

Of Books, Barns, and Boardrooms

Exploring Praxis through
Reflexive Inquiry

Ellyn Lyle



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INTRODUCTION TO REFLEXIVE INQUIRY

Reflexive Inquiry (RI) is both established and continually emerging. Its fluid nature has contributed to multiple conceptualisations and varied applications. At its most basic, reflexivity refers to the researcher's consciousness of her role in and effect on both the act of doing research and its eventual findings. Unlike reflection, reflexive inquiry compels us to engage in critical introspection in the moment, as well as after it, while simultaneously critiquing our socio-political contexts (Creswell, 2006; Hara, 2010; Langer, 2016; Roebuck, 2007; Zinn et al., 2016). Said another way, reflection is *after* and *individual* whereas reflexivity is *ongoing* and *relational*. In making central the role of the researcher in the research process, reflexive inquiry does at least two things: it interrogates agency by questioning whether there is a critically astute individual leading the research inquiry; and it raises philosophical notions about the nature of knowledge. By its very design, then, reflexive inquiry disrupts normalized assumptions about how we come to knowledge and presents essential questions about our capacities as researchers to account for an ever-evolving understanding of our experiences (Cunliffe, 2003). This ideology stands in stark contrast with social sciences' prioritization, first, of quantitative approaches and, then, of more broadly defined empirical approaches. To understand the emergence of RI, it is helpful to understand its paradigmatic situatedness within critical qualitative inquiry.

CRITICAL QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Critical Qualitative Inquiry (CQI) emerged in response to the rise of neoliberalism, particularly in Western society. Loosely defined, neoliberalism refers to the resurgence in the 20th century of 19th century economic liberalism. This liberalism was characterized by free market capitalism, economic deregulation, and reduced government spending to boost private sector economies. While some scholars argue that many principles of neoliberalism are common also to democracy, there is an increasing call for policy makers to be accountable for the inequitable social conditions born of this liberalism. It is not surprising that qualitative scholars have responded to this call given the paradigm's historical interest in issues of social justice (Denzin, 2017; Vidich & Lyman, 1994). Qualitative research, in its early