

PREFACE TO THE 4TH EDITION



When you take a word in your mouth, you have not taken up some arbitrary tool which can be thrown in a corner if it doesn't do the job, but you are committed to a line of thought that comes from afar and reaches beyond you.

—H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*,
2nd rev. ed., J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall,
trans. New York: Crossroads, 1989, pp. 547–548

We accept the fact that the subject presents itself historically under different aspects at different times or from a different standpoint. We accept that these aspects do not simply cancel one another out as research proceeds, but are like mutually exclusive conditions that exist each by themselves and combine only in us. Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is to be heard. It is present in the multifariousness of such voices: this constitutes the nature of the tradition in which we want to share and have a part.

—H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*,
2nd rev. ed., J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall,
trans. New York: Crossroads, 1989, p. 378

This book is a commentary on the meaning of approximately 400 selected words and phrases that partially shape our understanding of the philosophy, purpose, logic, meaning, conduct, methods, and significance of the practices broadly referred to as qualitative inquiry or qualitative research. The commentary combines explication, explanation, analysis, and, occasionally, criticism and evaluation of this vocabulary. Because it is written from a particular point of view, entries are more like annotations (critical and explanatory remarks) than definitions, and the entire effort is more interpretive than is characteristic of a dictionary. I have tried to make the interpretations of terms inviting, inclusive of multiple and often contested points of view, and occasionally provocative. My aim has been to present terms in such a way that further exploration is encouraged and not foreclosed. The book is intended to stimulate continued examination of the nature and purpose of qualitative inquiry through the language we use to discuss and conduct it.

As a guidebook for the vocabulary of qualitative inquiry, the *Dictionary* can be particularly useful because concepts acquire different interpretations both within and across the various theoretical perspectives and philosophies that shape the activity of qualitative inquiry—for example, naturalism, interpretivism, social constructionism, feminist theory, phenomenological sociology, philosophical hermeneutics, critical theory, cultural studies, postmodernism, and poststructuralism. This edition continues to reflect the orientation of the previous editions, namely, to promote investigation of philosophical and methodological assumptions that foreground the practices of qualitative inquiry.

The Reader's Guide groups terms into several very broad categories. The categories are not mutually exclusive and exhaustive. They do, however, provide a general sense of related terms that take up similar matters and concerns. This *Dictionary* can be used in a variety of ways. It can be a glossary for the vocabulary of qualitative inquiry in introductory courses on qualitative methods and methodologies, or a supplement to texts representative of different theoretical perspectives in courses on the foundations of qualitative inquiry. Some readers have even found it beneficial to read the entire dictionary cover to cover to grasp a sense of what is entailed in thinking about qualitative inquiry.

Changes to this edition of the *Dictionary* include a net gain of approximately twenty terms. References were also updated for many terms as appropriate. The definitions of a few terms (e.g., *data*, *evidence*) were expanded as

well. In several instances, terms that had separate entries were relocated under one umbrella term; thus under *data analysis* one now finds the definitions of multiple means of data analysis (e.g., constant comparative method, narrative analysis, thematic analysis); all the various versions of *hermeneutics* (e.g., conservative, radical, philosophical) now appear under that heading; and multiple ways of addressing the issue of *generalization* now appear under that heading. I made this change assuming that readers would find it more useful for purposes of comparison to have all such closely related terms in one place. I found a few instances in the previous edition where there simply were too many terms listed as cross-references under **See also**, creating the impression that everything is related to everything else, so I pared those down a bit to the most critical cross-referenced terms. Finally, the Reader's Guide was restructured using some new headings.

Qualitative research is a dynamic field where contested conversations about its key ideas, assumptions, and practices are always taking place. My hope is that this *Dictionary* serves as a useful tool for those who aim to participate in that conversation in a discerning way.