



Realist Qualitative Analysis



Aims for this session

- ✔ A quick reminder about realist evaluation
- ✔ A realist perspective on some issues in qualitative analysis
- ✔ Some techniques for analysing qualitative data for realist evaluations



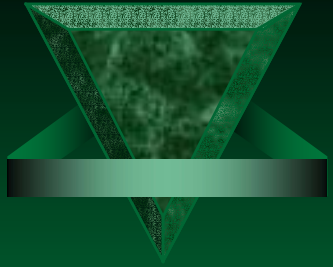
The realist analysis project

- ✓ The evaluation question: what works for whom, in what contexts, and how?
- ✓ Programs are theories incarnate
- ✓ Evaluation tests and refines the theories as much as it evaluates this particular manifestation of it
- ✓ Program theories take the structure “context + mechanism = outcome”



Analytic tasks

- ✓ Explain outcomes by identifying the mechanisms which create the change: *mechanisms cannot be identified without reference to outcome.*
- ✓ Identify contexts which influence whether, which and for whom mechanisms ‘fire’: *the significant aspects of context cannot be identified without reference to mechanism.*
- ✓ Identify context
- ✓ Identify mechanism
- ✓ Identify outcome
- ✓ Identify interactions



My Processes

- ✓ Tape and transcribe interview/focus group
- ✓ Print, read and memo in margins –
outcomes, features of context, reasoning,
resources, program strategies, emerging
themes
- ✓ Begin synthesis: matrices



Matrix 1

Partic. Name	Mech/ OC	Behav OC (Evidence)	Context	Program Strategies
Jo C.	notes Q. p 14	notes	notes	notes
Fred D.	notes	notes Q. p 4	notes	notes
Chris G				



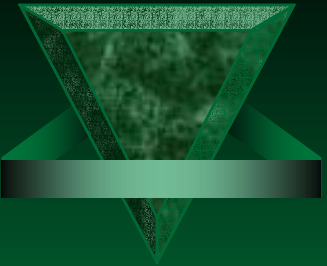
Synthesis

- ▼ Patterns / groups of outcomes (by respondent)
- ▼ Which mechanisms associated with which patterns of outcomes?
- ▼ Which contexts associated with those mechanisms? Which are not?
- ▼ Relationship to substantive theory
- ▼ Relationship to program theory



Analysing for mechanism

- ✓ Reasoning + Resources
- ✓ Resources:
 - material, financial, social, psychological, intellectual...
 - ‘new to the participant’
 - enabled or facilitated change
- ✓ Reasoning: attitudes, values, beliefs, ‘logic in use’
 - response to the program/initiative
 - changed as a result of the initiative



Restorative practice in schools: teacher ‘reasoning’

- ✔ belief in the possibility of change:

“because we believed it was going to make a change, ... when we were offered that support we jumped at it.” (A)

- ✔ the importance of removing blame:

“Something Helen came up with that sort of stuck in my mind was ‘name, blame, shame’, and I’m really mindful now that I don’t do that, and that other kids don’t do that.” (A)

- ✔ the importance of developing relationships:

“Because I only have each class for a short amount of time, like an hour a week, I’ve ... [been] thinking I can’t possibly build ... relationships with them... I’ve realised it’s more important to build relationships with them, ... you can’t with all of them but just with the serial offenders.” (A)



Restorative practice (cont)

- ✔ avoiding judgement:

“I think for me it’s highlighted each time an issue comes up, the stuff of ‘don’t judge’. You don’t know until you’ve actually heard, and even then, don’t judge, because it’s just two lots of experiences that are clashing with one another.” (B)

- ✔ the value of restorative approaches for ‘small things’:

I have a different picture, conferences are not the be all and end all ... A lot of the issues don’t have to get to that stage because children are actually understanding that there are ways restoring and of sorting out the problem there and then, which I think is the big thing for us in the classroom. (A)

- ✔ reduced stress for teachers:

I find with the questioning too, it’s settled me down. Because... you’re thinking ‘listen to them, now listen to that one, OK, what’s the next step in the process’, instead of getting a gut reaction, and verbalising that, and getting quite angry, ... knowing that certain questions have to be asked to try and help resolve the issue has made me a lot calmer in being able to deal with it.” (B)



Analysing for context

- ✓ Factors affecting:
 - whether mechanisms fire
 - which mechanisms fire,
 - for whom mechanisms fire
- ✓ In the program / organisation
- ✓ In the participants' lives
- ✓ Socially structured



Restorative practice – which students?

✓ Age/Stage of Development

- *“It’s a lot easier with older children. They’ve got the vocabulary, they’ve got the emotional intelligence to be able to say ‘how are you feeling’. ...”*
- *“You need to have empathy for this process to work and I think the empathy levels of children of, say 5 and 6, are quite different to those who are at the upper end of the school. And so ... some of it is developmental.*

✓ Moral Reasoning

- *“Kids with a conscience. Kids that can understand that there is a right and wrong and they’re used to knowing where that line is... Other kids, where it’s never been pointed out to them when they were younger that ‘that’s not right, you don’t do that’ - in other words, they really don’t have a conscience when they’ve done something to upset someone, or hurt someone – they’re the kids this doesn’t really work with...”*



