QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

An Introduction
to the
Major Traditions

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For my parents, Alice and Leslie Lancy

Preface

This text is designed as an introduction to the field of qualitative research. There is a small but growing number of graduate students and more established scholars who are choosing to utilize a qualitative approach in their research. This approach is moving from the status of a rather specialized alternative to a place of legitimacy alongside the quantitative approach to educational research. As a consequence, there is growing consensus that a thorough grounding in qualitative research should become the *sine qua non* for all professional educators inside and outside of academe. This book is aimed, then, at a large and diverse audience. It is primarily aimed at students enrolled in a graduate level, introductory class in qualitative research. It is also aimed at scholars and practitioners who completed their graduate education without having had such a course and who would now like an opportunity to rectify that omission.

Unlike typical introductory research texts, this work presents the substance of qualitative research as well as its methods. One reason to focus on substantive issues is that qualitative research is inductive. That is, unlike quantitative research, which is deductive, in qualitative research one observes reality, the particular, and extrapolates to the general. Hence, the general principles are *induced* from an examination of particular examples of qualitative research. Another reason to focus on substantive issues is that qualitative research is more than a collection of techniques. It often addresses different issues and incorporates different assumptions about reality than quantitative research.

This argument applies to those who would do qualitative research as well as to those whose goal is only to be able to read these studies with a critical and discerning eye. I will lead the reader through a representative sampling of work in the field, and, along the way, point out critical features that make a work qualitative, I will also note features that can be considered strengths or benefits of this approach as well as weaknesses or liabilities.

Another reason for offering the reader a chance to sample a rather extensive catalog of discrete studies flows from my desire to forgo paradigmatic purity for pragmatic utility. Many research texts focus exclusively on what should be—and this may be defined very narrowly—rather than on what is. Among my early mentors were Mike Cole and Millard Madsen, two experimental psychologists who introduced the study of culture into their work, and Jack (John W.) Roberts, a cultural anthropologist who used experiments, questionnaires, and other quantitative data collection techniques. Hence, I willingly err on the side of being overinclusive and include work that might be considered only marginally qualitative. This eclecticism permits me to stress "crossing points" between qualitative and quantitative methods. Ultimately, my aim is to promote the development of resourceful investigators, who use whatever means at their disposal to pursue interesting questions and pressing problems.

Another aspect of this text that reflects my interest in addressing the needs of a large and diverse audience is my inclusion of several distinct "traditions" of qualitative research. Many qualitative research texts focus exclusively on the ethnographic method, and most exclude such robust traditions of qualitative research as biography, history, and cognitive studies. By relying on a traditions framework, however, I eschew any lengthy consideration of newer, less well-established perspectives such as connoisseurship, deconstruction, critical theory, feminist theory, hermeneutics, post-structuralism, post-modernism, in short, what Fred Erickson, in a 1992 AERA address, referred to as "post-everything."

I would like this work to fill what I see as a wide gulf between the very brief treatment of qualitative research presented in the typical introductory research methods text and the very thorough treatment of specific areas of qualitative research characteristic of the current library of qualitative research texts. An instructor could, in theory, cover the material I review here but she would have to require her students to purchase several separate texts to do so—or use no text at all, which is what I've done until now.

This volume is exclusive in the sense that it focuses on research in education. Previous texts have had to draw on a variety of fields in the social sciences for illustrative examples. Because of the explosive outpouring of qualitative research in education during the last decade, I am able to pick and choose from a rich store of cases within my own discipline.

Chapter 1 consists of an in-depth introduction to the field of qualitative research. It is designed to make the reader aware of critical issues that will be raised again and again throughout the text, such as what role the qualitative researcher should assume. The chapter also delineates areas of widespread agreement in the field regarding the identifying features of qualitative research. These features will then be instantiated with numerous examples throughout the text, for example, deriving theory from data.

