QUALITATIVE RESEARCH - IT'S IMPORTANCE IN PRESENT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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Abstract

This article introduces the fundamental elements of qualitative approach in education. Qualitative study has big impact in educational field. This article show different types of qualitative methods, advantages and disadvantages. So far how qualitative research develops in educational research it is also showing in this study.

Key words: Qualitative Research, Education.

Introduction:

Qualitative research in education is currently in such flux that it is a daunting, perhaps even foolhardy task to attempt to trace its outlines, indicate its principal characteristics or even name the moment definitively. Each of the three editions of Denzin and Lincoln's (1994, 2000, 2005) has provided an exposition on the status quo of the field of qualitative research that has been widely accepted (though with a few detractors such as Alasuutari, 2004) as comprehensive and well contextualized (historically, thematically). One approach to sketching the current moment, therefore, would involve drawing on Denzin and Lincoln's summary of the status quo of qualitative research with necessary additional discussion of the specificities of qualitative research in education. This approach places the emphasis on research as opposed to education: In other words it involves discussing qualitative research in education as an aspect of qualitative research rather than focusing on issues in the field of education and how qualitative research is being employed to address them. According to
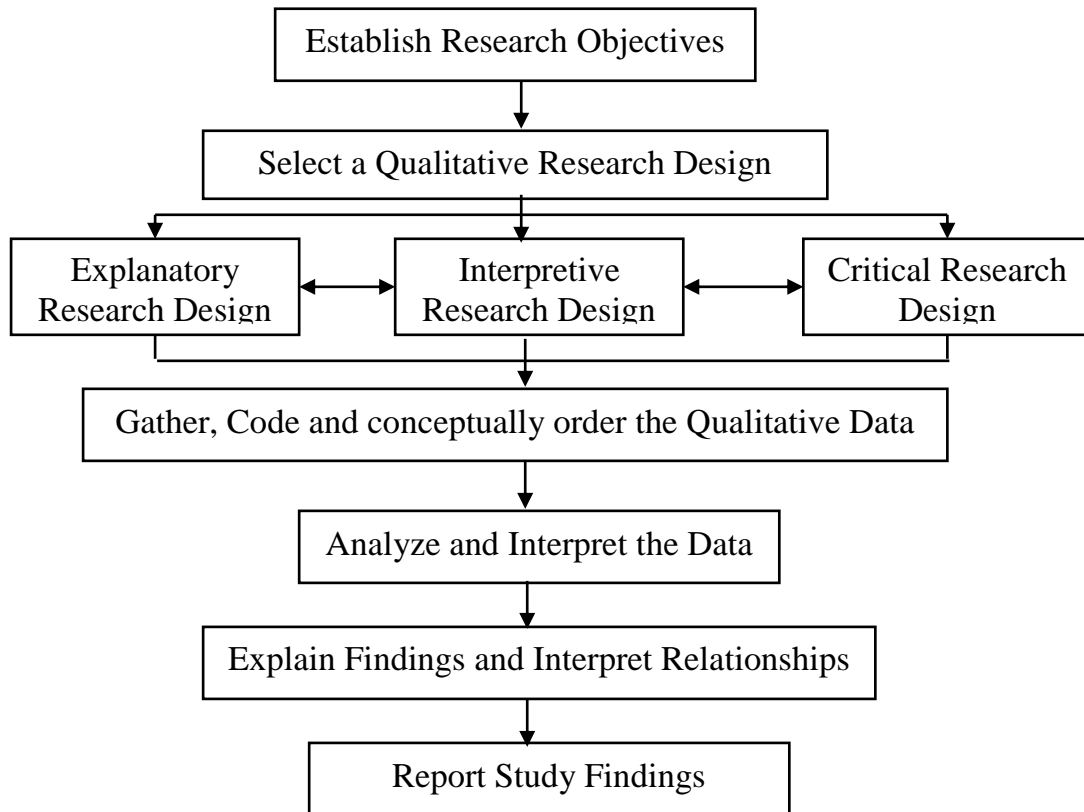
Denzin and Linclon (2000, 2005) it indicate that qualitative research in education is in contentious flux and that it is difficult to pinpoint and name its present moment. It would be misleading to describe the task at hand as involving merely outlining developments in what Edward said (1983) would decry as the impossibility of a hermetically sealed field; as providing indications of a neat linear progression of the discourse of qualitative research in education. There is the bewildering profusion of trajectories that qualitative research in general has taken: the postmodern turn, the poststructuralist turn, the narrative turn (Denzin & Linclon, 2000), and it would add for progressive qualitative research in education, the turn to cultural studies (Dolby & Dimitriadis, 2004).