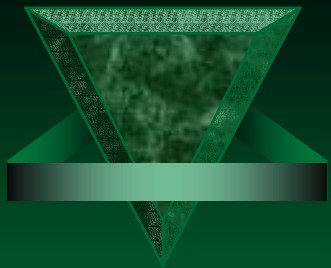
Analysing for interactions

- ✔ participants offer direct explanations
 - *“It made me see that I take too much on myself”*
 - *Whereas before I was stressing over everything ...but now, coming here, it’s like ...*
- ✔ co-location in the same sentence / paragraph
 - *...in the last couple of weeks I’ve actually got the courage to stand up to people and say, ‘Look, butt out, this is between me and her – no-one else – and if you don’t like it, tough luck’.*
- ✔ ‘referring back’
 - *“you know how I said...”*
- ✔ linguistic joiners
 - and, but, because, if, when...
 - *Because I had basically just collapsed in a heap, totally collapsed in a heap. My mum had to pick up the pieces. But now I’m starting to do the decisions that I need to do.*



Synthesis

- ✦ Those with a higher level of **self-awareness** and **reflective functioning** on commencement of the program, and/or a higher level of motivation (perhaps due to a perception of a ‘crisis point’) are enabled to make multiple changes in affect and reasoning, which combine to result in **positive outcomes for the parent as an individual, their parenting practice, the parent-child relationship and child behaviours**. The mechanisms at play (in terms of ‘reasoning’) are fundamental shifts in perception, that is, **changes to the ‘internal working model’ of the self and the child**. These also affect perceptions of broader social judgements of the parent and the child.



- ✓ Those with the cognitive capacity for reflective functioning but with lower levels of emotional or empathic capacity ‘learn the program content’ and are enabled to make some changes to parenting behaviours, which may in turn support some improvement to the parent-child relationship and/or child behaviours. However, the parent’s underlying issues are not addressed and the changes are therefore inconsistent and/or tenuous – they are more likely to ‘regress’ without the ongoing support of the group.



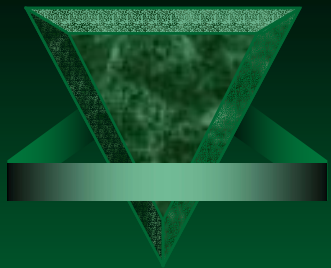
Issues in qualitative analysis

- ✓ The status of talk
 - does talk reflect people’s ‘real’ ideas or their social goals in particular interactions?
- ✓ The social construction of talk
 - discourses are socially constructed – how does/should that affect analysis of qualitative material?
- ✓ Circularity
 - did the participants ‘learn’ the program theory and are they reciting it back to you? If so, can participants’ talk be counted as ‘evidence’ about that theory?



A realist position on the status of talk

- ✓ The cognitive/psychological realm is ‘real’
- ✓ Human ‘reasons’ and reasoning can form a basis for actions in the world
- ✓ Participant talk *may* reflect ‘real’ attitudes, beliefs and reasons, which in turn may underpin action (and therefore demonstrate program mechanisms).
- ✓ **AND**



- ✔ The social world is real and structures the ways people talk
- ✔ Talk serves multiple social purposes
- ✔ Talk *may* reflect a respondents' purposes in the particular interaction (eg to present themselves or the program in a positive light)
- ✔ *Qualitative analysts have to make judgements about the trustworthiness of talk in relation to the particular purposes of the analysis (identifying CMO)*



Strategies for ‘status of talk’

- ✔ identify the ‘claims’ represented in the talk
- ✔ assess the ‘plausibility’ of the claim by tracking its internal logic;
- ✔ review the text for supporting evidence /a pattern of consistent claims;
- ✔ review the text for inconsistencies / absence of supporting evidence;
- ✔ search for other functions that the claim might fulfil;
- ✔ assess claims for consistency with theories underpinning the program;



Strategies for ‘status of talk’

- ✓ compare patterns of claims across respondents;
- ✓ if multiple interviews with the same respondent over time: track consistency, ‘logical development’ or ‘explainable change’ over time;
- ✓ if multiple sources of evidence deal with the same claim, make comparisons for similarities and differences;
- ✓ if multiple evaluators are involved, review similarities and differences of interpretation across evaluators.



Social construction of discourse

- ✔ what ‘texts’ are available to participants?
- ✔ did participants use different ‘texts’ before and after the program?
- ✔ texts can be socially structured and still influence beliefs and actions



Circularity

- ✓ the evidence that a concept learned in a program operated as a mechanism lies not in the participant's use of the concept in the interview, but in the link drawn between the concept (mechanism) and outcome (changed behaviour).



Examples from MLI

- ✦ “Cluster Coordinator **enthusiasm** was credited with building **staff motivation**, while the fact that they were seen as ‘**expert practitioners**’ and were **based in schools** was credited with increasing both their **accessibility** and their **credibility**. **Active involvement by senior leaders** in the school was seen both to **increase the priority** that teachers afforded to the project and to assist in overcoming tensions between staff who were and were not engaged in the project. Some professional development programs worked by **introducing and modelling practical strategies** that teachers could use in classrooms; others by **challenging** teachers to **reflect** on their own practice. (Final report p 155)



Exercise: identify resources & reasoning

- Group-based activities in schools increased the range of teaching strategies of which teachers were aware and provided peer support and accountability. Activity at the cluster level contributed ‘critical mass’ for ideas and peer support, provided exposure to different teaching and learning cultures than existed in teachers’ own schools, ensured that structured time was set aside for focussed reflection, analysis and planning, and provided a large enough group for some kinds of activities, such as cluster-based professional development workshops. Group based activities were also credited with reducing any sense of ‘teacher blaming’ (as might have resulted from strategies targeted to individual teachers).