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Exploring the Links between Qualitative Inquiry and Global Crises: Some Answers and More Questions

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Abstract

Reading an edited book such as Denzin and Giardina's 2011 *Qualitative Inquiry and Global Crisis* that comprises different chapters and authorship patterns may be challenging and evocative, let alone a book that focus on qualitative inquiry in an era of globalization, racism, privatization, and social injustice. To make the journey of reviewing this new book enjoyable, I posed a meaningful guiding question to me: what could a book that links between qualitative inquiry and global crisis contribute to our theoretical and practical knowledge about the qualitative paradigm? The answer is not yes or no but rather manifold; some papers shed light on innovative aspects of qualitative inquiry while others seem to reframe well-known scholarly forms or methods pertaining to the qualitative paradigm.

Keywords

Global Crisis, Globalization, Critical Qualitative Methods, Art-Based Research

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Exploring the Links between Qualitative Inquiry and Global Crises: Some Answers and More Questions

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*Reading an edited book such as Denzin and Giardina's 2011 *Qualitative Inquiry and Global Crisis* that comprises different chapters and authorship patterns may be challenging and evocative, let alone a book that focus on qualitative inquiry in an era of globalization, racism, privatization, and social injustice. To make the journey of reviewing this new book enjoyable, I posed a meaningful guiding question to me: what could a book that links between qualitative inquiry and global crisis contribute to our theoretical and practical knowledge about the qualitative paradigm? The answer is not yes or no but rather manifold; some papers shed light on innovative aspects of qualitative inquiry while others seem to reframe well-known scholarly forms or methods pertaining to the qualitative paradigm. Keywords: Global Crisis, Globalization, Critical Qualitative Methods, Art-Based Research*

I have been a qualitative researcher since my dissertation supervisors and I realized erratically that my research purposes (to unearth the process of self-renewal among women principals) ought to be responded by qualitative research tools rather than by a large-scale survey. Very reasonably, this upheaval in my research program forced me to read plenty of books and papers about the qualitative paradigm, at least those published until mid-1990s and to practice its methodologies in different courses. At a certain point I felt a sense of repetition and routine; every new book I read about qualitative methodologies became more similar in my view to those I had already read and I became skeptic, in some sense, about being exposed to new insights and knowledge.

While the scholarship about qualitative research has increased and developed considerably since those years, and probably because of that, the main question that underlying my decision to read Denzin and Giardina's (2011) compiled book was – what could a book that links between qualitative inquiry and global crisis contribute to our theoretical and practical knowledge about the qualitative paradigm? In other words, when the memory of my skeptical notion in the back of my mind (even though I read many new books and papers about qualitative inquiry ever since), I was simply curious to know what is new in this book, especially as compared to other writings of the first author, a putative scholar in the area whose many books are well-known to qualitative researchers worldwide.

So, I started to feed my curiosity by looking at the blurb. I quickly learned that the book compiles chapters from the Sixth International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry held in 2010 that aimed to show “how qualitative researchers can bridge gaps in cultural and linguistic understanding to address issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and environment in the interests of global social justice and human rights.” It turned out later on that this book is an ongoing part of the authors' writings about the moral, allegorical, and

therapeutic project of qualitative research. This purpose made me ponder about philosophy of science and epistemology; isn't our main goal as researchers to merely explore the reality rather than immersing ourselves in moral issues? But I left this pondering to the end of my reading.

A clue for the unique characteristic of this book I got just from the beginning as I found myself reading about the social, political, economic and social features of the global crisis in recent years, both in the US and the UK, instead of reading about the history or the essentials of the qualitative research, a traditional opening of many books about this paradigm. A page later, I realized Denzin and Giardina (2011) as critical, interpretive qualitative researchers "are committed to creating new ways of making the practices of critical qualitative inquiry central to the workings of a free democratic society" (p.13). In their view, qualitative inquiry can challenge the global crises and contributes to social justice in various ways, including the identification of different definitions of a problems and a situation, the exposure of strategic points of intervention into social situations, and the suggestion of alternative moral points of view from which any social policy or program can be assessed. They dub their methodological stance "activist qualitative inquiry" that means that the researcher is morally obliged to speak the truth, to expose lies, and to see events in their historical perspectives. At the end of the introduction I have already had an idea of what this book is all about as well as some critical thoughts about the social-protagonist role the authors hold; is it the role of researchers to promote a certain social ideology through their research?

