Qualitative Research in Rehabilitation Counseling

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Qualitative research approaches offer rehabilitation scholars and practitioners avenues into understanding the lives and experiences of people with disabilities and those people and systems with whom they interact. The methods used often parallel those used in counseling and appear to be well matched with the field of rehabilitation counseling. Despite this, qualitative research is still rarely present in *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin* (RCB) and other counseling-related journals. Thus, acquainting/reacquainting rehabilitation researchers and practitioners with qualitative research seems appropriate. This article presents an overview of qualitative research, including a discussion of common components and processes and two designs commonly used in RCB—case study and grounded theory. Research previously published in RCB is used to illustrate various aspects of the discussion. The article ends with a discussion of current qualitative research perspectives and how these perspectives challenge rehabilitation scholars to consider new directions.

Qualitative research is a rich source of information for people interested in disability, issues related to disability, and counseling in general. Based on extensive histories, various qualitative methods have been used to study a range of disability-related issues (e.g., counseling practices, perceptions of stress, returning to work) in many fields of study (e.g., education, nursing, psychology, rehabilitation, social work). This work has been published in a variety of journals (e.g., *Brain Injury, Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, Vocational Rehabilitation)* and books and, to a much lesser extent, in *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin* (RCB).

Berríos and Lucca (2006) described the connection between qualitative research and counseling professions as natural. According to these authors, qualitative researchers and counselors use similar methods (e.g., observing, interviewing, listening, interpreting) to learn people's life stories, understanding that people's experiences are the source of meaning in these stories. These stories are often unpredictable and may be different than expected. Ambiguity is accepted. Therefore, counselors and qualitative researchers must be attuned to the processes they use and the obvious and hidden content they discover. It would appear that qualitative research approaches, especially those such as case studies, narratives, and life histories, would fit well with the practices of counselors. However, Berríos and Lucca revealed that despite this fit, qualitative research is still scarce in counseling-related publications. In fact, their review of four counseling journals between 1997 and 2002 revealed that only 98 out of 593, or 17%, of the studies published in these journals were qualitative.

Although not included in the journals Berríos and Lucca (2006) examined, these results are similar for RCB. RCB has published qualitative studies for more than 30 years. Despite this fact, an electronic database search of RCB for the past 30 years, using such terms as *qualitative, case, case study, descriptive, ethnography,* and *grounded theory*, yielded only 23 studies with varying use of qualitative research designs or related methods. The absence of this research approach in work published in RCB was previously noted by two different authors as they have advocated for its increased use.

In her 1993 RCB editorial on research design, Szymanski alerted the RCB readership that qualitative research should be considered as a valuable contributor to

rehabilitation research. She emphasized that because qualitative research approaches gave value to subjective realities, these approaches give the means to create or modify theory and to better understand the lives of the people who are the focus of the research (Szymanski, 1993).

The following year, Hagner and Helm (1994) formally introduced the RCB readership to qualitative approaches to rehabilitation research. They felt that rehabilitation research needed to give increased attention to "research that (a) has direct relevance to field settings and practitioner issues . . . ; (b) examines individual participants in depth and over time . . . ; (c) involves people with disabilities as active collaborators . . . ; and (d) looks holistically at personal, environmental, and systems variables . . ." (p. 293). Hagner and Helm saw qualitative approaches to research as viable means to address these issues.

Today, there is no reason to believe that rehabilitation researchers should not continue to focus on issues relevant to practitioners, seek to better understand the lives of people with disabilities, or collaboratively involve people with disabilities in the research process. Thus, the points made by Hagner and Helm (1994) remain relevant, and rehabilitation researchers should continue to consider qualitative approaches as appropriate investigative tools. However, qualitative research has changed substantially since 1994. In fact, Denzin and Lincoln (2005e), authors in and editors of *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research,* characterized the changes in qualitative research since 1991 as "quantum leaps" (p. xi). Thus, it is appropriate to revisit qualitative research at this time and to once again consider how qualitative designs can contribute to the knowledge base of the field of rehabilitation and the lives of rehabilitation counselors, people with disabilities, and the families and communities of people with disabilities.

Unfortunately, as Hagner and Helm (1994) state: "Qualitative methodologies . . . are less well understood than are quantitative methodologies, and qualitative research is sometimes viewed as more mysterious or less 'scientific' than is quantitative research" (p. 290). Although not indicative of devaluing qualitative research, the relatively small number of qualitative research studies in RCB may indicate a general unease with the acceptability of qualitative approaches to research. If qualitative research is to become more accepted and valued within the rehabilitation research community, it is important that rehabilitation researchers understand the basics of qualitative research and how those basics have been used in previous rehabilitation research. Thus, the purpose of this article is to provide the RCB readership with a general overview of qualitative research and its use in previous RCB publications. To that end, we provide an overview of qualitative research; qualitative research designs; common components of qualitative research; and two commonly used approaches to qualitative research, using studies previously published in RCB as examples or discussion points.

Qualitative Research Overview

In general, qualitative research is an inductive process by which the researcher allows data interpretations to evolve and reveal patterns before, during, and after the data collection process. This approach emphasizes the perspective of the participants in the research project itself (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003), giving voice to the multiple realities that exist in their environments and within their cultures.

