Writing data chapters

When writing data chapters, the following points should be helpful:

Dimensions

1. The data chapters should be about a third of the final thesis - therefore about 27,000 words - or less in an EdD thesis.

2. About half the number of words of each chapter should be extracts from data.

3. The longer the extract, the more you need to say about it.

4. Extracts of data, in the first section, should begin to appear about half way through the first page.

Structure and themes

5. Chapter and section headings should be the same as the themes that have emerged from data analysis.

6. The process of analysis that has produced these themes will have been described in the methodology chapter and doesn't need repeating in the data chapters. When beginning the first data chapter, the reader should therefore already know where the headings come from.

7. They should be different to the research questions because data collection should have allowed the unexpected to emerge.

8. There should be between two and four data chapters depending on how many major themes have emerged.

9. Although a list of major themes and sub-themes will have emerged during analysis, the process of writing continues the analysis so that they will continue to develop and change.

10. As you write and work out which extracts of data fit best in which section, you may therefore decide to change the naming of sections, which chapter they best belong to and even the headings of chapters. When this is finished you should therefore go back to the methodology chapter and adjust what you said there.

Introducing, discussing, theorising, concluding

11. Each chapter should begin with a brief description of which theme and sub-themes will be looked at with a little bit of explanation of what findings will emerge.

12. Each section should begin with a little more detail about what findings will emerge within its sub-theme.

13. The data extracts are there to provide evidence for and to demonstrate what you have learnt from the data.

14. Each extract should be introduced by saying what it demonstrates, and should be followed by an explanation of how it demonstrates what you are claiming about it, often with reference to words and phrases in it.

15. As far as possible, you should make connections with other extracts that you have used so that a holistic picture - a thick description - is developed.

16. By the end of each section you should relate what you have learnt from the data, as demonstrated in the extracts, with the theoretical position you have established near the beginning of the thesis. This may, though not necessarily, require some, but not too much, reference to literature.

17. Reference to literature should **never** come before the data extracts have been dealt with in each section.

18. The implications chapter that comes after the data chapters is where the major discussion of what has been found in the data takes place. However, this builds on step-by-step discussion that takes place throughout the data chapters. In each section, when writing about the data, you are discussing what you think is going on in the extracts and how they relate to other parts of the data and to the theoretical perspective that you have set up.

Useful phrases for beginning a data chapter

**Chapter ...: [the title should be the same as one of the major
emerging themes]**

This chapter is a discussion of extracts of data which correspond to the emerging theme, ... The four sections each deal with the sub-themes ... , ... , ... , and ... It therefore shows how the participants ...

... 1: [the first section title should be the same as the first sub-theme]

Within this sub-theme, the participants are seen to ...   The first extract of data exemplifies this by ...

> [extract of data, which could be from an interview, participant writing, research diary and so on]

There are a number of things to note in this extract. It is possible that ... [quoting from the extract] shows how ... , which is also evident in ...

What might be going on here becomes clearer in the next extract, which ...

> [this extract could be from the same or a different type of data - thus building the thick description]

Here, there is a connection with the previous extract in that ...

[Towards the end of the section connection can be made with the literature] The understanding that is beginning to develop through the extracts of data discussion this this section throws a new light on what ... (...), referred to in Chapter ... say about ... [or] connects with how ... (...) ... which will be elaborated in Chapter ...

What a part of a data chapter looks like

Introducing the theme and the extracts

Data extract

Could be from interviews, research diary, documents etc, or drawings or photographs

Where there are different types of data, there is the added opportunity for unexpected interconnections that form thick description

Discussion and analysis

50% extracts, 50% discussion and analysis

Pointing to the relevant bits, discussing what might be going on, connecting with other extracts, *then*, *perhaps*, relating to literature

Data extract

Discussion and analysis