Writing up qulitative research ... better*

*Harry F Wolcot***

Thanks, appreciation.
Esp to Professor Carmen de la Cuesta

SUMMARY

The article contains the conference given by professor Harry Wolcott in May 2003 in Medellín for the presentation of the second edition in Spanish of his book Writing Up Qualitative Research. He asks why is always the second chapter of a written report the "Revision of Literature" and could it be something else instead? He proposes for chapter two to be "Linking Up" of literature, theory and method as an alternative to the traditional literature review, on demand, as necessary, instead of treating this activities as independent exercises. With respect to literature review readers want to be engaged immediately with the problem being addressed. References are critical in helping to analyse and to situate the problem and the research in a broad context. Making the link to theory should be next, but until it is quite clear what is the research interest and how it relates to the report. Finally, linking up through method, what readers want to know is how data was obtained or what are the bases for making inferences. In this manner the researcher may inform the reader since the beginning with enough detail about the problem, its context, the theory it t articulates to and the method.

Key words: qualitative research, writing research reports, report structure.

I am going to talk today about writing up qualitative research, not as a general topic but as the name of a book I have written called Writing Up Qualitative Research. The book was first published by Sage Publishing Company in 1990. It was one of those little blue volumes in the original Qualitative Research series. It had done remarkably well – about 30.000 copies at last count. So the editors at Sage suggested a second edition, this time as a stand – alone book, updated and expanded.

The success of the earlier monograph was surprising and unexpected. The idea for writing it came from Mitch Allen, then an editor at Sage and now the editor/publisher of his own AltaMira Press in California. Mitch suggested the idea when I stopped by the book exhibit at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 1988. By the time I returned to my hotel room, I already had in mind the book I dreamed of writing on the topic of writing. And, having written the book, I never have imagined its success. Three of what I might refer to as "former friends," all teachers of English in high school, thought the book quite unworthy and I steeled myself for the worst. What I had not realized is that high school English teachers are teachers of writing, not struggling researchers who must write. The book's audience was the latter.

That audience did not mind hearing about my problems and solutions, rather than be told how they should write their accounts or how Thomas Hardy or George Eliot or Willian Shakespeare had gone about writing theirs.

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Mejorar la escritura de la investigación cualitativa*

*Harry F Wolcot***

RESUMEN

El artículo contiene la conferencia que el profesor Harry Wolcott ofreció en Medellín en mayo de 2003, con motivo de la publicación al castellano de la segunda edición de su libro *Mejorar la Escritura de la Investigación Cualitativa*. El autor se pregunta por qué razón el segundo capítulo del reporte de una investigación es siempre la revisión de la literatura y si acaso no pudiera ser diferente? Propone la vinculación de literatura, teoría y método como opción al tradicional capítulo dos, incluyendo la información según la medida de lo necesario. Con relación a la revisión de literatura, los trabajos de otros se deberían referenciar sobre la base de la necesidad para ayudar a analizar y ubicar el problema en contexto amplio. En segundo lugar la teoría debe ser útil e introducida sólo hasta cuando esté claro cuál es el interés investigativo y qué relación tiene con el problema. Finalmente con respecto al método, los lectores necesitan saber cómo se obtuvieron los datos del estudio o las bases para hacer las inferencias. De esta manera el investigador puede dejar saber al lector desde el inicio del reporte cual es su problema, el contexto, la teoría con la que se articula y el método.

Palabras clave: investigación cualitativa, escritura de informes de investigación, estructura del informe.

I still don't know exactly what worked in the original edition. So in revising, I tried to leave as much as possible of the earlier writing intact, to focus on updating, clarifying, adding new ideas. I decided to leave the chapters in place, even with terrible titles like "Getting Going," "Keeping Going," or "Tightening Up." I hoped readers would grimace at such titles and try to think how one might out of bad first drafts, and it doesn't matter if people see it in my writing before recognizing it in their own.

In the years since the monograph's publication in 1990 I have been attentive to other writing – related problems I see among colleagues and, especially, among students completing higher degrees. Although I never gave name to the most critical set of problems I identified, I might give them the collective title of "the Chapter Two problem."

