

# Why Qualitative Methods?

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**AMAZING STORIES**  
BEING WRITTEN EVERY DAY.

# What does qualitative research provide?

“Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem.

The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.”

- John Creswell (1998) Qualitative inquiry and research design

# Products of Qualitative Projects

- Rich descriptions of complex phenomena
- Tracking unique or unexpected events
- Illumination of an experience
- Interpretation of events by people
- Giving voice to those whose views are rarely heard
- Conducting initial explorations to develop theories and to generate and even test hypotheses
- ...and more!

# Person-centered Practice

- Individuals tell their story
- Preserve the voice and perspective of participants
- Can be adjusted as new research questions arise
- Data includes details about human behavior, emotion, and personality characteristics

# Positively Unpredictable

- **Flexibility:** The data collection and analysis process can be adapted as new ideas or patterns emerge
- **Natural settings:** Data collection occurs in real-world contexts
- **Meaningful insights:** Detailed descriptions of people's experiences, feelings and perceptions can be used in designing, testing or improving systems or products
- **Generation of new ideas:** Open-ended questions and probes allow researchers to uncover novel problems or opportunities that they wouldn't have thought of otherwise

Describes the  
what of the thing,  
the why it matters,  
from the perspective of who it effects,  
when it is happening or when it happened, and  
where the thing occurred.

# Research Questions

- Use qualitative terms such as: explore, discover, understand, describe
- State the “central phenomenon” to focus the investigation
- State the participants and research site in the study

Example:

What are families' perspectives on the lived experience of children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) in Alaska's education system?

# Data Collection Questions

- Open ended- Begin with “How”, “What”, or “Why”, questions should not be able to be answered by a simple Yes or No
- Specify the independent and dependent variables
- When your questions deal with connections among multiple variables, use “relate” or “compare”

## Example:

- What were the most important things in education for you/your child and your family?
- Can you share what educational placements and supports you/your child experienced as they moved up through the school system?
- Was there ever a time you disagreed with those in the school system on what was appropriate? How did you handle the situation?
- What helped with academic success for your child?



# Doing qualitative research...

- Researcher responsibilities:
  - Good science- systematic
  - Good rapport, accessible and informative
  - Confidentiality & trust
- How is this done (during data collection)?
  - Cultural and community appropriate communication
  - Mirroring of responses
  - Active listening
- How is this done (after data collection)?
  - Researcher systematically analyzes the data to produce high-quality results in order to respect the participant's time and adhere to and respect the study's rigor
  - Researcher provides findings to stakeholders in plain language and in discipline specific formats

# Quotations

“I’ve tried since she was in pre-school, knowing what her struggles were going to be, I got her diagnosed at age 4 with fetal alcohol syndrome and then I started my research about it. And realized, like somebody mentioned, finding out early what they have but there is a dearth, it’s like a desert. Once you find out, where do you go with that? Because everyone is asking questions but no one really has the answers. So I tried to get her on an IEP, to have those extra supports and I just found barriers. We were in Ketchikan, they said no she didn’t need it. We went to Sitka, they said no she didn’t need it. I came to Anchorage, and it wasn’t until she was 3rd grade and they said you might want to consider a 504. And I said ‘thank you, I’ve been trying since she was 4 [years old]’ but we got the 504 but really it wasn’t until she had a teacher in 6th grade and he had a brother...but this teacher shared that he understood my child.”

## Quotations (continued)

“I would seek counseling for my children because I felt like we weren't meeting their needs and they would say they are fine, they are just kids. I was told that the Native community isn't competitive so your kids are not competitive, more apathetic. This was very upsetting to me.”

## Quotations (continued)

“When we walk into an IEP meeting, those can be nerve racking. It is you the parent and you’ve got the principal, the teacher, the OT, the PT, the speech and the SPED coordinator and the resource group and they are all on the same page but when they can step back and include you in that process, that really, really helps to a parent or myself realize that you are not giving my child services because these are the things that we are focusing on and let’s all work together because that’s what’s best for the child, especially for the long run- when our student is outside of the school world, the school environment.”

