

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH TODAY: VOICES IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

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In October 2019, the 4th World Conference on Qualitative Research (WCQR) brought together scholars from different parts of the world in Porto, Portugal. That conference provided an international platform upon which scholars initiated conversations regarding practices and challenges in qualitative research, in both academic and corporate contexts. These conversations concerned practices and challenges that on methodological rigor and ethical practices, with the overall aim for holistic integration and excellent qualitative research. WCQR has also allowed the forming of an international and diverse community of qualitative researchers, that annually come together to discuss experiences, trends and ongoing and future projects. This community remains active between editions, conducting collaborative research, training (namely at a distance), and publishing together. It is a movement that will continue to evolve. This book is also a way of congregating and giving voice to this community.

The chapters in this book are based on presentations from that conference. This is a maiden issue, being the first compilation of full papers presented in a WCQR. It is a product of a corporate effort of many people—authors, reviewers, editors—who believe in the value of qualitative research in helping to solve life and societal issues. We have divided this book into three sections: (1) *Qualitative Research at Work*; (2) *Qualitative Health Research*; and (3) *Teaching and Learning Qualitative Research*.

We selected these chapters based on the following criteria: (a) their relevance to the theme of the book, which is practices and challenges in qualitative research; (b) originality, which requires that the chapters introduce a new problem, a unique research paradigm, or an innovative combination of techniques; (c) the significance of the work to the conversation of scholars and whether it advances knowledge or understanding in a particular area; (d) technical quality, which refers to the careful evaluation of the proposed method and results; and (e) quality of presentation, which focuses on whether the paper promotes motivation to

continue research in the area of specification. These chapters present the practices authors employed relating to challenges still faced by qualitative researchers. In this introduction, we discuss these practices and challenges, at times mentioned by the authors themselves in the forthcoming chapters. We present these practices and challenges in six themes: (1) the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS); (2) the use of a variety of qualitative research methodologies and paradigms; (3) quality and rigor in qualitative research; (4) number of participants for qualitative research studies; (5) technology in qualitative research; and (6) teaching and learning qualitative research.

First, we showcase the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Emerging in the 1980s, qualitative research now has access to a varied and diverse number of new and improved versions of CAQDAS. This text includes chapters that present the use of software such as RQDA, an open-source R¹ package for qualitative data analysis, NVivo, webQDA, and ATLAS.ti. Using CAQDAS can enable researchers to more effectively work with a high volume of data; more efficiently code, transcribe, organize, analyze, and graphically display data; and provide an audit trail, i.e. documentation of the analytical process, to address the demand for credibility and dependability in qualitative research (Brandão, 2015; Pope, 2018). Importantly, using CAQDAS is not a substitute for a methodology and there must be a strong understanding of methodology before CAQDAS can be effectively used (Paulus et al., 2019; Silver & Rivers, 2016; Tagg, 2011).

The use of CAQDAS in qualitative research is still, unfortunately, misunderstood (Jackson et al., 2018). Mitigating these misunderstandings is one of the primary challenges of scholars who use, research the use of, and teach CAQDAS in qualitative research (Freitas, Leite, Neri de Souza, & Costa, 2020; Paulus et al., 2019). Additional research, such as the chapters included in this volume, that outline the affordances and limitations of CAQDAS continues to enhance the field and helps clear misunderstandings of what CAQDAS can and cannot do. The future of CAQDAS use in qualitative research has many possibilities (Costa & Amado, 2018; Paulus et al., 2018) and the chapters in texts such as this work to provide much needed clarity in the area (Humble, 2012).

Second, this book includes chapters on various qualitative research methodologies, each holding their own specific practices and challenges for researchers. True to the tradition of qualitative research, which aims to deeply understand, describe, interpret, and solve the complex issues that beset individuals and societies, several of the studies included here are

anchored in an emancipatory philosophical framework. Inequality of access to humanity's basic needs, such as education, material resources, and healthcare support, are among the issues examined in the following chapters. Authors consider the power imbalance between the rich and the poor, the differences between the educated and the less educated, and differences between races and skin colors. Further, these studies aim to give a platform and highlight the voices of marginalized groups to support their agency through sense-making and problem-solving of their own issues.

Through community-based participatory research, framed primarily for social change and empowerment, one study addresses inadequate health coverage and social and epistemic injustices in a rural community in South Africa. Another uses a critical-emancipatory workshop (CEW). This particular strategy leads a process of collective construction of knowledge through individual and group reflection based on a problematization method, critical-emancipatory education, and valuing emotions as knowledge builders.

Several studies in this text use narrative research. One introduces the concept of Narrative Medicine to promote therapeutic relationships between healthcare professionals and patients. Another uses story-telling to elicit participants' experiences regarding their health issues as a tool to promote health literacy. A third organizes the narratives of entrepreneurial accountants temporally to better understand their experiences of success. Conducting narrative research, both narrative inquiry and narrative analysis, is becoming a fairly common practice in qualitative research as it has several unique advantages. Narrative research assumes that as individuals express the meaning they make from their experiences to others in storied form, one of the best practices a researcher can employ to understand these experiences is to collect and analyze those stories. The chapters in this text illustrate this practice within unique contexts and in this way they contribute both methodologically (to our understandings of how to conduct narrative research) and conceptually (to how narrative research can benefit specific research contexts).