The problem struck me in bold fashion when I spent a year in Thailand as a guest lecturer and consultant. On one occasion I was invited to speak to graduate students at a university outside Bangkok. I decided to talk about one of my major studies, The Man in the Principal's Office. I wasn't sure how much of my talk a Thai audience would understand; my talk was in English and it was not being translated. I knew there was keen interest in qualitative research, and, like you, they understood English even if they did not speak it fluently. I presented the study as something of a model. I began by describing the first chapter in detail, since it described how I went about the research. I assumed that methods were of primary importance to these graduate students. I was watching my audience closely, trying to discern whether they were following my words, just as I am doing today. I decided to pose a question to them. "If Chapter one gave an account of the fieldwork, "I queried, what do you think I wrote about in Chapter two?"

An eager response and a flood of hands, and my listeners chanted with confidence, "Review of the literature." Wrong! My second chapter was titled "A day in the life." It was a description of what the school principal did on one particular day at school. But my audience of Thai students already had the contents of ***any and every*** academic Chapter Two fixed in their minds.

I was struck by having traveled half way round the world, to visit a strange campus, in foreign place, to describe a totally unfamiliar study, only to find students with a ready – made answer to my question. Damn, I thought, is Chapter Two doomed always and only to be a review of the literature, regardless of institution or language or national origin?

Then and there I resolved that somehow I would try to liberate Chapter Two. Of course Chapter Two can be a review of the literature, if that's what you want, or a thesis committee – or later, your publisher – insists. Or it can deal

with method. Or it can deal with theory. Or you can "go for broke" and get all three out of the way at once: theory, method, and review of the literature.

But my question for you is: Does Chapter Two ***have to*** deal with any of these? There is no law governing the contents of Chapter Two, any more than there is a law stating that dissertations must be boring. Furthermore, there is the risk that diverting attention to these topics will obscure or overshadow what you have to report. Chapter Two ought to be- whatever you as author want it to be. It's your story, your research, and you ought to be able to develop it in the manner that best allows you to accomplish your purposes.

Now, how to get the message out, at least to raise awareness of how we have come to accept this seeming "tradition." I saw my opportunity while planning the revision of Writing Up Qualitative Research. I could take up my cause in a new chapter, one that I could slip in right in the middle of the book. My title for the new chapter was "Linking Up."

Here I turn to the text, shortened to soften the effect of your having to listen to words intended to be read by you rather than to you. Keep in mind that this is Chapter Four of seven chapters in all. It sits right in the middle, with chapters about "getting going" and "keeping going" preceding it, and chapters about "tightening up," "finishing up," and "getting published" following it.

The editor at Sage with whom I worked on the revision was thrilled with the proposed chapter title and its presumed contents.

She promptly informed me she couldn't wait to see what I had to say about computer linking, networks, and the like. But I am not of that generation; no one reads Wolcott to learn the latest about computer capabilities. The chapter I had in mind was about making important links with the work of others. In the chapter, I proposed that we encourage less rather than more linking up, and that we draw on these three facets of qualitative study-method, theory, and Literature- on a when-and-as-needed basis. That is my message today. The content of this talk is an abridged version of the new Chapter Four, "Linking Up." It appeared in the revised edition of Writing Up Qualitative Research published in 2001. Today we celebrate the Spanish translation published by your university press under the auspices of the Faculty of Nursing Publishing Project. And my hope is that the revision, now available to you in Spanish, will lead to writing up qualitative research . . . better.

You may find my arguments unconvincing and feel more than ever that things should remain as they have been. Indeed, as researchers and academics, you may feel that I am only promoting a lessening of standards, a diminishing of rigor. But hear me out, and consider whether things need to be quite as rigid as they sometimes appear. When the thesis becomes the last document a person writes, the thesis research the only research in which a person ever engages, then our efforts at rigor seem counterproductive.

