

Guest Editorial Preface

Qualitative Research as a Means of Exploring and Transforming the Experience of Adult Education

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Qualitative research affords scholars with an opportunity to understand the experiences of others. Qualitative research affords scholars with an opportunity to understand not only what has occurred but also why and how a given phenomenon has unfolded. Qualitative research affords scholars with an opportunity to describe social reality in a holistic and nuanced way.

While all of these statements may be true, all of these statements focus only on the role of scholars in the endeavor of qualitative research. In this special issue, the reader will be presented with five articles that demonstrate the manner in which qualitative research can empower research participants as partners in the research process. The five articles in this special issue emphasize the importance of learning from the perspectives, insights, and expertise of others. In this way, this special issue presents examples of how qualitative research can both explore the experience of adult education (e.g., literacy education, teacher education) as well as transform the experience of adult education for both practitioners and community stakeholders.

In the first article, the authors review the methodology of case study. The authors make a case for how and why the methodology of case study is a particularly apposite approach when attempting to explore the educational experiences that are occurring within a given school, classroom, or lived experience of a given student. In the second article, the author, drawing on examples from the field of literacy education, presents an argument for how and why an acknowledgement of and respect for Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies are necessary when engaging in qualitative research with Indigenous populations. Perhaps the most compelling argument in this article is the statement that – at least from an Indigenous paradigm – research is rooted in relationship.

The third article builds on the themes the second article by introducing the methodology of participatory action research. The authors of this article describe a number of fundamental strategies and foundational ideas of this methodological approach. As with the second article, this article emphasizes the centrality of the participants in the research process. Indeed, if this approach to qualitative research is to be transformative – as it intends – then participants must be understood to be partners.

The fourth article presents the process and results of a longitudinal self-study within the context of teacher education. Specifically, the authors used qualitative methods to explore how their program was gathering and utilizing quantitative data about the development of their teacher candidates. This article represents a particularly illustrative example of how the process of qualitative research can be utilized by practitioners (in this case, teacher educators) to understand and improve their own practices. Also unique to this article is the feature that, in this self-study context, the participants of the qualitative research were the researchers themselves.

The fifth article similarly focuses on the context of teacher education and presents a framework for thinking about the intersection between community-based teacher education and arts-based research. Similar to the other articles in this issue, this article emphasizes that in order for qualitative research to maximize its transformative power, participants must be understood to be partners in the

research process. In the context of teacher education, this implies that community stakeholders must be understood to be partners (alongside university faculty) in the process of teacher development.

Taken together, these five articles present five unique methodological approaches to qualitative research: case study, Indigenous methodologies; participatory action research; self-study; and arts-based research. In addition to serving as a valuable introduction to these approaches to qualitative research, these articles also unite around an overarching theme: Qualitative research is at its most powerful – its most transformative – when qualitative research is understood to be relational and when participants are invited to be partners in the process.

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