Introduction: Fostering the Cultural Aspects of Doing Research

César A. Cisneros-Puebla, Robert Faux, Jo Moran-Ellis, Ercilia García-Álvarez & Jordi López-Sintas

Abstract: Framing the 14 contributions included in this special issue on "Advances in Qualitative Research in Ibero America" within the cultural complexity of our current world is the objective of this introduction. The particularity of doing qualitative research in specific local, national, and even language contexts should not be overlooked. A brief description of each article is provided to introduce this new issue on qualitative research practices in some of the peripheries of our globalized academic world.

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1. Introduction

In 2010 *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (*FQS*) will celebrate its 10th anniversary. From the first issue onwards, the Spanish language has been represented. The inclusion of Spanish arose out of a suggestion by CISNEROS (2000) to the editors that they include the Spanish version of his already accepted English text if he also submitted a German translation. Although *FQS* was envisioned as a bi-lingual journal (German and English), they accepted this proposal, and as a result of that, and other circumstances and other colleagues' contributions, *FQS* is now a trilingual journal (German, English, and Spanish). [1]

Contributions from Spanish-speaking researchers have steadily increased over the past nine years. Some researchers have preferred publishing in *FQS* in their native Spanish, while others have chosen to have their submissions appear in English, and still others have chosen to have their submissions appear in both languages. As ALASUUTARI (2004) has discussed, the dominance of the English language in the globalized world of qualitative research has resulted in a number of reactions from non-English speaking researchers. The dilemma for many of these researchers is the need to take a critical stance against the dominance of English while at the same time recognizing the need for disseminating their work to an international audience. [2]

In 2006 *FQS* published a special issue on qualitative research in Ibero-America. CISNEROS, DOMINGUEZ, FAUX, KÖLBL, and PACKER (2006), in proposing

such a special issue, also raised the concern about potential problems and the challenges posed in translating into multiple second languages including the how to resolve questions concerning accuracy and style. In the end, as in all issues of *FQS*, a number of submissions were published in all three languages while others were published only in Spanish at the wishes of the author(s). [3]

The current special issue still aspires to encourage the participation of native Spanish speaking qualitative researchers in order for their work to reach an international audience (CISNEROS et al., 2006, p.1). Consequently, the articles in this special issue come from researchers working in numerous Spanish-speaking countries and reflect the wide range of empirical and methodological work currently being undertaken. [4]

Before introducing this special issue it is important to frame its contents via the discussion of MRUCK, CISNEROS and FAUX (2005) concerning non-Anglo-Saxon "peripheries," the dominance of some disciplines in the qualitative research arena, the research practices (SEALE, GOBO, GUBRIUM & SILVERMAN, 2004), and epistemological assumptions that shape the different national experiences of doing research. [5]

First, all of the papers were submitted and evaluated in the native language of the authors and then translated to English (and the abstracts to German). Second, the contributions come from scholars working in vastly different areas of research and disciplines, with unique perspectives on the phenomena they study. Third, the epistemologies that underpin the research, as well as the concrete practices of carrying it out, have been shaped by, and are inextricably tied to, both local and national contexts. Thus, one can clearly see in the submissions in this special issue the role played by culture. For instance, you will read contributions describing research with heroin users in urban areas, the life of the poor in rural areas, youth in relation to criminal acts, transgender and health services providers, flexible employment and development strategies, and high-risk sexual practices, among others. In each of these articles the sense of place and of culture is palpable. Indeed the role of culture is inescapable and as such its significance needs to be made more visible. The power of these submissions, the power of qualitative research in general, is engagement with culture and the recognition of the role it ineluctably plays in people's lives. [6]

2. Interdisciplinary Collaboration: The Origins of This Special Issue

This special issue has its origins in the "Iberoamerican Conference of Qualitative Research" (IBERACUAL), held in Barcelona in June 2008. The aim of the conference was to help advance the theoretical and practical knowledge of qualitative research between different academic disciplines. For this reason the conference was organized around methodological approaches rather than substantive areas. This organizational scheme provided an interface between researchers who, though from different disciplines, use similar methods to analyze qualitative data. [7]

In the Conference's organization participated more than 50 researchers from psychology, geography, education, management, sociology, health, communication, anthropology and political science. The work reported on and shared was conducted in Spain, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Venezuela and the United States. All contributed their effort, knowledge, enthusiasm, and excitement to create an interdisciplinary space in which they could present and share their methodological practices, the development of these practices and methodologies, facilitate collaboration between disciplines, contribute to the establishment of common criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research, and ultimately influence academic research funding through the subsequent strengthening of the case for qualitative research as a valid and necessary way of understanding the social world. [8]