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From the Chapter

I begin the chapter by reviewing where we have been: I write "In the preceding chapters, I have focused single-mindedly on the stated purpose of your research. I have urged you to do the same. I have gone so far as to suggest

that you draw attention to a sentence that begins, "The purpose of this research is . . . ." You won't go wrong if those very words appear in your final draft and you make them sentence one, of paragraph one, of chapter one.

Although that is a rather unimaginative way to announce your purpose and begin an account, it should convey to readers what you have been up to.

But research is embedded in social contexts and, like all human behavior, is overdetermined, the consequence of a multiplicity of factors. As humans, researchers themselves have contexts and purposes far beyond the immediate scope of their studies. Time here to expand the gaze, to look at research as a social act and to the multiple purposes (note the plural) we seek in pursuing research as a professional calling. How do we link up our research-and ourselves-with others I draw attention to three topics that offer opportunities for such "linking up." The first is the traditional review of the literature.

The second is the expected paean to theory. Third is the customary discourse on method.

The three topics have become so much a part of the reporting ritual that, in any qualitative (and most quantitative) dissertations, each may capture attention and sometimes even be assigned a chapter of its own. Too often these topics are addressed in elaborate detail before the reader catches more than a glimpse of what the researcher is up to.

Rather than underscore the important role played by each of these in the research process writ large, I want to explore some alternative ways for linking up with "the literature," with theory, and with method that complement and augment the **specific** research being reported. That seems preferable to regarding the three as hurdles to overcome, or rituals to be performed, before you are free to strike out on your own.

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But-you must gauge your own situation and the prevailing norms in your academic specialization. And if you are preparing a thesis or dissertation, you must gauge the prevailing norms in your department. If institutional constraints are strong, or your committee members include faculty yet to be convinced about your qualitative approach, you may decide that a far, far better thing to do is to comply with the expectations set before you.

Before you begin to rock the boat, be sure you are in it.

At the same time, make sure that the traditions you honor really exist and are not just part of the mythology surrounding thesis writing or getting an article accepted. I recall a discussion with a senior faculty member at my institution who insisted that her advisees prepare a lengthy Chapter Two reviewing "the literature." She defended her staunchly held position on the grounds that a review was required by our Graduate School. I did not for a minute deny that she could insist that her students prepare such a chapter. But I did insist that the "rule" was hers. I offered to accompany her to the Graduate School to prove my point. She allowed (privately) that the "rule" might not actually exist, but she demanded such a review as evidence of her students "mastery" in their field. (Truth be known, I believe this actually served her purposes in keeping up with the field so she could periodically revise her own text.)

I had, and have, no argument with finding ways to have students demonstrate their newly-won command of some special body of literature. But it seems counterproductive to burden a thesis a secondary task diametrically opposed to demonstrating one's ability to focus on a particular phenomenon studied in depth. A command of the literature can be assessed through other assignments; for example, a separate synthesis paper included as part of the requirements in a graduate program.

What I propose is that instead of treating these linking activities as independent exercises-in a dissertation, and in all subsequent scholarly writing-you remain resolutely selective about the links you make, and you make relevant links on a when-and-as- needed basis. Most likely that will mean holding off except for the most general of comments until the research you are reporting needs to be situated in some broader context.

For purposes here, I am assuming that the researcher does have plenty, and probably even too much, to report, which is usually the case in descriptively-oriented, fieldwork-based studies. In my opinion, one should not be expected to present a major review of everything that everyone else has done before reporting some original observations of one's own.

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First, The "Lit Review"

Perhaps you paid close attention, even breathed a sigh of relief, when I suggested (as I have here, and as I do in an earlier chapter) that you dispense with devoting Chapter Two to a traditional literature review. Especially if, as Howard Becker put it in his neat little book Writing for Social Scientists, you are feeling "terrorized by the literature." Now hear the full message, not just the words you may have rejoiced to hear.

First, what I tell you - in the chapter or in this talk - has absolutely no authority behind it. I am not one of the people who must be satisfied with your study. Citing me as an authoritative source for deviating from tradition is more likely to get both of us in trouble than to get you out of an obligation, and by week's end, I will be gone and you will be standing alone. If you are directed to write a traditional Chapter Two or its equivalent by someone who does have authority, then do it you must.

