

Karyn Cooper · Robert E. White

Qualitative Research in the Post-Modern Era

Contexts of Qualitative Research

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Qualitative Research in the Post-Modern Era



The authors

While this unique and timely overview of the key foundational thinkers is sufficient reason for any qualitative researcher, new or experienced, to read this book, the questions and activities at the end of each chapter make it an indispensable text for instructors who teach qualitative research methods courses to use with their students.... The art of making the complex accessible takes great skill, and this book has the potential to truly engage and challenge graduate students without confusing them by overusing jargon.... Graduate instructors who take seriously the task of mentoring the next generation of qualitative researchers will definitely want to use this book to provoke their students into thinking multidimensionally about the research that they read and conduct.... The video clips will speak to millennial generation students in a way that typical qualitative research methods textbooks could never hope to do. I think that this will be a very popular textbook in many universities.

Jim Greenlaw
Dean of Education
University of Ontario Institute of Technology

The project was an ambitious undertaking to complete. The sheer energy that has gone into capturing, on video-tape, the top international researchers is commendable. The ability to harness “The Five Contexts” from the works and reflections of these scholars as a “conceptual framework for conducting, understanding and interpreting qualitative research in a variety of disciplines in this postmodern era” is both timely and original.... I think this would be an excellent research text for graduate students in the Social Sciences and Humanities. I expect most scholars would like to have a copy due to the archival nature of the material.... I wish I had this book and access to these research scholars when I was doing post graduate work....

Shawn Northfield
University of Nottingham

The smooth development of this book leads you on a journey through the history and reality of qualitative research. The video-clips add a dimension of hospitality, in that I feel as though I have sat down with each researcher to enjoy a cup of coffee as I learn from their experiences. As a graduate student, I am grateful for the discussions and discoveries that were sparked by these writings. Cooper and White have created a volume of important foundations and precious insights for the beginning researcher.

Lynnette Babin Rankin
Graduate Student
St. Francis Xavier University

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Please be informed that the video-interviews can also be downloaded from <http://extras.springer.com>.

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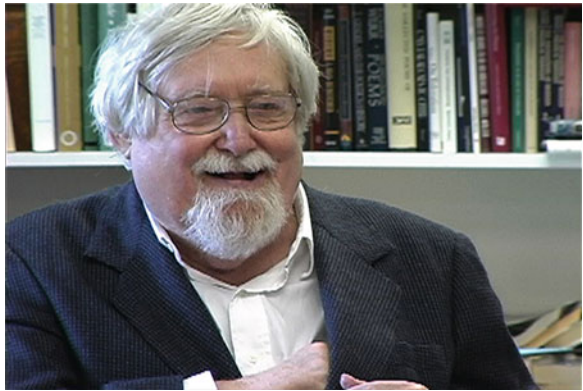
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*In memory
of
Clifford Geertz*



August 23, 1926–October 30, 2006

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Clifford Geertz. Interviewed just 4 months prior to his untimely death, Professor Geertz was responsible, at least in part, for developing ethnographic research within an interpretivist approach. Throughout his distinguished career, he helped to re-cast ethnography through the recognition that the researcher is the major instrument in the data collection and analysis process.

In recognizing this, Professor Geertz would be among the first to say that he was only a small part of a larger movement. His intellect, his humility and his humor will be sorely missed.

Professor Geertz is pictured here in his office at Princeton University, among books piled high on his desk, artifacts from Java and Bali adorning the walls. One of his favorite artifacts was a drawing by his grandson. Behind a refrigerator magnet is a miniature likeness of Wittgenstein, a speech bubble emanating from the head of the philosopher saying, "Hey, Dude." Perhaps Wittgenstein would have approved.

Foreword

This may be a set of volumes for which the field has been waiting. Gathered in one two-volume set are the voices and words of many of the giants in the field of qualitative research and/or critical perspectives. These interviews represent not only where the various interviewees have been, but mark new constructions, new terminologies adopted (e.g., “liquid modernity,” a term pioneered by Zygmunt Bauman) and sometimes new formulations. The figure, entitled “Key Words and Identifiers” (Fig. 2.2) summarizes three major strands in contemporary research, moving between conventional quantitative research, critical perspectives and ideologies, and more widely understood models of qualitative research in the interpretivist (and constructivist) veins.

There are at least three different reasons to delight in the introduction of these volumes to the literature. First, there are summaries of the interviews with figures important to the development of qualitative and critical perspectives on research. One wishes, in fact, to have longer summaries, but the realities of the publishing world make this impossible. Second, the book is a welcome and unique addition to the literature because there are accompanying video clips for each of the interviewees. For those of us who spent many hours – and resources – as junior faculty attempting to locate, get a glimpse of, and hear senior scholars, the photographs and video clips are a treasure. While we cannot say that we have “met” Zygmunt Bauman or Maxine Greene, we will nevertheless know their faces and perhaps have a stronger connection, if we are visual learners, to their ideas and to the scholarly histories from which these ideas spring. Third, these two volumes provide an opportunity, in a sense, to “compress” 30 years of history in qualitative and critical research paradigm development into a rich overview. While this work is not a substitute for extensive reading in the fields, it does serve as a judicious and vital guide to that reading and a sensitive and discerning aid to selection according to readers’ interests and needs.