More specifically, Denzin and Lincoln (2005a) described qualitative research as a multimethod approach to studying phenomena in natural settings and making sense of, or interpreting the meanings people bring to, the events, people, things, and so on that are being studied. Given this complexity, it is important to note that the term *qualitative research* does not equate to a particular design or method. Instead, it represents a variety of paradigms and perspectives and includes many designs and methods. In fact, Cheek (2005) noted that qualitative research is more a way of "thinking [than] a method" (p. 391).

Current qualitative research reflects several major paradigms and perspectives: postpositivism, constructivism, feminism, ethnic, Marxism, cultural studies, and queer theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). Each of these paradigms represents beliefs about the nature of reality or knowledge and the possibility of finding truth. In turn, each of these paradigms influences the approaches researchers choose and the research methods they use (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Because of the profound influence of these paradigms, it is important to understand the basis of each one.

Postpositivist paradigms are a response to positivist paradigms. Both paradigms are based on the belief that reality is external and objective. Whereas positivists believe that through using the scientific method "true" knowledge can be eventually discovered and described, postpositivists acknowledge that research methods are imperfect. Thus, knowledge is made up of probable facts and must be subject to constant revision. Researchers operating within a positivist or postpositivist paradigm strive to be neutral/objective; use experimental, quasiexperimental, or survey designs; and use easily replicable, meticulously defined procedures. Positivist and postpositivist products usually take the form of scientific reports. Although most research based in the positivist paradigm is quantitative in nature, qualitative research can be framed within this paradigm as well. However, it is more likely that qualitative research studies within these beliefs systems will be grounded within the postpositivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a).

Constructivist paradigms stress the existence of varying standards for truth claims and justification of knowledge, reflecting the belief that "knowledge" is the result of how the "knower" constructs reality from his or her experiences and perceptions. These approaches, including case study and ethnographies, use naturalistic methods in which the researcher and the participants co-create the meanings of the participants' experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a).

The remaining paradigms—feminist, ethnic, Marxist, cultural studies, and queer theory—focus on how the real world historically interacts with race, class, and gender to produce material differences. The products produced are reflexive and multivoiced and include essays, dramas, sociocultural analyses, cultural theory as criticisms, and autobiographies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a).

The enactment of these paradigms and perspectives results in a variety of designs, which include criteria, assumptions, and methods particular to the approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005c). Thus, qualitative research reflects a collection of designs and methods.

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research designs place the researcher within the context of the problem or experiences being investigated. Broadly described, the design includes the research question(s), purpose(s) of the study, and guidelines for connecting the theoretical paradigms to the strategies of inquiry. The design also includes, within the research methods, identification of the focus of the research, description of the data collection methods and tools, discussion of the analytic methods/processes, and description of the methods used to address representation and legitimization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a).

Qualitative research designs span a continuum that on one end has evolving, minimally structured approaches and on the other has meticulously designed and described approaches. The more "preplanned" a researcher is, the closer his or her approach comes to the positivist/postpositivist paradigm. Usually, a researcher who emphasizes developing the research questions early in the research process; uses hypotheses; and specifies the research site, sampling procedures, and data collection and analysis procedures prior to entering the field reflects a positivist/postpositivist orientation that is not found in other qualitative designs. Most qualitative designs reflect flexibility in all phases of the research process. Although many qualitative researchers will develop a general plan for their research procedures, these procedures will change once the researcher has entered the field. This change reflects the realities of the field and the growing knowledge of the researcher. As a result, qualitative research designs usually include both flexibility and planning, following discovery-oriented paths (Janesick, 1994).

Common Components and Processes

Qualitative researchers use a variety of overlapping methods of "generating and representing empirical materials" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005d, p. 641). As a result, qualitative research designs are not defined by their methodologic components and processes. Instead, many methodologic components are found in a variety of designs. In this section we provide an overview of some of the common methodologic components and processes: qualitative research questions, sampling, researcher role, data collection, data analysis, and results.

Research Questions

Wolcott (as cited in Morse, 1994) identifies three foundational stances of qualitative research: theory focused, concept focused, and problem focused. Whereas theory-focused research targets the development of a new theory or the alteration of existing theories (e.g., career development theories), concept-focused research investigates and describes concepts (e.g., the "real" roles of rehabilitation counselors; Morse, 1994). In theory-focused and concept-focused research, researchers seek to understand and reconstruct phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Concept and theory questions often reflect positivist, postpositivist, and constructivist paradigms.

Problem-focused research is used to create the awareness needed to spark change (Morse, 1994) and usually reflects the feminist, ethnic, Marxist, cultural studies, and queer theory paradigms along with some constructivist paradigms. Problem-based research is often depicted as giving voice to those individuals and groups who previously have not been heard. In these cases, researchers use critical theory to critique and confront a variety of factors (e.g., political, cultural, economic, gender) that "constrain and exploit" people (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113), focusing on how power and oppression affect people's lives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Furthermore, problem-focused research is used to understand how challenging dominance results in deeper insights into the process and experiences of the powerless (Kincheloe & McLaren). One potentially problematic area in problem-focused research is the ability of qualitative researchers to accurately capture the lives or experiences of the persons whom they are researching. Some authors have argued that the researcher's mediation of the experiences of others causes a representational crisis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a) in that such attempts "[provide] the foundation for reports about and representations of '*the Other*' [emphasis

added]" (p. 1). Thus, accurate reflection or interpretation of the lives and experiences is another form of power and, as a result, is politically and ethically charged.