In addition to narrative research, this book includes a study using hermeneutic phenomenology to describe and interpret the lived experience of patients with chronic kidney disease. The author employed van Manen's (2014) data analysis framework, and framed findings according to the five elements of a person's existential lifeworld: relationality, temporality, corporeality, materiality, and spatiality. As a qualitative practice, phenomenology can be used incorrectly, and studies labeled as phenomenological may not

be. The misunderstanding of phenomenological research is a very old challenge for qualitative researchers (Freeman, 2020; Schütz, 1945). A primary practice of qualitative research is to deeply examine experience, but phenomenological research interrogates experience in a very specific way. Rather than looking at research generally, this methodological approach attempts to pinpoint the essence of an experience shared by all who experience it (Groenewald, 2004). Studies that accurately promote this methodological focus help clarify and enhance the use phenomenology for both novice and experienced researchers.

Third, quality and rigor of qualitative research is an important practice that includes its own unique challenges. Researchers use a wide variety of methods to answer the question of what makes good qualitative research. Many researchers attempt to establish trustworthiness, rather than reliability and validity, which requires a paradigm shift in thinking about good research from quantitative standards to qualitative ones (Erlandson et al., 1993). Standards of good qualitative research differ from those for quantitative research due to the different focus of qualitative research, and issues such as validity and generalizability are often not addressed or strived for. Instead, qualitative researchers use different standards and methods to ensure trustworthiness and understanding these continue to serve as a challenge for researchers (Lincoln et al., 2011; Tracy, 2010).

Some chapters in this text discuss how to ensure quality and rigor through the trustworthiness framework, which includes four elements—credibility (replacing internal validity), transferability (replacing external validity), dependability (replacing reliability), and confirmability (replacing objectivity) (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 2011). Others use the work of Sandelowski (1986), who proposes researchers should strive for truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. As a third viewpoint, Tracy (2010) proposes includes eight criteria: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence.

Several authors within this text advocate for combining research methodologies, which may enhance trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). This can include combining qualitative research with quantitative practices, not fully considered a mixed methods approach to research. In shifting thinking from quantitative to qualitative standards, one chapter in this book problematizes the issue of generalizability in qualitative research, confronting the criticism that qualitative research is narrow in terms of its applicability. The author promotes the idea

that in using analytic generalization, qualitative research studies can meet the requirements of generalizability.

Fourth, another challenge for qualitative researchers is determining the number of appropriate participants for a study. This question does not have one answer, as there are many factors to be considered in determining sample size in qualitative research. Among these factors are the research design, the phenomenon under study and its context, the research questions, the availability of the participants, the political-cultural context, etc. This book includes chapters that show how this concept can vary with studies that collect data anywhere from eight to 400 participants. This variation contributes to research on the practice of qualitative research when looking at the methods used to collect these data. For example, those studies which had fewer participants use face-to-face interviews following methodologies such as narrative research and phenomenology. Others used text data collected electronically through email and online websites with a much larger number of participants.

Fifth, in the early part of the 20th century, when qualitative research started to increase in recognition, specially in the field of anthropology and sociology, researchers collected data primarily through face-to-face interactions either by interview or observation. However, with the advent of technology qualitative researchers have begun to explore other modalities of data collection such as the use of email, phone, video, and online talk (Paulus & Lester, 2020; Paulus & Wise, 2019). This new practice has opened a wealth of possibilities and challenges for qualitative researchers. Challenges include issues with ethics, recruitment, technology use and affordances, and learning how to use the new digital tools available. This last challenge is often combined with the challenge of learning qualitative research, particularly for novice researchers.

With this in mind, this book lastly examines teaching and learning qualitative research. In addition to the learning use of software and issues of quality and rigor, a final chapter looks at the graduate student experience with learning qualitative research more generally. A common challenge experienced by post-graduate students is their lack of readiness to conduct research, especially qualitative research. This can be due to a poor research background upon beginning their post-graduate work. They experience challenges with learning about qualitative research generally (Cooper et al., 2012; Roulston & Bhattacharya, 2018), learning theory (deMarrais et al., 2018), and in learning qualitative research in online

contexts (Roulston et al., 2018). Research studies that present methods to help both post-graduate students and instructors of qualitative research in providing methods through which better teaching and learning of qualitative research can occur.

In this book, readers will find qualitative research practices that are rigorous, sound, novel, and innovative. These practices, however, are not exhaustive. As qualitative researchers, we continue to search for better approaches and more effective methods. Moreover, we do not claim that this text provides all the answers to the many questions that beset qualitative research. On the contrary, some of you, after reading this book, may raise more questions than you had before leading to new, generative research. The search for answers for a thoughtful researcher and scholar is a continuous process; hence the questioning may never stop. This process of searching is made more complicated because a researcher is not only searching for solutions to life and societal issues but is, at the same time, honing his or her skill and perfecting a craft.

Hence, our conversation should not stop here. We continue to engage in more frequent and deeper conversations that challenge us, that push us to points of ambiguities and even bewilderment (to borrow the terms of Charmaz). “In the end,” Charmaz said, we “will transform our images of studied life, and [our] research journey will transform” us (Charmaz, 2004, p. 991).

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