The following six chapters each deal with a distinct "tradition" of qualitative educational research. Many would argue that unlike quantitative research, qualitative research cannot be viewed as a unitary, monolithic body of shared assumptions and tools. Rather, it has evolved in the context of the more narrowly focused and discipline-based traditions such as anthropology, sociology, and

history. Uneven chapter lengths reflect the varying popularity of these traditions. There are literally hundreds of published scholars in the field of educational anthropology, for example, while there are only a dozen or so active ecological (educational) psychologists. Each chapter reviews several studies on particular topics in considerable depth. This review permits an examination of the kinds of issues that unite scholars in this particular tradition as well as the development of a more discerning and critical approach to the research literature. An underlying premise here is that one must first read and digest a fairly large body of qualitative research before attempting to do it oneself.

In the penultimate chapter of the book, the practical problems involved in getting started on a qualitative research project are discussed. Finally, in the last chapter, John Rury offers the reader the unique perspective of the historian of education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Reflection

The case also demonstrates a crucial conflict I felt between my role as teacher and my role as researcher. As Fida's teacher, I felt responsible for her learning. As a researcher, I did not feel that same responsibility. In fact, I believed I had to maintain some sort of distanced, observer status, even after I had identified the strategies Fida used that hindered her growth as a writer. I was uncomfortable with my findings and unwilling to confront Fida with what I saw as one source of her failure—a dependency on teachers that I, as one of her teachers, had helped create. (p. 335)

Ray's frustration at having to sit back and describe a phenomenon is evident. It would seem that it is difficult for the teacher to study an essentially static problem, in this case one student's inability to grow as a writer.

PROMISES AND LIMITATIONS

I see the study of Personal Accounts as having enormous potential. Rather cursorily, I have reviewed several works (e.g., Conroy and others) which can be profitably studied as a group. Their collective wisdom about cross-cultural teaching, the role of values, institutionalized racism, and so on, being much greater than the sum of the individual chronicles. Almost any area of education can be illuminated by synthesizing material from the extant autobiographical record of teachers, principals, school board members, and so on. A literary critic studying genre or voice, a clinician looking for signs of stress, an historian searching for evidence of a transition from teaching as a calling to teaching as a job, will all find grist for their respective mills. While local archives can be searched for unpublished material, the inter-library loan system will prove invaluable for tracking down published works that are no longer in print. Of course, a researcher can also collect life history material from the living. One of the most direct sources is from our own students. Recent changes in the nature of public school curriculum have provided impetus for student autobiography. Teachers, in turn, and with proper safeguards, can analyze these materials for themes, so that we may gain a better understanding of, for example, how academic "careers" (see Chapter 3) are constructed.

The in-depth study of a single life in the conduct of biography can also be rewarding. Two issues need to be addressed by the aspiring biographer. Does this person's story illuminate issues that have contemporary significance? And, is this someone that you can treat sympathetically, but dispassionately? An area of biography that has an almost urgent appeal are the lives and stories of teachers who have had successful teaching careers in the inner-city (e.g., Edwards, 1989). Almost everyone has had, or heard, about these legendary figures, but we know almost nothing about what they have in common, what techniques they use in teaching, their philosophy, or their strategies for self-preservation and renewal.

With respect to the collection and analysis of multiple-life histories, there are numerous topics waiting to be addressed. For example, innovation in education has been looked at from a number of perspectives (Chapter 5), but no

one, to my knowledge, has collected oral histories in which the participants were asked to reflect on their encounters with "new ideas." Where did these come from? How were they initially received? Was there a change in the classroom, school, or school district? What does the wisdom of hindsight suggest to the teacher?

As we have seen, the case study demands that the researcher acquire multiple sources on the participants—observation, collection of written material, and perhaps, interviews with their colleagues, employers, and family members. The researcher now has the opportunity to construct a universal or etic characterization to set alongside the emic perspective provided in the interview and diary material. Here the field is truly wide open, so to speak. I have earlier mentioned the need for a case study or studies of female principals. But imagine how our personnel preparation courses would be enhanced if we had vivid and thorough case studies of gym teachers, guidance counselors, speech pathologists, secretaries, and assistant principals to draw on? Would we need to revise the text material used in training these individuals for their roles, as real-world accounts became available?