For a shortage of space, it is less plausible to review all the 13 chapters at length in one book review. Therefore, I remained committed to my initial purpose and read every chapter in order to unearth new territories and innovative standpoints in the study of qualitative inquiry. Fortunately, it was not a very complex mission, as right in the first chapter I was challenged to reflect upon my own ways of teaching qualitative research in my class through the term "qualitative responsiveness." Based on the centrality of "responsiveness" in some forms of qualitative inquiries, Judith Preissle and Kathleen deMarrais (2011) put forward the need to transfer from "traditional" teaching methods of these inquiries into responsive and reflective teaching methods in the classes about the theory and practice of qualitative research. They explain:

Responsive qualitative instructors seek to learn the students' goals in their learning, the background they bring to learning qualitative research, the skills and talents that support that learning, and the scholarly disciplines and perspectives from which they are drawing... (p. 35)

This kind of instruction encourages students to take on a pro-active role in their study of qualitative methodologies, a kind of pedagogy that has been advocated by classical theorists of teaching and learning in adult education. The next two theoretical chapters move the reader (back?) to the empirical arena either by questioning the traditional belief that interviewing can unearth deep, true meaning, or consistent truth (and in turn undermining the basic essentials underlying standard textbooks about qualitative methodologies!), or by suggesting the development of "epistemic interviews" that "position respondents as accountable, responsible citizens" (Brinkman, 2011, p. 69). Needless to say, I remained blurred and doubtful about the place I have always given to

in-depth interviewing (has it ever provided me with the information I thought I received?) Something has challenged my professional self-confidence...

Given my strong (conservative?) belief in manual analysis of qualitative data, my response to Davidson and di Gregorio's (2011) attempts in the fourth chapter to glorify digital tools in qualitative analysis in our new, challenging and complex environment was much more impartial. Needless to say I could not judge how innovative is Qualitative Data Analysis Software Web 2.0 and to what extent it differs from other digital tools. Conversely, I could grasp some innovative aspects in the next three chapters (in the section titled "Methods") that revolved around critical contributions of mixed, triangulated methods to our understanding of complex social problems, global crises, and casual explanations.

Probably due to my sole focus on qualitative inquiry in my academic career, I found the fifth chapter—using situational analysis for critical qualitative research purposes—most commendable and challenging. Michelle S. Perez and Gaile S. Cannella (2011) open their chapter by displaying their own social perspective, an unusual outlet in most of the papers about qualitative methodologies, I believe:

In our contemporary condition of global neoliberal hypercapitalism in which new forms of imperialism are constituted in the name of democracy, education, and even social justice, conceptualizations and practices of critical qualitative social science are a necessity. (p. 97)

Inspired by the need to challenge universals, normality and truths, the authors encourage us to use a Situational Analysis, a method that makes, according to Clarke (2005) possible "a more complete construction of the full situation, including the discourses that both legitimated and are created by the situation" (p. 98). The researchers who adopt this kind of method remind me miners whose job is to break a layer after layer in order to find the treasure—be it coal or gold. In our academic world, these are the latent, discriminative, impregnable discourses which are to be broken (deciphered) into pieces through varied maps. The mapping process is well described and debated in this how-to-do paper and the reader is provided with examples of situational mapping along the research process. No doubt, I will re-read this chapter several times to better understand the subtle, practical aspects of situational analysis in order to check its utility in my own research programs.

For a shortage of space I cannot provide a detailed report of each of the final five chapters that are grouped in the section—performance. This section sheds light on new forms of qualitative research in practice. Three chapters bring art-based research into the discourse of qualitative study, a kind of inter-fields connection I have never thought about. Their authors urge us to think like artists, poets, musicians, drawers, and other artists in order to replace our logical-rational approaches in imaginary, transformative, and improvisational processes. While reading these chapters I was thinking how far these ideas are from my own professional arena due to the socialization we have all undergone in order to join the 'club' of science in modern higher education.

Personally, I felt attached to the final chapter in which Isamu Ito (2011) is asking how we could make the best use of qualitative research to address new problems Japanese rural people face in our era of globalization. The answer seems to be positive;

qualitative methodologies, as the author demonstrates, allow us (i.e., those who live in urban areas) to expose how rural people value their farming and rural lives, “especially by analyzing their vocabulary, rhetoric, and logic, and studies the relationships between these values and the experiences of farming, family life, community life...” (p. 252). Although I have not learned new aspects of qualitative inquiry in this chapter, I did enjoy reading quotes of people whose lifestyle is different from my own, and for several minutes I found myself immersing in an old, disappearing world.

When I closed the book the first thing that came up in my mind was that learning new kinds of knowledge in research and methodology never ends. New insights I gained from the book chapters—be it related to art, technology, social injustice or any other area of study—made me wonder if the proliferation of the literature about qualitative inquiry will lead to better understanding of researched phenomena or over-permeation of new discourses and ideologies that, in turn, reconstruct the meaning of the qualitative research. My concerns are strengthened when I tried to understand the organization of the book and the rationale underlying the order of the book chapters. I felt I want to know more about this order so as to frame my own meaning and interpretation of the scholarly area named “qualitative research.”

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