Perhaps you can negotiate the alternative that I propose. If not, accept the fact and rise to the challenge. Whether or not the experience will be "good for you" is difficult to ascertain, but I can assure that it could be bad for you if you do not. Note also that if you are asked to prepare such a chapter, it will be left to you to figure out just which literatures (note the plural again) you are expected to include - method, theory, prior research, social significance of the problem, philosophical underpinnings of inquiry, implications for policy, applications to practice, etc.

My sense is that unless the purpose of your dissertation is a historical review, your readers want to be engaged immediately with the problem you are addressing. They do not want a recital of how learned you have become. They will assume you have a solid rationale for undertaking your research and will reveal it in time. They are not likely to insist on a complete history of your topic before you dare take an independent step of your own.

One of the things that makes all academic teaching and writing so boring is the practice of approaching every topic with a backward look at where and how it all began. Origins are important, but things don't necessarily need to be presented in the order in which they happened. A brief explanation as to the significance of the topic should be enough for starters.

The alternative to devoting one or more chapters to the underpinnings of your inquiry is to draw on the relevant work of others on a "when and as needed" basis. (As you surely are beginning to realize, when-and-as-needed serves as mantra for the whole chapter.) I object to the practice of simply backing up with a truckload of stuff and dumping it on unsuspecting readers, which seems to be what most traditional reviews accomplish.

That is more likely to create an obstacle that gets in the way, rather than paves the way, to reporting what you have to contribute.

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If the urge and urgency to provide a traditional review reflects the wishes of a dissertation committee, perhaps you can negotiate that the review be incorporated into your research proposal rather than into the final account. In that way you can demonstrate your command of the literature without having to force it into a predetermined place in the study. By all means flag important citations to the work of others. But do so sparingly, only as the references are critical in helping you to analyze and to situate your problem and your research within some broader context. In the normal course of things, the need for locating your work within a broader circle is most likely to be toward the conclusion of your study, as you begin to draw the strands together and ponder some implications.

Next, Making the Link to Theory

You may be expected-or directed- to say something explicit about the issue of theory. No one will let you (or me) get away with the idea that there are no theoretical implications in our work, but issues of theory can be addressed in myriad ways. Let me turn to the roles theory can play so that it offers a way to extend the significance of your work. Theory should not be regarded as just another ritual to attend to, another obstacle along the route to obtaining a higher degree or getting something published. Don't begin "linking" too soon. I have already suggested that you hold off on the "lit review" until the material you are introducing is well in place. Even more emphatically, I urge you to hold off introducing theory until it is quite clear what you are interested in theorizing about, and how that relates directly to what you have to report. Focus on the descriptive task until you have provided a solid basis for analysis and for determining how, and how much, to draw on the work of others.

When you are ready to address matters of analysis and interpretation, consider proposing multiple plausible interpretations rather than pressing single-mindedly for a particularly inviting one. Guard against the temptation to offer satisfying, simple, single-cause explanations that too facilely appear to solve the problems we address. Human behavior is complexly motivated. Our interpretations should mirror that complexity, rather than imply that we have the omniscience to infer "real" meanings. Qualitative researchers should reveal and revel in complexity. Leave for one more quantitatively-oriented colleagues efforts to tie things up in

neat bundles. They are better situated to do that—and appear to be far more compulsive about it.

Interpretive remarks belong in the summation, where you situate your study in broader context. That is the place to draw upon the work and thinking of others. Be selective. Don't succumb to the temptation of making a "parade" of social theory. Theory ought to be **useful,** not simply for show. [Roger Sanjek[1] offers a practical lesson for drawing on theory quite different from simply making a parade of it. In describing how theory served as a resource in writing up an extended field study, he reports, "I searched for no more theory than I needed to organize and tell my story"]. If you are writing up research, theory should serve your purpose, not the other way around. When you can make theory work for you, use it. When theory is only making work for you, look for alternative ways to pull your account together.

