

RESEARCH THAT MATTERS: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN THE SERVICE OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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The article summarizes the keynote address delivered at the 23rd Annual Ethnographic & Qualitative Research Conference. It is routine for qualitative researchers to “locate” themselves, sharing their history in relation to the settings/contexts, issues, vocabularies, identities, and other factors associated with their topic of inquiry. In this article, I explore how my ideas about qualitative methods shifted and expanded as I pursued a line of inquiry connected to transforming understandings of human abuse, exclusion and, conversely, inclusion and competence of people classified as disabled. My introduction to qualitative research came through the lens of examining the meaning of disability in society, although at the outset I could not fully anticipate the directions the method would lead, that it would afford both wide angle and macro views.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC POLICY ANALYSIS OF A MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL'S IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE-MANDATED UNIVERSAL COLLEGE PREPARATORY CURRICULA

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Although many states mandate college preparatory curricula for all high school students, there is no conclusive evidence regarding the benefits of this effort. Furthermore, we know little about how schools interpret and implement such policies. This extended ethnographic case study included a 4 year examination of 1 Michigan high school's response to a state policy mandating college preparatory curricula for all high school students. Using interviews with 10 administrators and 22 teachers, observations of 13 mathematics and 12 science classes, and various related documents, we examined how these school-based educators made sense of and implemented this policy. Data analysis was guided by Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory about the recursive relationship between structure and agency. Our findings reveal how administrators and teachers, in responding to the policy, created structures that unintentionally hurt the struggling students they were trying to help. We recommend additional resources to assist those responsible for implementing policy in public schools.

COPING CONSTRUCTS RELATED TO COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH CHRONIC PAIN

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This phenomenological, qualitative research study involved in-depth interviews with 22 participants enrolled in a private Midwestern university. Each participant reported living with a respective chronic pain syndrome while also being a full-time student. Our semi-structured, interviews centered around the constructs of physical, social, emotional, and existential coping. Students described utilizing a variety of coping mechanisms that represented four main themes: (a) ignoring and distraction attempts by students, (b) minimizing pain's debilitating effects, (c) advantageous comparisons, and (d) attempts to find meaning in their respective pain. First, students attempted either to ignore their pain or to distract themselves from their pain by utilizing a range of approaches, from intentionally participating in an activity, to denying feelings of pain. Second, students reported either physically or psychologically trying to minimize the adverse effects of their pain. Third, students compared themselves to others who they considered in a more arduous situation than themselves in order to ameliorate their present feelings about their painful circumstances. Last, students searched for potential meanings of their respective pain in order to help them psychologically process their dysphoria in terms of advancing existential life meanings.

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION STORIES

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The international adoption entrance story is an unexplored topic in the adoption literature. The stories that families tell of beginning life with their new children has important implications for the development of an autobiographical narrative of an adopted child. A coherent autobiographical narrative is vital for healthy childhood development. Family therapists interviewed adoptive families about their international adoption stories. In the study we report here, a qualitative narrative analysis revealed 5 salient themes from these interviews: a) loss and choice, b) emotion-based and logic-based processes, c) history and heritage, d) becoming a family and, e) accentuating the positive and eliminating the negative. The authors suggest further research to better understand families' international adoption narratives and the impact on the developmental trajectory of their children.
