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Introduction

Ifirst began work on this book during a 1994 summer qualitative seminar in Vail, Colorado, sponsored by the University of Denver under the able guidance of Edith King of the College of Education. At that seminar I facilitated a discussion about qualitative data analysis. I began on a personal note, introducing one of my recent qualitative studies—a case study of a campus response to a student gun incident (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995) (see Appendix F in this book). I knew this case might provoke some discussion and present some complex analysis issues. It involved a Midwestern university's reaction to a gunman who entered an actuarial science undergraduate class with a semiautomatic rifle and attempted to fire on students in his class. The rifle jammed and did not discharge, and the gunman fled and was captured a few miles away. Standing before the group, I chronicled the events of the case, the themes, and the lessons we learned about a university reaction to a near tragic event. Then, unplanned, Harry Wolcott of the University of Oregon, another resource person for our seminar, raised his hand and asked for the podium. He explained how *he* would approach the study as a cultural anthropologist. To my surprise, he had "turned" my case study into ethnography, framing the study in an entirely new way. After Harry had concluded, Les Goodchild, then of Denver University, discussed how he would examine the gunman case from a historical perspective. We all had, then, two different renderings of the incident, surprising "turns" of my case study using different qualitative approaches. It was this event that sparked an idea that I had long harbored—that the design of a qualitative study related to the specific *approach* taken to qualitative research. I began to write the first edition of this book, guided by a single, compelling question: How does the type or approach of qualitative inquiry shape the design or procedures of a study?

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

I am now into the third edition of this book, and I am still formulating an answer to this question. My primary intent in this book is to examine five different approaches to qualitative inquiry—narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies—and put them side-by-side so that we can see their differences. These differences can be most vividly displayed by exploring their use throughout the process of research, including the introduction to a study through its purpose and research questions; data collection; data analysis; report writing; and standards of validation and evaluation. For example, by studying qualitative articles in journals we can see that research questions framed from grounded theory look different than questions framed from a phenomenological study.

This combination of the different approaches and how their distinctiveness plays out in the process of research is what distinguishes this book from others on qualitative research that you may have read. Most qualitative researchers focus on only one approach—say ethnography or grounded theory—and try to convince their readers of the value of that approach. This makes sense in our highly specialized world of academia. However, students and beginning qualitative researchers need choices that fit their research problems and that suit their own interests in conducting research. Hopefully, this book opens up the expanse of qualitative research and invites readers to examine multiple ways of engaging in the process of research. It provides qualitative researchers with options for conducting qualitative inquiry and helps them with decisions about what approach is best to use in studying their research problems. With so many books on qualitative research in general and on the various approaches of inquiry, qualitative research students are often at a loss for understanding what options (i.e., approaches) exist and how one makes an informed choice of an option for research.

By reading this book, I hope that you will gain a better understanding of the steps in the process of research, learn five qualitative approaches to inquiry, and understand the differences and similarities among the five ***approaches to inquiry*** (see the glossary in Appendix A for definitions of terms in bold italics).

WHAT IS NEW IN THIS EDITION

Since I wrote the first and second editions of this book, the content of the book has both remained the same and changed. In this edition I introduce several new ideas:

- Based on reviewers' feedback, I reworked Chapter 2 on the philosophical assumptions and the interpretive frameworks used by qualitative researchers. I needed to better position philosophy and frameworks within the overall process of research. I also sought to clarify the relationship between philosophy and interpretive frameworks, and to discuss interpretive frameworks as they are currently being used in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).
- In Chapter 3 I have added a new section on ethical issues that traces the types of qualitative ethical dilemmas likely to arise at different phases of the research process. In this way I am expanding the ethical coverage in this book.
- In discussing each of the five approaches in this book, as mentioned in Chapter 4, I have added passages on each of the five related to "defining characteristics" of the approach. Readers will have my best assessment of the key features of the approach summarized in one place. Also in Chapter 4 I have moved from relying primarily on one book for each approach in the last edition to using two books to construct a picture of the approach in this edition. I have done this because of the popularity of multiple approaches for understanding each approach, and the value of constructing an understanding of each approach from multiple authors.
- I also updated the illustrative articles that I used in the book in Chapter 5 and removed articles that were outdated. Consequently, I added two new articles: one in narrative research (Chan, 2010) and one in grounded theory (Harley et al., 2009). I decided to keep the gunman incident case study in (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995) because the issue of safety on college campuses remains a critical concern in the literature given recent campus violence.
- In the discussion about research questions, I simplified the discussion about subquestions and focused on how subquestions subdivide the central question into several parts. I also provided additional illustrations of subquestions drawn from different qualitative approaches.
- In the area of data collection, I cannot overlook the technological developments in data collection, and any treatment of qualitative methods needs to incorporate new ways of gathering qualitative data electronically. I have added online methods of qualitative data collection into the discussion in Chapter 7. I have also added information about observational techniques to expand discussions in earlier editions of this book.