Multiple case studies shorten the perspective. That is we invest less in any single individual, we learn less about them, in order to obtain comparative data on several individuals. "Unpackaging" the teacher's or administrator's instructional tool kit is amenable to study using several case studies. When a teacher says ". . . the 'Quality Circle' is particularly important for me now. It's an opportunity for me to grow" (Marinera in Raphael 1985, 77), what does that mean?

In order to realize this promise, some limitations in the present Personal Accounts literature must be addressed. There is a tendency to locate at one or another end of the idiographic-nomothetic continuum, rather than attempting to strike a balance as Spencer (1986) does. I think we are rapidly reaching the saturation point with respect to single-case or collections of teacher's stories that do not address a problem. On the other hand, some problem focused studies use such large samples that all sense of individual identity is lost.

The selection of participants has been treated in a rather off-hand fashion in too much of the Personal Accounts literature. Considering the enormous investment one makes over the course of the project, it is not sensible to select a participant who is unrepresentative of the class one wants to refer to (e.g., a 45-year old "beginning teacher"), or someone who does not possess the qualities or attributes one is interested in studying (e.g., selecting an administrator who turns out to be widely regarded as incompetent for a study of leadership style). It is clearly unwise to study one's friends, whether or not they are treated as "collaborators."

We need a truth in advertising policy. Far too often, when I expected to read a report of research, I was treated to a lecture, in which the life history material was not analyzed, but selectively drawn on to illustrate the lecture. Fortunately, in some of these works, sufficient material is presented so that one could use it to compare with other similar cases in the literature—this was particularly true of the works on beginning teachers. I am, obviously, an advocate of using life history material for instructional purposes, and see its usefulness in illustrating

a novel thesis about the larger social forces that have an impact on teaching. But, one should be very careful to (e.g., "I am not sure that I want to call what I do research." Grumet 1991, 71) avoid claiming that one is reporting qualitative research findings.

Too many reports leave out what would seem to be essential pieces of the puzzle. Many scholars fail to gather and/or fail to report life history details that might have a bearing one one's character in school. Critical contextual detail should include: the subject's family life, including the subject's role as parent; personal school history, especially details of the professional training; significant others, parents and favorite teachers; some sense of the individual's daily routines and life-style; the nature of the school and classroom environments; students' characteristics and background, especially regarding class and ethnicity; some sense of school climate and the prevailing teaching ethos; and classroom routines, including the use of prepared curricula, grouping arrangements, management strategies, predominant instructional mode, etc. Again, I would cite Spencer (1986) as representing the ideal, although I missed any discussion of the teacher's pedagogical philosophy, another critical detail.

Let me now turn to two of the newer paradigms in the Personal Accounts tradition. The jointly constructed research project between a practitioner in the field and a researcher needs careful exploration. It certainly makes sense to suggest that in pursuing a study where an individuals' life history is a primary data source, that that individual should have considerable say in the conduct, outcome, and reporting of the research. However, in the published literature to date, the teachers seem not to have claimed ownership of the project. Largely, this seems to be due to selecting collaborators who are accessible, rather than seeking out teachers with a genuine interest in and understanding of research. When I contemplate this type of study, I think of a teacher of my acquaintance who did a superb job on her master's thesis; is widely recognized for her innovative teaching; and, is called upon frequently to provide leadership in her school, as well as in the district and state. She knows she is at the peak of her profession and would, I'm sure, be quite comfortable working with a researcher to pick apart some aspect of her pedagogical model (e.g., Gudmundsdottir 1990) or her practice.

The teacher-as-researcher[20] paradigm is a very welcome recent development, but it is too early to see just what further developments to expect. There are several possibilities. Recently, I met with a group of primary teachers to discuss an aspect of a multifaceted project they have been funded to carry out, a primary feature of which was teacher autonomy. It was interesting that, despite teachers' (perhaps legitimate) complaint of being bogged down with official record-keeping, these teachers did not immediately see the need to document, via narrative description as well as using quantitative indicators where available (e.g., "number of parents attending an open house"), their actions and the outcomes thereof. Too often teachers are charged with designing and carrying out new programs, while some district or building-level administrator is charged with "evaluation" and "reporting." Thus, the teacher-as-researcher movement may facilitate a development whereby teachers take greater responsibility for documenting and reporting the course of projects they are involved in.

