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BOOK REVIEW

Transforming Self and Others Through Research: Transpersonal Research Methods and Skills for the Human Sciences and Humanities

by Rosemarie Anderson & William Braud

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The wider your range of knowledge and feeling, the greater your range of imaginative possibilities and the more synthetic and important your work will be.

—Robert and Michèle Root-Bernstein

The process of scientific inquiry into human experience cannot be separated from life itself. Becoming aware of the ways in which research in the human sciences and humanities is already infused with tacit knowing may be the first step to intentional cultivation of skills and practices that aim to loosen, shift, and altogether change *how* researchers approach understanding of lived experience—their own and others'—and, thus, how they transform through and beyond the topical focus of their scholarly pursuits in ways that bridge formal research and lifelong, personal inquiry. *Transforming Self and Others Through Research* (Anderson & Braud, 2011) provides just such a detailed exposition of whole-person, transformative approaches to scholarly research.

In this book, Anderson and Braud expand and deepen what they presented in their first co-authored book, *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (1998). They contribute to the teaching and practice of research in the human sciences and humanities in ways that are both complementary to existing texts on specific research methods and outstanding among them; but as the authors make sure to clarify, this book is not meant as a standalone text for the teaching of diverse traditions of research methods. The unique value of *Transforming Self and Others Through Research* is twofold. First, where the authors' 1998 book offered a broad introduction to transpersonal research methods, the new book is an

in-depth primer to transpersonal research *process*. The exercises given throughout the book serve to prepare researchers for all phases of study, particularly when the topics include phenomena and experiences that are difficult to measure and define and attempt to account for the many ways in which humans perceive and process personal and transpersonal experiences. Secondly, those readers who are specifically interested in any of the three methods for which the entire first section of the book is devoted, namely Intuitive Inquiry (by Rosemarie Anderson), Integral Inquiry (by William Braud), and Organic Inquiry (by an invited contributor, Jennifer Clements), will find the most updated, in-depth, and well illustrated depictions of these methods to date, along with numerous, past and recent examples of a wide range of topics to which they were applied.

Transpersonal psychologists ground their worldviews in transpersonal practices that are rooted in various wisdom traditions. Anderson and Braud developed the methods they describe in this book over two decades of experience as practitioners, scholars, and educators in this field (although both began as experimental psychologists in the late 60s and early 70s). Nevertheless, they do not present themselves as experts and humbly recognize the collaboratively, evolutionary nature of their insight and teaching. They acknowledge the possible critique for the methods and skills they advocate. Further, they acknowledge the challenges their

readers are likely to face by opening to a wider horizon of “knowing” that couples a rigorous effort to bolster the validity of their inquiry without reducing human experience to fit positivistic epistemologies. Integrating their philosophical views, methodological expertise, examples from current applications, and vision for the role of transpersonal inquiry in our diverse, globalized, and ecologically challenged world, the authors invite an inward turn in attitude toward research in the human sciences and humanities by emphasizing the value of a multi-sensorial, praxis-oriented discovery that is meditative, mindful, intuitive, imaginative, and embodied.

In the Preface to their book, Anderson and Braud offer an in-depth consideration of the nature and value of inquiry into human experience when researchers intentionally apply transformative skills and practices that permit more expansive and inclusive insight and target more than reason and analysis. The reader is reminded of or awakened to the possibility that scientific inquiry can be personally transformative, not only due to its findings, but inherently through research as a self-actualizing experience, particularly through the direct impact on all who partake in it or are exposed to its unfolding and/or final presentation (the scholar, research participants, audience, colleagues, and others in the researcher’s social milieu). In Anderson’s and Braud’s own words:

We are emphasizing individual and personal transformation. We are suggesting that under certain conditions, planning, conducting, participating in, or learning about, a research project can be accompanied by increased self-awareness, enhanced psycho-spiritual growth and development, and other personal changes of great consequence to the individuals involved . . . a qualitative shift in one’s lifeview and/or worldview . . . one’s perspective, understanding, attitudes, ways of knowing and doing, and way of being in the world. It may be recognized by changes in one’s body, feelings and emotions, ways of thinking, forms of expression, and relationships with others and with the world. (Anderson & Braud, 2011, pp. xvi-xvii)