The different methodological approaches reported on included grounded theory methodology, discourse analysis, ethnography, case study, action research, content analysis, narrative research, and a combination of methods. This rich assortment of methodologies provided the basis for the discussions during the Conference. The selected 14 contributions are a small sample of the developments, innovations, and applications of qualitative research taking place in the countries that were represented at the Conference. [9]

The diversity of methodological approaches, areas of knowledge, and cultures, allowed us to explore the different criteria each of us use to evaluate the quality of the methodologies we use. To support this, each paper submitted to the conference and afterwards to *FQS* was assessed by two anonymous reviewers. We stipulated that at least one of the evaluators was trained in a particular discipline and was knowledgeable of the methodology reported on in the manuscript. In some cases, both of the reviewers came from the same discipline and had equivalent knowledge and background in the methods discussed. This approach was followed throughout the evaluation process. [10]

The sessions were organized around the methodological approaches used; this helped to facilitate the methodological discussions across disciplines, countries, and approaches. Through these discussions researchers from different disciplines came to realize that they were facing similar challenges. This clearly revealed not only the need for training and dissemination of qualitative methodological innovations in the Ibero-American context. We hope that the knowledge shared and gained will help to guide future research and lead to specific training to improve the quality of investigations and facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue. [11]

The panel discussions revealed the need to influence the institutional context of qualitative researchers to improve the relationship between them and the institutions that fund their research and assess their productivity. [12]

Among other topics discussed, the participants acknowledged that pressure to finance their projects by responding to competitive requests from national research organizations was compounded by a lack of qualified reviewers to

evaluate those proposals submitted to such national funding competitions. This lack of qualified reviewers is also apparent in the assessment of researcher productivity. The dearth of qualified researchers to evaluate proposals for qualitative research projects reduces the likelihood these projects will receive funding even if they are of the highest methodological quality and soundness. It is incumbent upon qualitative researchers from across disciplines to address these issues of funding, acceptance, and quality (DENZIN, 2009; SMITH & DEEMER, 2000; CRESWELL, 2007; GUBA & LINCOLN, 1989, 2005; LINCOLN & GUBA, 1985; SPENCER, RITCHIE, LEWIS & DILLON, 2003). [13]

3. Contributions to this Special Issue

Advances in Qualitative Research in Ibero America is divided in two sections. The first section is entitled "Conceptual and Methodological Reflections." It includes four papers which reflect upon methodological and conceptual issues related to the conduct of research. [14]

Pilar ALBERTIN in her article *Reflective Practice in the Ethnographic Text*, reflects on the field work she conducted with a group of heroin users in Barcelona. The discussion centers on the text's production, taking into account its potential readers. She does so by analyzing the ability of language to produce an action by considering microtextual descriptions, dialogue, the emergence of the subjectivities of the researchers, and the possibility of action. [15]

Jorge RUIZ offers a conceptual reflection in his article *Sociological Discourse Analysis: Methods and Logic*, in which he examines sociological discourse analyses, comparing differences to other approaches and identifying types, and opens interdisciplinary debate by studying what is common and what is different in the analysis of discourse in the various disciplines that use this approach. [16]

In her work *Ontological and Epistemological Foundations of Qualitative Research* Irene VASILACHIS opens a debate about the conceptual tenets of qualitative research; proposing to revise the fundamental ontological, epistemological, and methodological frameworks of qualitative research in order establish a foundation based upon interaction, collaboration, and knowledge construction. [17]

Raúl VAIMBERG and M. Teresa ANGUERA[1] in their article *Methodological Options for Text Analysis in a Technology-mediated Psychotherapy Group* illustrate how to deal with textual analysis from four perspectives: surface analysis of text, textual analysis, detection of verbal behavior patterns, and the detection of patterns from texts written by cybertherapy, obtained and analyzed with the help of four qualitative analysis programs: AntCom 3.2.1; Atlasti, SDIS-GSEQ and THÈMECoder. This work shows how the complementarity of techniques and tools of analysis facilitate the detection and study of processes and therapeutic micro-processes, while demonstrating the analytical possibilities of both commercial and non-commercial software. [18]

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1   Note from the *FQS* editors: This article has not been published.

The second section is "Research Practices." It includes articles, dealing with specific approaches and methodologies for doing qualitative research. This section is divided into three subsections: "Visual Analysis," "Grounded Theory Methodology," "Evaluation and Validity," and "Narrative Analysis." [19]

In the first subsection, "Visual Analysis," Maria Teresa CAUDURO, Márcia BIRK and Priscila WACHS reveal in *Arts-based Investigation: A Brazilian Story* how the drawings made by children can be used to identify their views regarding the contexts in which live. They describe the analytical process used to work with the drawings of 17 children who live in a poor neighborhood, Canudos, in Brazil, and provide evidence that the depictions of their lives provided by children through drawing articulate their likes and dislikes about their lives; such data may serve as the basis for developing training programs for teachers to better serve these children. [20]

