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How to Write Qualitative Research? -- A Book Review

by
Yuliang Liu [±]

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As the validity acceptability, legitimacy, scope, breadth, depth of qualitative research increasingly expands, qualitative research writing becomes more and more important in research and academic areas. Contrary to the novice's expectations, qualitative research writing is not an easy thing. Qualitative research writing requires the qualitative researcher's unique experiences in this area. *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words* which was co-authored by Ely, Vinz, Anzul, and Downing ([1997](#)) and published by The Falmer Press in Bristol, PA gives the reader a comprehensive, detailed, and current overview of how to go about transforming collected words into writing qualitative research.

Different from other qualitative research books, this book is aimed at challenging, modeling, questioning, illustrating, and examining the processes as well as rhetorical devices and a variety of other tools which are helpful for both experienced and novice qualitative research writers. The major argument of this book is that writing in composing and articulating meaning in the whole process of qualitative research can lead toward intensified discovery and representation of others. This book focuses on those aspects of writing that facilitate the reader to compose meaning from research data and present it meaningfully to others. This book exhibits a variety of its unique characteristics and advantages.

First of all, this book as teamwork represents a collective work in qualitative research writing. All four authors have their own insights, concerns, and experiences, which include being a teacher or a researcher of qualitative research methods, or directing dissertations, or involving in the development of process writing curricula in the classroom. Therefore, although each author contributed separately to each chapter, each submerged their own perspectives and added pieces to all chapters in order to seek a stronger collective "we". Four authors share authorship and responsibility for all chapters. The authors' perspectives differed as relativistic, feministic, and post-modernistic perspectives are included. Therefore, this book integrates the major concerns of these schools' thought that is useful information for qualitative research writing.

Second, this book has a very specific and clear goal, which is, to focus on the needs of a variety of readers, including students, researchers, and teachers of qualitative research methods. This book not only has theoretical considerations, but also has intensely practical considerations. For students of qualitative research methods, this book provides a framework of qualitative research writing and a variety of accounts of experiences related to different levels of the important aspects of writing. In addition, for either novel or experienced researchers as well as teachers of qualitative research methods, they are encouraged to study, explore, and create those aspects related to the process of qualitative research. Therefore, from this book, students can learn a framework of qualitative research writing; researchers and teachers, too, can hone their previous qualitative research writing skills and deepen their grasp of this area.

Third, this book addresses interdisciplinary interests and endeavors in qualitative research writing. This book is enriched with many carefully selected and designed examples from the beginning through the end. The examples in each chapter are selectively drawn from many fields including sociology, psychology, education, and others. Most of the examples are in the form of quotations in order to present a clear picture for the reader. All specific examples and the authors' analyses of them are involved in a variety of qualitative research methods, such as how to use microanalysis to analyze the collected data. According to the authors, these examples carry primary meaning in this book. They are essential and are the heart of this book. Therefore, these examples can be regarded as modules that can be slid out and replaced by the reader's own.

Fourth, this book covers the whole process of qualitative research writing from initial idea to final publication. Specifically, this book includes discussions of research design, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, research findings, research reporting, and refinement of the final report. This book addresses how to compose meaning from data, how to create forms such as narrative turns, metaphors, dramas, and poetry. It also presents plans, outlines and tables of contents to inform understanding, how to develop a framework that includes the use and the creation of a theory as well as how to have conversations with a theory. how to write toward understanding, how to reveal an interpretation as filtered through the reader's own sensibilities and theoretical perspectives, and the like. In addition, this book talks about rhetorical devices and other tools for writing qualitative research.

Fifth, this book regards the process of qualitative research writing, especially the refinement of the final report writing, as an ongoing social act and learning process for both the writer and the reader. According to the authors, qualitative research writing can not only transform the self of the researcher, but also touch others. Specifically, qualitative research writing can affect the writer and the reader in a variety of ways. For the writer, the authors propose the researcher-as-instrument metaphor because they regard the researcher as a powerful, central, and active force in shaping and creating in qualitative research writing. The authors focus on several specific techniques, which include (a) negotiating with support group, mentors, and editors, (b) co-authoring with researchers and participants, and (c) responding to others mentioned above. According to the authors, these techniques are essential and necessary in the interpretative process of qualitative research writing. The authors encourage the reader to join into thinking about the examples throughout the book. This thinking includes how to create the reader's own plan and solutions, how to assess the reader's own status and skills, and the like, in all aspects related to the processes of qualitative research writing.

Finally, this book has a splendid and stimulating end. In the final chapter entitled "What Makes It Worthwhile After All", the authors present nine uniquely selected and designed scenarios for the reader to ponder and summarize the key considerations for evaluating all aspects related to the process of qualitative research writing.

In all, as a student reader of qualitative research methods in education, I have learned the basic framework of qualitative research writing from this book. I think a reader of any level or any area who is interested in qualitative research writing will profit greatly from reading this book.

Reference

Ely, M., Vinz, R., Anzul, M., & Downing, M. (1997). *On writing qualitative research: Living by words*. Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press.

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⁺*Yuliang Liu* obtained his Ph.D. in Educational Psychology at Texas A&M University-Commerce, Texas, USA in May 2000. He has taught five years in high schools and has five years of research experience in education in the People's Republic of China. He has a dozen publications in China and several in the USA. His primary research interests are in areas of instructional technology, distance education, and cross-cultural studies. He is currently an assistant professor in Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. yuliang_liu@hotmail.com.