Module 3: Phenomenology Design to Understand Reading Achievement for Students with Learning Disabilities

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Fidelity of my Design

Trustworthiness is a term that has been used across qualitative studies. Trustworthiness describes the degree to which the reviewer is convinced that a research study has captured a significant experience related to their study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Morrow, 2005). Methodological integrity is the foundation of trustworthiness. To achieve trustworthiness the researcher must have fidelity within their methodological foundation (William & Morrow, 2009). This section of my paper will investigate the components I used to create my design to study my phenomenon. I will deconstruct my design and analysis to ensure to the reviewer that my study was done with fidelity. I define fidelity as in intimate connection that researchers can obtain with the study of the phenomenon (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017). Janesick (2011) states that a researcher must be able to allow the reader to understand any bias, beliefs, and personal values that the researcher might have that can persuade the study. With this notion of transparency, as previously stated, my oncology is that everybody has their own interpretation of the world. In my thinking, it is not feasible to think that there is a traditional way that people interpret information to create their reality. Individuals create their own reality with experiences that they encounter. Those experiences dictate their reaction to the world. This was my thinking to design my study using a phenomenological design. Phenomenological design is the best approach to understand human experiences provided by the descriptions of the people involved.

According to Giorgi (2009) a main word in phenomenology research is *describe*. The research describes, as accurately as possible, the phenomenon, trying to remain true to the facts. The design interests include understanding social and psychological phenomenon from the perspective of the people involved. A researcher applying phenomenology should be concerned with understanding the lives and experiences of people with the issue being researched (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). There are several measures that create trustworthiness using phenomenology design (a) if the research problem requires an understanding of human experiences common to a group of people; (b) if the phenomenon being investigated is a common experience by individuals; (c) if the common human experiences is basically identical; and (d) this identical human experience can be expressed under the same label (Creswell et al., 2007; Patton, 2002). To further support trustworthiness, fidelity is improved when data is collected from diverse sources that can explain variations in the phenomenon being studied (Levitt et al. 2015). In believing that my phenomenon fits this criterion, I will move forward in discussing my design.

**Participants**

**School district.** A major component in my design is the school district and my participants. I need to closely monitor my relationships that I have with my former school district and the teachers. As a former school administrator, I have personal connections with the school district. Yet, there is a caveat to these connections. The prior school district that I worked in may see me as a former administrator and not a researcher. The school district may have their own ideas and suggestions for my research. They might suggest to me what teachers and what grade levels I need to have in my study. The school district may ask me to share individual responses or strategically ask me to add additional questions that align to their needs. The school district may ask my personal opinions on the teachers and use my response to validate their actions towards those teachers. I will try to circumvent this action by clearly stating to the school district my intentions and what I will and will not be willing to share. Having the opportunity to work in my previous school district, I may have to use any remaining political capital I still have, with individuals in the district, to allow me to conduct my research as a researcher. In the same breath, I must remember that I am a researcher and not school administrator. My perceived notions and bias must be addressed with every piece of data I collect. Details with addressing these perceived notions and bias will be discussed in this paper.

**Teachers.** When selecting my participants, I will use the notion that I want to select teachers who have personal experiences with the topic in my study (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). I need to ensure that I have diversity among my participants. Diversity pertaining to forms of diversity that are relevant across my phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For example, I need teachers that work with students with various disabilities, co-taught setting, and self-contained classrooms. To further increase fidelity, pertaining to diversity, I must also include participants in my studies that represent a range of grade levels, age, race, and experience. In grade levels, the culture in middle school differs from the culture of high school. If my participants are all selected in middle school, it would only provide me with a one-sided perspective of the experiences teacher encounter in secondary education. In my experience, there are several blaring differences with middle school and high school teachers (e.g., teaching schedules, attitudes towards students, parent involvement, etc.) I must consider age within my participants. Age may correlate to teaching experiences and maturity. Because I will have a hard time measuring experiences and maturity, I will attempt to attract teachers across a wide age range. For instance, A teacher who is young, right out of college, may interpret and respond to the questions differently compared to a teacher who has been out of college for a while or a career switcher. Taking race into consideration will allow me to obtain a broader understanding of the study because it might provide me with a deeper perspective of the issues. It is important to monitor gender in my participants. Being strategic with my participants helps to strengthen my results in the study.