Of course, if theory has guided your inquiry from the start, the reader should be informed from the start. But in observing students and colleagues at work over the years, I have more often seen theory imposed, in a too-obvious effort to rationalize data already collected, than I have seen data-collection guided by a theory already well in hand. Field-oriented researchers tend to be greatly influenced (might we say "awed"?) by theory. By the very nature of the way we approach things-flatfooted observers with feet of clay-we tend to be theory borrowers (or theory "poachers, as others sometimes see us)-rather than theory - builders. Taking a model of theory-driven research derived from the hard sciences doesn't serve anything but our already heightened sense of physics envy. Keep your "theorizing" modest and relevant.

Take your own work as far as you are able. Lei your students do the same. Point the way if you are not prepared to take the theoretical leap yourself-especially if and when it begins to feel like a leap-rather than making a pretense at "doing the theory thing."

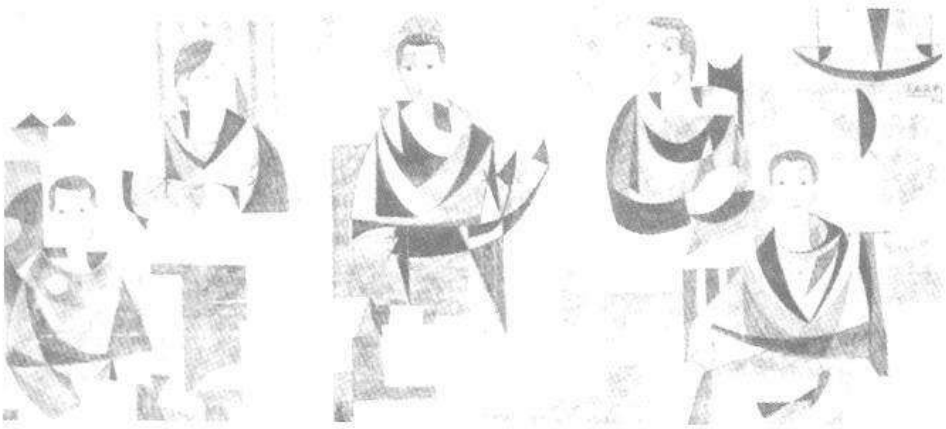
Clifford Geertz[2] observes [in a brief new Preface to a reissue of The Interpretation of Cultures,] quote. "This backward order of things - first you write and then you figure out what you are writing about-nm seem odd, or even perverse, but it is, I think,... standard procedure in cultural anthropology end quote . I'll hazard that it's standard procedure in most qualitative inquiry. Discovery is our forte.

Drawing theoretical implications is an important facet of the research process writ large, and the advancement of theoretical knowledge is a reasonable expectation for our cumulative efforts.

But it should not be regarded as a condition. Advancing theoretical knowledge is not a step that every researcher is prepared, or has been prepared, to make.

Take your own work as far as you are able. Lei your students do the same. Point the way if you are not prepared to take the theoretical leap yourself-especially if and when it begins to feel like a leap-rather than making a pretense at "doing the theory thing."

If you have presented your descriptive account well, and offered what you can by way of analysis, you have fulfilled the crucial obligation to make your research accessible. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS UNREPORTED RESEARCH. And no one ever pulls off the whole thing or quite gets it right. My hunch is that if you are drawn to qualitative approaches, you are not among the theory-compulsive.



ANTONIO HERNÁNDEZ CARPE. *Sesión Académica.* Temple. 2.73 x 5,15 m.

If you have the choice-that is, if you are not directed otherwise-consider integrating theory, or introducing your concerns about theory, into your account at the place where such concerns actually entered your thinking, rather than feeling obligated to slip theory in at the beginning as though it prompted or guided your research all along.

The search for theory, like a cogent review of the literature, offers a way to link up with the prior work of others and a shorthand way to convey the gist of our interests and our inquiries. This "searching" stage is where one's thesis committee, one's student or faculty colleagues, even anonymous reviewers, can-but seldom do-render invaluable service.