- In data analysis, in Chapter 8, I added in new techniques that are being discussed for analyzing the data in each of the five approaches, and I cite recent references. I also updated the discussion about qualitative computer software analysis packages.
- In the writing of qualitative research, as presented in Chapter 9, I added more information about reflexivity, its importance, and how it might be incorporated into a qualitative study.
- At the end of each chapter you will find sample exercises to practice specific skills introduced in the chapter. Many of these exercises have been rewritten in this new edition to reflect my growing understanding of the specific skills that a qualitative researcher needs to know.
- In the final chapter, I have not only "turned" the initial qualitative gunman case study into a narrative project, a phenomenology, a grounded theory study, and an ethnography, but I have made more explicit what changes actually occurred in this reworking.
- As with all new editions, I have updated the references to include recent books on qualitative research methods as well as select journal articles that illustrate these methods.

Many areas have also remained the same as in the last edition. These include:

- The core characteristics of qualitative research have remained the same.
- An emphasis on social justice as one of the primary features of qualitative research is continued in this edition. While a social justice orientation may not be for everyone, it has again been given primacy in the latest edition of the *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).
- A healthy respect exists for variations within each of the five approaches. I have come to understand that there is no single way to approach an ethnography, a grounded theory study, and so forth. I have selectively chosen what I believe to be the most popular approaches within each approach and to highlight books that emphasize them.
- On a similar note, I have continued to use the five approaches that have now stood the test of time since the first edition. This is not to say that I have not considered additional approaches. Participatory action research, for example, could certainly be a sixth approach,

but I include some discussion of it in the interpretive framework passages in Chapter 2 (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). Also, discourse analysis and conversational analysis could certainly have been included as an additional approach (Cheek, 2004), but I added some thoughts about conversational approaches in narrative approaches. Mixed methods, too, is sometimes so closely associated with qualitative research that it is considered one of the genres (see Saldaña, 2011). However, I see mixed methods as a distinct methodology from qualitative inquiry, and one that bridges qualitative and quantitative research. Further, it has its own distinct literature (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), and thus I wanted to limit the scope of this book to qualitative approaches. Accordingly, I have chosen to keep the five approaches that I started with and to expand within these five approaches.

- I continue to provide resources throughout the book for the qualitative researcher. I include a detailed glossary of terms (and have added terms from the last edition), an analytic table of contents that organizes the material in this book according to the five approaches, and complete journal articles that model designing and writing a study within each of the five approaches. For both inexperienced and experienced researchers, I supply recommendations at the ends of chapters for further reading that can extend the material in this book.

- The term that I used in the first edition, *traditions*, has now been replaced by *approaches*, and I continue this use of terms in the third edition. My approach signals that I not only want to respect past approaches, but I also want to encourage current practices in qualitative research. Other writers have referred to the approaches as "strategies of inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), "varieties" (Tesch, 1990), or "methods" (Morse & Richards, 2002). By **research design**, I refer to the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing research questions, and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and report writing (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Yin (2009) commented, "The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions" (p. 29). Hence, I include in the specific design features from the broad philosophical and theoretical perspectives to the quality and validation of a study.

POSITIONING MYSELF

You need to know some information about my background in order to understand my approach used in this book. I was trained as a quantitative researcher about 40 years ago. By the mid-1980s, I was asked to teach the first qualitative research course at my university, and I volunteered to do so. This was followed a few years later with the writing of the first edition of this book. While I have expanded my repertoire to mixed methods as well as qualitative research, I continually return to my strong interest in qualitative research. Over the years I have evolved into an applied research methodologist with a specialization in research design, qualitative research, and mixed methods research.

This background explains why I write from the standpoint of conveying an understanding of the process of qualitative research (whether you want to call it the scientific method or something else), a focus on strong methods features such as extensive qualitative data collection, rigorous data analysis through multiple steps, and the use of computer programs. Moreover, I have developed a fascination with the structure of writing, whether the writing is a qualitative study, a poem, or creative nonfiction. An enduring interest has been the *composition* of qualitative research. This compositional interest flows into how to best structure qualitative inquiry and to visualize how the structure shifts and changes given different approaches to research.

This interest in structured features has often placed me in the camp of postpositivist writers in qualitative inquiry (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), but, like most researchers, I defy easy categorization. In an article in *Qualitative Inquiry* about a homeless shelter (Miller, Creswell, & Olander, 1998), my ethnography assumed a realist, a confessional, and an advocacy stance. Also, I am not advocating the acceptance of qualitative research in a "quantitative" world (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991). Qualitative inquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparisons to quantitative research.