As noted earlier, the authors divide their book into two main sections. Section 1, inclusive of the first three chapters, is dedicated to the teaching via praxis of three transpersonal methods (intuitive inquiry, integral

inquiry, and organic inquiry). Each chapter, respectively, weaves experiential exercises and practices to help the reader gain intimate knowledge of the various structural aspects of the presented method and provides useful skills that can serve as vehicles to inform and guide the research process through all its phases with integrity and depth.

Chapter 1 presents Intuitive Inquiry. This method is hermeneutical in nature, with emphasis on the value of an intuitive approach. The method carries the researcher through five iterative cycles: a) clarifying a research topic via imaginal dialogue, b) identifying one’s existing-understanding through engagement with the literature, c) gathering data and descriptive findings, d) interpretation of findings and transformation through the understanding of others, and e) integration of one’s discovery with the existing literature. Intuitive inquiry invites the researcher to honor his/her own voice, to be fully attuned to subtle nuances and synchronicities of internal and external experiences, and to employ imaginal and psychic processes, sensory/embodied awareness, empathic identification, and knowing through our wounds as valid modes of understanding the essence of human experience.

Chapter 2 presents Integral Inquiry. This method aims to blend qualitative and quantitative modes of knowing in a manner that values the unique contribution of integrated approaches toward a more inclusive understanding of human experience. It values the multiple facets of research topics: their historical and conceptual contexts; their process oriented nature; and their outcomes and implications. This approach encourages the researcher to be informed by multiple disciplines (conventional and innovative—involving ordinary and nonordinary states of consciousness). It allows the tailoring of a particular blend of methods to suit the study’s topic and purpose (including linear/analytical, as well as nonlinear/intuitive and imaginative approaches). Integral inquiry emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the research findings are accessible to a variety of audiences through multiple styles of data presentation.

Chapter 3 presents Organic Inquiry. This method is based on the gathering of rich narratives, often pertaining to psycho-spiritual growth, where the researcher’s personal connection to the topic is central to the study’s motivation, and where the researcher’s identity, psyche, and subjective, unique ways of knowing

facilitate the organic evolution of the research process. In this approach to research, information and transformation are inseparable, through the integration of thought, sensations, feelings, and intuition. The researcher is encouraged to pay attention to liminal and spiritual influences throughout the study. The method employs a three-step process as part of a gradual unfolding, beginning with preparation, through inspiration and, finally, integration—as a whole, intending to inspire a transformative experience for the researcher, participants, but more importantly for the readers or those exposed to the research findings.

Section 2 (chapters 4-7) is highly relevant to all fields of qualitative research in the human sciences and humanities, as it presents skills (i.e., quietude and slowing; intentional, attentive, and mindful observing of both conscious and unconscious processes; sensorial and imaginal skills; play and creative expression; as well as intuition, embodied awareness, and direct knowing), which can accompany various research methods, not only the ones that originated through engagement with transpersonal topics of inquiry. When first reading this book and introducing it to students, I viewed Section 1 as structured, compartmentalized, and somewhat separate from the more exploratory and intricately threaded second section. With my intimate knowledge of the methods and skills, as a past student of Rosemarie Anderson and the late William Braud at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, I wondered why the authors chose to open the book with a methodological section, rather than offer it after they introduced the many skills that are integrated into these methods.

