embedded in the leaves, so is meaning embedded in people's experiences, and what I see as I look and sense what is before me will be expressed through my own unique perception in the light of intuition and self-reflection.

Fall teaches us so much; the process that gives life to trees is called photosynthesis, which literally translates "putting together with light". Yes, Qualitative research is much like that process, being a careful observer through data collection and analysis; research activities; by careful organization and construction using triangulation, checking interpretations, field study and clarifying biases and assumptions, under girding the study with a theoretical framework, we can "shed light" on this wonderful phenomenon that passionately moved us. You see the tree does not die, the leaves must just drop.

As spring turns to fall, the tree's leaves produce less chlorophyll, so that other colors can show through, and then they explode with a brilliant rich array of color, and so it is also with the results of qualitative research, although perhaps the photosynthesis shuts down, or my story, or my research comes to an end, that theory, phenomenon, new development that was studied, can ignite more interest and color and perpetuate and facilitate wonderful elegant delightful beauty through the research of others.

Reliability, Validity and Generalizability

Reliability and validity are rooted in positivist perspective and in quantitative research it seeks evidence through rigorous methods that the means of measurement are accurate and they are able to test and retest numbers that can be quantified to ensure replicability or reproducibility of the results.

In Qualitative research, there is emerging criteria for reliability and validity, although there is not a consensus, several strategies can be utilized to enhance trustworthiness.

The researcher according to Merriam (1998), can use six basic strategies to enhance internal validity:

- 1.) Triangulation – using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings.
- 2.) Member checks- taking data and tentative data back to the subjects for interpretation
- 3.) Long-term observation- repeat observation of the same phenomenon
- 4.) Peer examination – asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge
- 5.) Participatory or collaborative modes of research –involving participants in all phases of the study
- 6.) Research biases-clarifying the researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation

Reliability refers to the ability to replicate the study. Because human behavior is never static, it would be almost impossible to replicate a study.

The human researcher can become more reliable through training and practice and can use several techniques to ensure that results are dependable:

- 1.) Investigators position – the researcher should explain the assumptions behind the theory, or her position or bias for selecting informants
- 2.) Triangulation – multiple methods strengthens reliability
- 3.) Audit Trail – describe in detail how we arrived at our results

External validity or how generalizable are the results of the research is limited, but the results strengthened by utilizing many cases to study the same phenomenon, the use of predetermined questions, and specific procedures for coding.

To enhance the possibility for generalizability, the following strategies should be utilized:

- 1.) Rich thick description – provide detailed description
- 2.) Typicality or modal category – describe how typical the event or individual compared with others in the same situation
- 3.) Multisite designs – using several sites, cases, situations, especially those that maximize diversity in the phenomenon of interest

Ultimately it is the responsibility of the researcher to conduct the investigation in an ethical manner and to examine her own philosophical orientation.