Jesús René LUNA HERNÁNDEZ in *Photoethnography by People Living in Poverty on the Northern Border of Mexico* presents the experience of giving an active role to informants through photography with the intention of obtaining their perspective on what they consider important in their daily lives in poverty in Mexico. Photography thus serves a twofold purpose in this study: it produces visual data and it acts as a means to initiate a reflection on the situation of the participants. [21]

Alejandra BOSCO and Montserrat RIFÀ-VALLS in *Space, Times and Knowledge for a Reflective Subjectivity in Bellaterra Primary School* describe an analysis of how girls and boys develop forms of positioning, identity, and differentiation through relationships with others in the school: i.e. teachers and peers. For this purpose they study the learners and teachers in a primary education school in Spain. The combination of methods they used has allowed a reconstruction of the formation of the subjectivity of children through storytelling scenes observed in different groups and spaces in the school. [22]

The subsection on "Grounded Theory Methodology" has two contributions. In *The Non-sexual Needs of Men that Motivate Them to Engage in High-risk Sexual Practices with other Men*, Percy FERNÁNDEZ-DÁVILA explores unsafe sex practices with casual partners among men in order to produce a theory based on data that permits us to understand why these practices take place. The author has used the Internet as a means of accessing informants from this group or men. The analysis of 20 interviews has allowed him to uncover the reasons for taking such risks that go beyond what is strictly sexual. The author underscores the need to understand the motivations behind these practices if we are to improve the impact of HIV prevention programs. [23]

Jaime ANDRÉU ABELA and María PÉREZ CORBACHO in *Investigating a Sense of Identity in Andalusia Using Interactive Research Processes and Grounded Theory Methodology* put forth the thesis that it is necessary that analytical theories be developed by working groups that interact in open, flexible, and equivalent ways. [24]

The subsection on "Evaluation and Validity" starts with a contribution from Carlos CALDERÓN. In *Assessing the Quality of Qualitative Research: Criteria, Process and Writing*, CALDERON raises the issue of needing to establish an agreed upon standard of quality through the identification of coordinates that satisfies both methodological requirements and substantive ones in health research. He points to the importance of the role played by three dimensions: previously established criteria, the research process, and the writing of the final report. [25]

In *The Contribution of Qualitative Methods in the Validity of an Instrument which Measures Quality of Life Related to Health in Children Suffering from a Chronic Illness*, María Isabel TOLEDO GUTIÉRREZ, Ana María ALARCÓN MUÑOZ, Luis BUSTOS MEDINA, Felipe HEUSSER RISOPATRÓN, Eduardo HEBEL WEISS, Pedro LORCA OSORIO, María Elisa CASTILLO NIÑO and Francisco GARAY GREVE have argued for incorporating qualitative methodology into the validation of health-based measurement instruments which assess quality of life with respect to children who live with a chronic disease. It is stressed that the living experience of patient creates constructs that may not coincide with the theoretical basis of most measurement instruments currently in use. In addition, their work reveals that the development of the concept "quality of life" with these child patients must also take into account the children's own cultural and communication contexts as well as the possible influence of parents on children's perception of the disease. [26]

The third and last subsection is concerned with "Narrative Analysis." It begins with a contribution from Kátia BONES ROCHA, Lucia Helena RUBIN BARBOSA, Carolina ZAMBOM BARBOZA, Prisla ÜCKER CALVETTI, Fernanda TORRES CLÁVALHO, Elder CERQUEIRA-SANTOS, Julia HERMEL and Andreína da SILVA MOURA. In *Attitudes and Perceptions of the Brazilian Public Health System by Transgender Individuals*, these authors describe a content analysis of health care in Brazil from the perception of transvestites, transsexuals, and transgendered people. Based on interviews which focused on participants' experiences of the public health system in Brazil, the authors examined the health care users' perceptions of care and identified the lack of awareness of health care providers regarding the specific requirements of the most vulnerable and marginalized. Finally, BONES ROCHA et al. argue for the need for qualitative approaches in defining and shaping health policies and programs that will facilitate the inclusion of all. [27]

Lupicinio IÑIGUEZ, Jordi SANZ, Pilar MONREAL, Arantza DEL VALLE and Josep FUSTÉ in their article, *An Integrated Analysis of the Perceptions of Healthcare Users, Professionals, and Managers in Catalonia*, discuss the perceptions of users, professionals, and managers of the resources and the processes within the health-care system of Catalonia, and the nature of the relationship between users and professionals. The authors argue that each of these groups has a different interpretation of seemingly similar resources, processes, and interactions. They highlight the need to take into account these different interpretations for an effective health-care system to be put in place. [28]

Vicente SISTO and Carla FARDELLA in *Narrative Control and Governmentality: Coherence Production in Identity Narratives* reflect on how to empirically address the relationship between narrative, identity, and social order and through that uncover control mechanisms in the narrative constructions of 32 informants (young adults and professionals in Chile) who are employed in the flexible workforce. [29]