The offer of these perspectives simultaneously gives us a powerful introduction to some of the “giants on whose shoulders we stand.” More powerful, however, is the set of *voices* which accompany the text. We have not, in the past, as I observed, been able without serious effort and financial resources to *hear* all these voices

speak and, particularly, to hear them speak on the same or similar topics. Now, the video clips accompanying the texts present the fuller (although edited) interviews without the reduction necessary for a printed text. If there is such a text anywhere else, with commentary, summary, author autobiographies, interviewee bibliographies, and accompanying video clips, I am unaware of it. What a delight to be a part of these historical moments, including being able to hear the now-deceased Clifford Geertz speaking about his work and theoretical insights, and to be able, via those video clips, to revisit the voices and themes again and again. Readers, users, teachers, and generations of students will be touched untold times by these voices: the towering anthropologist-methodologist-theoretician Geertz, with his gentle voice on video, the elder but still-generative Maxine Green, Norman Denzin at the height of his powers, the prolific activist/social critic Henry Giroux, and the thoughtful Pinar, with his graciously invitational manner.

Equally useful, for students, researchers, and teachers alike, are the editor/authors' "five contexts" for grasping this complex and dynamic history. First, they discuss the *autobiographical* context, arguing that our own histories and experiences shape our research far more than a rigid hypothetico-deductive model, with its emphasis on an assumed ability to achieve perfect objectivity, would have us believe. Our autobiographies, as individuals and as scholars, create and re-create our research interests, our philosophical predilections, and our paradigmatic stances; until we understand those histories, we will not fully understand who we are or why we do what we do, save in the most superficial way.

Second, Cooper and White explore the *historical* context for the debates surrounding research, and integrate both Freebody's and Pinar's commentary on why qualitative research has taken a back seat to quantitative research in the past half century or more. This historical context is of course interwoven with the third context, the *political* context, where issues of power, control, regulation and other dynamics interweave with paradigm choice (and, unfortunately, with funding decisions throughout the Western world). Their arguments here are buttressed by other literatures regarding "the audit culture", the dangerous nature of knowledge, and the desire of some to contain knowledge, particularly knowledge about the oppressive effects of gender, race, class, national heritage, and ongoing tensions between the West and emerging nation-states.

The fourth context, the *postmodern* context, is perhaps the most fluid of the contexts; Zygmunt Bauman reframes the postmodern context as "liquid modernity," a kind of unfixed and fluctuating transition between unsettled eras. Bauman's terminology reflects Thomas Berry's observation that we are in an era where we are between stories: the old "story" – of who we are and what we are about – no longer works, but the new "story" is not yet in place. For researchers, the most important issue is the nomination of questions that appear to be the most critical at this point in time.

The fifth context, the *philosophical* context, is at the same time the most stable, but also itself in flux. We have Rom Harré's work on the principal outlines of logical positivism, including his incisive criticisms of the goal of achieving objectivity. But we are still trying to construct a research-directed or -oriented form of pragmatism,

and are still attempting to create a meaningful and well-integrated model for mixed methods research for those who wish to pursue such designs.

These five contexts represent a major contribution to ways of thinking about research methods and their more overarching paradigms. As Cooper and White point out, there is much overlap and many border crossings between methods and between paradigms, especially between interpretivist and critical perspectives. We are incredibly fortunate to be the recipients of this work, simply because it provides us with a fresh set of intellectual and mental constructs with which we can teach and do research.

Yvonna S. Lincoln

Preface

Because society has invested extensively in social structures, such as education, to resolve ever larger and more entrenched social problems (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991), research activities in the social sciences and humanities are of paramount significance. Universities and colleges commonly have research departments dedicated to the furthering of such knowledge through both quantitative and qualitative means. Predictably enough, different modes of research have figured prominently at different moments in time (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). For instance, in this postcolonial, postmodern era there has been a renewed focus on matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion (Bauman 2007). Consequently, a multitude of qualitative research methodologies are developing to address the messy, complex, and dynamic nature of inquiry in the postmodern context within which we live.

A number of general qualitative research books on the market provide substantial coverage of research methodologies across disciplines. Some examples of these include *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (Flick 2006), *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* (Merriam 2002), *Qualitative Researching* (Mason 2002), and *Applying Educational Research: A Practical Guide* (Gall et al. 2004). Furthermore, there are multitudes of new and emerging approaches surrounding specific research methodologies: arts-based (Barone and Eisner 1997; Eisner 2002; Greene 1995), life history (Cole and Knowles 2001), and narrative research (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) fit this perspective.

A consequence of such diversity is a richness in specialized thought; for example, *Psychology and Postmodernism* (Kvale 1992), *Hermeneutics and Education* (Gallagher 1992), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Yin 1994), *Poststructuralism and Educational Research*, (Peters & Burbules 2004), and volumes on ethnographic (Carspecken 1996) to phenomenological research (Van Manen 2002). Tomes on educational research (e.g., Creswell 2005) and significant textbooks such as the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 1994) overlap and interpenetrate themes and issues that cut across these perspectives.

