

The Role of Qualitative Methods in Early Childhood Education: A Review of J. Amos Hatch's *Early Childhood Qualitative Research*

Maribel Del Rio-Roberts

Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida USA

Early Childhood Qualitative Research is an edited book that captures the importance of conducting educational research and the significance of such research being scholarly and rigorous. In addition, this book does a phenomenal job of stressing the importance of giving participants in educational research a voice to describe their experiences is stressed, including the experiences of classroom teachers. The aim to provide professionals in the early childhood arena an opportunity to see different perspectives than they make typically be exposed to and to provide them with opportunities to critique current practices, in order to enhance qualitative research practices in the field of early childhood education. Key Words: Early Childhood Research, Educational Research, and Qualitative Research.

As a clinical psychologist, emphasizing the personal experience of the individual participating in treatment is engrained so deeply in mind that it comes as naturally as instinctual activities such as eating and sleeping; therefore psychotherapy can be seen as somewhat qualitative or phenomenological in nature. However, the traditional quantitative approach to determining treatment efficacy is typically the standard and the norm in psychological research. Similarly, educational research has focused on traditional quantitative means to determine the efficacy of educational strategies or interventions. There is limited research available regarding qualitative approaches to conducting educational research, especially in the field of early childhood education. Research in the area of early childhood education should incorporate qualitative methods as frequently as quantitative methods in order to elicit information regarding the experiences of students and teachers in order to determine how to educate our young children most effectively. Why is it so important to include qualitative methods in early childhood educational research? Students of the twenty-first century are different than those studied in the past due to the impact of technology and access to information that was limited to students in the past. In order to truly understand the needs of today's students, it is crucial to obtain this information from the students themselves and the classroom teachers that educate them. Also, with emphasis on accountability being placed on schools, it is becoming more important to accurately determine what counts as appropriate early childhood education.

This book targets early childhood researchers in order to provide a guide for conceptualizing, conducting, and evaluating qualitative research in the field of early childhood education. This book is divided into two distinct sections; Part I of this book is dedicated to a discussion of qualitative methodologies in qualitative research, while Part II discusses issues commonly encountered in the practice of early childhood qualitative

research. In chapter 1, the author discusses the role of qualitative research in early childhood education in a time when “scientifically-based” research is emphasized. In this chapter, Hatch seeks to “explore the place of early childhood qualitative research in sociopolitical context of the early 21st century” (Hatch, 2007, p. 7). In addition, Hatch believes that the most important reason for conducting qualitative research in early childhood education is to reveal the ineffectiveness of traditional “scientifically-based” methods and its limited scope. The author does an excellent job of highlighting the limitations of positivism in comparison to qualitative approaches.

A discussion of the utility of hermeneutic text analysis and its application to early childhood activities, particularly those involving play to be extremely informative. The author, Stuart Reifel, focuses on three different aspects of play including his own studies of play, the observations of Vivian Paley in her kindergarten classroom, and the poststructuralist application of text. He explains how descriptions of classroom observations in text can help explore the meaning of “culture, learning, cognition, or social development” (Hatch, 2007, p. 25). Case examples are used throughout the chapter to demonstrate situations in which hermeneutic text analysis is utilized, and these help to understand in greater detail the utility of this approach. I found the case examples to be extremely helpful in promoting understanding of the material.

I found the chapter on the use of digital video in field-based research in early childhood education to be helpful in understanding how to apply digital media in educational research with children. The goal of the authors Walsh, Bakir, Lee, Chung et al. was to build a “solid foundation for (a) generating data, (b) constructing data records, and (c) analyzing data” (Hatch, 2007, p. 43). It is important to conduct field-based research because it provides us with insight into the specific details of a situation in real-time that can be looked at repeatedly in order to infer meaning. In this chapter they authors highlight the strengths (detail, rare events, revisiting data in real time, completeness of analysis, and collaborative analysis) as well as challenges (exaggerated sense of confidence, lack of contextual information, confidentiality, and getting approval) of using video in field-based research in early childhood settings. The authors do an excellent job of comparing and contrasting the advantages and disadvantages of video as used in research.

Also, the utility of focus groups in research in order to impact social policy is also addressed in this book by Ryan and Lobman. The ways in which focus group can be useful in influencing the practice and policy of early childhood education was enlightening. The detailed discussion on how to design focus groups, conduct focus groups, and analyze focus group data was clear and logical for a beginning researcher like me to understand. In addition, the process of conducting action research within the early childhood classroom in which qualitative data is obtained by having teachers of young children conducting qualitative studies within their classrooms.