To ensure that I have the right participants, I will incorporate a purposive sampling technique. This will ensure that my participants meet my criteria. The purpose of this technique is to allow me to base my decision using the best participants for my study. I must closely monitor who is involved in this study. The crux of my information is coming from my participants. I must select participants who can provide me with the experiences I need to understand my study. I will review my criteria with a colleague to ensure I attract the right participants for the study. When selecting my participants, I must closely monitor my bias and select participants who will provide me with responses to help me understand my study. For instance, I’m cautious not to select participants with who I have been their prior supervisor. They may be reluctant to provide me with information that will help me understand my study. They made provide me with information that they think I might want to hear, which will lack truthfulness, in their response. To sidestep this dilemma, I will review all participants that meet my criteria with a colleague and we will come to an agreement of the participants selected to participate in the study.

**Teacher recruitment.** Initially, I plan to send out emails to secondary teachers who teach students with LD. I need to be more strategic with this action. I will solicit teachers who I have a relationship with to help me create an email that may seem appealing to teachers. In my email, I will include a monetary amount of 50 dollars to each participant. Once I have my email crafted, I need to work with the school district to send the email to teachers. Strategically, if the school allows, I would like to go to a meeting and explain my research to the teachers. The school district that I have in mind has one high school and two middle schools. This is where I see myself scrapping together any political capital I have left to accomplish this goal. Once I send my email out and receive willing participants, I will briefly interview (phone or person) each participant to ensure they meet my criteria. I will obtain informed consent forms from each participant that meets my criteria for my study (Dillman et al., 2014). If I am not able to find 10 participants in my study, I will use a snowball sampling technique with the participants who met my criteria (Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2012).

**Data Collection**

Fidelity is improved when data is collected from a variety of sources. Data is gathered to provide a clear and vivid trail of the phenomenon that is being studied (Creswell, 2014). Data can be compiled with interviews, documentation of events, videos, researcher observation, artifacts, or researcher’s reflection (Janesick, 2011). Ensuring fidelity with data collection will ensure to the reviewers of my study that the data is trustworthy. As the researcher, I must recognize and be transparent about the influence of my perspective upon data collection and try to limit that influence to obtain a clear understanding of the phenomenon (Dillman et al., 2014). I will use the technique called bracketing, which will aid me with my preconceived notions that may interfere with my data collection (Giorgi, 2009). Additionally, I will implement reflective journaling to help me identify my assumptions that may influence my data. The data collection method should be aligned with characteristics of my participants to enhance fidelity for the study (Gilligan, 2015). There are three main methods I will use to collect my data.

**Interview process**

Interview strategies to ensure fidelity includes seeking a wide range of questions, using nonleading language when asking questions, using open-ended questions, and closely following the interviewee (Creswell et al., 2007). The interview questions will be open-ended questions with semi-structured (face-to-face) interviewing to collect my data. It is important to have open-ended questions because this will permit me to capture individual’s feelings, emotions, and interpretation of the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The semi-structured questions will give me the flexibility to change the level of deepness, with the conversation, of my questions to gain a deeper perspective of an individual’s thinking and feeling (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

I must remind myself that there is no magic number of interviews (Morrow, 2005). In any event, interviews are just a strategy of collecting point information that will be needed for the analysis of the study of my phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Janesick, 2011). Interviews will allow me to establish a rapport with my participants. All interviews will be audio recorded. In the beginning of the interview, I will attempt to build a rapport before the interview. In the interview, I will be cognizant of my participants body language including facial expressions, fidgeting with their hands, and movement in their seat. I will use member checking throughout the interview process to make sure I am capturing the interviewee response. Additionally, as soon as possible, after each interview, I will listen to the recorded interview and make notes. Within my notes, I will look for keywords, phrases, and statements that allow the voices of the participants to be heard (Patton, 2002). My participants will receive a copy of the interview to authenticate what I captured is accurate with their experiences. Also, I will ask a colleague to listen to the recording and make their own notes. I will compare my keywords, phrases, and statements captured with my colleague.