The contributions to this special issue vividly display the roles that culture and context play in the conceptualization and practice of qualitative research. In addition, each of the articles, to lesser and greater degrees, reflects the cultural context of the research being reported upon. This is a critical point. Qualitative research is particularly well placed to articulate the complexities of culture and context. Embracing the complex, the "messy" stuff of life is what gives qualitative research such power to bring about change for the better. Indeed, in most of the contributions the overarching aim of the research was to improve the lives of those being studied. [30]

Culture shapes us in countless ways just as we shape culture. Thinking, acting, believing, perceiving, being human, is imbued with culture. We are beings-in-the-world. It is only by understanding our relationship with the world and the world's relationship with us, and the interaction of the two, that we can begin to recognize ways to improve that relationship. The articles in this issue reflect this ideal. Importantly, the work reported on here will help turn this ideal into a reality on the basis of reflective and rigorous research. [31]

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Authors

César A. CISNEROS PUEBLA is Professor in the Department of Sociology at Autonomous Metropolitan University-Iztapalapa, Mexico. He teaches qualitative methods and social sciences epistemology. His research interests include narrative and discourse analysis, grounded theory methodology, symbolic interaction, qualitative data analysis and qualitative computing. For *FQS* he is the editor for the Spanish version and coordinates the Ibero American branch.

Contact:

César A. Cisneros Puebla

Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa
Departamento de Sociología
Av. San Rafael Atlixco No. 186
Col. Vicentina
Delegación Iztapalapa
C. P. 09340
México, D.F.

Tel.: ++52 55 580 44 788
Fax: ++52 55 580 44 789

E-mail: csh@xanum.uam.mx
URL:
http://www.paginasprodigy.com/cesarcisne/

Robert B. FAUX teaches in the Psychology Department at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. He is an educational psychologist and teaches research methods, the psychology of culture and ethnicity, psychological disorders, brain, behavior, and cognition, and the history of psychology. His research in educational psychology has centered on using case studies to teach psychology and the development of professional identity. His other research interests include the relationship between psychology and the arts, and identity development in non-Western cultures, and cultural psychology. He is also interested in the history and philosophy of psychology.

Contact:

Robert B. Faux

537 McAnulty College Hall
Psychology Department
Duquesne University
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15282 USA

Tel.: ++1 412 369 1614

E-mail: fauxr@duq.edu

Jo MORAN-ELLIS is Head of the Department of Sociology at University of Surrey. She specializes in the sociology of childhood and child protection and methodological issues in the social sciences. Her research interests include issues in integrating methodologies, qualitative methodology, the study of childhood and child protection, and children's mental health services. She is currently developing research on children and sleep with colleagues in psychology and the biomedical sciences.

Contact:

Jo Moran-Ellis

Department of Sociology, University of Surrey
Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH, UK

Tel: +44 1483 686975

E-mail: j.moran-ellis@surrey.ac.uk

Ercilia GARCÍA-ÁLVAREZ is Full Professor at Universitat Rovira i Virgili Tarragona (Spain), Associate researcher of the Center for Humanities Research (Cerhum) and Director of the research group QUALOCIO (Qualitative research in leisure markets and organizations). She is the president of ESPACUAL (Spanish Association for the advance of Qualitative Research) and she was Coordinator of the Scientific Comitee of IBERACUAL (Iberoamerican Conference of Qualitative Research). She has published in various journals, such as: *Social Forces*, *Family Business Review*, *Field Methods*, *European Sociological Review* and *The Sociological Review*.

Contact:

Ercilia García-Álvarez

Escola Universitària de Turismo i Oci
Campus Educatiu i Esportiu de Vila-seca
C/Joanot Martorell, s/n. 43480 Vila-seca
Tarragona, Spain

Phone: ++34 977 395709

E-mail: mariaercilia.garcia@urv.cat

Jordi LÓPEZ-SINTAS is Full Professor at Universitat Autònoma Barcelona, Director of the Center for Humanities Research (Cerhum), Director of the CMC research group (Consumptions, Markets and Culture), Vice-president of ESPACUAL (Spanish Association for the advance of Qualitative Research), director of SAIC (Advanced Seminar in Qualitative Research) and Coordinator of the organizational committee of IBERACUAL (Iberoamerican Conference of Qualitative Research). He has published in numerous journals, such as: *Field Methods*, *European Sociological Review*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Social Forces*, *Small Business Economics* and *The Sociological Review*.

Contact:

Jordi López-Sintas

Dept. of Business Economics
Faculty of Economics
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Edificio B
08193-Bellaterra, Barcelona, Spain

Phone: ++34 935812270

E-mail: Jordi.Lopez@uab.es

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