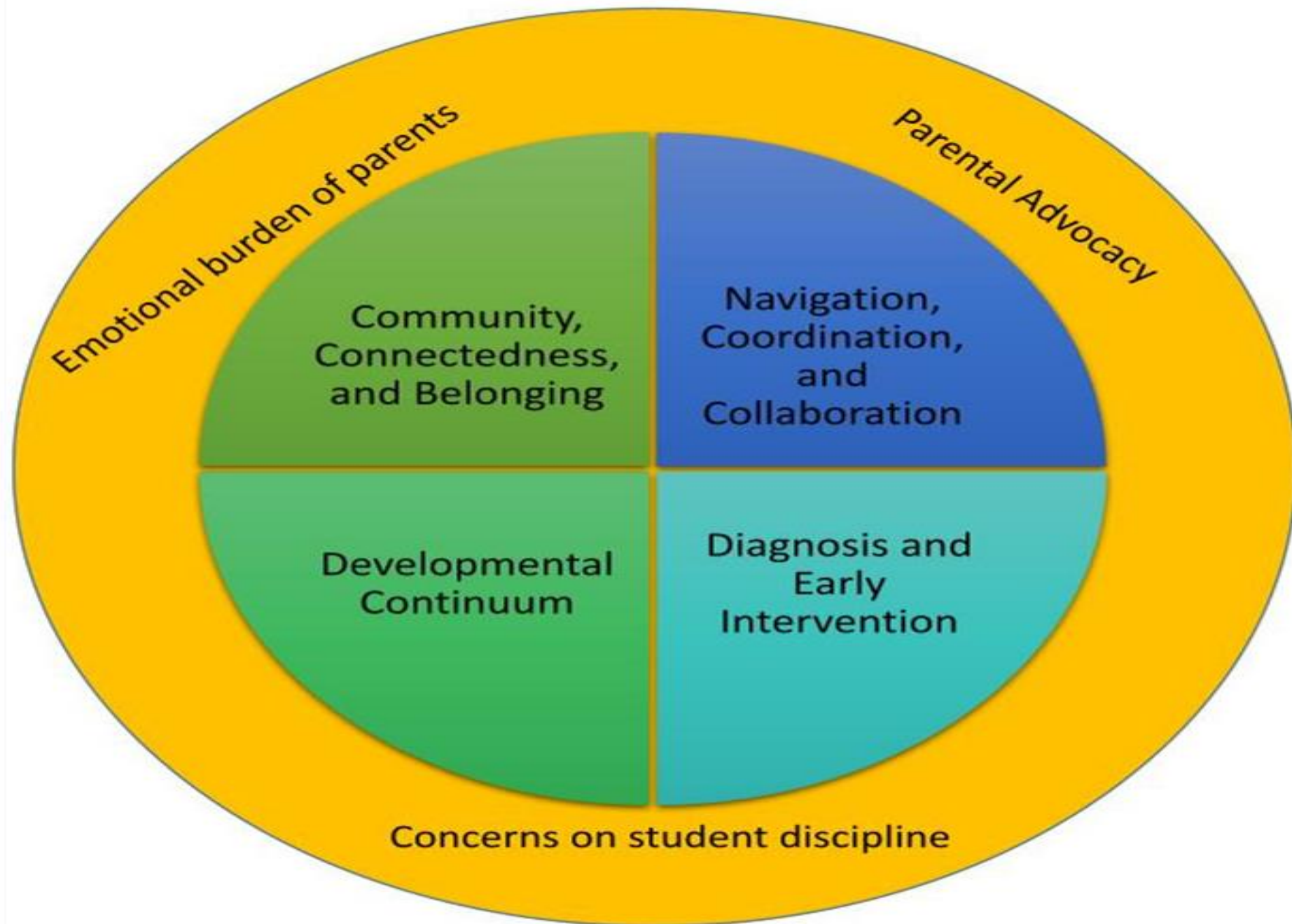
## Quotations (continued)

“The most important thing [in education] is the willingness to work together for a common goal. To really sit down and say okay, are academics the most important? Are social-emotional regulations? Having that open dialogue to where the specific teachers can call me or text me or email me and know that I will respond. That we are working together. That we are utilizing even the same terminology. Like ‘use your words and not your body to express your emotions’ and utilizing the same calm down techniques and tactics and verbiage. Allowing time for processing. Allowing us [family] to be part of that conversation. Not treating us as though we know less than them or that we are not equal partners in the education and the future of our children.”

## Quotations (continued)

“One of the biggest successes for our kiddo was actually meeting them at their level. They’re so sometimes you see they are hitting them at grade level and I see so much of not meeting them at their level, not seeing where they are. We are going to continue the 6th grade math book but because of COVID, we backed things up and I realized that he did not know, he is 13, and he did not know and still does not know his ABC’s in his head. So we were struggling with reading and we realized that he still can’t tell you the ABCs in order and he is 13 years old. So how did we miss that? Where did that fall through? Because someone was so busy about making him at grade level that that wasn’t even caught. He is in 8th grade so like nine years of schooling.”

## Example of Thematic Findings



# Impact

- Member checking
- Multiple products
- Exemplar quotes
- Amplification of perspectives
- Power of story in advocating policy changes
  - Program implementation
  - Statutory change





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