

9-24-2012

Foundations of Unlimited

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Recommended APA Citation

Azulai, A. (2012). Foundations of Unlimited. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(39), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1726>

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Foundations of Unlimited

Abstract

Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (3rd ed.) is an informative, engaging and user-friendly book by J. W. Creswell (2012) that is focused on practical application of qualitative research methods in social inquiry. The author provided a useful comparison of the five types of qualitative inquiry (narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study) and discussed foundational and methodological aspects of the five traditional approaches. Creswell also effectively demonstrated how the type of the approach of qualitative inquiry shaped the design or procedures of a study. This book could be particularly useful to novice researchers and graduate students who are new to qualitative research, as well as to educators teaching qualitative methods of inquiry.

Keywords

Book Review, Phenomenology, Ethnography, Grounded Theory, Narrative, Case Study

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Dan Wulff for his review of the earlier version of this paper and his thoughtful comments.



Foundations of Unlimited

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Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (3rd ed.) is an informative, engaging and user-friendly book by J. W. Creswell (2012) that is focused on practical application of qualitative research methods in social inquiry. The author provided a useful comparison of the five types of qualitative inquiry (narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study) and discussed foundational and methodological aspects of the five traditional approaches. Creswell also effectively demonstrated how the type of the approach of qualitative inquiry shaped the design or procedures of a study. This book could be particularly useful to novice researchers and graduate students who are new to qualitative research, as well as to educators teaching qualitative methods of inquiry. Keywords: Book Review, Phenomenology, Ethnography, Grounded Theory, Narrative, Case Study

An increase in acceptance of qualitative research methods in behavioral and social sciences during the last decade has led to a variety of excellent resources for students and faculty of qualitative research methodology to draw upon. Few of these books, however, offer a concise and to-the-point organization suitable for easy reference of basic aspects of qualitative methods for novice qualitative researchers.

Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (3rd ed.) is a remarkably comprehensive text in foundations of qualitative research, where Creswell (2012) describes, compares and discusses the five most prominent types of qualitative inquiry: narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study. Within these descriptive comparisons, the reader is taken step-by-step through the key elements of the actual process of doing qualitative research. According to Creswell (2012), this book was driven “by the desire to answer one compelling question: how does the type of approach of qualitative inquiry shape the design or procedures of a study?” (p. 1). Clear and user-friendly organization of this book and the engaging writing style of the author make *Qualitative Inquiry* an enjoyable read.

My attention was immediately caught by the accessible structure of *Qualitative Inquiry*. The book is presented in eleven chapters, where Creswell (2012) managed to allocate equal space to each type of the five qualitative inquiries embedding them within description of theoretical frameworks, formulation of research questions, data collection procedures, data analysis and quality verification of the study results. Five essays from journal articles were provided in the book to offer examples of the five different qualitative designs and to help those who are new to qualitative research to see how studies might differ based upon the different approaches they select. Throughout the book the author provided summarizing tables, discussion questions, exercises, glossaries and templates for study proposals that are useful to novice researchers, as well as abundant

thematic reference lists that are helpful to those who would like to read about particular topics more in-depth.

I was carried away by “Turning the Story” presented in the last chapter of the book, where Creswell (2012) demonstrated transformation of a case study into a narrative study, then into a phenomenological one, a grounded theory and an ethnography. In the third edition of the book, not only did Creswell illustrate this transformation, but he also outlined and explained changes that actually occurred in this reworking. This concluding chapter of *Qualitative Inquiry* helped Creswell to fulfill the main purpose of his book, namely to demonstrate how the type of the qualitative inquiry shapes the design or procedures of the qualitative study.

There are several new useful components in the third edition of *Qualitative Inquiry*, as compared to the previous editions of the book. First, Creswell (2012) made an already well-organized structure of this monograph even more user-friendly by adding an analytic table of content as a supplement to the traditional table of content. This handy feature offered the content put together in groupings around the five types of qualitative approaches: a concentration of all information related to the particular approach in themes under the title of the approach allows easy and quick reference. In discussing each of the five approaches in the book, Creswell also added passages on each of the five approaches related to “defining characteristics” (p. 3) of the approach summarized in one place. In addition, the author updated the references to include recent books on qualitative research methods as well as select journal articles to illustrate these methods. Further, he updated illustrative articles in Chapter five, as well as incorporated new exercises to practice specific qualitative skills.

Second, Creswell (2012) added new and important content in the third edition of the *Qualitative Inquiry*. For example, the author devoted more attention than in the previous editions of the book to ethical considerations (Chapter three) in relation to dilemmas that likely to arise at different phases of the research process. He also provided a discussion about reflexivity and its role in qualitative inquiry. One may find the coverage of this important concept somewhat limited, though, relatively to the place that reflexivity takes in contemporary qualitative research. In Chapter seven on data collection, Creswell paid special attention to observational techniques in order to expand discussion in earlier editions of the book. Moreover, the author incorporated new ways of gathering qualitative data electronically to reflect technological developments in qualitative research (p. 3). Information about qualitative software analysis packages, such as Atlas.ti, MAXQDA, NVivo, and HyperRESEARCH, was also updated. These software applications were introduced in the previous edition of the book along with eight specific criteria that could help to choose suitable computer program.

