Content Analysis

I. Transcribing: Write down what your participants said, including grammatical errors, exclamations, laughter, “um”, “pause”, etc. (don’t need to be perfect, just like a memo)

II. Recognizing: Find the “concepts”, “themes”, and “events” in your transcripts
   A. Concepts: A word or term that represents an idea important to your major point
   B. Themes: Explanations of what is going on
   C. Events: Occurrences that have taken place

   Note: You should look for the concepts and themes in the following ways:
   (1) Questions you asked
   (2) Concepts and themes interviewees frequently mention
   (3) Concepts and themes indirectly revealed
   (4) Concepts and themes that emerge from comparing interviews
   (5) Concepts and themes suggest new concepts and themes (reflect on what they imply)
   (6) Figures of speech (e.g., similes, metaphors, slogans, etc.)
   (7) Creating concepts through your own labeling

III. Elaborating: Generate new concepts and themes by “clarifying” and “synthesizing” ideas that are present
   A. Clarify: Examine specific concepts and themes
   B. Synthesize: Put together your understanding of the overall narratives/stories

IV. Coding: Mark/label in the transcripts where the concepts, themes, or events are found with a “precise definition” (related to your major point)
   (see Excerpt 14.3 & 14.4)

V. Sorting the data: Group all of the data units with the same label into a single computer file and look for similarities and differences (relationships) on the same concept, theme, or event (see Figure 14.8)

VI. Discovering patterns: Combine the same concept or theme and explain how and why; if your data disagree with each other, you have to combine the credible (reliable & valid) descriptions and create your own interpretation of what happened and what it means

VII. Building grounded theory: As you code according to your major points from literature review, you should remain alert to other important ideas that you might have missed; look at the data a different way to see what else is in there (look for the broader implications of what you have learned)
Coding Structure

Category 1 (Pro 1)
Category 2 (Pro 2)
Category 3 (Pro 3)
Category 4 (Con 1)

Grounded Theory

Pattern 1
Pattern 2
**EXCERPT 14.3 Initial Topics in Transcripts of Elementary School Principals’ Practices of Grade Retention**

**Principal #1**

"Well, like I said, retention is failure, and failure is bad for kids. In education it is our job to help kids learn that they are good at things, and that school is a place to develop their skills. School should be a place that helps students develop self confidence and healthy self concepts. Retention doesn’t do anything to promote those things, and if I had my way, it would only be used rarely, or maybe not at all."

**Principal #2**

"We’re not here to make kids hate school. We’re not here to make kids feel like they can’t learn. What good does it [retention] do? Our policy is basically that retention is a negative thing, we would rather see other alternatives used to help a child and use retention only as a last resort."

**Principal #3**

"One thing we have to uphold is, hummmmm, when a child has been absent a certain number of days, regardless of the circumstances, we have to consider the possibility of retention simply due to the fact that a lot of material has been missed. . . . Hummmmm . . . there’s nothing we can do about that. So, in those instances, retention becomes something that we are not really in control of, hummmmm, and we do what we can, but sometimes we just have to retain a child for that reason. Hummmmm . . . there might be a situation where if a parent is willing to work with us, we can still avoid it—attend summer school, use of tutors, possibly even going through a situation where a parent would be willing to hire a tutor, or take the child somewhere for a summer program. Then we would test the child upon the child’s return, and possibly we could move him on. . . . Hummmmm . . . it’s not written in stone, but we are required if a certain number of days is missed, according to school board policy, to retain a child, unless we can prove that the child has attained a certain degree of proficiency in school work so that they can successfully move on without being totally frustrated."

**Codes**

- retention
- absence
- school goal
- alternative
- policy
- school goal
- policy
- alternative
- retention
- Absence
- Alternative
- Policy

## Excerpt 14.4 Recoded Transcripts of Elementary School Principals’ Practices of Grade Retention

### Principal #1

"Well, like I said, retention is failure, and failure is bad for kids. In education it is our job to help kids learn that they are good at things, and that school is a place to develop their skills. School should be a place that helps students develop self-confidence and healthy self-concepts. Retention does nothing to promote those things, and if I had my way, it would only be used rarely, or maybe not at all!"

### Principal #2

"We’re not here to make kids hate school. We’re not here to make kids feel like they can’t learn. What good does it [retention] do? Our policy is basically that retention is a negative thing, we would rather see other alternatives used to help a child and use retention only as a last resort."

### Principal #3

"One thing we have to uphold is, hummmm, when a child has been absent a certain number of days, regardless of the circumstances, we have to consider the possibility of retention simply due to the fact that a lot of material has been missed . . . Hummmm . . . there’s nothing we can do about that. So, in those instances, retention becomes something that we are not really in control of, hummmm, and we do what we can, but sometimes we just have to retain a child for that reason. Hummmm . . . there might be a situation where if a parent is willing to work with us, we can still avoid it—attend summer school, use of tutors, possibly even going through a situation where a parent would be willing to hire a tutor, or take the child somewhere for a summer program. Then we would test the child upon the child’s return, and possibly we could move him on. Hummmm . . . it’s not written in stone, but we are required if a certain number of days is missed, according to school board policy, to retain a child, unless we can prove that the child has attained a certain degree of proficiency in school work so that they can successfully move on without being totally frustrated."

### Codes

- **RF** = Retention as failure
- **G Sk** = School goal as skills
- **G SelfC** = School goal as self concept
- **R Use** = Retention use
- **G Att** = School goal as attitudes
- **S Pol** = School policy
- **R Alt** = Retention alternative
- **R Ab** = Retention for absenteeism
- **S Alt** = School alternative
- **P Ch** = Parent choice
- **SB Pol** = School Board policy

DISCOVERING PATTERNS

The ultimate goal of qualitative research is to make general statements about relationships among categories by discovering patterns in the data. A **pattern** is a relationship among categories. Pattern seeking means examining the data in as many ways as possible. In searching for patterns, researchers try to understand the complex links among various aspects of people’s situations, mental processes, beliefs, and actions.

Pattern seeking starts with the researcher’s informed hunches about the relationships in the data. It demands a thorough search through the data, challenging each major hunch by looking for negative evidence and alternative explanations. The researcher then shifts to a deductive mode of thinking—moving back and forth among codes, categories, and tentative patterns for confirmation. The researcher determines how well the data illuminate the research problem and which data are central.

Patterns can take different forms and levels of abstraction, depending on the purpose and use of the study. Patterns also relate to the conceptual framework selected for the inquiry. The major pattern(s) serves as the framework for reporting the findings and organizing the reports. This process is schematically represented in Figure 14.4. Notice that

![Diagram of pattern, category, and code relationships]

**Figure 14.4 Building Patterns of Meaning**

FIGURE 14.8 Assembling the Coded (Topic) Segments