But after a brief time of working with the book and gaining further appreciation of its full arc (including the final chapters on an expanded view of validity and the authors' transformative vision for research and scholarship), I realized that immersing in the methodological conceptualizations and applications of transpersonal approaches to research in Section 1 and understanding their rationale and thoughtful structure, indeed set the stage for a more purposeful utilization of the practices in Section 2. For this reason, when teaching a course named Integral Research Skills (originally developed by Braud and Anderson and taught by various faculty over the past decade at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology—now Sofia University), where the second section of *Transforming Self and Others through Research* serves as a main text, I ask students to

begin their reading with the introduction to Section 1 and their choice of one of the three first chapters as a way to dive with their whole being into the deep waters of transpersonal research methods. Only then, do they gradually explore and exercise the transformative potential of what Braud and Anderson called integral research skills, by considering their own research topics and all phases of their envisioned study through the various lenses of multiple, interwoven, and integrative ways of knowing.

Observing my own experience of working with the integral skills, as well as witnessing their effect on others, I can attest to the resultant transformation researchers undergo in their relationships with inquiry topics, methods, designs, participants, data, findings, and readers. When working with graduate students at Sofia University, who are called to research human experiences of a vast and complex nature, yet attempt to pursue them within the limited scope of a doctoral dissertation, I noticed how rapidly they form an intimate connection with their topics, when introduced to Anderson's and Braud's integral research skills and transpersonal approaches to research, and how they access their questions in a vulnerable, sensitive, and deeply insightful ways.

I have used the book with two cohorts since its release in the Fall of 2011. The first group of students has since went on to write their proposals and begin their dissertation studies. For the purpose of this review, I inquired with two students from that cohort, who are in different phases of their research, as to how their dissertation processes benefitted from having been introduced to this book. One of them, who is researching the meaning and significance of crisis as it leads to transcendence in the evolution of an artist, continues to draw on the book's philosophy and applications a year after she was introduced to it. She wrote:

The use of integral, intuitive, and complementary methods allows [my] process to remain loosely woven, to breathe and intermingle. The transpersonal research methods and skills that Rosemarie Anderson and William Braud offer enlist the tenets of wonder as question and answer simultaneously, and still acknowledge that all perceptions have a certain degree of correctness and incorrectness. . . . In order to present conclusive interpretation about the evolutionary process of an artist, perceiving the

artist as process (from ego to crisis to transformation) I am reminded that the interpretation will merely be my perception of the artist's perceptions in hindsight. Containing this process within theory and method dangerously risks derailing the creative process, confining and imprisoning it in old interpretations, or perhaps completely extinguishing the flame. There is danger of suffocating the breath or the spirit from the inquiry, danger of robbing it of God. (D. Meyer, personal communication, December 12, 2012)

Another student, who is now in the process of data gathering for her dissertation on the transformational aspects of postpartum depression, resonated with Braud's (2011) assertion that "finding recent ideas in these very early sources can help foster an attitude of *humility*. . . that certain ideas were present for others, even long ago, and that one is often simply rediscovering what has gone before" (p. 95). She has written about incorporating creative expression into her literature review process, to more fully explore the importance of honoring the historical context of current literature:

[In addition to comparing past and present literature], I have worked with this by doing photo collages of women and their children from different points in history. These collages serve to ground my intention, pique my intuition, and externalize a sense of awe and gratitude for everyone touched by my topic throughout time. . . . Anderson's and Braud's exercises on working with imaginal, visual, and intuitive listening have been of significant help. My topic is very difficult material. The interviews are not easy. And it is the imagining of what I am intuiting that serves my wellbeing as a researcher, and I believe serves the topic. Where words fail, images fulfill the essential expressive need. (W. Karraa, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

Similarly, in the most recent offering of the Integral Research Skills course, a student described the flowing nature of considering her intention for a dissertation topic when incorporating visualization into her contemplation. She reflected:

Intention is a powerful tool that Anderson and Braud (2011) discuss in regard to investigating a research topic. I have always found the process of setting intention to be a powerful motivator.