So it is difficult to find an unambiguous and definitive statement as to what qualitative research in education actually is. Lancy (1993) points out to the fact that topic, theory and methodology are usually closely interrelated in qualitative research. Therefore, a brief definition of the field will center on the methods, terms and topics employed in qualitative research. These have been quite diverse. Bogdan and Biklen (1994) point out that qualitative research in education draws from many sources, reflected by the use of such terms as symbolic interactionist, inner perspective, phenomenological, case study, interpretive, ethno methodological, descriptive etc. In a similar fashion, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) observe Qualitative inquiry is an umbrella term for various philosophical orientations to interpretive research. For example, qualitative researchers might call their work ethnography, case study, phenomenology, educational criticism, or several other terms.

Qualitative Methods In Education:

Qualitative methods were first brought into education via the use of anthropological and sociological methods for the study of educational settings and systems (Vidich & Lymon, 1994). Qualitative research in education involved the importing of non-experimental and observational procedures and field-oriented and data-driven theories from other disciplines in social research. Some of the early proponents of this effort include Spindler (1955), Jackson (1968), Erickson (1973), and Wolcott (1973). Early theoretical positions centered on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and socially constructed models of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This is highlighted by the inclusion of field and ethnographic approaches into empirical and scientific educational research.

Figure-1: Steps in Qualitative Research Process

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          ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
          │  Establish Research Objectives  │
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                          ▼
       ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
       │  Select a Qualitative Research Design │
       └──────────────────────────────────────┘
          │               │              │
          ▼               ▼              ▼
 ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
 │ Explanatory  │◄►│ Interpretive │◄►│   Critical   │
 │  Research    │  │  Research    │  │  Research    │
 │   Design     │  │   Design     │  │   Design     │
 └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘
          │               │              │
          └───────────────┼──────────────┘
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   ┌───────────────────────────────────────────────┐
   │ Gather, Code and conceptually order the        │
   │ Qualitative Data                               │
   └───────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                          │
                          ▼
       ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
       │   Analyze and Interpret the Data │
       └─────────────────────────────────┘
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   ┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
   │ Explain Findings and Interpret Relationships  │
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          ┌─────────────────────────────┐
          │    Report Study Findings     │
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The three most common qualitative methods are participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups.

Participant observation:

Participant observation is appropriate for collecting data on naturally occurring behaviors in their usual contexts. Data can be collected by also an external observer, referred to as a non-participant observer.

In-depth interviews:

In-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals, personal histories, perspectives and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored. Interviews in qualitative research are usually wide ranging, probing issues in detail. Researcher encourages subjects to express their views at length.

Interviews may be structured or unstructured. Structured interviews follow a preplanned discussion guide in which answers are sought to specific questions. Unstructured interviews are more like conversations between friends. The researcher must be careful to avoid leading questions or communicating any value judgments.

Focus groups:

The researcher brings together a small number of subjects to discuss the topic of interest in focus groups method. The group size is kept deliberately small, so that its members do not feel intimidated but can express opinions freely. A topic guide to aid discussion is usually prepared beforehand and the researcher usually 'chairs' the group, to ensure that a range of aspects of the topic are explored. The discussion is frequently tape-recorded, then transcribed and analyzed.

Further methods used in qualitative research studies

Diary methods:

The researcher or subject keeps a personal account of daily events, feelings, discussions, interactions etc. in this type of methods.

Role-play and simulation – Participants may be asked to play a role, or may be asked to observe role-play, after which they are asked to rate behavior, report feelings, and Predict further events.

Case-study:

This is an in-depth study of just one person, group or event. This technique is simply a description of individuals.

Advantages Of Qualitative Methods:

One advantage of qualitative methods is that use of open-ended questions and probing gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do.

