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Jumped Three Hurdles with One Leap: A Review of Qualitative Research and Complex Teams (Understanding Qualitative Research Series)

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Jumped Three Hurdles with One Leap: A Review of Qualitative Research and Complex Teams (Understanding Qualitative Research Series)

Abstract

This book is a guide to ways of conducting and writing qualitative research projects through complex teams and lone research undertakings. The text is grounded in Davidson's experience as a qualitative researcher and writer, as well as her experience working with complex research teams. With an emphasis on the value of writing in qualitative research, Davidson describes issues of research design, methodological writing, documenting research findings, and implications regarding complex research teams. The book is written in a motivating orientation using a mixture of both a formal and conversational tone. Davidson triangulates this narrative text and builds reliability through personal experiences as a qualitative researcher on complex, small, and lone projects; working with her own students' qualitative projects; real life field stories as examples; detailed appendices to support her content; and references from her own publications. This book is appropriate for anyone engaged with qualitative inquiry with a beginner researcher considered as well.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Complex Research Teams, Qualitative Research Design, Digitalization in Qualitative Research

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Jumped Three Hurdles with One Leap: A Review of *Qualitative Research and Complex Teams* (Understanding Qualitative Research Series)

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This book is a guide to ways of conducting and writing qualitative research projects through complex teams and lone research undertakings. The text is grounded in Davidson's experience as a qualitative researcher and writer, as well as her experience working with complex research teams. With an emphasis on the value of writing in qualitative research, Davidson describes issues of research design, methodological writing, documenting research findings, and implications regarding complex research teams. The book is written in a motivating orientation using a mixture of both a formal and conversational tone. Davidson triangulates this narrative text and builds reliability through personal experiences as a qualitative researcher on complex, small, and lone projects; working with her own students' qualitative projects; real life field stories as examples; detailed appendices to support her content; and references from her own publications. This book is appropriate for anyone engaged with qualitative inquiry with a beginner researcher considered as well. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Complex Research Teams, Qualitative Research Design, Digitalization in Qualitative Research

As a Ph.D. candidate, I have read several books about qualitative research, and I still have an interest in learning more regarding this research design. I reviewed Davidson's book from an informed perspective based on my own knowledge of research in general and qualitative research in particular. As a researcher, what hooked me on this book was not so much of the book's title, but rather the Oxford University Press series', "*Understanding Qualitative Research*." From the beginning, I put aside my biases about what I think I know regarding qualitative research and opened myself to new ideas. While it was not easy to bracket my biases, Davidson's nuanced style of writing was refreshing and engaging; it got me into reading the book like a fiction novel. I was eager to know what was coming next and how she approached a subsequent chapter. Much as I anticipated, one takeaway from the book was understanding qualitative research; the value of writing and the place of digitalization in qualitative research were two other takeaways—hence the title, "Jumped three hurdles with one leap." In this book review I use both the phenomenological (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2009) and narrative (Riessman, 2007) approaches to present my lived experience of reading the text, while simultaneously presenting how Davidson (2019) conveyed the story on understanding qualitative research and its place in complex research teams.

The first chapter of Davidson's book provides a hypothetical discourse in relation to issues that are driving the increased use of interdisciplinary research teams globally. To the novice researcher, this chapter provides an overview of the growing literature on complex teams in qualitative research, writing in qualitative research, and an introduction to the basic forms of qualitative research. Issues discussed in the second chapter are: a description of research issues in complex teams (specifically about their formation), ethical considerations, the structuring of the database research team, and the role of writing in the design and conduct process. The foci of chapter three are writing and qualitative research methodology. Davidson

(2019) describes how writing about methodology is an emergent and continuing process with thoughtful reflection and reporting throughout. The fourth chapter explores four distinct areas necessary for team-based research in writing up research findings. The four areas are: (a) conducting and documenting interpretive work, (b) trustworthiness, (c) forms of reporting, and (d) ensuring success for the project. The last chapter is about trends, issues, and considerations that prompt the reader to think about what the interconnectedness we experience today means for research.

I found the book appealing. As a typical, portable paperback, I was able to carry it with me wherever I was able to read, including my favorite coffee shop. Although it has a total of five chapters, Davidson (2019) breaks down each chapter into smaller, focused sections. Through these small units, she presents and describes ideas in a variety of ways that convey a personal perspective rooted in experience but with a pinch of humor here and there. From giving examples of methodological writing, to log and coding, to focus group ground rules, Davidson is thorough; she adds an example of a qualitative research syllabus and course schedule based on team perspective. These elements, as well as tables in the text that she uses to summarize some of the content, made my reading experience meaningful.

Davidson's guiding theme for the book is writing up qualitative research on complex teams. She provides information on how to design, organize, and conduct complex research projects while making use of today's technologies. According to Davidson (2019), complex research teams are on the rise, yet there are not many examples of team-based research literature; however, there is a lot of research on single qualitative research. This singleton researcher practice is a long-standing tradition that has created a deficit. As a result, Davidson states that even the most experienced qualitative researchers are not able to understand how to work in complex, interdisciplinary teams to successfully complete a project. Many team research projects; therefore, are not completed but rather left in cabinets or as files on computers—"project carcasses," as she calls them. As I look forward to graduating, this book comes at the right time because up until now I have only practiced qualitative research as a solitary endeavor.