The types of research questions asked evolve from the three previously identified stances. Research questions include, but are not limited to, questions of meaning and descriptions (Morse, 1994). Research based on questions of meaning focus on understanding others' experiences (Morse, 1994). For example, Conyers, Koch, and Szymanski (1998) sought to understand what work means in the lives of people with disabilities.

Researchers interested in description ask questions that address values, beliefs, and practices of a group; ask questions that address processes or experiences that occur over time; or ask both kinds of questions (Morse, 1994). In one example of description-focused research, Gilbride, Stensrud, Vandergoot, and Golden (2003) sought to understand values, beliefs, and practices of employers open to the inclusion of people with disabilities. In another example, Koch, Egbert, Coeling, and Ayers (2005) sought to describe processes or experiences that occurred over time as they sought to find the answers to this question: "What challenges are encountered by right hemisphere stroke survivors as they attempt to integrate back into their communities?"

Questions of meaning and description combine to address description and analyses of verbal interactions and behavior (Morse, 1994). Examples of questions that address both meaning and description include "What are the types of verbal interactions that rehabilitation counselors have with their clients?" and "How do the social behaviors of adults with disabilities in supported employment settings differ from those of individuals in sheltered work settings?"

Frequently, qualitative researchers pose their initial research question(s) prior to beginning the study and use them to guide in the design and implementation of their studies. In some forms of qualitative research, however, questions emerge from the field after the researcher has immersed herself or himself in what is to be studied. In both cases, qualitative researchers do not ask directional or causal questions because they are not attempting to test hypotheses or make causal assertions. Instead, the research questions are used to guide the reflexive processes, resulting in the intertwining of the research questions and the research participants. If ongoing analyses reveal that the questions are not adequate in addressing the phenomenon under study (e.g., too broad, wrong aspect), the research questions may change across the course of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a; Morse, 1994).

Sampling

Who or what is studied in qualitative research focuses on cases, instances of phenomena, or instances of social processes. According to Maxwell (1996), there are four goals commonly reflected in qualitative sample selection: (a) select a sample representative of the population to ensure typicality, (b) select the unique/nontypical to ensure maximal heterogeneity, (c) select the extremes to support or challenge theories, or (d) select a variety to allow for comparisons. The particular goal is determined by the research design and paradigms selected by the researcher and the research questions. These goals can be met by using one or more of Patton's (1990) 16 sampling methods. These include selecting instances/cases that are (1) extreme or deviant, (2) deep enough to be good sources of information, (3) typical, (4) critical, (5) politically important, (6) convenient, or (7) opportunistic. Sampling also could be conducted to assure (8) maximum variation or (9) minimum variation or could include (10) cases/instances suggested by other participants or nominated by knowledgeable people (snowball or chain). Finally, instances/cases may also be selected because they (11) meet a specific criteria, (12) manifest a particular theoretical or operational construct, (13) provide confirming or disconfirming evidence, (14) reflect stratification related to particular subgroups of interest, (15) reflect a combination or mix of characteristics, or (16) are randomly selected cases within large samples.

In the first stage of research, sample selection is based largely on the researcher's purpose, research questions, and theoretical orientations. In later phases of the research process, the researcher generally engages in discriminate sampling with the objective of locating data that confirm or disconfirm the relationships among the generated categories and, if grounded theory is the research design, the theory as a whole. Later phases of sampling usually include selecting negative instances or cases (Stake, 2005). Discussing the twofold nature of this approach, Mason notes, "The aim is to produce, through sampling, a relevant range of contexts or phenomena, which will enable you to make strategic and possible cross-contextual comparisons, and hence build a well-founded argument" (2002, p. 122).

Cultural studies ethnographers are more interested in identifying and describing common social experiences or processes. They focus their work on intensive analyses of the experiences or processes they select. As a result, the particular case is less important, and there is no effort to find negative cases or make generalizations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b).

Researcher Role

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. One of the benefits of this strategy of data collection and analysis is that the researcher can be sensitive to responding and adapting to events and people in the field (Merriam, 1998). Unfortunately, the way in which the researcher collects, interprets, and represents the participants' perspectives

can pose problems (Glesne, 1999). Researchers' prior knowledge, experiences, assumptions, and expectations can influence what they see and hear, both heightening and diminishing their openness to phenomena, people, or events under study (Bean, 2006). Therefore, qualitative researchers must continually reflect on their involvement in the research process and how this involvement affects the outcomes and products. This reflection, called *reflexivity,* encompasses two aspects: (a) being aware of and reflecting on how the researcher's beliefs, experiences, and so on affect the research process and (b) reflecting on how the research process affects the outcomes. Attention to reflexivity is particularly important because researcher assumptions and world views shape everything in the research process, from research questions to data collection and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a).

