

## **Post Qualitative Inquiry**

Keynote Lecture

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qualitative methodology if one puts the poststructural critiques of humanist ontologies and epistemologies to work.

When I wrote that chapter, I was well aware of the slippery politics of any critique of qualitative methodology given the current neo-positivist status of educational research, policy, and practice in the U.S. In addition, conventional humanist 1980s qualitative methodology continues to be radical in U.S. social sciences disciplines like psychology, political science, and economics. Further, I have certainly championed qualitative methodology for decades in my teaching and writing. My point is that qualitative methodology has done much good work in educational research.

But my critique comes from my own experience in teaching qualitative methodology for the last 20 years. At the University of Georgia, we offer a five-course sequence in qualitative research methodology, and doctoral students who complete the sequence are awarded a certificate, which is supposed to qualify them to teach qualitative methodology once they enter the academy. I joined the faculty at the University of Georgia in 1995, and, since then, taught our introductory course in qualitative methodology 17 times. But I also taught courses on postmodern theory, on Foucault and Derrida; and I sent our education students to our Comparative Literature Department to take courses with Ronald Bogue, who is an internationally renowned Deleuzian scholar. Over the years, students who had diligently studied poststructural and postmodern theories struggled and failed to reconcile those theories with humanist qualitative methodology. So in 2003 I developed a counter-course, Post Qualitative Research, that is not grounded in humanist qualitative methodology to support them, and the content of that course has changed over the years as we all got smarter about how one might inquire using the

as a

doctoral student, a disconnect I believe occurs because our educational research curriculum generally separates epistemology and ontology from methodology. Like my students, I had studied two bodies of knowledge simultaneously but separately: poststructural and postmo

deconstructed other concepts of qualitative methodology. For example, Patti Lather (1993) deconstructed validity, Jim Scheurich (1995) deconstructed the interview, and Wanda Pillow (2003) deconstructed reflexivity. Many of you at this conference were doing the same.

to work the ruins (St.Pierre & Pillow, 2000) of

ontology and epistemology. this problem later, but first I want to set the stage for my call for post qualitative methodology by briefly reviewing the history of qualitative methodology in the U.S. experience talking with you about that later.

in the U.S. was part of the larger interpretive turn in our social sciences that drew heavily from interpretive anthropology introduced *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Geertz told us that in interpretive anthropology we don't first find and then describe or represent culture in our research reports; rather, we *inscribe* culture as we write it; we make it in our texts. That understanding ushered in what Geertz (1988) (p. 138), crisis of representation (1975) called the legitimation crisis.

After the interpretive turn, our research reports could no longer be naïve, innocent, transparent reflections of what *really is* but were always already partial, contingent, and potentially dangerous *fictios*, fictions interpretations of interpretations they found in their cultures and used in living. What this means for interpretive social scientists is that even if we invent five or ten or twenty different research designs even if we follow a trusted, well- even if we improve

rather interpretation piled on interpretation piled on interpretation. All we can ever get in interpretive social science is what a participant thinks today, what we observe today. What we get is which might well change in six weeks or six months and we have to be content with that. Such is the nature of interpretive social science. And why should we expect more? fe like that messy and our minds about what we think constantly reinterpreting our lived experiences as we tell them to different people throughout our lives ll those re-tellings change us as well? I surely hope so. As Foucault (1982/1997) wrote

Interpretive social science in the U.S. was



positivism who claimed to be neutral and untouched by race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and so on. As the feminist, Donna Haraway (1988), put it, there is no privileged nowhere. Haraway and others argued that knowledge is always situated, local, partial, and contingent and cannot be replicated, generalized, and scaled up, as we like to say in education these days. Further, identity politics argued that, contrary to positivist claims, all science, both social and natural, is contaminated. In other words, the researcher cannot not be there, and science is always a very human enterprise.

So interpretive social science, and interpretive qualitative methodology, was invented in the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s to counter the positivist social science that had been dominant for decades, and it thrived until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For a number of years, in fact, more qualitative than quantitative research studies were presented at the American Educational Research Association, and qualitative methodology became a powerful methodological machine in educational research.

But a powerful backlash to interpretive social science and qualitative methodology began in the U.S. in 2000 with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, which introduced the research in education is essentially positivist. Interestingly, the person who wrote the definition of scientifically based research in the federal law was neither a researcher nor an educator, but we should not be surprised at that. As Foucault explained, politics and not rationality is often found at the beginning of things. Nonetheless, this political maneuver took everyone by surprise because it was the first time in our history that the federal government had mandated research methodology in federal law. The argument was that, because educational researchers, especially qualitative researchers, had failed to produce knowledge that could



problems, the government had to intervene and use the force of law to make us use rigorous, scientific methodologies. In fact, scientizing everything about education soon became the norm. The president of our National Academy of Sciences said in his 2001 presidential address that his goal was, in fact, to make education a science.

