



Practitioner research

Analysis

JANET SOLER:

I think you've touched on the question I next wanted to raise, which is a common one that we face as researchers -- I've got a passion. I'm passionate about a topic, I've gone out, I've become really engaged in it; I've collected lots of evidence, but the analysis seems to be a stumbling block for researchers, and again, I've seen it from, as you're saying, young children involved in research right through to adult researchers.

MARY KELLET:

I've learnt a lot about research analysis by working with children and young people and by supporting them in the process, because they, like adults, find analysis the toughest part of, of research process. And the times when they analysis has been the most successful is when we've been prepared to, if you like, explode the data. So be prepared to be to let it become a very messy stage. I've had occasions where very young children, children as young as 9, have been sitting on the floor surrounded by bits of paper where they've taken interview transcripts and they've cut out each particular response to a question in an interview, and they're just sitting like it's like a sort of fountain around them.

And they're gradually going to reduce that data, that mountain of data, first by just putting it into one or two piles that may, they may think they can group them in a certain way. And once you've got that first sift, it then gets much easier to, to re-sift and re-sift. So you may start with three mountains of, of data which gradually you can then reduce.

It's about managing data; how you sort it, sift it, reduce it, manage it, in order that you can interpret it. You can't if you think you can instantly just take data and yes, there's gonna the answer's going to be there, we can immediately interpret it - it won't happen like that. We can't take those kind of shortcuts. You really do have to immerse yourself in the messiness of the data first and begin to sort and organise it.

A little game I play with young people is with a box of Quality Street, where we throw all the chocolates together on the floor and they've all got different coloured wrappers, different patterned wrappers, different shapes of chocolate, different centres, and a little bit like data, is very messy, initially. We have a lot of fun then in sorting the chocolates out into different kinds of either by colour or by shape or by taste or by likes and dislikes. And the children soon see there are so many ways in which I can begin to interrogate this data. But where are the connections? Once you've got your data into manageable chunks, you can then start to see the connections between them. And then the analysis really starts to make sense.

So, it's about being brave; jumping in and not being concerned when nothing makes sense initially, because it will once you begin to just start to order and sift and produce that data.

JANET SOLER:

Another problem I think all researchers encounter when we're learning to be researchers, or even with the experienced researchers, is linking the literature in what's been written about in the field with, um, with the evidence and the analysis that we're conducting, it's sometimes very hard to make those links. Do you have any kind of advice or how do you help young people make those kind of links in their analyses?

MARY KELLET:

One of the ways I sometimes use is a washing line with pegs. So if you've done your literature review, you will have extracted from that literature review certain themes, because that's probably the way in which you've structured your literature review. So maybe you have 5 or 6 themes. If it's something to do with student voice, it might be around rights issues, it could be around power dynamics. There could be themes that are, you are, um structuring in your literature review. If you create a washing line with pegs and you put each of these themes on your washing line with a piece of paper pegged to the washing line, with a theme on each of those papers, as you are sifting through your data and beginning to extract those early themes.

Keep looking at what's on the washing line. Is there anything that I can add to, to that sheet that's coming out of my data? Is there anything that's actually contradicting something that's up there, in which case, that's important to put up as well. And again, it's just a way of organising and sorting and hanging on to that data.

But if you can just keep hold of those themes, it's very easy then to get the themes that are coming through in your data and link them to the themes in your literature. I quite recommend the washing line.