Reflexivity requires that the perspectives of both the researcher and the participants be represented in the text products of the research. The text must include the descriptions of what the researcher has learned and how the researcher learned it. This ensures that all points of view are represented. Elements of how researchers can ensure they attend to reflexivity can be found in Toma's (2006) discussion of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Toma stated that including a full description of the research design enhances trustworthiness. More specifically, he said that the description of the research should include

> (a) researcher self-reflection toward articulating biases; (b) concrete strategies for confronting biases in collecting and analyzing data; (c) steps for addressing ethical concerns in qualitative research; and (d) commitment to challenging one's own interpretations, including a search for alternative explanations and negative instances. (Toma, p. 416)

It follows that the reflexive researcher will identify her or his assumptions, experiences, and biases along with the biases and assumptions represented by the selected research methods. He or she must then develop strategies to confront these influences while collecting and analyzing data and reporting the findings or identify these factors as important aspects of the process.

Data Collection

Qualitative data come from three primary sources: observations; interviews; and permanent products, including documents such as photos, artistic works, and the like (Patton, 2002). They are collected through many activities: textual analyses; open-ended survey questions; individual interviews; focus groups; review of documents, products, and the like; observation; and the creation of graphic representations and other preliminary analyses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a; Janesick, 1994; Morse, 1994). Observing, taking field notes, interviewing, and reviewing records are four common data collection activities. In this section, we specifically address each of these.

Observing. Direct observations can give richness and context to the qualitative study. Observation types fall on a continuum that reflects the interaction between the researcher and the research participants. On the true observation end of the spectrum, the observer has little or no interaction with the participant. Moving along the continuum is the observer as participant–researcher in which the observer is mostly removed from the participants, with the exception of minor interactions. Participant-as-observer and full-participant categories place each researcher role further along on the continuum toward full participation. Being a participant–observer can lead to an overall "feel" for the site, increase the researcher's rapport with participants, and give the researcher a unique opportunity to interact with participants (Glesne, 1999). Wolcott (as cited in Glesne) recommended that all observers use the following strategies: "(a) observations in a broad sweep, (b) observations of nothing in particular, (c) observations that search for paradoxes, and (d) observations that search for problems facing the group" (p. 49). Observations should also make note of how the participants interact with the setting (Glesne, 1999).

Taking Field Notes. Observation strategies also include the creation of detailed field notes. Observation of the field begins with making notes of the setting and surrounding environment, describing the setting in words and sketches (Glesne, 1999). These field notes also include descriptions of activities, events, and issues. They should be taken daily using symbols, shorthand, and mnemonics to help facilitate the completeness of the notes, and they should be organized into memos, interim reports, and so on (Fetterman, 1989). Field notes can also be used while conducting interviews or focus groups in the field. In fact, Fontana and Frey (2005) recommended that interviewers take notes regardless of whether the researcher uses audio or video recording devices. These notes should be as comprehensive as possible, but they should not be intrusive to the participants. Finally, notes should be reviewed frequently (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Interviewing. Interviewing is the researcher's way of probing deeply into the mind of a key informant or informants. The interview serves to help the informant describe experiences in her or his words. The general types of interviews range from structured to unstructured (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Structured and semistructured interviews may use a questionnaire format, or as Merriam (1998) characterizes them, "oral surveys" (p. 74). Unstructured or informal interviews have been described as ongoing casual conversations (Fetterman, 1989) and could include oral histories (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Interviews

can take the form of individual interviews or group interviews, often referred to as focus groups. Group interviews can also include brainstorming, nominal/Delphi, natural field, and formal field groups. The setting, interviewer's role, question format, and purpose vary based on the structure of the interview or group (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Most of the qualitative studies published in RCB relied on individual interviews or focus groups as the main source of data collection. For example, Bergland and Thomas (1991), Buys and Rennie (2001), Conyers et al. (1998), Fesko (2001), Gilbride et al., (2003), and Koch et al. (2005) used semistructured interviews to obtain their data. In all these studies, the researchers used (a) open-ended questions and probes for understanding and (b) expansion in individual interviews to explore a variety of topics: from psychosocial issues following severe head injury in adolescence (Bergland & Thomas, 1991) and personal experiences of individuals who were human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) positive or who had cancer and continued to work (Fesko, 2001), to developing relationships between rehabilitation agencies and employers (Buys & Rennie, 2001). Iwasaki and Mactavish (2005), Gilbride et al. (2003), and Conyers (2004) used the same approach within the context of focus groups to examine stress in the lives of people with disabilities, characteristics of employers and settings open to inclusion of people with disabilities, and the relationships between having HIV or acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and employment. (Gilbride et al. used both individual interviews and focus groups.) Finally, McCarthy (2003) and Habeck, Scully, VanTol, and Hunt (1998) used structured interview formats to learn about the effect of the disability rights movement on the lives of prominent people with disabilities and successful strategies for presenting and managing disability.