**Focus Groups**

Participants are selected on the criteria that they have something to say about the phenomenon. Focus groups allow me to obtain information about a range of ideas and feelings that individuals have about the phenomenon (Rabiee, 2004). The criteria of my focus group must (a) use homogeneous teachers as participants; (b) rely on a structured interview with facilitator involvement; (c) have 6 to 10 teachers participants per group; and, (d) have a total of one to two. (Levitt et sl., 2017). The focus groups will have a group facilitator and an outside individual, not associated with the school, taking notes. All sessions in the focus group will be recorded. After each focus group, I will discuss with the individual taking notes what big themes came across during the session. I will look to see if these big things arise when I analyze the transcription.

**Field Notes**

The field notes in my design is crucial in me retaining the information that I am gathering. I will use my field notes after every interview, focus group, and to support general thoughts or ideas during the process of collecting my data. Some questions I will ask myself to dissuade my bias in my field notes are, what happened and who is involved? What was the feeling the participant displayed? Who was involved that created the experience for the participant (Creswell, 2013)? With my field notes, it is important that I prevent my interpretation of data from being categorized or my personal bias about the experiences teachers are having in the classroom.

All the strategies that I select to ensure trustworthiness in my design may be influenced by my values, questions, and methods. I should not engage in data collection seeking to confirm my bias but instead strive to understand the perspectives and experiences of my participants. To manage my bias within my design, I am using triangulation in collecting my data. In this study, triangulation of the interviews, focus groups, and field notes are used to establish a chain of evidence and identifying patterns and themes. The multiple sources of data will allow me to translate the data from the study. Creswell (2009) states that triangulation allows the researcher to process the evidence collected from different individuals, types of data, or other methods of data collection. This encourages the researcher to develop data, for a study, that is accurate and credible.

**Fidelity of analysis**

Fidelity is increased within my analysis when I consider how my perspective influences or guides my analysis. I need to be mindful of how my perspective can influence my approach of analyzing my data. To manage my own perspective and preserve fidelity in my study, I will implement two strategies purposed by Kidd and Kral (2005). First, limit the effects of my prior knowledge and theories with my analysis by developing self-awareness and challenging my prior notions. This approach allows me to better draw an understanding that is presented from my data and not from my own personal perspective. Second, I will use a theoretical framework as the vehicle for my analysis to analyze data. For instance, by using critical constructivism it allows me to observe and develop my data through a lens that identifies areas of marginalization and inaccessible access to participants (Gilligan, 2015; Giorgi, 2009).

The data I collect and analyze will come from interviewing, focus groups, and my field notes. To gather data from my interviews, I will use the technique of textual and structural analysis. Textual analysis refers to the description of *what* is expressed by the participants. Structural analysis states *how* it is expressed by the participants (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). Data from my focus group will be categorized by the framework purposed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) as my analytical process to identify themes within my groups. The stages involve familiarization, identify thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation. To better categorize my data, I will use an independent coder. I will dialogue with my participants to provide clarity with analyzing my data. For instance, I will talk to participants when I am shaping my results to sharpen my understanding of the phenomenon being study (Morrow, 2005). Finally, in the event, if the data presented does not appear to support any findings, I must consider if it was my data source or my participants were not able to provide any insight (Gilligan, 2015). In that case, I will revisit my design.

**Limitations**

A limitation in this design is finding a diversity of participants who experienced this phenomenon in the classroom. For example, with their only being one high school and two middle schools in the district, this may limit the range of participants that I get to participate in the study. Additionally, if the characteristics of the participants are similar this can place an additional limitation on the possibility of generalizing the findings of my study. Although diversity among my participants is ideal, it may never be fully achieved in the study. This could affect my study in understanding the experiences teachers have with my phenomenon being studied. With limited time this can impact the opportunity to build trust with my participants during the interviews and focus groups. Specifically, with my participants, trust can be a restrictive factor, especially when participants are sharing confidential information. In this study, I only focus on the teachers as my participants. This study does not look at the perceptions of school administrators, parents, and central office personnel. The findings that will be produced from this study are from a suburban school system. It is not clear if the same finding will be found in an urban or rural school.

Jason – good work on this paper – at this stage – there are specific concerns your committee will bring to the table about quality – including ethics and other areas they might seek out –but overall –for this paper –you have done a great job putting it all together and making a authentic effort at speaking to how the reader will trust your work.

I really enjoyed working with you this semester and wish you the best as you continue this journey!   
Dr. B

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