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Abstract

I reviewed Yin's (2011) recent publication entitled *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, with a particular eye to the benefits for the seasoned researcher, as well as significant aspects that are appropriate for the beginning and intermediate graduate student. A unique element of the book is the inclusion of a discussion of worldviews at the end of the book. Additionally, the adaptive focus of the book might be helpful for both novice and seasoned researchers.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Adaptive, Emergent Designs, Doctoral Students

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Qualitative Research from Start to Finish: A Book Review

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*I reviewed Yin's (2011) recent publication entitled *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, with a particular eye to the benefits for the seasoned researcher, as well as significant aspects that are appropriate for the beginning and intermediate graduate student. A unique element of the book is the inclusion of a discussion of worldviews at the end of the book. Additionally, the adaptive focus of the book might be helpful for both novice and seasoned researchers. Key Words: *Qualitative Research, Adaptive, Emergent Designs, Doctoral Students.**

As I set out to review Yin's (2011) book *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, I struggled with how to approach the book—as a qualitative researcher or as a teacher of qualitative methods to masters' and doctoral students? I decided to read the book first as a qualitative researcher to see what I could glean from Yin's writings that would further my understanding of qualitative methods from Yin's perspective. Then, I read the book through again, thinking about my students and their needs they've expressed over the past five years of my teaching at the graduate level. In this review I have provided a brief summary of Yin's focus and intent, and then my thoughts as a researcher and a teacher of research, as to how Yin's style and substance may meet the needs of various research communities.

Yin's (2011) focus was to provide a guidebook to the novice qualitative researcher about the process of conceptualizing, designing and conducting a qualitative research project. Yin described the book as “practical,” “inductive,” and “adaptive” (p. v-vi). Combining these approaches allowed the reader to think critically about their own paradigm of research, and to “adapt” Yin's approach as presented to fit the needs of the researcher's own project. Yin divided his book into four sections, three of which are fairly common to methodological books. Section one refers to understanding qualitative research; section two is on doing qualitative research; and, section three describes how to present the results from qualitative research.

A final chapter, which Yin (2011) included as the only chapter in part four—Taking qualitative research one step further—seeks to “place qualitative research within the broader realm of social science research” (p. 281). In this chapter, entitled “Broadening the challenge of doing qualitative research,” Yin examined qualitative research as part of a paradigmatic worldview, and included discussion about multiple methodologies from multiple worldviews in an attempt to remind the reader that we rarely conduct qualitative research as an end in itself, but rather in order to answer questions that we and others have about the world. Qualitative research can illuminate specific contexts, while other methodologies have diverse purposes. Sometimes the social scientist may engage with multiple methodologies in order to answer complex questions, while other scientists find that *all* of their questions are confined to the realm in which qualitative methods are the best tool to answer those questions.

From my mid-career experience as a qualitative researcher, I found the topic of “worldviews” an interesting one in which to engage at the end of a book on qualitative research. In most books that I’ve read for my own resource in completing qualitative research projects, or used to teach research methods to doctoral students, the discussion on “worldviews” and how our questions are derived from our worldview is usually placed at the beginning of the text. However, I believe this approach has merit in that if Yin (2011) was trying to provide a guidebook for novice researchers, he might have assumed that a first project would consume the majority of the researcher’s time. Only when that inaugural project was finished, the researcher might then ponder “what’s next for me as a researcher?” Thinking about worldviews and other research methodologies as you are thinking about your next project works well with an action research or practitioner research approach¹ in which all research is seen as part of a cyclical process of formalized reflection.

I found other characteristics particularly useful to my teaching of doctoral students. As stated earlier, Yin’s (2011) approach included an “adaptive” perspective so that the reader could adapt elements from the book to their own study. For example, in chapter four, “Choices in designing qualitative research studies,” Yin included many sub-heading topics, each of which bears the parenthetical statement “or not” following the sub-heading. Choice one was entitled “Starting a research design at the beginning of a study (or not)”. This sub-heading and others like it (e.g., “Attending to sampling (or not);” or “Planning at an early stage (or not) to obtain participant feedback”) suggested a post-modern (or multi-perspective) view of designing qualitative research studies, which allowed for varying viewpoints regarding the need for and level of planning necessary to successfully design and implement a qualitative research study. Yin’s approach encouraged access by many readers from a variety of viewpoints and specialties who may find assistance and explanations of ways that might help them approach their study, without being linearly prescriptive. Those who write from the perspective of the Emergent Design (See, for example, Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008) approach will appreciate Yin’s inclusion of this idea throughout the research design process, and also his acknowledgement that the researcher must practice rigor through the purposeful explanation for each design choice (either early or late in the process).