Interviews do not always have to occur in a face-to-face format. Questionnaires can be a variation of an interview. Questionnaires that use open-ended questions can elicit similar information obtained from person-to-person interviews. McCarthy and Leierer's (2001) study of consumer concepts of the ideal characteristics and minimal qualifications of rehabilitation counselors is an example of this. The researchers constructed a mail questionnaire composed of semistructured and structured sections. In the first part, the semistructured section, former clients of rehabilitation counseling were asked to write descriptions of "ideal" and minimally qualified rehabilitation counselors. The structured section consisted of a brief demographic survey, and four evaluative questions related to the impact on the life of the individual of services provided by a rehabilitation counselor. Majumder and Walls (1994); Flowers, Strong, Turner, Moore, and Edwards (1998); Koch (2001); and Hein, Lustig, and Uruk (2005) also used the survey method to obtain their data. Each study included one or more open-ended questions along with demographics data to address topics that ranged from Koch's survey of client expectations for vocational rehabilitation services to Majumder and Walls's investigation about the flow of information in rehabilitation counseling.

Reviewing Permanent Products. Data collection also commonly includes review of documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts, such as art and photographs (Yin, 2003). These can include, but are not limited to, personal journals, internal memos, policy manuals, correspondence between the counselor and client, or agendas from meetings. Archival records are useful for confirming or disconfirming evidence derived from observations and interviews. For example, Bergland and Thomas's (1991) study included reviewing the medical files of the adolescents they interviewed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is an interactive, ongoing process in which data collection and analysis influence each other. As data are collected, they are analyzed. The researcher creates an ever-evolving field text that incorporates field notes and analysis documents. This evolving field text reveals emerging patterns or further questions that need exploration and subsequent data collection changes to reflect these new needs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a; Janesick, 1994). Thus, data analysis is an artistic and political process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a), one in which the researcher decides what to pursue and what to abandon in data collection. Data collection continues until existing codes or themes account for all variation in the data and no new information is being collected (Miller, 1995). Theoretical or other templates may be used to structure data analysis in some studies. However, final analyses reflect the unique voices and experiences of the participants. Because data analysis is inductive rather than deductive, general statements result from the emerging themes and come at the end of the research (Hagner & Helm, 1994).

Qualitative data analysis includes data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing, and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As he or she reviews the data, the researcher looks for patterns by using many methods, including the frequently used techniques of interrater dialogue, debriefing, creation of pictorial representations, and memo writing. Computer programs designed for qualitative analyses can aid in the analysis processes. Regardless of which tools are used, the qualitative researcher considers her or his findings within the context of the evaluative criteria established for the researcher's operating paradigm. These criteria range from internal and external validity to caring, reflexivity, accountability, and emancipatory implications (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). In this section we provide an overview

of data analysis in general, a discussion of memo writing, and an overview of common evaluative criteria.

Data Reduction, Data Display, Conclusion Drawing, and Verification. Miles and Huberman (1994) described the steps of data analysis as data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Although other authors have described the analytic steps and their order differently, all authors agree that the first step is data organization and reduction. Because qualitative data often include information that is not related to the investigation, one of the initial steps in data reduction is to identify which data are relevant to the project's focus. Relevant data are then organized; initial analytic categories, themes, and patterns are identified; and data are often coded (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Through the process of initial analysis, concepts will be identified and the number of concepts will grow. When concepts begin to accumulate, the researcher begins the process of grouping them under categories. Formation of these categories usually involves terms that are more abstract and explanatory than the terms used in identifying the original concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), this step is intended to develop the structure that will allow the researcher to begin to discern patterns, identify potential interrelationships, identify higher-order categories or themes, and begin the process of drawing conclusions. Previously fractured data are rearranged in new ways by grouping particular interrelated labels, or concepts, into categories and by making connections between a category and its subcategories (Glaser, 1998). This process often includes the development of flow charts and other graphic displays that attempt to show the emerging patterns and connections (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Miles and Huberman (1994) described the third and fourth parts of analysis as conclusion drawing and verification. Conclusion drawing involves considering the larger meanings and implications of the data, especially as they relate to the purpose of the study. This is the process of theory building or constructing the case/story and involves the generation of comprehensive constructs, or categories, that subsume a mass of particular sets of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After conclusions are drawn, verification occurs. Verification requires the researcher to "test" emerging conclusions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This is done by revisiting the data to search for alternative explanations (Marshall & Rossman), searching for multiple sources or modes of evidence, following up on surprising connections, and so on (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The steps in the analytic process are not linear, meaning the researcher does not move from one step to another in a strict, consecutive manner. Instead, all operations blur and intertwine from the beginning of the investigation until near its end. These processes also include constantly asking questions about the data, themes, conclusions, and so on and constantly comparing new data and interpretations with other data or interpretations (Glaser, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In comparing incident to incident and incident to concepts, and in asking questions, concept generation becomes a meaning-making activity (Glaser, 1998).