There are several issues in the new edition that could evoke some debate. For example, *Qualitative Inquiry* cannot be used as a resource for in-depth exploration of philosophical underpinnings of different types of qualitative methods. Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011) *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (and other texts that aim comprehensive overview of various qualitative methods) could probably be more useful in this regard. It is worth mentioning, though, that in the third edition of the book Creswell (2012) reworked and improved presentation of the philosophical assumptions and the interpretive framework used by qualitative researchers (Chapter two) with intent to better position philosophy and frameworks within the overall process of research. For

this, *Qualitative Inquiry* could serve well to provide a basic description of terms and major traditions in epistemology. It would invite, however, further reading for someone who seeks a more thorough foundation in this area.

Another issue relates to Creswell's (2012) choice of the particular five types of qualitative inquiry, which could be perceived by some as possibly misleading within a large spectrum of approaches to qualitative inquiry. Some qualitative scholars see qualitative research based on the five traditions and those based in the arts as falling into two distinct camps - one grounded in the social sciences and the other rooted in the arts and humanities (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Cooper, 2010). Does this mean that *Qualitative Inquiry* is directed mainly to those affiliated with the former camp? And can those who utilize experiential methods still find this book useful?

It is my impression that in the third edition of the book Creswell (2012) dealt with those questions more effectively than in the previous one. He openly shared and expanded upon justification behind the selection of the particular qualitative methods, such as his specific intention to help students and novice researchers in making an informed choice of qualitative methods for their intended research by strengthening foundation, offering comparison and boosting discussion of selected methods:

We often choose one approach and subscribe to it. This makes sense in our highly specialized world of academia. However, students and beginning qualitative researchers need choices to fit their research problems and that suit their own interests in conducting research. (p. 2)

Creswell (2012) has been cognizant about the increasing fragmentation in the qualitative research. He openly stated that he embrace methodological eclecticism and provided summary of creative variety of qualitative approaches that have surfaced over the years. Creswell stated, however, that for the purpose of *Qualitative Inquiry*, he "continued to use the five approaches that have now stood the test of time since the first edition" (pg. 4). In order to better illustrate his goal (i.e., to demonstrate to how the type of the qualitative inquiry shapes the design or procedures of the qualitative study), Creswell put an emphasis on expanding within the traditional five approaches, choosing depth over breadth. Indeed, using a well-grounded methodology of a limited number of selected approaches for the "turning the story" exercise seems as a responsible decision, whereas a more eclectic choice of methods could have possibly compromised the clarity of the book.

The how-to emphasis on effective delivery of the qualitative material is interconnected to the author's own positionalities, on which Creswell (2012) openly reflected in his book (p. 6). The author commented on his fascination with qualitative and mixed methods research, as well as with structured features. He assumes a realist, a confessional, and an advocacy stance, advocating applied, practical, form of conducting research. Aware of related critiques in relation to his position, Creswell mentioned that "Some may say that I oversimplify the craft of research" (p. 7). However, given that the book was directed to the audience of MSW and PhD students, the author argue that applied focus allows readers and writers to understand methodology in less technical ways, thereby affording greater access to scholars and democratizing science.

The advocacy stance and importance of democratizing science concur with Creswell's (2012) explicit emphasis on social justice as one of the primary features of qualitative research. The notion of social justice has been given primacy by reputable qualitative research scholars (Denzin, 2009, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), who advocate that qualitative researchers should not only interpret the world but to strive to change it for the better. Creswell acknowledged that researchers should always be cognizant about arising racial, ethnic and other power tensions. He mentioned, however, that social justice orientation may not be for everyone. As a social worker, I appreciate the connection between qualitative research and the social justice perspective. I would wish, though, to see a broader discussion on this important topic in *Qualitative Inquiry*. Although I probably would not expect a discussion of this kind from someone who does not subscribe to the social justice perspective, I definitely would expect it from someone, who believes that social justice is important enough to mention in his book.

Conclusion

Qualitative Inquiry is an informative and user-friendly textbook focused on a practical application of qualitative research methods. It effectively delivers basics. Creswell (2012) managed to clearly and vividly show differences, similarities and utilization of the five qualitative methods of inquiry. By bringing the discussion of these several methodological approaches together into one text, the book inspires possibilities for creative combinations in qualitative research design. It should be mentioned, however, that Creswell urged novice researchers to focus on one method at a time in order to become proficient in each method chosen. There is a strong educational principle in this recommendation to strengthen foundations prior to any experimentation. This makes *Qualitative Inquiry* an excellent reference for novice researchers, graduate students and faculty teaching qualitative research.

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Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr. Dan Wulff for his review of the earlier version of this paper and his thoughtful comments.

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Article Citation

Azulai, A. (2012). Foundations of unlimited. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(Rev. 17), 1-5.
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