Davidson (2019) uses examples from particular research teams, helping the reader to understand concepts given in her text. The ideas she shares through these examples give an indication of what to expect and what to do as a qualitative researcher on team-based projects. By reading about the advantages she presents for being part of a research team and the possible benefits of joining or initiating a team project, she gives you the impetus to be part of one. She briefly discusses issues related to administration, management, policy, and institutional level complexities that are associated with writing and implementing research projects. As in any teamwork-based project, she reminds the reader that this area of writing can be problematic unless approached with an open mind and respect.

I found it helpful to read the book in its order to make sense of the connections Davidson (2019) makes between examples, chapters and concepts. As a person who likes story and autobiographical writing, I appreciated Davidson's use of the narrative approach. A good example is how she described the meaning of the term "interpretive zone" (p. 19). She also used a dating site example and a blind date setting when explaining how research team building develops through the "How we met" scenario (p. 41). Davidson indicates clearly what each chapter is about and what the reader is likely to learn. I sought to cross-check with each chapter, and I found out that she actually accomplishes what she sets out to do. I could verify this from my field notes. This was important to me because I have come across books that do not meet the stipulated goals or expectations they set at the beginning. *Qualitative Research and Complex Teams: Understanding Qualitative Research* is not your typical work-study textbook, but rather a mixture of both guidelines and mentoring supported with literature, research and

experiences. In giving context to her text, Davidson (2019) covers the what, why, and how elements of the books' theme which made me, the reader, an insider in some way.

As I read the book, I could identify Davidson's character as a mentor through her writing style. I personally found it helpful that she goes beyond the philosophical and theoretical writing to mention an essential, honorable issue about "caring" as an important aspect of self and others in any team-based work. She calls it "team care". Davidson (2019) also expresses a personalized view regarding novice researchers. She indicates the need for senior researchers to help young academics as the next generation of researchers. She takes care of novice researchers reading her book by dedicating a chapter to help them get basic acquaintance of the qualitative research design. She is open to admit that she also comes across challenges, which is hard to find in many scientific books. She mentions her own struggles in some instances: "On a personal note, over the years, I have struggled to bring my qualitative research methods class closer in line with a truly team-based model" (p. 129). Like me, she also struggled to understand all the different research types in qualitative research. That personalized approach contributed to trustworthiness for her text. On the divide between qualitative and quantitative research designs, she discusses both while highlighting what would work in relation to either approaches. She mentions the need for the scientific world to overcome power differences regarding quantitative and qualitative research designs. Davidson advises that it is better to consider team processes that provide new ways for practitioners of both methodologies to function together to produce the richest results while solving problems. This, according to her would be better than pronouncing the superiority of one over the other. She recommends that instead of considering "big data – little data" why not "big data – deep data" (p. 121). As a future mentor of researchers, this was a positive message to live with and encourage those I encounter to adopt.

Davidson's passion and emphasis on good writing in qualitative research is evident throughout the book. As a Ph.D. candidate, I am interested in quality writing, and this was valuable for me because she uses an entire section in chapter four to discuss tips on collaborative writing. I was also impressed by how she cautions the reader on issues of plagiarism. While emphasizing the issue of moral and ethical character surrounding acknowledging others' works, her indirect approach gives the reason behind the practice more meaning for a novice researcher. Davidson writes,

In terms of development of ideas, we are always indebted to others. In addition, readers are assisted by appropriate references, as it allows them to see the pathway authors have taken to get to their ideas. Your final products are not the place for payback for slights in your professional life, and it is always better to take the high road when acknowledging others' assistance or lack thereof. (2019, p. 115)

Davidson (2019) discusses how to successfully utilize the tools of the digital age to achieve success in qualitative research with complex team projects. Davidson demonstrates that she is up to date with different technological tools as she advocates for their use while also mentioning their challenges. She shows that she has interacted with different software and can offer her opinion. She observes that there are significant contrasts in digital use across disciplinary, institutional, national, and other boundaries. She provides comparison for readers to decide what would work best for them. In her use of the digital vocabulary, I was reminded of the need to hone my technological skills.

Davidson (2019) observes that there is a need for technological training to bring members across countries to the same level of research team interconnectedness, especially in the digital age. This would also suggest training of the next generation of researchers to be able

to thrive in these new environments. She reminds the reader of the impact of the digital age and what it means for research dissemination and practice. It was enlightening for me to learn about the different digital tools and how I can utilize them in research. Davidson, however, does not mention the financial costs attached with packages like QDAS and NVIVO, among others. A cautionary statement about costs and how an individual or group of researchers with little funding can overcome price issues would be helpful. This may be especially true for researchers that will read this book but cannot access such packages. I know it can be a disadvantage to solitary researchers who need to know what costs are involved before embarking on research.

This book is suitable for qualitative and mixed-methods researchers as well as graduate and novice researchers. It gives guidelines to the concepts and processes of qualitative research and complex teams. For the individual working on a thesis, dissertation, or qualitative related research report, Davidson offers ideas and examples of ways to organize and store data and how to make use of the digital world. Was it worthwhile to read and do a book review? I can confidently affirm so; knowledge was acquired, experience was added, and inspiration was found in relation to understanding qualitative research, the value of writing, and the place of digitalization in qualitative research. Three hurdles jumped with one leap; that is my experience and my perspective.

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Julius Kyakuwa is a doctoral candidate in Music Education at Louisiana State University. Julius' research interests include multicultural music education, culturally responsive pedagogies, music teacher professional development, creative teaching of music and arts integration, comprehensive musicianship, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: Julius Kyakuwa at E-mail: jkyaku1@lsu.edu.

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