Memo Writing. Data analysis usually includes memo writing throughout the research process. In memo writing, the researcher writes down thoughts, interpretations, and hypotheses about field observations and emerging categories, themes, generalizations, and theory. Strauss and Corbin (1998) pointed out that there are no incorrect or poor memos. Instead, memos develop in complexity, density, intelligibility, and accuracy as the research progresses. Memo writing helps the researcher become more connected to the data and open to the possibilities of seeing the data from different angles, leading to the refinement of the emerging categories, themes, generalizations, and theory (Charmaz, 2000).

Adequacy Criteria. Although the criteria used to evaluate the adequacy of the research vary with design, triangulation is often cited as the primary source for securing a deep understanding of the focus of the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005a) stated,

> Triangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation. The combination of multiple methodologic practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry. (p. 5)

Other quality criteria vary by research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Based in logical–deductive or grounded theories, the research designs grounded in positivist and postpositivist paradigms use internal and external validity, reliability, objectivity, and generalizability as their evaluative criteria. Constructivist researchers reject the concepts of internal and external validity, reliability, and generalizability (as controlled by the researcher) and replace them with attention to the concepts of authenticity (Toma, 2006), credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). Much of the research published in RCB reflects constructivist paradigms; therefore, we provide more detail about each of these concepts in the following sections.

Credibility and Authenticity. Credibility and authenticity refer to ensuring that the interpretations of the researcher are "real" to the participants or that they reflect the perspectives of participants and not those of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Toma, 2006). Techniques used to enhance credibility include theoretical saturation (continued sampling until no new themes

emerge), persistent observation, peer debriefing, prolonged field engagement, member checks, and negative case analysis (Janesick, 1994; Morse, 1994).

Transferability. The constructivist researcher provides thick description in an effort to assist readers in understanding the people and contexts from which the results have emerged. Through thick description, readers can identify similarities or differences that may make the results more or less applicable to their or other situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a; Morse, 1994).

Confirmability. Finally, constructivists concern themselves with confirmability or the ability of the researcher to assure that the interpretation has emerged from the data and not been imposed on the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). Researchers concerned with confirmability use an audit trail to review the evolution of their interpretations and their justifications for those interpretations. The audit trail includes information from the researcher's field diary, written field notes, analysis memos, process and personal notes, and the like (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

By attending to these concepts, constructivists reject objectivity based on the fact that these researchers believe that reality is "relative and locally situated" (Toma, 2006, p. 408). Furthermore, they, along with critical theorists, also believe that they co-create meaning with their participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Thus, objectivity is not applicable to studies based on constructivist or critical paradigms.

Finally, researchers who work within feminist, ethnic, Marxist, cultural studies, and queer theory paradigms use different accountability criteria. They seek to produce work that is "evaluated in terms of [its] emancipatory implications" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 25). Thus, criteria used to judge work within these paradigms include passion, feeling, caring, discourse, and "personal accountability" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 25).

Regardless of the paradigm within which the researcher operates, readers need to be able to determine if the study's design is adequate enough to answer the research question(s) (Bean, 2006). Furthermore, Mason (as cited in Toma, 2006) stated that at a minimum, qualitative researchers must ensure that they have carefully recorded and analyzed their data and have accurately represented their data throughout the analysis process. In sum, qualitative researchers should clearly describe their data collection and analysis methods so that readers can understand what they did and why they did it.

Results

In general, qualitative data analyses produce two types of results. First, these approaches summarize and produce descriptions of settings, situations, events, and perspectives. In this case, the researcher usually creates a word-based depiction of the data but may also include a graphic depiction. Second, results may be interpretive. Here, the researcher takes summarization a step further to develop a new perspective, representation, or understanding of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The narrations produced vary widely and include (but are not limited to) scientific reports, fables and dramas, critiques, case studies, sociocultural analyses, and autobiographies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). Within these products, new theories may be developed and old theories may be altered. Sometimes the results are used to create social action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005).

Strategies of Inquiry

In examining the qualitative studies published in RCB, we found that less than half of researchers who published qualitative studies in the journal specifically named their strategies of inquiry. Those who did name their strategy primarily used case study and grounded theory. The remaining researchers described their studies via the analytic framework (e.g., phenomenologic focus, ethnographic content analysis) or data collection methods used (e.g., semistructured interviews, survey/questionnaire, focus groups, life stories). Because it is impossible to present all the strategies of inquiry in one article, we chose to describe the two most commonly used approaches found in RCB articles: case study and grounded theory.

Case Study

In qualitative research, "case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 1). In addition to being a research design, case study can also be a research strategy (Yin, 2003). Stake (2005) stated that case study often refers to what is studied rather than the methodology used. In fact, researchers who study cases often call their work by another name and build their cases on qualitative and/or quantitative data (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003).

As described earlier, case studies can be conducted using many different forms: single case study, multiple case or collective study, or embedded case study designs (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). Single case studies may be simple or complex, studying an individual, an event, or a system, and are undertaken to allow the researcher to understand the particular case. The case is chosen because of its uniqueness or its ordinariness; however, products produced often highlight the unique or uncommon aspects of the case (Stake, 2005). Only two studies published in RCB used a single case design: Lundervold (1986) described the use of behavioral relaxation and self-instruction training to treat

stress-related agitation and disruptive outbursts in a woman with mental retardation, and Wehman, Kreutzer, Wood, Morton, and Sherron (1988) described one person's experience in supported employment.

