Deciding to Do a Qualitative Study

Should I do a qualitative study? This is a question I hear often as I meet with advanced graduate students and occasionally as I talk with academic colleagues. They come with a variety of reasons to answer yes to their own question. Some are convinced that qualitative research is more suited to their personal style. After all, educators would not be in the business unless they were interested in people and making positive social contacts with them, so the idea of treating teachers or children as subjects upon which experiments are to be done or treatments are to be tried seems off-putting for starters. Others are suspicious of the usefulness of quantitative research for making real changes in education. They have had to read a lot of traditional research as part of their training, and it's difficult for them to see how breaking the complex world of classrooms and schools into supposedly discrete dependent and independent variables then running sophisticated statistical analyses actually reveals much about what's really happening or what really needs to be done.

Others openly confess that they have never felt comfortable with math, especially statistics. They reason that their strengths are verbal and conceptual, so why not go with the best fit and take the qualitative route? Others are interested in taking action, in using their research to bring about social, political, and/or economic change. They have learned that in some qualitative approaches, engaging participants in the change process is a desirable outcome, while such an action orientation would be virtually forbidden in most quantitative work.

I am more empathetic with some reasons than others ("I am no good at math" is not my favorite). I understand that every person comes to the

decision about whether to go quantitative or qualitative with different understandings, feelings, and expectations. When I don't know the individuals, I usually try to find out what they know about qualitative research before I give advice. I try to give them my sense of what qualitative research can and cannot do. I emphasize the importance of receiving the appropriate "training" to do qualitative research—my rule of thumb is *at least* two formal qualitative research courses, one of which must include experience collecting real data and doing real analysis. Then I try to get them to do something that most of them have never been asked to do: unpack their ontological and epistemological beliefs.

Most students have heard the terms but have no idea what *ontology* and *epistemology* actually mean, so I ask them their beliefs about how the world is ordered and how we can come to know things about it. I try to outline my argument that their approach to thinking about research ought to grow out of their answers to the ontological and epistemological questions. I don't expect them to be able to articulate their metaphysical perspectives on the spot or to see with clarity the connections between assumptions and method, but I want to establish the importance of their being introspective about their worldviews and tying their assumptions to decision making about research (see Garrick, 1999).

Then I send them off to read. I usually recommend general texts to introduce them to the foundations and distinguishing features of qualitative work and more specific "methods" books if they have an interest in a particular methodological approach. I always suggest that the best way to find out what qualitative research is and what it can do is to read qualitative research reports in areas of scholarly interest to them. In addition, several internet sites include information about qualitative research (see appendix A for an annotated list of several such sites).

As I put this chapter together, I tried to include the kinds of information that I think beginning students of qualitative research ought to consider. I provide some foundational knowledge that prospective researchers should have before declaring that they will do a qualitative study. I present a list of characteristics that distinguish qualitative from quantitative research. I then offer a discussion of research paradigms that provides a way for novice researchers to begin to conceptualize the relationships among ontological, epistemological, and methodological issues and to come to terms with their own metaphysical assumptions. I next describe several kinds of qualitative research, including references to original sources and examples of studies done in educational settings using the approach described. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of what to call the work once one has decided to do it.

FOUNDATIONS

While direct applications of qualitative research to education settings are a fairly recent phenomenon, qualitative approaches to social research (especially in anthropology and sociology) have rich and interesting histories. The first professional qualitative researchers were probably anthropologists who wrote ethnographies describing "primitive" cultures in faraway places. Franz Boas was one of the first social scientists to spend time in natural settings and to attempt to understand a culture inductively. Working in the late 1800s, Boaz's studies were a sharp contrast to previous accounts provided by missionaries, explorers, and colonial bureaucrats who characterized the peoples they were describing in terms of their deficiencies in relation to Western culture and norms. Boaz was a cultural relativist who believed that the object of anthropological study is to describe the knowledge that members use to make sense within their own culture.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) provide a framework of historical "moments" that is useful for thinking about the evolvement of qualitative research. From 1900 to World War II, the time Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 7) label the "traditional period," anthropologists such as Malinowski, Margaret Mead, and Radcliffe-Brown exemplified the model of the "lone ethnographer" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 30), spending extended periods of time doing participant observations among natives in a distant land. They produced ethnographic accounts that are considered classics, and they developed fieldwork practices such as participant observation, interviewing, and artifact gathering that continue to be the mainstays of qualitative data collection today. While the work of these classic ethnographers is seen by many as relics that are linked to objectivism, colonialism, and imperialism (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Rosaldo, 1989), it provides important historical bedrock on which qualitative foundations are built.

