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## A Review of Teaching Qualitative Research: Strategies for Engaging Emerging Scholars

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## A Review of Teaching Qualitative Research: Strategies for Engaging Emerging Scholars

### Abstract

This review highlights salient features of the book, *Teaching Qualitative Research: Strategies for Engaging Emerging Scholars*. The review notes the practical applications of the book, including the advice that the book's authors offer about beginning research projects. Of particular note in the review is the way the authors balance a classroom introductory approach to qualitative work, while also giving attention to the depth and complexity of the methodologies that are used.

### Keywords

Introductory Methods, Pedagogy, Qualitative Paradigms

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## ***A Review of Teaching Qualitative Research: Strategies for Engaging Emerging Scholars***

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*This review highlights salient features of the book, Teaching Qualitative Research: Strategies for Engaging Emerging Scholars. The review notes the practical applications of the book, including the advice that the book's authors offer about beginning research projects. Of particular note in the review is the way the authors balance a classroom introductory approach to qualitative work, while also giving attention to the depth and complexity of the methodologies that are used. Keywords: Introductory Methods, Pedagogy, Qualitative Paradigms*

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While other qualitative research books I have encountered focus on the broad strokes of theoretical components or the art of writing up reports, *Teaching Qualitative Research* focuses on transposing these ideas to the classroom in practical steps. Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2018) aim to equip other teachers who engage in qualitative research instruction, and teachers of qualitative research form the major audience for this text.

Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2018) have written the book in an accessible way, which is most helpful, while giving nods to the deep and complicated theories that form the bedrock of qualitative methodology. Wisely, the authors leave the tenuous details about each methodology to the respective figures who represent the variety of interweaving qualitative approaches that exist. There is much to explore in each strand of qualitative inquiry, and there are many weeds that could bind up the readability of this book - Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2018) steer clear of these pitfalls and the reader is the beneficiary of that decision.

Without providing a complete summary for the purposes of this review, I will note that the authors begin their discussion in a consideration of the kinds of approaches that a teacher can take. This section was one of most valuable findings in the book because it highlights a notion that some may take for granted – our assumptions and epistemologies surface in our classroom processing and dialogues. The authors discuss a variety of viewpoints in the opening chapters and make a case for a considered and carefully managed pedagogy.

Each chapter and subsection include reflective exercises, and these ideas are flexible enough to apply to a wide variety of topics throughout a college semester. I appreciated the span of prompts that the authors include in these sections, and there is great possibility in these questions for exploring qualitative research as both a teacher and primary investigator. For example, when considering how to help students think qualitatively, the authors include probing questions about assumptions, limitations, and questions like, “What other types of evidence would have helped you?” and “what three themes or questions emerge?” (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018, p. 49). I can imagine students responding to these questions and activities in positive ways that might lead to internalizing some of the trickier aspects of the research process. Guidelines for both the student and teacher are included in these activities, again speaking to the practicality of the text. The impression is strongly conveyed that this book is not simply theoretical, but that the authors have been in the classroom and practiced these ideas in situ.

What is more, these ideas can also be adapted to fit the needs (and epistemology) of the individual instructor. Whether it is the first three chapters, which really focus on the instructor, or the chapters that follow, which begin to consider the learner in greater detail, Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2018) never lose sight of accessible and workable ideas. These ideas were another sterling takeaway from my reading of the text.

The latter parts of the book, once epistemologies and approaches are explained and explored, are organized like a “how-to” for helping others in building strong research projects – practical steps of advice are widely applicable in this section, not just in the context of a research courses. The benefit here is that the process of completing such a project is explained clearly, so the reader/instructor can be reminded about features of qualitative research. In this way, *Teaching Qualitative Research* is a useful primer for those who might be more familiar with quantitative methods.

The book is the kind of resource I would expect to see in an instructor’s office, but this is also a text that can be considered for upper-level doctoral work with students who wish to become teachers themselves. Step-by-step workshops are included so that teachers can begin to help students practice a variety of methods – while the possibility exists that students can read the book and follow the steps, as well. In this way, the book can act as a kind of teacher’s manual, but has wider uses.

Especially notable in these “how-to” chapters is the way the authors have given due to as many avenues of data collection and management as possible. Again, a volume that focused exclusively on one methodology’s hallmarks might be a useful companion to this text, but Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2018) have provided much in these chapters, from considerations about creating a research problem to composing the review of the literature.

Most helpful in the authors’ discussion of the research problem is the attention that is given to “So What” question, which forms the basis of the study’s purpose and begins to address issues of the gaps that need to be filled in, depending on the student’s focus of inquiry. The authors explain that the “So What” question addresses both the need for the study and questions of what will be learned and understood as a result of the work. They wrote, “These questions need to be asked at every stage of the research process to yield deeper thinking,” and go on to explain the danger of focusing only on process without attention to the interpretation that is needed in qualitative inquiry (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018, p. 68). In this and other discussions, the authors position themselves not just as teachers who are abstractly studying their topic but as practitioners who have had their hands in the methodological clay.

Other approaches that the authors address include interviews, memoing, and field notes – which one would expect to find in a book like this. Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2018) have given appropriate due to primary sources when they discuss these methods. What was pleasantly surprising was the authors’ inclusion of emergent methods in chapters eight and nine. This consideration of visual data and literacy speaks to the extant voices that consider arts-based research forms, including dramaturgical approaches (Saldaña, 2016). As the authors write, “Researchers argue that visual literacy is increasingly important in the world today where technology is at one’s fingertips and allows participants and researchers alike to record, create, and produce images of various types” (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018, p. 135). As the authors note, there are ethical concerns with this type of data collection, as well as the analytical processes associated with visual data, including who and what is represented in the images. Readers can explore possible next steps in qualitative analysis, in addition to the traditional tools and ideas that have been practices for years.

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of the book is its inability to treat on qualitative methodology comprehensively, but this is also wise. This kind of larger approach has already been taken by other authors (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Flick, 2014). While Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2018) offer one chapter that speaks to putting together the report in written form, a

number of other books can serve as companion texts, as well (Holliday, 2006; Wolcott, 2008). A complete and exhaustive consideration would extend this volume greatly and would go beyond the boundaries of what is really possible in a semester's worth of work. There is little fault in providing focus.

What *Teaching Qualitative Research* offers most readily and readably is a pedagogical approach that is absent from other volumes. By taking this track, Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2018) have begun to fill the need for texts that can enhance doing and learning qualitative approaches within the boundaries of a classroom. The book may not be the sum total of interpretive and descriptive work, but the authors have helped to sculpt a formidable topic into a friendly resource that can serve as a starting point for many explorations.

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### Author Note

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