However, there tends to be a pattern among qualitative research texts. Two broad genres include conceptual books and methods books. Conceptual books focus on

the foundations and conceptual underpinnings of different paradigms of qualitative research. Some conceptual texts such as *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive and Critical Approaches* (Willis 2007) provide a broad overview of the major contemporary intellectual foundations that guide our thinking about qualitative research. Methods books, on the other hand, emphasize how to do various types of qualitative research. Some of these volumes provide a comprehensive view of a few methodologies, while others develop an overview of numerous methodologies. These genres do not represent mutually exclusive domains, as books on qualitative research often include both of these categories to a greater or lesser extent, together representing “a practical wisdom.”

The fact that qualitative research is changing as a result of postmodern influences, which have changed the way research is interpreted and understood, has prompted questions which have been knocking at the door of qualitative research for some time now: Where is the researcher in the research account? How does the researcher relate to his/her research? How can the researcher who reads qualitative research understand the nuances and complexities in qualitative research? While many books and articles are dedicated to qualitative research, there are few attempts to place it in an autobiographical context (Pinar 1994, 2004) for scholars, for the general public, or for practitioners who have been in the field of research for some time. Historically and traditionally, much qualitative research continues to ignore the important relationship between the person doing the research and the research itself. What seems to be neglected, in many cases, is an acknowledgment of the essential role of the (auto)biographical in the conceptual and intellectual development of qualitative research.

We believe that autobiographical research can lay bare relationships between the lives we live and larger, more important world events, since such research begins with self-reference to elements in time, connecting the personal biography of the individual with perspectives of history. What can we learn from the autobiographies of researchers at the top of their stride who have struggled in order to develop qualitative research? How can this volume help to not only describe, effect, and manage change, but help us to understand, imagine, and affect policies, practices, and procedures related to research?

Because volumes on qualitative research unfortunately may sacrifice conceptual issues for methodological concerns, this book forms part of a series which attempts to do justice to the conceptual frames and methods that guide qualitative research through the autobiographies of renowned scholars across a variety of disciplines. This first volume, which deals with conceptual and theoretical foundations, features excerpts of interview transcripts accompanied by video clips of key scholars in qualitative research, while the second book in the series attends to practical methods that comprise the expanding field of this type of research.

This volume, based on a larger study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, attempts to open up just such interpretive horizons by interviewing distinguished qualitative researchers from various disciplines who provide key insights into the educative role of disciplines relating to qualitative research in education. Five key scholars, William Pinar, Norman Denzin,

Henry Giroux, Zygmunt Bauman, and Maxine Greene, were selected for this first volume because their autobiographical interviews and programs of research led us to develop what we now describe as “The Five Contexts,” a conceptual framework for conducting, understanding, and interpreting qualitative research in a variety of disciplines in this postmodern era.

In this volume, we have also included excerpts from interviews with Raewyn Connell, Peter Freebody, and Elliot Eisner. Not only are these qualitative researchers connected to the ethos and context of a particular era within which they live and engage in research, they also lay bare relationships, specific issues of subjectivity, and interrogate the significance of the individual autobiographical within current historical, political, postmodern, and philosophical perspectives. In the end, is it not the personal story, the autobiography, which gives life to history and its political and philosophical conditions which, in turn, sustain the contexts of qualitative research?

We wrote this series so that researchers of all stripes and, perhaps, consumers of research may gain greater clarity regarding the embodied nature of current qualitative research. It was enlightening to understand that there is more research available to us now than there has ever been before, that many of our top researchers are still among us and that they are so forthcoming, generous, and gracious with the results of their work. Although viewers may not always agree with positions taken within the pages of this book, if readers find that they can articulate a better understanding of qualitative research, then we will have achieved our goal.

Karyn Cooper
Robert E. White

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Acknowledgments

This volume was based on a larger study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada. It was through the generous funding of this project that we, the authors, have been able to attempt to open up interpretive horizons in qualitative research by interviewing distinguished qualitative researchers from various disciplines who provide key insights into the educative role of disciplines relating to qualitative research in general and qualitative research in education in particular.

The writing of this book could not have been completed without help from many different directions. First and foremost we would like to take the opportunity to thank Professor William Pinar for his time, his suggestions, and for his collaborative participation in this project. Also, a number of graduate students from both the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and from St Francis Xavier University (StFX) deserve our thanks. Rebecca Hughes of OISE has helped to shepherd this project along with her significant editing skills. Without Rebecca, we would still be struggling with time codes, paper edits, and the like. Thank you, Rebecca, for all the meetings in strange places at odd times to answer some of the most trivial of video questions. The results speak for themselves. In addition, we would also like to thank J.M. London McNab for assisting with the editing of the video clip entitled “What Is Research?” as well as with sundry other requisites.

Neil Tinker of OISE’s Education Commons set high standards in his work as videographer. Although Neil was unable to finish the project with us, he is responsible for shooting some of the finest footage and is also responsible for some of the subsequent editing. Thank you, Neil. You set a fine example for the interviews that were to come.

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