Building Community With Thematic Content Analysis

Casey Swanson
Plymouth High School
Recipient of a 2019 APA TOPSS Charles T. Blair-Broeker Excellence in Teaching Award

As psychology teachers, we are lucky enough to read, write, and teach about cognition, learning, and memory. While this may provide us motivation and opportunities to teach and utilize reflection, this lesson plan allows for students to reflect on their learning in your class, their personal successes and failures, and it allows them to see that their peers are also experiencing similar successes and struggles. As a teacher, it will give you a chance to engage students in qualitative research and foster an engaging and supportive classroom that recognizes and celebrates our common humanity. This is an easily adaptable activity that could be done in your psychology classes, your other courses, and in a professional development setting.

Content Standard 1: Research methods and measurements used to study behavior and mental processes

Students are able to

- 1.2 Describe and compare a variety of quantitative (e.g., surveys, correlations, experiments) and qualitative (e.g., interviews, narratives, focus groups) research methods
- 1.3 Define systematic procedures used to improve the validity of research findings.

Content Standard 2: Ethical issues in research with human and non-human animals

Students are able to

- 2.1 Identify ethical standards psychologists must address regarding research with human participants

Content Standard 3: Basic concepts of data analysis

Students are able to

- 3.2 Define forms of qualitative data and explain how they are used by psychological scientists

Prior knowledge assumed:

At the end of a progress report, quarter, tri-mester, semester, etc., students may benefit from a zoomed out reflection. As part of our modeling of and teaching our students metacognitive skills we may focus on reflection centered on recent content or further developing skills. This activity allows for you as a teacher to provide protected time and space for a reflection based on a longer period of time. Most importantly it allows you to reteach research methodology and provides an opportunity for students to act as researchers/psychologists.

It is assumed that at this point of the quarter/semester/etc, that they have already learned about basic elements of quantitative and qualitative methods; specifically including thematic/inductive analysis. I complete this task a few weeks after concluding our methods unit. As a result, it may provide you with an opportunity to review and disrupt the forgetting.

One or two days before activity

- Spend the last ten minutes of a class reviewing overarchinging ethical guidelines in research. The level of which you do this is dependent on your own class setting. I like to complete this in a Think, Pair, Share format. This generative retrieval practice allows students to self-assess their level of understanding and mastery while also getting them to talk and discuss research methods and ethics. During the share, I introduce the survey and how we'll use it.
- Assign survey of for homework. Attached is a link to the Google Form. When you use, make a copy and modify to best fit your class and students. (https://goo.gl/forms/rjwoX8vf1R0zDUG42)

Preparation

- You will need some time between the completion of the survey and the actual activity. Compile student responses from the Google Form by questions. This task is easy but it takes some time to copy and paste student responses. These will serve as artifacts/transcripts of which they will conduct the content analysis. You can modify the number of questions and number of group members as you see fit. I prefer doing this activity in small groups of two or three students.

Day 1

- Each group receives the compiled printout of all student responses to one question. I recommend having two groups for each question so that you can talk about inter-research reliability and/or researcher triangulation.
- Upon entering the class, students are quickly assigned to groups and find the compiled list of student responses. Instruct students to read the transcripts by themselves twice before having a conversation with their group members. This allows them to become familiar with the data. This should take about 10-15 minutes.
- Next students work together in their group to develop initial themes or categories of responses. Students can use the Thematic Analysis worksheet. This can be shared as a Google Doc or as a physical copy. The Google Doc makes it easier to revise and to collaborate.
- As students create these themes, they provide textual evidence from their artifacts as support.
- Close the lesson with some general questions. This could be done as a class or in groups.
    - What is difficult/easy about this task?
    - How did you identify or narrow down the data into themes?
    - What are some limitations to this data? What are some strengths of this data?

Day 2

- Combine the groups that shared the same questions from yesterday's activity. Set the goals for the day as:
    - Compare and consolidate themes between groups with the same questions.
    - Create a 2-3 minute summary of the findings to share with the larger class. This should include sharing some examples of textual evidence from the subject responses.
    - Allow 10-12 minutes to complete this work and then transition to a full class restorative circle or another classroom setup that may allow for simple reporting out from groups.
- After completing the presentations, you are left with a wonderful opportunity to discuss the strengths and limitations of semi-structured interviews/surveys, sampling methods, researcher triangulation, and countless other qualitative research components. While I recommend being prepared to talk about a couple of concrete ideas, I find that students are excited to lead this discussion.
- Reserve the last five minutes to reflect on two things:
    - How would we improve our methodology?
    - Who may be interested in knowing our results and how might they use them?
        - Parents?
        - Teachers?
        - Classmates?

Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *The All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *9*(3). Retrieved from http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/335/553

Question from Survey/Interview	
Theme	**Text Evidence From Responses**