Another possible development is that teachers will begin to incorporate the methods and techniques of researchers into their instruction (e.g., Cangelosi 1990). That is, they will "study" aspects of their own practice in order to make more systematic improvements. Teachers might go one step further and conduct these studies in such a way that permits the findings to be disseminated to wider and wider circles of colleagues. And, finally, all three of these developments may merge, and this would be the ideal. For this to happen, however, teachers must meet the same obligations for rigor as any academic scholar. For a start, they must locate their study at the edge of our present knowledge, and to do this they must first conduct a thorough and critical review of the literature, a step not advocated in the how-to literature for teacher/researchers, unfortunately.

In the culminating activity for the master's degree, we have an untapped resource of incalculable magnitude for producing teacher/researchers. Thousands of educators earn a masters degree every year and, as their final responsibility, submit a project or a piece of writing. Most of these are make-work undertakings, in my experience, of no value except to fulfill degree requirements. There is absolutely no reason in principle why the legion of masters degree candidates in education should not be required to conduct a publishable piece of research (as their counterparts are required to do in other disciplines). The major impediment for years was that teachers simply didn't have the resources to do "good" research meaning: access to large, randomly assigned samples of student "subjects"; who could be given elaborate treatments; the results of which could then be analyzed by sophisticated statistical techniques. This book should make abundantly clear that there are other avenues to good research which are accessible to teachers (and administrators as well).

Let me conclude by leading you back to an earlier chapter. There are many interesting themes which arise in the Personal Accounts literature which can be better pursued in another tradition. One of these is the issue of "shop talk" or discussion among educators of student and instructional issues. There is the suggestion in much of this literature that it occurs rarely, and when it does it may take on a very negative tone (Hammersley 1984). And then one comes across something like the following in, an interview with Tracy Kidder (Daniels 1989):

> Mr. Kidder's interest . . . was piqued by listening to conversations of several friends who teach elementary school. "I had thought teachers wouldn't talk about their work outside of a school setting. . . . But whenever they'd get together, that's exactly what they did. They seemed so animated, so invested in their students, I was intrigued." (p. 46)

Now it would be very hard to get at shop talk using the framework advanced in this chapter. It occupies too small a time and space in the life history of the individual. However, it is perfectly suited to an ethnomethodological approach (Chapter 3), where the social-interactional setting is the usual unit of analysis. In the next chapter, we again have the opportunity to observe the way in which a specialized methodology has evolved to tackle a particular set of issues in education.

