Story Completion exercises: An idea worth borrowing?

Description

Tweet

Yesterday, TheoNabben, a friend and colleague of mine and an MSC trainer, sent me a link to a webpage full of information about a method called Story Completion: https://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/story-completion.html

Background

Story Completion is a qualitative research method first developed in the field of psychology but subsequently taken up primarily by feminist researchers. It was originally of interest as a method of enquiring about psychological meanings particularly those that people could not or did not want to explicitly communicate. However, it was subsequently re-conceptualised as a valuable method of accessing and investigating social discourses. These two different perspectives have been described as essentialist versus social constructionist.

Story completion is a useful tool for accessing meaning-making around a particular topic of interest. It is particularly useful for exploring (dominant) assumptions about a topic. This type of research can be framed as exploring either perceptions and understandings or social/discursive constructions of a topic.

This 2019 paper by Clarke et al. provides a good overview and is my main source of comments and explanations on this page

How It Works

The researcher provides the participant with the beginning of the story, called the stem. Typically this is one sentence long but can be longer. For exampleâ?¦

> *â??Catherine has decided that she needs to lose weight. Full of enthusiasm, and in order to prevent her from changing her mind, she is telling her friends in the pub about her plans and motivations.â?•*

The participant is then asked by the researcher to extend that story, by explaining â?? usually in writing â?? what happens next. Typically this storyline is about a third person (e.g. a Catherine), not about the participant themselves.

In practice, this form of enquiry can take various forms as suggested by Figure 1 below.

Enquiry variations:	One type of respondent	Multiple types of respondent
One version of the stem	1	3
Multiple versions of the stem	2	4

Figure 1: Four different versions of a Story Completion inquiry

Analysis of responses can be done in two ways: (a) horizontally â?? comparisons across respondents, (B) vertically â?? changes over time within the narratives.

Here is a good how-to-do-it introduction to Story Completion:
http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/sasspsychlab/2017/10/15/story-completion/

And here is an annotated bibliography that looks very useful:
https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/psych/about/our-research/documents/Resources%20for%20qualitative%20story%20completion%20(July%202019).pdf

How it could be useful for monitoring and evaluation purposes

Story Completion exercises could be a good way of identifying different stakeholders views of the possible consequences of an intervention. Variations in the text of the story stem could allow the exploration of consequences that might vary across gender or other social differences. Variations in the respondents being interviewed would allow exploration of differences in perspective on how a specific intervention might have consequences.

Of course, these responses will need interpretation and would benefit from further questioning. Participatory processes could be designed to enable this type of follow-up. Rather than simply relying on third parties (e.g. researchers), as informed as they might be.

Variations could be developed where literacy is likely to be a problem. Voice recordings could be made instead, and small groups could be encouraged to collectively develop a response to the stem. There would seem to be plenty of room for creativity here.

Postscript

There is a considerable overlap between the Story Completion method and how the ParEvo participatory scenario planning process works.

The commonality of the two methods is that they are both narrative-based. They both start with a story stem/seed designed by the researcher/Facilitator. Then the respondent/participants add an extension onto that story stem describing what happens next. Both methods are future-orientated and largely other-orientated, in other words not about the storyteller themselves. And both processes pay quite a lot of attention after the narratives are developed, to how those narratives can be analysed and compared.

Now for some key differences. With ParEvo the process of narrative development involves multiple people rather than one person. This means multiple alternative storylines can develop, some of which die out, some which continue, and some of which branch into multiple variants. The other difference, already implied, is that the ParEvo process goes through multiple iterations, where is the Story Completion process has only one iteration. So in the case of ParEvo the storylines accumulate multiple segments of text, with a new segment added with each iteration. Content analysis can be carried out with the results of Story Completion and ParEvo exercises. But in the case of ParEvo it is also possible to analyse the structure of peopleâ??s participation and how it relates to the contents of the storylines.

Category

1. Qualitative methods

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