Of particular interest to me as a resident of a diverse community such as South Florida, was the discussion presented by Elizabeth Quintero in her chapter “Critical Pedagogy and Qualitative Inquiry: Lessons from Working with Refugee Families”. It is especially interesting how she lays out her methodology for teaching her U.S. graduate students to work with refugee families in the United Kingdom by using qualitative research strategies in order to increase the efficacy of working with this population by limiting “scientifically-based” practices and therefore provides an excellent transition to

the second part of the book that focuses on issues faced when conducting qualitative research in an early childhood education setting. Furthermore, since the majority of clients and research participants that I work with are of minority status and having worked with refugees from different parts of the world, the implications of conducting qualitative research with these individuals was very appealing to me.

Part II

In Part II of this book, a compilation of various issues often faced by qualitative researchers in the field of early education is presented. It is essential for educators and educational researchers to have insight into variables that may threaten the integrity of their research. In the chapter authored by Lisa S. Goldstein, outlines ways to survive a “methodological crisis” including: remaining calm, attributing positive intent to participants, remembering that unexpected findings are still valuable data, continue to take detailed field notes even though you think your study is ruined. I found this discussion extremely beneficial to my own research and practice since during the course of writing research proposals or collecting data; I also have encountered a “methodological crisis” which has led to feelings of frustration and lack of motivation to continue to pursue my research.

I was also pleased to come across a chapter in this book addressing the difficulties encountered when conducting research in schools. The bureaucracy of these large social entities can make conducting qualitative research in these settings difficult at times. In the chapter by Susan Grieshaber, she discusses the challenges that she faced when conducting qualitative research in Australian schools. Specifically, what I found most interesting was the discussion on the effects of the presence of the researcher in the classroom. In addition, a subsequent chapter discusses the importance of conducting “child-friendly” research by considering their rights as participants and offering children the opportunity to become involved in the research. I believe that without directly involving the children that we are studying, our findings are likely to not be reflective of their experiences.

Later on a discussion of conducting qualitative research on cross-cultural settings is presented in which Swadener and Mutua advocate for empowering our research participants to obtain equal treatment in countries in which discrimination against certain groups is common. The authors explain in the chapter “Decolonizing Research in Cross Cultural Contexts” that “decolonization is the process of valuing reclaiming, and foregrounding indigenous voices and epistemologies, with emphasis on doing research with children and youth in cross-cultural settings” (Hatch, 2007, p. 186). Therefore, we as qualitative researchers studying young children should be knowledgeable of the impact of a child’s culture in their experience of the schooling and educational research.

Finally, it was refreshing to see the book conclude with the topic of methodological decision-making as well as what I find interesting is a set of guidelines that helps novice researchers assess the quality of an early childhood qualitative research study. I found the concluding chapter to be the most practical in regards to designing and implementing a qualitative research study with young children because it outlines a set of questions that I can use as a guide to evaluate my research.

Conclusion

Overall, I found this book to be a valuable contribution to the field of early childhood qualitative research because it fills in the gap in the literature regarding the applicability of qualitative approaches in education settings. In addition, it is a collaboration of researchers around the world who provide their expertise in conducting qualitative research in early childhood settings and discusses many of the strengths and challenges of utilizing this approach in this setting. I highly recommend this text to anyone interested in conducting qualitative studies in educational settings focused on young children as an introduction to the field as well as for experience educational researchers. This is truly a comprehensive guide to conducting qualitative research on the sensitive but important area of early childhood education that can bring to light important information related to educating young children.

References

Hatch, J. A. (Ed.). (2007). *Early childhood qualitative research*. New York: Routledge.

Author Note

Dr. Maribel Del Rio-Roberts is a Program Professor of Human Services at Nova Southeastern University's Fischler School of Education and Human Services in South Florida. She is a Licensed Florida Psychologist who specializes in clinical child psychology, pediatric psychology, infant mental health, and parent and teacher training. She is also a supervisor of Psychology trainees at the Center for Assessment and Intervention (CAI). In addition, Dr. Del Rio-Roberts is a co-principal investigator on several university-based grants. She is the author of *The Playful Minds Coping Skills Program: A Treatment for Pediatric Oncology Patients*. She can be contacted at 1750 N.E. 167th Street, Technology Building, 4th Floor, North Miami Beach, FL 33162; Telephone: 954-262-8529; Email: mdelrio@nova.edu

Copyright 2009: Maribel Del Rio-Roberts and Nova Southeastern University

Article Citation

Del Rio-Roberts, M. (2009). The role of qualitative methods in early childhood education: A review of J. Amos Hatch's *Early Childhood Qualitative Research*. *The Weekly Qualitative Report*, 2(15), 90-93. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/WQR/hatch.pdf>
