FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY

Workshop Module for
Transdisciplinary Understanding and Training on Research –
Primary Health Care (TUTOR-PHC)

A collaborative initiative by

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Focus Group Methodology  
TUTOR-PHC Workshop Module

Objectives
1. Identify the uses and limitations of focus groups.
2. Discuss some of the challenges inherent in focus group methodology and develop strategies for dealing with those challenges.
3. Practice analyzing a focus group transcript.

Reading Assignments
Week 1

Week 2
Unpublished research data.

Week 3


Tasks/Exercises:
Week 1
Participants discuss the introductory readings on focus groups and explain how they apply to their research plans.

Week 2
Read a transcript of a focus group composed of family physicians discussing the role and impact of Walk-in Clinics on Ontario’s health care system and then generate thematic analysis from the transcript.

Week 3
Read two publications resulting from these focus groups and their subsequent analysis. Participants compare and contrast their ideas with those that were published.

Discussion Summary
Number of participants: 6
Total number of messages: 67
Number of facilitator posts and comments: 32

Week 1 – Original facilitator post
Hi everyone! I would like you to read the chapter from Crabtree and Miller (online under workshop materials) and look at the power point where I have made some comments in the notes section of the power point presentation to stimulate discussion. I look forward to your comments!

Number of participant posts: 10
Number of facilitator comments: 9

Selected facilitator comments
  o  I have not used video conferencing but I would imagine that it could be difficult to pick up on the non verbal stuff if the quality was not outstanding. Also several of the key points that Yom made about the
focus group methodology

over zealous participant or the recalcitrant participant might be more of a challenge over the air waves!

I have used conference calls and again the non verbal was impossible. Our dilemma was that we wanted to do focus groups with rural family doctors and while you can get 8-10 FPs together in rural Ontario with relative ease this is not the case in rural BC or Alberta who may live a 100 miles apart. So we resorted to conference calls!

week 2 – original facilitator post

Hello all - as the weekend is ahead and perhaps some of you may be preparing for week 2 I wanted to direct you back to the workshop outline section to review the upcoming tasks. I know that several of you are attending a meeting in Montreal at the end of the week and into the next week and this may limit your opportunities for posting. However I do encourage you to make an effort to log-on as the success of an online learning experience is dependent on the students' collective participation. As the lab discussion groups have revealed you have so much to offer each other!! Perhaps for those who will be away it might be prudent to post early and let the others follow you.

Have fun reading the transcript in its true raw form and experience the challenge of making sense of a hot discussion!!

Have a great weekend everyone!

number of participant posts: 19
number of facilitator comments: 15

selected facilitator comments

- An excellent question!! Secondary analysis of qualitative data is in my mind (and experience) limited. I think there is more work being done in this area however. Recently I did a secondary analysis of three studies that I had been involved as a co-investigator. Each study explored women’s experiences on different health issues: HRT - to use or not use, Maternal Serum screening, and use of CAM by breast cancer survivors. At the conclusion of these studies, which all used focus groups, I was impressed by the similar themes that emerged. Each research team had a different set of interdisciplinary members with the only constants being me and the methodology. To make a long story short I published the findings of the secondary analysis in the journal of patient education and counseling in 2002.

So yes it can be done and sometimes the data reveals themes that you do not expect like the pervasive tension we experienced in the walk-in clinic study as you will read next week!

- Martin - you have done the process a different way and if it helps you organize the data then it is right for you! I think the end result would ultimately be the same and we will hopefully see that when you read the papers written from this transcript and the 8 others we did for this project.

- Tom - a very important point about how "the researcher is in the analysis"! This is why having an interdisciplinary team is wonderful as many different perspectives are revealed. It is also critical to have team meetings to review the transcript and everyone's interpretation/coding line by line. I am NOT going to make you guys do that as we
do not have enough time but by each of you posting your observations I think we are certainly getting a flavour of the similarities and differences (some of which are based on your discipline perspective or world view).

Week 3 – Original facilitator post

So Welcome to week three! You have read transcripts, done analysis, reflected and done an incredible synthesis!

Now as you read the published works please think about how they resonate with what you have done in the last two weeks. I look forward to your comments and reflections!

**Number of participant posts: 6**

**Number of facilitator comments: 8**

**Selected facilitator comments**

- Hi Jen - thanks for your reply and thoughtful comments! I too was impressed on how you all captured the many key themes from this one transcript! It was rather awesome from my perspective!

  In reply to your question about how these findings influenced the next phases of the project -- they helped develop and guide the patient and provider surveys and the pre and post encounter interviews in the quantitative phases of the study. In some studies, but not in this one, the qualitative and quantitative can be merged to reinforce one and other. This (to date) is however rare and as Fred noted in his presentation at the symposium in May/03 multimethod papers are hard to write but even harder to publish (mostly a length issue).

  Thanks again Jen for your contribution!!

- I have been saying WOW all last week to myself as I read your postings but all the while having to be quiet until this week until you read the papers. So YES I am very impressed by the depth and quality of this group’s analysis -- based on one transcript! What a team - I think we should all collaborate on a qualitative study!!! Ideas???

**Participant Feedback**

**Average workshop rating (1=poor, 5=excellent): 4.3**

**Selected comments**

- **Comments related to the instructor**
  
  excellent

- **The most useful part of this workshop was**
  
  Actual hands-on thematic analysis of transcript materials helped to synthesize the materials learned.

- **Suggestions for improvement**
  
  Clearer specific tasks for trainees on a week to week basis.
  
  Post the articles containing analysis derived from the manuscripts after group analysis is complete.

*This workshop module was conducted in November 2003. For more information, please contact the TUTOR-PHC program manager at tutor@uwo.ca for further information.*