NOTES

1. Kinkead suggested that, as there is such a great variety of genre expressions in this chapter, that those that differed markedly from earlier quotations should be "framed."
2. The contradiction is intended.
3. The personal accounts that are reviewed in this chapter are predominantly those of teachers, that's the nature of the literature. However, I have strived to find accounts of other actors on the education stage to provide some variety.
4. Many of the portraits of Indian Americans were published for this reason (e.g., "Ishi"-Kroeber 1961) as were oral histories or urban types (e.g., Stanley the "Jackroller"-Shaw [1930] 1966) collected by the Chicago School of Sociology.
5. In the course mentioned above, I used his (1984) *Growing Minds: On Becoming a Teacher* as the text.
6. With McLaren, Kozol, Kohl, and Conroy, I have certainly not exhausted the store of autobiographical material focused on teaching impoverished elementary school children. Furthermore, there is a parallel library of works on the challenges facing secondary school teachers (e.g., Best 1983; Channon 1970; Cherry 1978; James 1969; Kaufman 1964; Natkins 1986; Williams 1987; Welsh 1986) that I can't even touch on here.
7. In the older literature, pre-1985, those whose lives are studied or chronicled are referred to as subjects. This term, associated as it is with experimental psychology and conveying an air of manipulation and uneven status, has now fallen out of favor in the Personal Accounts literature. No widely agreed-upon substitute exists. I have used "cases" or "participants" where it seemed appropriate.
8. I lasted only one quarter as a supervisor of student teachers because I ran into two intractable cases (out of six supervisees!). In one, I had to conclude that the individual would need far more than one quarter of student teaching before she would be considered competent, and yet she had earned all A's and B's in her teacher education classes, and her "failure" in student teaching was unacceptable to my department head. In the second, the practicing teacher used an approach out of the dark ages, yet she was only aping her supervising teacher and following directions.
9. Wolcott (1983) himself describes a dramatically contrasting example which illustrates the difference between life history and case study. Here he discovers 19-year-old "Brad," squatting in a shack he has made for himself on a corner of Wolcott's wooded property. for two years, Wolcott gathers Brad's life history. A "stonie" and eventual dropout, Brad has gotten little from his schooling. He uses Brad's story to make the point that while school can teach you things, it can't give you reason for wanting to become educated, only your parents can do this. And Brad's parents have failed him. But what is interesting is that Wolcott treats Brad's case quite differently than Ed's, as he says, "There should be a high ratio of information to explanation in a life-story . . ." (p. 8), and that's exactly what he does, his analysis is minor, instead he helps Brad tell his story.
10. Districts vary a great deal in how concerned they are about "managing" research contact with schools. The best approach is a modified grass-roots approach where you search for the teacher/school/students that are right for your study, while keeping contact with a "guardian angel" in central administration—someone who is sympathetic toward your project and can go to bat for you if someone in authority is upset that you didn't follow correct protocol. Of course, after getting informal agreement from teachers, principal, etc., you need to seek formal permission through the district office.

11. In the retrospective evaluation of Kensington School reviewed in the previous chapter, the researchers track down the principal actors 15 years later to conduct life history interviews (Smith, Klein, Dwyer, Prunty 1985). They were not surprised to find that the crusading innovators who established this ''open'' school, all revealed a history of deep involvement with organized religion. The authors refer to educational innovation as ''secular religion.''

12. One of these is Phil Bingham (Clandinin and Connely 1991), the very effective principal of an inner-city school in Toronto. Actually he sounds like McLaren's (1980) principal. Phil related a story about his being teased when he was sent to school in short pants to explain his empathy for minority students.

13. When the prospectus for this book was reviewed, one of the reviewers complained that my references all seemed quite dated. I took this concern into account in preparing this book. However, I would argue that neither the march of progress in educational administration, nor in educational research methodology are likely to have invalidated Wolcott's (1973) 20 year old study, except in one regard. Now I would have to say that Ed was typical of good, male principals. The time is right for a replication of Wolcott's original study with a female principal.

14. See also Bullough's (1990, 137–9) discussion of his relationship with Kerrie.

15. Studying a friend is not a good idea. Even in a project that attempts to be collaborative, it is extremely difficult to keep a hierarchical relationship at bay. And, in the analysis, more may be revealed than is comfortable for either researcher or subject.

16. Sarah seems muddled about pedagogy for teaching English, and unaware of the exciting developments taking place at the time, such as the National Writing Project, reader-response theory, and the integrated language arts curriculum.

17. Aileen and Stephanie make guest appearances in a recent textbook (Connelly and Clandinin 1988) for teachers. Their narratives are used illustratively as in Bullough (1989) and Fuchs (1969).

18. I was, for example, distressed that, given the pervasive emphasis on the cooperative nature of this work, the teachers, who should have been given co-authorship of the book, aren't even identified by their real names (see also Shulman 1990)!

19. An important work in progress, Adra Cole and Gary Knowles (1991) are starting to systematize the whole area of what they refer to as ''partnership.'' Their work should provide an invaluable guide to the varied roles taken in, and purposes of (university) researcher—(school) teacher relationships.

20. There is an interesting parallel body of work that might be referred to as ''counselor-as-researcher.'' Clark Moutsakis (1990) has written a useful guide for clinicians and counselors who would adopt a research perspective based on Personal Accounts.