Embedded case study is a single case study design in which subunits within the larger case are targeted as part of the study (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998). An example of an embedded single case study is a rehabilitation facility being studied as the large unit (or single case) and analysis occurring in the form of an evaluation of the programs, services, or human resources within the facility. The analysis from these levels would then be brought back to the facility level for analysis. The interaction between the whole unit (facility) and the embedded components (specific programs, services, and human resources) would be a critical piece of the equation.

Collective or multiple case studies are usually instrumental in nature, using the cases to understand something else. As a result, the case is of secondary importance because it is the vehicle for understanding another interest (Stake, 2005). Individual cases may have commonalities, or they may be selected to represent a range of characteristics. Thus, cases are chosen based on what the researcher is hoping to learn from studying the cases (Stake, 2005). Although much of the qualitative research previously published in RCB reflects collective or multiple cases, the authors of only four studies specifically identified their methodology as case study (Bergland & Thomas, 1991; Heinemann & Shontz, 1984; Preston & Ulicny, 1992; Sandler & Turner, 1973).

In an excellent example of a collective case study, Bergland and Thomas (1991) examined the psychosocial issues that followed severe head injury in adolescence. Data consisted of interviews with 12 adolescents, interviews with each adolescent's primary caregiver, and review of the adolescents' medical records. These data were instrumental in understanding the larger concepts of coping with personality change, family disruption, loss of relationships, learning difficulties, and vocational adjustment following severe head injury.

Stake (2005) summarized the tasks of the qualitative case study researcher. The first task is identifying and describing the problem, along with the rationale for its selection (Heck, 2006). Next, as extensively described earlier, is the task of "bounding the case" or conceptualizing what will be studied. How the researcher defines and identifies or selects the case or cases is a critical step in the research process. In selecting the case, the researcher uses the purpose and research questions to guide the selection of the person(s), program(s), system(s), or event(s), building a metaphoric fence around the actual case itself (Merriam, 1998). In other words, the case under consideration must have clear limits and boundaries. Boundaries can include the walls of a sheltered workshop, clinic, or treatment facility; one person or one group of people; or a specific policy or process.

In addition to problem identification and case selection, the researcher develops the research question(s) that specify the phenomena, themes, or issues that will be studied (Stake, 2005). Data are collected usually via interviews, focus groups, document and other archival date reviews, and observations (Heck, 2006). As data are collected, the researcher continually analyzes the data, seeking patterns that describe or clarify those phenomena, themes, or issues (Stake, 2005). Analysis can include pattern matching, explanation building, and emergent categories in relation to theoretical propositions or, for descriptive case studies, synthesizing data around important emergent aspects of the data (Heck, 2006).

Throughout data collection and analysis, the researcher attempts to triangulate data related to key observations or interpretations by seeking multiple interpretations or repeated observations or by using other redundant methods of data collection. Within this process, the qualitative case study researcher develops or seeks alternative explanations to challenge those that appear to be emerging from the data. At the completion of this process, she or he then develops generalizations or statements about the case (Stake, 2005).

Grounded Theory

As in case study, grounded theory researchers usually study action, lives, or events from the perspective of the actors involved. Grounded theorists believe that participants' behaviors revolve around a main concern in a substantive area and that their behaviors continually focus on resolving this concern (Glaser, 1998). Therefore, grounded theorists seek to identify both the main concern of the participants and how the participants organize their behavior to resolve that concern. Through these processes, the researcher attempts to develop a theory that provides an accurate and practical explanation of the social process, the participants' behaviors, and the meaning-construction that mediates the linking of the main concern and resolution process to each other. Thus, grounded theory is an inductive approach that calls for emphasis on the emergence of both the issue, alone, and the theory, in relation to the emerging issue (Glaser, 1998).

In grounded theory research, theory emerges through constant reciprocal interactions among information gathering, theoretical analysis, and interpretations. The theory might be new, developing from the data, or an elaboration or modification of existing theories. If the research results in new theory, two forms can be developed: substantive or formal. Substantive theory is grounded in research on one particular substantive area, for example, vocational adjustment to health disabilities such as HIV or AIDS, and it might apply only to that specific area. Substantive theory is a strategic link in the formulation and generation of grounded *formal* theory. Formal theory is more general than substantive theory and often explains general con-

ceptual areas, such as career development (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Regardless of the type of theory produced, grounded theory methodology is designed to guide researchers in producing theory that is "conceptually dense." Conceptual density refers to the richness of the emerging concepts, which should provide researchers with a comprehensive explanation of the participants' worlds—that is, with a greater awareness of associated data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Grounded theory emphasizes conceptualization and interpretation in addition to mere descriptions, or reporting.

