Collecting

and

Interpreting
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Materials

Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln

Editors

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Preface

◆   For more than two decades, a quiet methodological revolution has been taking place in the social sciences. A blurring of disciplinary boundaries has occurred. The social sciences and humanities have drawn closer together in a mutual focus on an interpretive, qualitative approach to research and theory. Although these trends are not new, the extent to which the "qualitative revolution" has overtaken the social sciences and related professional fields has been nothing short of amazing.

Reflecting this revolution, a host of textbooks, journals, research monographs, and readers have been published in recent years. In 1994, we published the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* in an attempt to represent the field in its entirety, to take stock of how far it had come and how far it might yet go. Although it became abundantly clear that the "field" of qualitative research is defined primarily by tensions, contradictions, and hesitations—and that they exist in a less-than-unified arena—we believed that the handbook could be valuable for solidifying, interpreting, and organizing the field in spite of the essential differences that characterize it.

Putting together the *Handbook* was a massive undertaking that was carried out over several years, the full story of which can be found in the preface to the *Handbook* (which can also be found on the Web site for the *Handbook*: http://www.sagepub.com/sagepage/denzin_lincoln.htm).

We have been enormously gratified and heartened by the response to the *Handbook* since its publication. Especially gratifying has been that it has been used and adapted by such a wide variety of scholars and graduate

students in precisely the way we had hoped: as a starting point, a springboard for new thought and new work.

◆ The Paperback Project

There was one constituency we did not focus on centrally as we developed the plan for the *Handbook*: students in the classroom. The sheer size of the *Handbook,* with its corresponding expense, seemed to make the book a difficult one to assign in courses. Yet within a year of publication, it became clear that the material contained in the *Handbook* was deemed sufficiently valuable to override some considerations of size and expense.

Despite the reception the *Handbook* received in the classroom, students and teachers alike have urged us to publish the book in a less expensive, paperback iteration. We and our publisher, Sage Publications, decided to figure out a plan to do this.

Peter Labella, our editor at Sage, canvassed more than 50 scholars and students about the way the *Handbook* works in the classroom setting. Through a series of phone interviews and e-mail surveys—which themselves led to an ongoing conversation—a plan to do the book as a series of paperbacks began to emerge. The three-volume plan was codified at a series of meetings in the spring of 1997.

It was decided that the part structure of the *Handbook* could serve as a useful point of departure for the organization of the paperbacks. Thus Volume 1, titled *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues,* takes a look at the field from a broadly theoretical perspective, and is composed of the *Handbook*'s Parts I ("Locating the Field"), II ("Major Paradigms and Perspectives"), and VI ("The Future of Qualitative Research." Volume 2, titled *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry,* focuses on just that, and consists of Part III of the *Handbook.* Volume 3, titled *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials,* considers the tasks of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting empirical materials, and comprises the *Handbook*'s Parts IV ("Methods of Collecting and Analyzing Empirical Materials") and V ("The Art of Interpretation, Evaluation, and Presentation").

We decided that nothing should be cut from the original *Handbook.* Nearly everyone we spoke to who used the *Handbook* had his or her own way of using it, leaning heavily on certain chapters and skipping others altogether. But there was great consensus that this reorganization made a great deal of sense both pedagogically and economically. We and Sage are

committed to making this iteration of the *Handbook* accessible for classroom use. This commitment is reflected in the size, organization, and price of the paperbacks, as well as in the addition of end-of-book bibliographies.

It also became clear in our conversations with colleagues who used the *Handbook* that the single-volume, hard-cover version has a distinct place and value, and Sage will keep the original version available until a revised edition is published.

◆ Organization of This Volume

Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials introduces the researcher to basic methods of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data. Part I moves from interviewing to observation; to the use of artifacts, documents, and records from the past; to visual, personal experience; to data management and computerized, narrative, content, and semiotic methods of analysis. Part II focuses on interpretation, evaluation, and presentation. It begins with a discussion of criteria for judging the adequacy of qualitative materials, then turns to the interpretive process, the written text, and qualitative program evaluation before concluding with a look at the ways in which qualitative research can influence the policy process.

◆ Acknowledgments

Of course, this book would not exist without its authors or the editorial board members for the *Handbook* on which it is based. These individuals were able to offer both long-term, sustained commitments to the project and short-term, emergency assistance.

In addition, we would like to thank the following individuals and institutions for their assistance, support, insights, and patience: our respective universities and departments, as well as Jack Bratich and Rob Leffel, our respective graduate students. Without them, we could never have kept this project on course. There are also several people to thank at Sage Publications. We thank Peter Labella, our new editor; this three-volume version of the *Handbook* would not have been possible without Peter's wisdom, support, humor, and grasp of the field in all its current diversity. Peter had the vision to understand how a three-volume set could be better

suited to the classroom and to the needs of students than the original format of the *Handbook.*

As always, we appreciate the efforts of Lenny Friedman, the director of marketing at Sage, along with his staff, for their indefatigable efforts in getting the word out about the *Handbook* to teachers, researchers, and methodologists around the world. Astrid Virding was essential in moving this project through production; we are also grateful to the copy editor, Judy Selhorst, and to those whose proofreading and indexing skills were so central to the publication of the *Handbook* on which these volumes are based. Finally, as ever, we thank our spouses, Katherine Ryan and Egon Guba, for their forbearance and constant support.