Another advantage of qualitative methods is that they allow the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses – that is, to ask why or how. The researcher must listen carefully to what participants say, engage with them according to their individual personalities and styles, and use "probes" to encourage them to elaborate on their answers.

Disadvantages of Qualitative Methods:

The key difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is their flexibility. Generally, quantitative methods are fairly inflexible. The advantage of this inflexibility is that it allows for meaningful comparison of responses across Participants and study sites.

Another downside of qualitative research is that, invariably, only small numbers of subjects can be studied because data collection methods are so labor intensive. It is also often criticized for being subject to researcher bias. The difficulties in analyzing qualitative data rigorously; the lack of reproducibility and generalisability of the findings.

Developments In Qualitative Research In Education:

Developments in qualitative research in education have for the most part been an integral part of the developments in qualitative research in general that Denzin and Lincoln outline in their periods framework, there are important specificities that have marked the evolution of qualitative research in education, sometimes divergently. Since the 1990s qualitative research in education has been marked by a breathtakingly rapid proliferation of work based on post modernism, post structuralism, identity policies, global relations, new media etc. Thus, another example of the specificities of historicizing qualitative research in education involves two principal developments in educational research that are relative of Denzin and Lincoln's postmedernist / poststructuralist period. The first is a set of mostly white male researchers who have embraced postmodernism (e.g. James Scheurich, 1995) and the second is a set of mostly white female researchers (e.g. Elizabeth Britzman, 1995; Elizabeth St. Pierre & Wanda Pillow, 2000) who have embraced poststructuralism. In addition, the moment that Denzin and Lincoln identify so strongly as post modernist and post structuralist for qualitative research has also been one in which in the specific field of education people of color, indigenous people and other minorities people working in education have been strongly putting forward research that reflects their identities and communities. In educational research, therefore, the Crisis of Representation and the Postmodernist / Poststructurallist periods have overlapped and been prolonged in interesting ways. It is a period that has extended into the early 2000s : one of 'racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies' (Ladson – Billings, 2000) and a turn to critical race theory (Delgado, 1995; Parker et. al., 1999); one in which white privilege and racism are named and actively tackled (Scheurich & Young, 1997, 1998; Tyson, 1998 and Chicana/o (Delgado, 1998), Black (Dillard, 2003, 2006), Maori (Bisho P, 1998; Tuhiwai Smith 1999), First Nations (Hermes, 1998; Graveline, 2000), educational research have proliferated, intermingling with existing epistemologies such as feminism to produce hybrids such as black feminist (Dillard, 2000, 2006) epistemologies and inspiring responses such as black male pro-feminist postmodernist infleeted critiques (Wright, 2003). These newly articulated epistemologies challenge not only established, mainstream postpositivist and constructivist research but established feminist, critical and emergent postmodernist and poststructuralist educational research as well.

Conclusion:

Some qualitative researchers in education are busy addressing the problematic of epistemological (and possibly paradigmatic) proliferation, others would acknowledge, as

Guba and Lincoln (1994) do for qualitative research in general, that we can identify several competing paradigms but not that paradigms are proliferating. Resistance from within qualitative research to the advocacy and fact of a proliferation of epistemologies in qualitative research in education buttresses (whether wittingly or unwittingly), the (Post) Positivist backlash or at the very least contributes to the turn to standardization, conformity and uniformity, to the taming and curbing of what Lather (2006) celebrates as 'a wild profusion' of approaches to qualitative research in education. This current situation of innovative qualitative research in education being under threat is shared by qualitative research in general. No research paradigm has a monopoly on quality. None can deliver promising outcomes with certainty. None have the grounds for saying "this is it" about their designs, procedures, and anticipated outcomes. However qualitative research and its movement will determine its nature within the field for years to come. Qualitative inquiry is a systematic empirical inquiry into meaning. This type of research looks upon the data of the world not as facts, but as signs. As signs, they can be clues, symptoms, or omens (Shank, 1987) of the nature of reality in the situation we choose to examine and explore. Qualitative research is not just an action to describe the role of education in culture, but should transform that role in the process. In a very real sense, qualitative research in education has the potential of being one of the first modes of empirical inquiry to move into a post-scientific framework. While the idea of a post-scientific systematic mode of empirical inquiry to too new for most of us to be able to draw out a full picture of its implications.

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