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Review of *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation (4th ed.)* (2016) by S.B. Merriam & E.J. Tisdell.

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Book Review

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 346 pp. \$50.00 (softcover).

Reviewed by: Wayne A. Babchuk, *University of Nebraska–Lincoln*

As an instructor who has assigned the third edition of *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (2009) as a core reading for qualitative research methods courses spanning three departments at a RI institution since its publication in 2009, I enthusiastically embraced the invitation to review the fourth edition (2016) of this text. I have found it to be the most accessible of the many qualitative research textbooks for several key reasons that I will expand upon below, as I have seamlessly transitioned to the fourth edition for use in my courses. I have had success coupling this work with Creswell's *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* used in tandem as these are extremely compatible texts that complement each other and provide a holistic view of qualitative research.

Sharan Merriam, internationally known for her work in adult education and qualitative methods, is joined by Elizabeth Tisdell, a well-known and prolific educator in her own right, to sharpen the focus and extend the earlier work in the fourth edition. As the title suggests, the text provides a general overview of the design and application of qualitative research methods useful for both novice and more experienced researchers. It is divided into three parts encompassing 10 chapters and an appendix. Part One, "The Design of Qualitative Research," consists of four chapters focusing on the foundational history, epistemology, and characteristics of qualitative research, a synthesis of six popular approaches within this tradition as well as emerging approaches gaining traction among qualitative scholars and practitioners, and the initial stages of designing the research and selecting a sample. Part Two, "Collecting Qualitative Data," contains three chapters detailing interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Part Three, "Analyzing and Reporting Qualitative Data," covers data analysis, ways in which validity and reliability are approached in qualitative research, research ethics, and issues surrounding the writing and dissemination of qualitative reports for different audiences. The appendix provides a template for graduate students employing qualitative designs for their thesis or dissertation work.

Merriam and Tisdell draw upon their diverse experiences conducting qualitative research, comprehensive knowledge of the history and development of the qualitative paradigm, and their rich experiences mentoring and advising

generations of students to provide a hands-on pragmatic approach to learning about qualitative research. There are several key strengths of this work that, taken together, separate it from other texts on qualitative design and implementation. The text is extremely well organized, easy to read, and systematically laid out for those new to qualitative research, although more experienced researchers will also find it helpful. It provides a succinct but solid background of epistemology, theory, history, and shared characteristics of qualitative research that sets the stage for the design and implementation chapters that follow. Although Merriam and Tisdell discuss popular approaches often covered in introductory texts including phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and case study, they underscore a sixth type they label “Basic Qualitative Design,” which, like the authors, I believe to be the most historically utilized qualitative approach over time and across disciplines. Moreover, they augment these fundamental types with emerging popular designs including mixed methods, action research, critical research, and arts-based research.

Chapter 4 on research design is invaluable as it provides readers with clear-cut suggestions and examples for selecting research topics, writing problem statements, crafting purpose statements and research questions, applying theoretical frameworks, reviewing literature, and employing qualitative sampling techniques. The chapters on interviewing, participant observation, and document analysis are also key in that the authors provide a host of useful explanations, examples, diagrams, and so on, that explicate techniques, strategies, and challenges of the data collection process. Similarly, another strength of the text lies in the authors’ treatment of challenging aspects of the data analysis phases of qualitative research where they clearly delineate this process from the initial planning stages through the formation of categories, themes, and theory. Here they discuss the use of computer data analysis software and unique challenges presented by the types of qualitative designs covered in the text. The chapter on validity and reliability is quite useful, especially the exhibits and tables focusing on trustworthiness, member checking, and strategies for promoting validity and reliability. Students identified the Problem Statement Worksheet (p. 83), examples for asking good interview questions (pp. 118-124), and the Interview Guide (p. 126) as particularly helpful.

I strongly recommend *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* for qualitative and general methodology courses and for researchers and practitioners looking for guidance in planning or gaining a better understanding of qualitative research. It is a wonderful text that provides succinct and useful descriptions of fundamental attributes of qualitative research, invaluable examples for planning and conducting research studies, and strategies for disseminating and evaluating research. As qualitative research has gained momentum in academic disciplines and applied fields of practice, the text provides a bedrock publication for adult education scholars and practitioners to help further advance our discipline.