The conceptual framework is generated through a discursive form of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation and then embedded in a coherent structure of descriptive and conceptual writing (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Analysis leads to the development of conceptualization of what occurs under certain condition and thus the emerging theory "is able to specify consequences and their related conditions. [Furthermore] the theorist can claim predictability for it, in the limited sense that if elsewhere approximately similar conditions obtain, then approximately similar consequences should occur" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 169). According to Charmaz (2002), the strengths of grounded theory approaches reside in (a) strategies that guide the researcher, step by step, through an analytic process; (b) the self-correcting nature of the data collection process; (c) the methods' inherent bend toward theory and the simultaneous turning away from a contextual description; and (d) the emphasis on comparative method.

For six studies, the researchers specifically identified them as using a grounded theory design or appeared to use this design. The design of two studies reflected grounded theory characteristics (Conyers et al., 1998; Iwasaki and Mactavish, 2005), whereas four studies were specifically identified as grounded theory studies (Conyers, 2004; Gilbride et al., 2003; Koch, 2001; Koch et al., 2005). In this section we will report on only those studies that specifically identified grounded theory as the study's design.

Conyers (2004) grounded her research in the five construct, six-process career development model (Szymanski, Hershenson, Enright, & Ettinger, 1996) as she explored the employment-related issues and concerns of 26 individual with HIV/AIDS. Responses of participants in five focus groups further qualified and expanded the five construct, six-process career development model.

In an effort to help rehabilitation professionals improve their placement and educational activities, Gilbride et al. (2003) used a grounded theory approach to identify characteristics of employers who would consider hiring and supporting people with disabilities. Their intent was to build a theory of employer openness by analyzing the data they collected through focus groups and individual interviews with successfully employed people with disabilities, successful employers, and successful placement providers. The results of this study supported and extended existing knowledge about characteristics of employers open to hiring people with disabilities, specifically as these characteristics relate to previous work in the areas of work culture, job match, and employer experiences and supports.

Koch's (2001) study explored the expectations of individuals who were seeking vocational rehabilitation services. Specifically, using previous theoretical work in client expectations as her backdrop and a paper-and-pencil survey with open-ended questions, Koch wanted to know what were the preferences and anticipations of her 65 respondents and if there was congruence between the preferences and anticipations. The results of her study expanded the work of previous researchers in the areas of client expectations of counseling and career counseling.

In her next study, Koch, and her colleagues (2005) used "open-ended, semi-structured interviews to examine the experiences of right hemisphere stroke survivors in their attempts to reintegrate into their work communities and to return to work after onset of illness" (p. 210). The study was constructed using a grounded theory design, connecting the theoretical basis of the study and the emergent results with the ecologic model of career development (Szymanksi, Hershenson, Enright, & Ettinger, 1996).

Conclusions

Hagner and Helm (1994) described qualitative research in rehabilitation as

> (a) studying behavior within the context of a particular rehabilitation organization or setting, (b) understanding the subjective meanings and perspectives in the rehabilitation process, looking at new trends and previously unexplored areas of rehabilitation service delivery, and (d) examining complex interactive social processes. (p. 293)

This research reflects several paradigms and perspectives and is accomplished through a variety of processes. Although the term *qualitative research* presents a collection of paradigms, perspectives, designs, and methodologies, Patton's (1990) work describing common characteristics provides a structure in which to summarize this approach to research.

Qualitative research is naturalistic inquiry, studying naturally occurring situations that are dynamic. It is approached from a holistic perspective, with its research questions and analyses reflecting context sensitivity by placing the research within the social, historical, and temporal contexts in which they exist. Qualitative designs and methods are flexible, allowing the researchers to respond to changing conditions or unexpected events or revela-

tions. Data are qualitative in nature in that they reveal meanings and experiences and are collected through prolonged continuous or intermittent personal contact with the participants or data sources. Qualitative data are analyzed using inductive techniques, allowing categories and dimensions to emerge from the data. Thus, data analysis and discussion reflect the researcher's understanding that each case is unique (Patton, 1990).

Finally, Patton (1990) identified one other theme, empathic neutrality (emphasizing neutral understanding rather than subjectivity), which applies to some qualitative designs and not others. Recent discussions of the nature of qualitative research have included such words as *representation*, *politics*, *critical theory*, and *social justice*. These concepts are reflected in some qualitative designs (e.g., queer theory studies, feminist studies, critical race theory). In these cases, qualitative research is used as a tool of social action, and empathic neutrality is seen as impossible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005a) urged researchers to use qualitative methods to advocate for change and social justice. To this end, qualitative studies in rehabilitation should also include critical examinations of policies, services, events, relationships, and issues within the contexts in which they are found, including social groups, politics, community perceptions, economics, power dynamics, and cultural considerations. Rehabilitation-related studies that would respond to this challenge might include studies that describe overt and covert biases, such as paternalism or racism, in access to or delivery of rehabilitation services; studies that detail the impact of changes in social programs, such as welfare reform, on the everyday lives of people with disabilities who live in poverty; and studies that are conducted with the intention of using the results to advocate for new services or social changes for people with disabilities in local communities.

Qualitative research has much to offer rehabilitation research and service providers. The perspectives and experiences of the human beings that deliver and receive services provide unique lenses through which rehabilitation service, life experiences, and social policies can be seen. Thus, qualitative research provides a way to obtain in-depth examinations as complex, dynamic phenomena that are not easily quantified.

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