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Rather than belittle the efforts of novice researchers who thrash about trying desperately to hook up with theory, those more experienced can-and should-suggest possible leads and links.

Graduate students often reach this "Where's your theory?" stage in writing their studies, pressed for time and feeling they have gone about as far as they can go-or dare go-in theorizing their work. Potentially that presents a great teaching moment, provided help is proffered in a truly helpful way. But when well- intended suggestions fail to take root, it seems preferable to me to leave fledgling researchers' accounts where they are, rather than stepping in to wrest control from them.

Wresting control may Save the Day for Science, but at the possible cost of stopping beginning researchers dead in their tracks. Better, I think, for a student to submit an under-theorized study that is entirely his or her own than to feel that in the final moments a work has literally been tom away, to be placed on a theoretical plane that the student is not yet able to attain.

Personal reflection: The satisfactory closure that my own dissertation committee was probably expecting, or hoping for, in 1964, did eventually get written-but a quarter of a century passed before I was able to write it-in the 1989 reissue of A Kwakiutl Village and School. I appreciate that committee members were satisfied, if perhaps not wildly elated, with the essentially descriptive account that I wrote. If they wondered among themselves whether I might be pushed to take things a bit further, they were kind enough not to insist.

In contrast to my experience, I am haunted by the words of a student who told me, years after the fact, that she never bothered to make a personal copy of her dissertation. "Why should I?" she queried. "Those weren't my words, they were my advisor's! Such intrusiveness is most likely to be exhibited in theoretical heavy-handedness when a novice researcher is shoved aside by a probably well-intentioned advisor who insists, "Here, let me take over. You don't seem to know what you are doing." More recently, a former colleague serving with me on a dissertation committee confided privately that he simply did not have time to bring the students study up to his own high theoretical standard.

Sound familiar? An academic put-down, when a patient reach - down would have been so much more instructive.

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Similarly, it has been suggested that we need not, indeed, should not, limit ourselves to a consideration of only one theory at a time. Economist Johan Galtung[3] makes this plea on behalf of what he calls theoretical pluralism. Should you regard theory as too lofty even to make an appearance in your work, can you be coaxed into an examination of the concepts you have employed, or your ideas, your hunches, your notions, your speculations, even your best guesses?

We might also become more forgiving about our lack of theoretical sophistication. I am not apologetic about the lack of theory in my own work. I doubt that those with strong theoretical leanings find much of interest in my studies. I call my interpretations just that, "interpretations." I do not deny their implications for theory, nor do I deny that my data, like all data, are theory-laden; I subscribe to William James's notion , that you cant even pick up rocks in a field without a theory. It is the term "theory" itself, and the mystical power attributed to it, that seem to have gotten out of hand.

Finally: Linking Up Through Method

If the role of theory tends to be underplayed in writing up qualitative research, the role and importance of method are more often overplayed, especially when method is equated with, and thus limited to, discussing techniques of data gathering.

Fully explicated, method encompasses more than technique, far more importantly including procedures for data analysis. But when qualitative researchers address method as a topic to be "covered," they tend to dwell too narrowly, too exhaustively, and sometimes too defensively on how they conducted their fieldwork and collected their data.

It is that narrow sense of method as technique, to which I call attention. The defensiveness grows out the idea that essentially all we do is observe, while our quantitatively-oriented colleagues pursue their work through something called The Scientific Method. I remember a brief conversation with a seat mate on a transcontinental flight who told me he was a physicist whose

specialty was the study of the ozone layer. I asked him how one would ever begin to research such a topic. I found his answer remarkably comforting: "First off, you need some observational data."

All research is based on observational data, an observation that is itself overlooked by those who insist on emphasizing differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches. But, a word of caution to qualitative researchers tempted to lean too heavily on the sanctity of method, and especially to fíeldwork techniques, to validate their research or to confer status. A critical appraisal" of our techniques is in order. That is the third kind of "linking" I examine. And as with the previous two, I suggest you make less rather than more of this link.