Another feature that might be helpful for novice researchers and/or doctoral students was Yin’s (2011) description of and resources for completing the literature review. Yin included information about how and whether or not to conduct a literature review in the first section of the book—“Understanding Qualitative Research.” The third chapter in this section, “How to start a research study,” included a section on the literature review. While recognizing the traditional concept of a literature review in research and dissertations, Yin described the process as somewhat antiquated in that it could possibly narrow the focus for the researcher, limiting what they might find in their fieldwork. Traditional literature as a way of understanding a minority population might influence the researcher to describe and interpret this minority population through the lens of a majority culture, instead of through the perceptions and understandings of the

¹ Two genres of action research can be investigated further in: 1) Noffke, S. & Somekh, B. (2009). *The Sage Handbook of Educational Action Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; and, 2) Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (2008). *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

minority or indigenous culture. Inclusion of the indigenous culture as expert insider has been strongly encouraged, for example, in some countries with ancient indigenous cultures which no longer wish to be “studied” by the outside culture in traditional, anthropological terms (See, for example, Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008).

However, such an approach could be difficult for the novice researcher, who has little background in a particular topic. My experience as a teacher of research influenced me to see the literature review as a way to help the student narrow their focus (from a broad, unmanageable one) and to compel students to discover what has been studied on the topic and what has not. As I encouraged students to write a literature review from the perspective of “arguing the need for your question” I also emphasized their perspective as unique, especially in qualitative research, and that the student researcher can provide a contextual understanding and interpretation of a context. Yin (2011) concurred, stating: “. . . new investigators need to show their awareness, if not adroitness, in identifying specific lines of research. . .” (p. 62).

I was glad to see Yin’s support of immersing oneself in the literature, while at the same time critically noted a distinct lack of citations within Yin’s (2011) own work. For example, within the literature review section just discussed (Yin, pp. 61–65) Yin included only one citation—a vignette of Lew’s (as cited in Yin, p. 63) study of Korean-American high school students and that was only to describe how Lew argued for the need for her study. This section on the literature review (included in Part one—“Understanding Qualitative Research”) was written as if Yin were giving a classroom lecture to students. Perhaps that was Yin’s rationale for the lack of citations. Other sections did include citations, but as opposed to many journal articles I’ve read lately, Yin included citations much more sporadically—perhaps a design choice. Still, I was surprised to note the absence of what I considered to be seminal sources in defining particular aspects of qualitative research. Yin’s table on page 17 of “illustrative variations in qualitative research” included several study designs—action research, case study, ethnography, etc. For case study the relevant works Yin included were from Platt and Yin himself. No mention was made of Robert Stake’s considerable body of work on case study methods (See, for example, Stake, 1995, 2005, 2010; Stake, Bresler, & Mabry, 1991; and Stake & Easley, 1979), except for a single reference to Stake’s explanation of the difference between an “intrinsic” case study and an “instrumental” case study (as cited in Yin, p. 18). Again, this may have had more to do with Yin’s desire to limit citations to unique and specific ones, so as not to clutter the text for the novice researcher. Additionally, in the spirit of full disclosure, I must admit to a slight bias in offering this particular critique, as I wrote a case study dissertation, was a student of Stake at the University of Illinois, and am extremely familiar with Stake’s work on case study methods.

Overall, I found this to be an exciting addition to the list of sources available for the new researcher. However, for those who wish for a linear, prescriptive approach this is not a good choice. Instead, Yin (2011) presented a book organized in a linear fashion, because Yin noted that “books have to be presented in linear fashion” (p. vii). However, within that linear, clear sequencing, Yin offered multiple options and reasons for choosing certain options (or choosing other options), encouraging researchers to do the same. The writing style was clear, concise and not jargon-loaded, which also might appeal to the novice researcher. Yin included a brief glossary in the appendix of terms specific to qualitative research practices. I wrote of the writing style at the end of this

review, for I believe that a clear writing style is the most significant factor in connecting with a reader, and, indeed, I connected with Yin's work as a researcher and as a teacher. For more information about this text, including a link to chapter five, see the book's website on Guilford's webpage: http://www.guilford.com/cgi-bin/cartscript.cgi?page=pr/yin.htm&dir=research/res_qual&cart_id=319470.26556

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