I also tend to be oriented toward citing numerous ideas to document articles; to incorporate the latest writings from the ever-growing, vast literature of qualitative inquiry; and to advance an applied, practical form of conducting research. For example, it was not enough for me to convey philosophical assumptions of qualitative inquiry in Chapter 2. I also had to construct a discussion around how these

philosophical ideas are applied in the design and writing of a qualitative study. I concur with Agger (1991), who says that readers and writers can understand methodology in less technical ways, thereby affording greater access to scholars and democraticizing science. Also, always before me as I write is the picture of a beginning master's or doctoral student who is learning qualitative research for the first time. Because I have this picture in my head, some may say that I oversimplify the craft of research. This picture may well blur the image for a more seasoned qualitative writer, and especially one who seeks more advanced discussions and who looks for problematizing the process of research.

SELECTION OF THE FIVE APPROACHES

Those undertaking qualitative studies have a baffling number of choices of approaches. One can gain a sense of this diversity by examining several classifications or typologies. Tesch (1990) provided a classification consisting of 28 approaches organized into four branches of a flowchart, sorting out these approaches based on the central interest of the investigator. Wolcott (1992) classified approaches in a "tree" diagram with branches of the tree designating strategies for data collection. Miller and Crabtree (1992) organized 18 types according to the "domain" of human life of primary concern to the researcher, such as a focus on the individual, the social world, or the culture. In the field of education, Jacob (1987) categorized all qualitative research into "traditions" such as ecological psychology, symbolic interactionism, and holistic ethnography. Jacob's categorization provided a key framework for me as I began to sketch out the first edition of this book. Lancy (1993) organized qualitative inquiry into discipline perspectives, such as anthropology, sociology, biology, cognitive psychology, and history. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have organized and reorganized their types of qualitative strategies over the years.

Table 1.1 provides these and other various classifications of qualitative approaches that have surfaced over the years. This list is not meant to be exhaustive of the possibilities; it is intended to illustrate the diversity of approaches recommended by different authors and how the disciplines might emphasize some approaches over others.

Table 1.1	Qualitative Approaches Mentioned by Authors and Their Disciplines/Fields	
Authors	*Qualitative Approaches*	*Disciplines/ Fields*
Jacob (1987)	Ecological Psychology Holistic Ethnography Cognitive Anthropology Ethnography of Communication Symbolic Interactionism	Education
Munhall & Oiler (1986)	Phenomenology Grounded Theory Ethnography Historical Research	Nursing
Lancy (1993)	Anthropological Perspectives Sociological Perspectives Biological Perspectives Case Studies Personal Accounts Cognitive Studies Historical Inquiries	Education
Strauss & Corbin (1990)	Grounded Theory Ethnography Phenomenology Life Histories Conversational Analysis	Sociology, Nursing
Morse (1994)	Phenomenology Ethnography Ethnoscience Grounded Theory	Nursing
Moustakas (1994)	Ethnography Grounded Theory Hermeneutics Empirical Phenomenological Research Heuristic Research Transcendental Phenomenology	Psychology

Authors	Qualitative Approaches	Disciplines/ Fields
Denzin & Lincoln (1994)	Case Studies Ethnography Phenomenology Ethnomethodology Interpretative Practices Grounded Theory Biographical Historical Clinical Research	Social Sciences
Miles & Huberman (1994)	Approaches to Qualitative Data Analysis: Interpretivism Social Anthropology Collaborative Social Research	Social Sciences
Slife & Williams (1995)	Categories of Qualitative Methods: Ethnography Phenomenology Studies of Artifacts	Psychology
Denzin & Lincoln (2005)	Performance, Critical, and Public Ethnography Interpretive Practices Case Studies Grounded Theory Life History Narrative Authority Participatory Action Research Clinical Research	Social Sciences
Marshall & Rossman (2010)	Ethnographic Approaches Phenomenological Approaches Sociolinguistic Approaches (i.e., critical genres, such as critical race theory, queer theory, etc.)	Education

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Continued)		
Authors	*Qualitative Approaches*	*Disciplines/ Fields*
Saldaña (2011)	Ethnography Grounded Theory Phenomenology Case Study Content Analysis Mixed Methods Research Narrative Inquiry Arts-Based Research Autoethnography Evaluation Research Action Research Investigative Journalism Critical Inquiry	Arts (Theater)
Denzin & Lincoln (2011)	Research Strategies: Design Case Study Ethnography, Participant Observation, Performance Ethnography Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology Grounded Theory Life History, *Testimonio* Historical Method Action and Applied Research Clinical Research	

Looking closely at these classifications, we can discern that some approaches appear consistently over the years, such as ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies. Also, a number of narrative-related approaches have been discussed, such as life history,

autoethnography, and biography. With so many possibilities, how did I decide on the five approaches presented in this book?

