Abstract

For a number of reasons qualitative techniques are especially appropriate _maybe uniquely appropriate_ to the study of student experience and other aspects of teaching and learning in Higher Education. But the nature of the data which are produced by qualitative research, the way such data must be handled, and the use to which such data can be put, are all rather readily open to confusion and misunderstanding. Confusion often lies in the failure to differentiate among several orientations to qualitative data. (i) Positivist research presupposes that there is some underlying, true, unequivocal reality, and a theory covering this is to be sought by the research. There must be evidence of validity _in the sense of a match between the data and the reality they are supposed to reveal_. Non-positivist research is of a number of kinds, despite often being treated as unified. Examples are (a) descriptive (‘phenomenological’) research; (b) interpretative (‘hermeneutic’) research, and (c) discourse analysis. In this workshop, the varieties of qualitative research will be exemplified (rather than described in technical detail) using examples from our recent work on cheating and plagiarism¹. And there will be participation throughout.

Keywords

Methods, qualitative research, positivism, hermeneutics, phenomenology.