Although it may not be set as a goal per se, it is a motivating force. I find that whenever I have set intentions in my life that I begin to carry them around within a mental construct as well as emotionally. My attention is drawn to it often even in moments when I'm not even fully aware. . . . There seems to be a mix of great excitement, yearning, anticipation, attention, and unknown all mixed in one. As I contemplate my research topic, I find I am filled with the aforementioned emotions and thoughts. A great mix of it all. I hold the intention to research the connection between the embodiment practice of Hatha yoga, in particular, yoga therapy, in increasing and deepening levels of mindfulness. In framing an intention for my topic, the following words arise: awareness, body, yoga, movement, mindfulness, compassion for self and others, embodiment, program, spirituality, oneness, stillness, contemplation, space and sympathetic joy. I envision this as a spiral of different colors swirling around. As I see it I can see that one color stands out more than the next in some moments and others in other moments. I am sitting with this as a lesson in not predicting outcome or goals right now but rather staying in a "watching" phase. (A. Saffi Biasseti, personal communication, September 20, 2012)

About a month into working with the text, she added:

I was used to research always being approached in one way and it feels so freeing to think creatively with my topic. I feel it has already opened up so many doors for me to explore. I am excited each week to sit with the experientials waiting to see what unfolds (A. Saffi Biasseti, personal communication, October 18, 2012).

A student, who expressed interest in researching trauma and PTSD, shared the following response to one of the first group of exercises of slowing down and quieting the mind to allow a research question to authentically emerge with intentionality.

In exploring the exercises Intention, Quietude and Slowing, Attention and Mindfulness in Anderson and Braud (2011), I found a new dimension of thinking in terms of my intended research topic. . . . After deep, slowing breaths, I turned my attention to mindfulness of the breath and found myself drifting into thoughts. I felt tension and a closed sensation

in my abdominal Tan Den area, and my throat. I began to breathe into these chakras and tried to allow for an expansion and spaciousness to develop. (S. Hutton-Metheney, personal communication, September 28, 2012)

Detailed images (too many to mention in this review) emerged in the course of this student's meditation, which she subsequently made note of and remarked: "After this meditation exercise, I felt deeply relaxed and calm. The following [question] manifested in regard to my research topic: Can applying mindfulness techniques help trauma and PTSD patients cope and recover from their trauma?" (S. Hutton-Metheney, September 28, 2012). This student is an experienced therapist and an adept meditator, who has obviously entered deep trance states of consciousness many times before, and so she readily took to harnessing these skills as beneficial to approaching her research topic in a new way. For example, one of the images that arose in her initial meditation was of children engaged in painting, which prompted her to consider the possibility of focusing her PTSD topic on family dynamics and utilizing creative expression as one of her vehicles for data gatherings. Following this imaginal meditation, she wrote: "the narratives of family and relationships within the scope of trauma could lead to deeper understanding of the effects of trauma, perhaps the origin of trauma, and the healing of trauma individually, systemically, and communally" (S. Hutton-Metheney, September 28, 2012). She continued with framing the following intentions:

I intend that within the creation of my research project, Trauma: Effects of Mindfulness and the Nature of Emptiness on PTSD, images, thoughts, ideas, and fresh inspirations will arise effortlessly and naturally. I will be able to articulate and communicate these images and ideas cohesively and thoughtfully in order to add new information to the field of transpersonal psychology and trauma therapy. This will lead to a deeper understanding of mindfulness and trauma and will benefit the society and the whole planet for the betterment of humanity. (S. Hutton-Metheney, September 28, 2012)

Interestingly, the ease with which students engage with the integral skills in their daily lives is not necessarily predictive of their comfort and ability to

bring these practices into a research project. Another student commented:

One of the biggest gifts of the course is that I am witnessing how much difficulty I am having integrating traditional methodology with more organic ways of knowing. I am also witnessing myself fearful of not knowing. This is interesting for me to observe as in other realms of my life, this does not seem to be a predominant issue. What I am also gaining from this course is how we have the freedom and access to various ways of knowing (A. Charest, personal communication, October 24, 2012).