When it comes to method, the links we can make to the work of others are neither powerful nor persuasive. Method is **not** the, fortay of qualitative research. And you are not obliged to review and defend the whole qualitative movement before proceeding with the particulars of your case. What your readers need to know is how you obtained the data that your have reported in your study, or, when you are making inferences, what is your basis for making them. They do not need to go all the way back to Heroditus to get a sense of how much confidence they can place in your observations.

What I have done in this part of the chapter is to underscore how broad the scope of qualitative study has become, how interrelated but complex its facets. To suggest that interrelatedness, I carne up with the idea of representing qualitative approaches as a tree. not coincidentally unlike the giant oaks and maples I see from the windows of my house. Major branches extend out for archival research, observation strategies, and interview strategies, and main trunk retains the feature common to them all: participant observation.

I offer you my "tree" on paso 101, it's branches labeled in Spanish, and in detail to suggest that there is little point in trying to provide a grand overview of qualitative research when any particular study can draw only selectively among such a wide variety of techniques and approaches. Broad overviews are properly the subject of entire books devoted to the topic.

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The critical concept of participant observation adds to the confusion, since it is the cover term that refers to all qualitative approaches but also singles out one particular variant among them (in contrast to an observer study, an interview strategy, etc.). Thus it is essential to provide detail as to exactly how participant observation, in its all-inclusive sense, is played out in any particular piece of research. The label itself is too encompassing.

There is a vast difference between borrowing one or two of the fieldwork techniques that ethnographers (and other qualitative researchers) use to gather data and claiming to be "doing ethnography" on the basis of technique alone. A study influenced by an ethnographic approach, by symbolic interaction, etc., is not the same as a study informed by these approaches. Such a study is best represented modestly-"in the manner of-rather than laying claim to demonstrate all the nuance of seasoned researchers fully conversant with that tradition.

Readers do need to be assured that you are secure in the position from which you do your viewing and that your selection of a position is a reasonable

and reasoned one, well suited to your purposes and your particular talents. If a dissertation committee wants assurance of your general command of the "method" literature, or you as a committee member feel that such a demonstration is in a students best interests, here is another aspect that might be developed in the research proposal subsequently to be employed selectively on a when-and-as-needed basis.

By identifying participant observation as the core research activity in qualitative inquiry, I underscore not only the everyday nature of our data but the everyday nature of the way we go about collecting data. It is impossible to shroud in mystery or esoteric explanation an approach that can be encapsulated by the term "participant observation." Method alone is not sufficient to allow us to make strong claims about what we have done.

Employing ordinary fieldwork techniques in the course of an inquiry does not require one to dwell excessively on who has pioneered them or who has employed them elsewhere. Neither "being there" in some natural setting nor "intimate, long-term acquaintance" is sufficient to guarantee the accuracy or completeness of what we have to report. There is little point in trying to make a big deal of them.

Qualitative inquiry is more than method, and method is more than fieldwork techniques. The more you dwell on the latter, the more you draw attention away from your substantive report.

Don't try to convince your audience of the validity of your observations based on the power of a fieldwork approach. Satisfy readers with sufficient detail about how you obtained the data you actually used. And keep in mind that since your data consist essentially of rather everyday stuff, collected in rather everyday ways, any insight you have gained about organizing and analyzing data will be especially welcome. As you all know, the real "work" of qualitative research lies in mind-work, not fieldwork.

Coda

There you have a sneak preview of the newest chapter in the revised version of Writing Up Qualitative Research. And thanks to the efforts of the Faculty of Nursing Publishing Project, the book is now available in Spanish. If you are interested in qualitative research, I hope you will avail yourself of the opportunity to read it more carefully. I need only remind you that the ideas I have expressed are thoughts, not commandments, and hardly new thoughts at that. There have always been colleagues working on behalf of making academic writing-yes, even thesis writing-less pompous and less dependent on ritual; more searching, more discovery oriented, more honest. Stories well told, their links and contexts relevant. Can we do even more? P

Thank you

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