To accomplish that, Grover Whitehurst, an educational psychologist, was appointed as the first Director of the new U.S. Institute of Educational Sciences that was created by NCLB. The Institute of Education Sciences was the new funding agency for educational research. Whitehurst immediately determined that causal research was the only kind of research that

of causal research was the randomized, controlled trial. Qualitative research was dismissed across the board as unscientific because, as some (Shavelson, Phillips, Towne, & Feuer, 2003)

es and not on facts. During the decade after NCLB, the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we qualitative researchers in education often heard patronizing, dismissive comments like

Another comment was, in any fifth grade classroom in the country

The upshot of NCLB was that U.S. federal government would not fund qualitative research because it claimed its findings could not be scientifically-based or evidence-based. Qualitative research findings could not be generalized. Qualitative studies described but did not measure, and rigorous science is supposedly based on numbers, not on words. What happened is that in order to get federal funding for educational research, many qualitative researchers proceeded to make their

audit trails, inter-rater reliability, coding data, and so on. Interpretive qualitative methodology, whose methods are emergent, became methods-driven, linear, and systematic, following a pre-



literature reviews

cept





to make the ontological turn and *until we just leave*  
*humanist qualitative methodology behind.* We must try to forget it, and, as I said earlier, that  
 will be especially very well-trained as qualitative  
 methodologists. But we must remember that we invented qualitative methodology as an  
 interpretive research methodology to counter positivist social science almost 30 years ago. We  
 invented it. We made it up. not sacred. I if we just put it aside and try  
 something different.

First, we must understand that the  
 demand that we think differently about *method*. In 1979 Lyotard (1984/1979) wrote that he  
 found postmodernism in America, and he defined postmodernism rd

comes too late, is immediately out-of-date, and so is inadequate to the task at hand. *But method not on* *more seriously, it prevents them from coming into existence.*

Again, *n conventional humanist qualitative methodology, cannot be thought or done in new empirical, new material post qualitative inquiry.*

, accepted

scientific research methodologies, h

I would respond by saying

that science exists only in a relation of power, when one group who claims to be scientists draws a line to exclude others they claim are not scientists. We certainly learned how this works in recent U.S. history when someone who was neither an educator nor a researcher wrote a definition of scientifically based research in education for the No Child Left Behind Act that drew the line between science and not-science. We also learned first-hand that drawing that line was an act of power, politics, desire, and values and not an act of clear-headed rational deliberation. But the history of science tells us this, and perhaps we should begin educational research courses by reading books like (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. *ory illustrates that scientists who support normal science are often*

to worry about whether this new work is science. out of

the bag, so to speak. Educational researchers have already begun to study the new empiricisms, the new materialisms, and the posthuman and are putting them to work in their projects. As I explained earlier, I introduced the concept *post qualitative inquiry* in 2011 to encourage researchers to move past 1980s interpretive qualitative methodology and the more recent positivist qualitative methodology. In 2013, Patti Lather and I edited a special issue of the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* on post qualitative inquiry. In 2014,



Alecia Jackson and I edited a special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* on qualitative data analysis



Deleuze also believed that it is only in a practical and experimental engagement with the

or Deleuze

just as the established was always established from the outset, even if a certain amount of

136). So it may take some time to



readers know that their beliefs about the world may well be demolished by reading the next book

is no longer prior to language, method, and the world; in fact, the human being of humanism is no longer intelligible.

from the nonhum

to

simplify Deleuze and Guattari, we are always *assemblages* that are not stable entities that can be broken down into distinct component parts and made to mean but, rather something like machines that are constantly connecting, territorializing and deterritorializing becoming.

Importantly, assemblages do not imply interiority but exteriority, so we would not ask what an assemblage *is* or what parts it contains but rather with what it connects, what it plugs into. Again, human being is not independent and self-contained but mixed with everything else on the surface.

The point is that we cannot separate out the human subject in posthuman, new empirical, new material, post qualitative inquiry. Our responsibility is no longer to the privileged human but to the assemblage which is always more-than



*gender*      *s entanglement*



Of practical concern, of course, is how scholars doing this post-qualitative, new empirical, new material, posthuman research work with Institutional Review Boards who monitor human subjects research for possible harm to research participants. My students certainly worry about

How do we explain our posthuman studies to people in charge of human subjects ethics review? In the U.S., \_\_\_\_\_ been fighting the creeping control of our Institutional Review Boards for decades. Our IRBs have seldom understood interpretive qualitative methodology and so have contributed to positivizing our interpretive studies for some time. For example, one of my colleagues

them to do the next thing experimental ontology enables them to think and do. These practices may be quite familiar, what we do when we want to explore anything. For example, we read, we

We may make a movie,

paint a picture, run a marathon who knows? In the name of methods-driven, positivist social science, we have, as the recommendations for revisions to the U.S. human subjects law

acknowledge, overdetermined, over-formalized, systematized, and scientized *some* everyday

e completely ignored

others. For example, in

have to be formalized, scientized,

conceptual practices, inquiry practices, we neglect to

garden and inevitably get unstuck. I suppose I could call *walking* and *weeding* research

practices but why formalize them? And, surely, we could name *reading* a research practice,

that

concepts like *diagram*, *Bodies without Organs*, *entanglement*, and *vital matter* enable. What

would one *do* if one were thinking and living

students who are doing this new empirical work are especially drawn to music; others to film;

and others, like me, just write, write, write, trying to put words together differently, such a

simple thing putting words together differently that, as we know, can change the world.

To sum up, my strongest recommendation is that we not to try to force our new empirical, new material, posthuman, post qualitative studies into the structure of conventional humanist methodology, I recommend putting the concepts and theories of experimental ontology to work reading, I wager we cannot *not* put it to work. It will have transformed us we cannot think and live without it. *We will be living it.*

As Foucault in our lives, but we have to in the experimental moment of *not* knowing what to do next because we are *not* driven by method and methodology that we might push through the grooves of the given and the self-evident toward the new and different in our work and lives. Method will always come at the end, too late to help us, when we think back about what we did and why and what we might have done instead and will try next time.

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