The idea for this three-volume paperback version of the *Handbook* did not arise in a vacuum, and we are grateful for the feedback we received from countless teachers and students, both informally and in response to our formal survey. We wish especially to thank the following individuals: Jim Barott, University of Utah; Joanne Cooper, University of Hawaii; Fran Crawford, Curtin University; Morten Ender, University of North Dakota; Rich Hoffman, Miami University of Ohio; Patti Lather, Ohio State University; Michael Lissack, Henley-on-Thames; Martha MacLeod, University of Northern British Columbia; Suzanne Miller, University of Buffalo; Peggy Rios, University of Miami; Cynthia Russell, University of Tennessee, Memphis; Diane Schnelker, University of Northern Colorado; Coleen Shannon, University of Texas at Arlington; Barry Shealy, University of Buffalo; Ewart Skinner, Bowling Green State University; Jack Spencer, Purdue University; and Carol Tishelman, Karolinska Institute.

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Introduction

Entering the Field of
Qualitative Research

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◆ Qualitative research has a long and distinguished history in the human disciplines. In sociology the work of the "Chicago school" in the 1920s and 1930s established the importance of qualitative research for the study of human group life. In anthropology, during the same period, the pathbreaking studies of Boas, Mead, Benedict, Bateson, Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown, and Malinowski charted the outlines of the fieldwork method, wherein the observer went to a foreign setting to study the customs and habits of another society and culture (for a critique of this tradition, see Rosaldo, 1989, pp. 25-45). Soon qualitative research would be employed in other social science disciplines, including education, social work, and communications. The opening chapter in Part I, Volume 1, by Vidich and Lyman, charts key features of this history.

In this introductory chapter we will briefly define the field of qualitative research, then review the history of qualitative research in the human disciplines, so that this volume and its contents may be located in their proper historical moment. A conceptual framework for reading the qualitative

research act as a multicultural, gendered process will be presented. We will then provide a brief introduction to the chapters that follow.

◆ Definitional Issues

Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matter.[1] A complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term *qualitative research*. These include the traditions associated with positivism, poststructuralism, and the many qualitative research perspectives, or methods, connected to cultural and interpretive studies (the chapters in Part II of Volume 1 take up these paradigms). There are separate and detailed literatures on the many methods and approaches that fall under the category of qualitative research, such as interviewing, participant observation, and visual methods.

Qualitative research operates in a complex historical field that crosscuts five historical moments (we discuss these in detail below). These five moments simultaneously operate in the present. We describe them as the traditional (1900-1950), the modernist or golden age (1950-1970), blurred genres (1970-1986), the crisis of representation (1986-1990), and postmodern or present moments (1990-present). The present moment is defined, Laurel Richardson (1991) argues, by a new sensibility, the core of which "is doubt that any discourse has a privileged place, any method or theory a universal and general claim to authoritative knowledge" (p. 173).

Successive waves of epistemological theorizing move across these five moments. The traditional period is associated with the positivist paradigm. The modernist or golden age and blurred genres moments are connected to the appearance of postpositivist arguments. At the same time, a variety of new interpretive, qualitative perspectives made their presence felt, including hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, cultural studies, and feminism.[2] In the blurred genres phase the humanities became central resources for critical, interpretive theory, and the qualitative research project was broadly conceived. The blurred genres phase produced the next stage, the crisis of representation, where researchers struggled with how to locate themselves and their subjects in reflexive texts. The postmodern moment is characterized by a new sensibility that doubts all previous paradigms.

Any description of what constitutes qualitative research must work within this complex historical field. *Qualitative research* means different

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things in each of these moments. Nonetheless, an initial, generic definition can be offered: Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand.

The Qualitative Researcher as *Bricoleur*

The multiple methodologies of qualitative research may be viewed as a *bricolage,* and the researcher as *bricoleur.* Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992, p. 2), Lévi-Strauss (1966, p. 17), and Weinstein and Weinstein (1991, p. 161) clarify the meaning of these two terms.[3] A *bricoleur* is a "Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17). The *bricoleur* produces a *bricolage,* that is, a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation. "The solution (bricolage) which is the result of the *bricoleur's* method is an [emergent] construction" (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 161) that changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques are added to the puzzle. Nelson et al. (1992) describe the methodology of cultural studies "as a bricolage. Its choice of practice, that is, is pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive" (p. 2). This understanding can be applied equally to qualitative research.

The qualitative researcher-as-*bricoleur* uses the tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials as are at hand (Becker, 1989). If new tools have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. The choice of which tools to use, which research practices to employ, is not set in advance. The "choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context" (Nelson et al., 1992, p. 2), what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting.

