EDITORIAL

Dear readers

The new millennium brought with it new life-conditions for the world and not least for all living creatures. We face new illnesses and the ways to experience well-being are changing. A main aim for the International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being is to publish interesting, original and inspiring results that say something significant about health and well-being. Several of the published papers in QHW have mirrored the existential and global changes. From the editorial side we appreciate that approach and further want to encourage researchers to submit such papers to QHW.

Another aim of QHW is to contribute to the quality development of qualitative research. This aim was on the agenda when we decided how we want results to be published. When findings from an empirical study or other results of research are being presented in QHW we want them to include a short collected description of the main result. A passage that collects the main meanings of the findings enables readers to understand the paper better and to transform its results into practice better.

Such collected description of the findings can be carried out in several ways. In phenomenological research, for example, there is most commonly a description of the essence of the phenomenon, which thus is a short description of the main result that moreover is a general structure. In more hermeneutic analysis, there is commonly a main interpretation or a comprehensive understanding, while in the Grounded Theory approach there is a conceptual model or theory with a core category. As an extra explication of the main results and, for example, its implications for praxis, or if for some reason an essence, or a main interpretation cannot be obtained, the findings can be collected in a conclusion.

The aim of QHW to contribute to the quality development of qualitative research is also pointing at a more direct methodological development. Qualitative research in general would benefit from a more straightforward discussion of the epistemological assumptions that ground and direct the research, as well as from a more concrete discussion of different aspects of data gathering and data analysis. We are very pleased that for example Polkinghorne, Todres and Holloway, as well as Kirkevold and Bergland have published their methodological analyses in QHW. Even if they not always explicitly deal with methodological issues, all other philosophical papers that we have published in QHW, for example, by Cavalcante Schuback, Alma and Smaling, Ashworth and Sarvimäki, contribute to the methodological awareness. We also appreciate reviews such as the one by Brink and her colleagues, where a new approach to Grounded Theory by Charmaz was presented. All these contributions are essential if QHW will succeed in the quality supporting work. Consequently, we welcome more of these methodology-challenging papers.

Lastly, we want to invite to a particular methodological discussion. It can be noticed that there is a quite frequent use of content analysis in qualitative research. We see at least two big problems in this practice.

The first problem is that the emphasis is on the manifest content in data, i.e. what the informants say or do, without any efforts to discover the deeper lying meanings that most often give new and surprising information about human existential phenomena. We have discussed what reasons there could be for researchers not to claim more analysis from their data. Could it be a positivistic leftover demand not to interpret but just describe what “is”? Or, is the reason poor research education, which lacks the epistemological and methodological training that enables researchers to accomplish a more thorough analysis? Or, has content analysis just become a general way of understanding research at some departments?

The second problem is that sometimes researchers who are fond of content analysis see that there are deeper lying and interesting meanings to be found. However, instead of a reasonable shift of approach to one that allows for the clarification of meanings, they persist in calling it content analysis, but add that they could be for researchers not to claim more analysis from their data. Could it be a positivistic leftover demand not to interpret but just describe what “is”? Or, is the reason poor research education, which lacks the epistemological and methodological training that enables researchers to accomplish a more thorough analysis? Or, has content analysis just become a general way of understanding research at some departments?

What is “latent content”? What is the difference between “latent content” and meaning? How, with what guidelines does the researcher work in order to find the “latent content”? We do not want to say that we do not publish research that is based on content analysis. Several studies benefit from content analysis, not least as a starting point of a project. To appear in QHW such a paper, as all other papers, must meet the scientific demands of research papers. In general, the chosen
approach and method must match the phenomenon of study and the aim of the research. In particular, the practice of content analysis must consider the epistemological and methodological questions above.

There is no one and only qualitative approach, there is no one method that in general is better than another is. There is consequently room for both meaning analysis and content analysis. Both modes of analyse research data rest on a basic idea that all approaches, methods and techniques must be related to the phenomena to be studied in the best possible and open enough way, so that we gain new and better insights into how we can live a good life, preserving and/or regaining health and well-being.

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