My choice of the five approaches resulted from reflecting on my own personal interests, selecting different approaches popular in the social science and health science literature, and electing to choose representative discipline orientations. I have had personal experience with each of the five, and have advised students and participated on research teams using these qualitative approaches. Beyond this personal experience, I have been reading the qualitative literature since my initial teaching assignment in the area in 1985. The five approaches discussed in this book reflect the types of qualitative research that I most frequently see in the social, behavioral, and health science literature. It is not unusual, too, for authors to state that certain approaches are most important in their fields (e.g., Morse & Field, 1995). Also, I prefer approaches with systematic procedures for inquiry. The books I have chosen to illustrate each approach tend to have procedures of rigorous data collection and analysis methods that are attractive to beginning researchers. The primary books chosen for each approach also represent different discipline perspectives in the social, behavioral, and health sciences. This is an attractive feature to broaden the audience for the book and to recognize the diverse disciplines that have embraced qualitative research. For example, narrative originates from the humanities and social sciences, phenomenology from psychology and philosophy, grounded theory from sociology, ethnography from anthropology and sociology, and case studies from the human and social sciences and applied areas such as evaluation research.

The primary ideas that I use to discuss each approach come from select books. More specifically, I will rely heavily on two books on each approach. These are the books that I highly recommend for you to get started in learning a specific approach to qualitative inquiry. These books reflect classics often cited by authors as well as new works. They also reflect diverse disciplines and perspectives.

Narrative Research

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Phenomenology

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Grounded Theory

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* London: Sage.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ethnography

Fetterman, D. M. (2010). *Ethnography: Step-by-step.* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

Wolcott, H. F. (2008). *Ethnography: A way of seeing* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: AltaMira.

Case Study

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

AUDIENCE

Although multiple audiences, both known and unknown, exist for any text (Fetterman, 2010), I direct this book toward academics and scholars affiliated with the social, human, and health sciences. Examples throughout the book illustrate the diversity of disciplines and fields of study including sociology, psychology, education, nursing, family medicine, allied health, urban studies, marketing, communication and journalism, educational psychology, family science and therapy, and other social and human science areas.

My aim is to provide a useful text for those who produce scholarly qualitative research in the form of journal articles, theses, or dissertations.

I have pitched the level of discussion to be suitable for upper-division students and beyond into graduate school. For graduate students writing master's theses or doctoral dissertations, I compare and contrast the five approaches in the hope that such analysis helps in establishing a rationale for the choice of a type to use. For beginning qualitative researchers, I provide Chapter 2 on the philosophical and interpretive frameworks that shape qualitative research and Chapter 3 on the basic elements in designing a qualitative study. I feel that understanding the basics of qualitative research is essential before venturing out into the specifics of one of the qualitative approaches. I begin each chapter with an overview of the topic of the chapter and then go into how the topic might be addressed within each of the five approaches. While discussing the basic elements, I suggest several books aimed at the beginning qualitative researcher that can provide a more extensive review of the basics of qualitative research. Such basics are necessary before delving into the five approaches. A focus on comparing the five approaches throughout this book provides an introduction for experienced researchers to approaches that build on their training and research experiences.

ORGANIZATION

Following this introduction, in Chapter 2 I provide an introduction to the philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks that inform qualitative research. I emphasize how they might be written into a qualitative study. In Chapter 3, I review the basic elements for designing a qualitative study. These elements begin with a definition of qualitative research, the reasons for using this approach, and the phases in the process of research. In Chapter 4, I provide an introduction to each of the five approaches of inquiry: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study research. The chapter includes an overview of the elements of each of the five approaches. Chapter 5 continues this discussion by presenting five published journal articles (one on each approach with the complete articles in Appendices B–F), which provide good illustrations of each of the approaches. By reading my overview in Chapter 4, and then reviewing a journal article that illustrates the approach, you can develop a working knowledge of an approach. Choosing one of the books I recommend for the approach in this chapter and beginning a mastery of it for your research study can then expand this knowledge.

These five preliminary chapters form an introduction to the five approaches and an overview of the process of research design. They set the stage for the remaining chapters, which take up in turn each step in the research process: writing introductions to studies (Chapter 6), collecting data (Chapter 7), analyzing and representing data (Chapter 8), writing qualitative studies (Chapter 9), and validating and evaluating a qualitative study (Chapter 10). Throughout these design chapters I start with the basics of qualitative research and then expand the discussion to advance and compare the five types.

As a final experience to sharpen distinctions made among the five approaches, I present Chapter 11, in which I return to the gunman case study (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995—see Appendix F), first introduced in Chapter 5, and "turn" the story from a case study into a narrative biography, a phenomenology, a grounded theory study, and an ethnography. This culminating chapter brings the reader full circle to examining the gunman case in several ways, an extension of my 1994 Vail seminar experience in looking at the same problem from diverse qualitative perspectives.