Qualitative research is inherently multimethod in focus (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). However, the use of multiple methods, or triangulation,

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reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured. Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation (Denzin, 1989a, 1989b, p. 244; Fielding & Fielding, 1986, p. 33; Flick, 1992, p. 194). The combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation (see Flick, 1992, p. 194).

The *bricoleur* is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing to observing, to interpreting personal and historical documents, to intensive self-reflection and introspection. The *bricoleur* reads widely and is knowledgeable about the many interpretive paradigms (feminism, Marxism, cultural studies, constructivism) that can be brought to any particular problem. He or she may not, however, feel that paradigms can be mingled, or synthesized. That is, paradigms as overarching philosophical systems denoting particular ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies cannot be easily moved between. They represent belief systems that attach the user to a particular worldview. Perspectives, in contrast, are less well developed systems, and can be more easily moved between. The researcher-as-*bricoleur*-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms.

The *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and those of the people in the setting. The *bricoleur* knows that science is power, for all research findings have political implications. There is no value-free science. The *bricoleur* also knows that researchers all tell stories about the worlds they have studied. Thus the narratives, or stories, scientists tell are accounts couched and framed within specific storytelling traditions, often defined as paradigms (e.g., positivism, postpositivism, constructivism).

The product of the *bricoleur*'s labor is a *bricolage,* a complex, dense, reflexive, collagelike creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis. This *bricolage* will, as in the case of a social theorist such as Simmel, connect the parts to the whole, stressing the meaningful relationships that operate in the situations and social worlds studied (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 164).

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Qualitative Research as a Site of
Multiple Methodologies and Research Practices

Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive practices, privileges no single methodology over any other. As a site of discussion, or discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory, or paradigm, that is distinctly its own. As Part II of this volume reveals, multiple theoretical paradigms claim use of qualitative research methods and strategies, from constructivism to cultural studies, feminism, Marxism, and ethnic models of study. Qualitative research is used in many separate disciplines, as we will discuss below. It does not belong to a single discipline.

Nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods that are entirely its own. Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival, and phonemic analysis, even statistics. They also draw upon and utilize the approaches, methods, and techniques of ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizomatics, deconstructionism, ethnographies, interviews, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research, and participant observation, among others (see Nelson et al., 1992, p. 2).[4] All of these research practices "can provide important insights and knowledge" (Nelson et al., 1992, p. 2). No specific method or practice can be privileged over any other, and none can be "eliminated out of hand" (p. 2).

Many of these methods, or research practices, are also used in other contexts in the human disciplines. Each bears the traces of its own disciplinary history. Thus there is an extensive history of the uses and meanings of ethnography and ethnology in education (Hymes, 1980; LeCompte & Preissle, 1992); participant observation and ethnography in anthropology (Marcus, Volume 1, Chapter 12), sociology (Atkinson & Hammersley, Volume 2, Chapter 5), and cultural studies (Fiske, Volume 1, Chapter 11); textual, hermeneutic, feminist, psychoanalytic, semiotic, and narrative analysis in cinema and literary studies (Lentricchia & McLaughlin, 1990; Nichols, 1985; see also Manning & Cullum-Swan, Volume 3, Chapter 9); archival, material culture, historical, and document analysis in history, biography, and archaeology (Hodder, Volume 3, Chapter 4; Smith, Volume 2, Chapter 8; Tuchman, Volume 2, Chapter 9); and discourse and conversational analysis in communications and education (Holstein & Gubrium, Volume 2, Chapter 6).

The many histories that surround each method or research strategy reveal how multiple uses and meanings are brought to each practice. Textual analysis in literary studies, for example, often treat texts as self-contained systems. On the other hand, a researcher employing a cultural studies or feminist perspective would read a text in terms of its location within a historical moment marked by a particular gender, race, or class ideology. A cultural studies use of ethnography would bring a set of understandings from postmodernism and poststructuralism to the project. These understandings would likely not be shared by mainstream postpositivist sociologists (see Atkinson & Hammersley, Volume 2, Chapter 5; Altheide & Johnson, Volume 3, Chapter 10). Similarly, postpositivist and poststructural historians bring different understandings and uses to the methods and findings of historical research (see Tuchman, Volume 2, Chapter 9). These tensions and contradictions are all evident in the chapters presented here.

These separate and multiple uses and meanings of the methods of qualitative research make it difficult for researchers to agree on any essential definition of the field, for it is never just one thing.[5] Still, a definition must be established for use here. We borrow from, and paraphrase, Nelson et al.'s (1992, p. 4) attempt to define cultural studies:

> Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and the social and physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective, and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions.
>
> Qualitative research embraces two tensions at the same time. On the one hand, it is drawn to a broad, interpretive, postmodern, feminist, and critical sensibility. On the other hand, it is drawn to more narrowly defined positivist, postpositivist, humanistic, and naturalistic conceptions of human experience and its analysis.

This rather awkward statement means that qualitative research, as a set of practices, embraces within its own multiple disciplinary histories constant tensions and contradictions over the project itself, including its methods and the forms its findings and interpretations take. The field