

Chapter 2: Epistemological bases for qualitative research

Glossary

Critical realism: an epistemological position; data can tell us something about what is going on in the 'real' world but it does not do so in a self-evident, unmediated fashion – data needs to be interpreted to unpack underlying structures or hidden aspects

Descriptive phenomenology: concerned with capturing experience exactly as it appears; extracting the essence of experiential qualities with the aim of producing descriptions which capture and comprehend experience as it presents itself

Interpretative phenomenology: seeking to generate knowledge about the quality and texture of experience as well as the meaning of that experience within particular social and cultural contexts

Methodological pluralism: combining different qualitative methodologies and epistemological positions; a pluralistic approach involves asking a series of questions of the same data and with each question a different analytical method is used.

Naïve realism: an epistemological position akin to positivism; our knowledge of reality can approach an 'objective' knowledge; there is a relatively uncomplicated and direct relationship between what the researcher can see and what is really going on – data more or less directly represents reality

Person-centred counsellor: someone who listens to a client's account of their experiences empathically, with an attitude of unconditional, positive regard and without questioning the external validity of what the client is saying

Phenomenological orientations: aiming to obtain and produce knowledge about the subjective experience of research participants and the quality and texture of experiences

Radical social constructionism: an epistemological position; assuming different versions of events and 'social reality' are constructed depending upon the particular social context and discursive resources utilised.

Realist orientations: aiming to obtain an accurate picture of the social world; aiming to generate valid and reliable knowledge about reality which exists independently of the researcher

Relativism: an epistemological position; a view that there is no such thing as 'pure experience' and that the aim of research ought to be an exploration of the ways in which cultural and discursive resources are used in order to construct different versions of an experience or reality

Social constructionist orientations: aiming to explore the social construction of 'knowledge' itself and how people construct versions of reality through the use of language; investigating the process of constructing knowledge about a phenomenon and often involving the study of discourses