A student, who is planning to research the experience of psycho-spiritual wholeness during single motherhood wrote:

I feel so grateful that this beautiful language about research is here to support us as we brave new territory as transpersonal students and researchers. What would it have been like if I had this kind of guidebook in earlier academic settings? . . . Autogenic Training and breath work come very naturally to me as I have been engaged with these practices for a very long time. . . . My biggest challenge will be to remember to incorporate them while I'm working on my research! (T. Page, personal communication, September 29, 2012)

Practice, however, is key to ground general affinity to this approach to research in experiential knowing of its value. The same student reflected on her embodied experience during a slowing and centering exercise in the following comment:

I automatically slow down when I read this book. The cadence in which it is written affects a somatic response and my breathing slows. Also, I have to note, the finding a peaceful uncluttered space to "be" was nothing short of amazing for me. For the very first time in my life I have my own space, free of children, noise, clutter and distractions. I am filled with gratitude before I even begin, my eyes are slightly teary. I'm sitting in my new home, a beautiful old Victorian, in the living room, next to a bay window where I hear the birds outside and my heart is bursting with love for this moment. There is truly space for me, just me, and my soul

becomes expansive and quiet. (T. Page, personal communication, September 29, 2012).

She went on to link this awareness of self with her relationship to her future study's participants:

Once my eyes closed, my focus flowed to my heart. It seems this coming year is going to be all about my heart. . . . When in doubt, go back to my heart. After all - that is what got me through and that is what drives me in my research now. The love I have in my heart for single mothers doing the good work, raising the next generation, is all about love. (T. Page, personal communication, September 29, 2012).

Transforming Self and Others through Research is grounded in a global worldview, with awareness of and recognition for the mutual, reciprocal, and collective nature of our human existence and the relevance of this paradigm to our present and future approaches to research. In their last chapter, *A Transformative Vision for Research and Scholarship*, Anderson and Braud call on researchers to consider the urgent need for positive individual, communal, and worldwide transformation. They convey that in order to promote such change through scholarly inquiry, researchers must begin with more inclusive approaches to inquiry—honoring cross-cultural wisdom psychologies, with reverence for humans' interdependence on one another and the natural world, and respect for authenticity and diversity in all species.

Anderson and Braud suggest, and I agree, that *Transforming Self and Others Through Research* can be included as a whole text or select chapters in advanced undergraduate and graduate research courses, particularly in disciplines such as psychology, counseling, education, and various allied health professions. The book also engages seasoned researchers in the above fields, who are open to acknowledge the shortcomings of conventional research methods, namely the attempt to claim objectivity by employing various controls in the studies' design, researchers' involvement, and participants' contribution. I believe that it should be a required text for research students and a must-read for all researchers in fields such as transpersonal studies, humanistic psychology, spiritual direction, religious studies, the arts, creative-expression therapies, and transformative education, since these disciplines call for approaches to research that recognize the subjective

and inter-subjective nature of human experience and expression, and the individually constructed meaning that accompanies attempts to inquire about them.

What I value most about this book is that the authors do not ask their readers to take their word for the value of this more expansive attitude toward ways of knowing; they wisely remark that not all approaches will suit all researchers and that some research topics might call for alternative means of understanding more than others. Most importantly, they provide a myriad of examples to illustrate their approaches, and detailed exercises to explore and choose from—each carefully crafted to hone various skills, such as awareness, attention, and intentionality—activating intuitive, imaginative, embodied, and creative ways of knowing through all phases of the study. These skills and practices are commonly associated with personal and psychospiritual development, person-centered therapies, and education, but they have significant influence on the process and outcome of inquiry, when applied in conjunction with established qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, or as integral to the transpersonal research methods described in the book. In this manner, Anderson and Braud provide a roadmap for researchers to connect with their topics, participants, and research audiences through processes that lead to a deeply felt and personally meaningful understanding of human experience.

I close this review by referring to Anderson's and Braud's message, with a heartfelt recommendation of this book to all who seek a pathway to engage in conscious, healing and harmonizing inquiry: be it through interdisciplinary collaborations, integration of spiritual and indigenous insights, methodological pluralism, or the simple but profound appreciation of the transformative qualities embedded in the researcher's passion to inquire and be of service, transform awareness, and influence change toward health and well-being, peace and harmony, compassion and kindness, integrity and truthfulness.

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