In parallel with the development of qualitative anthropology, sociologists around the turn of the century were exploring the possibilities of qualitative research methods. Much of the activity in qualitative sociology centered on the emergence of "Chicago sociology" at the University of Chicago. Chicago sociologists utilized their city as a social laboratory and for three decades produced urban ethnographies that captured human life in the city (Vidich & Lyman, 1994). These researchers emphasized a slice-of-life approach, using the ordinary language of their participants to reveal the points of view of working-class and poor migrants. Chicago sociology was undertaken in the context of reform efforts by muckrakers, organized charities, and other social reformers, but advocating for reform was secondary to providing empirically based descriptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). As in

anthropology, the work of sociologists such as Redfield, Park, Thomas, and Hughes is recognized for its foundational contribution. However, contemporary scholars criticize the work as sociological stories that romanticized the subject, turning the deviant into a hero and producing the illusion that a solution to a social problem had been found (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 8) characterize the period that extends from the postwar years to the mid-1970s as the "modernist phase." It was during this period that qualitative methods were formalized, and scholars became much more self-conscious about their research approaches. Qualitative researchers attempted to make a fit between positivist expectations for validity, reliability, and generalizability and constructivist models of doing research. Important books were written describing qualitative methods and alternative theoretical approaches. Glaser and Strauss published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), and Blumer wrote *Symbolic Interactionism* (1969). In education, books by Jackson (1968), Wolcott (1973), Henry (1965), and the Spindlers (1955) pointed to the efficacy of applying qualitative methods to understanding the special social contexts of schools and schooling. New theories associated with ethnomethodology, phenomenology, critical theory, and feminism began to be recognized (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The next period includes the 1970s and early 80s, the "moment of blurred genres," according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 9). The blurring was widespread. A wide range of paradigms, methods, and strategies became available, and researchers were reaching across boundaries as they designed and reported their work. Qualitative researchers in education sampled perspectives, theories, and methods from a variety of fields, challenging traditional territoriality among disciplines. Further, the boundaries between the social sciences and humanities were becoming blurred as interpretive methods such as semiotics and hermeneutics that were developed in the humanities began being adapted for use in qualitative analyses (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

It was during this time that qualitative work began to develop more stature as a legitimate form of educational research. The great paradigm war between quantitative and qualitative scholars raged in the pages of *The Educational Researcher* during these and subsequent years, and many more sessions at national research conferences, especially the American Educational Research Association (AERA) meetings, were given to qualitative presenters (Hatch, 1995a). A number of journals devoted to publishing qualitative studies were begun, and mainstream education journals began to publish occasional qualitative studies.

The blurring of genres has continued and the complexity of qualitative work has escalated during the years since 1985. I will try to unravel some of

that complexity later in this chapter, but to wrap up this mini-history, something needs to be said about the "crisis of representation," Denzin and Lincoln's (1994, p. 9) name for the stage that takes them through the publication of their essay in 1994. Critical anthropologists of this period (e.g., Clifford, 1988; Marcus & Fischer, 1986) challenged the norms of classic ethnography, arguing that traditional methods and writing produce texts that do not and cannot represent lived experience. They contend that understandings of human experience are always processed through language, and language is inherently unstable (Denzin, 1989a). Ethnographers who claim to have captured their participants' perspectives in field notes and interviews then written these into accounts that objectively represent the cultural experience of those participants are said to be *creating culture* rather than representing reality. The crisis of representation places qualitative researchers in a bind similar to the one they created for their quantitative colleagues. Its resolution may require another paradigm shift, to include new ways of thinking about what constitutes "Truth" and ways to come to know and communicate it.

It is useful to divide this historical overview into periods following Denzin and Lincoln's moments, but it is important to remember that, as the field has evolved, the development of new perspectives and methods has not meant the abandonment of perspectives and methods that came before (for a comprehensive critique of the five moments model, see Delamont, Coffey, & Atkinson, 2000). At present, deconstructivist and poststructuralist perspectives are being taken seriously by contemporary qualitative researchers, and critical, feminist, and other transformative epistemologies are having a major impact on the field, but there are qualitative researchers who continue to do work that might be classified as "traditional" or "modernist." As Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 11) point out, "each of the earlier historical moments is still operating in the present, either as legacy or as a set of practices that researchers still follow or argue against." Later in this chapter, I describe an array of perspectives and methods that define the field of contemporary qualitative research. For now, I want to give more information to help potential researchers make methodological decisions by describing characteristics of qualitative research.

What is qualitative research? What about qualitative research distinguishes it from other forms of inquiry? What kinds of knowledge are foundational for understanding qualitative research? What are the kinds of research that count as qualitative? What should I call my research? These are questions novice qualitative researchers should struggle with as they consider doing qualitative work. When I make students confront these questions, I don't tell them they have to find *the answer* to each question because I don't believe a single correct answer exists. I do tell them that they have to find *an*

answer, that they must be able to articulate *their answer* in a rational and consistent manner, and that I will force them to defend their answer at every step of the research process.

Qualitative researchers have attempted to define their work in many different ways. The literature contains a variety of approaches to defining what qualitative research is and is not (see Potter, 1996). Definitions range from straightforward attempts such as "any kind of research that produces findings that are not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17) to more descriptive formulations such as "a research paradigm which emphasizes inductive, interpretive methods applied to the everyday world which is seen as subjective and socially created" (Anderson, 1987, p. 384), to more product-oriented statements, for example, "research procedures which produce descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior. [It] directs itself at settings and the individuals within those settings holistically; that is, the subject of the study, be it an organization or an individual, is not reduced to an isolated variable or to an hypothesis, but is viewed instead as part of a whole" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 2). Coming up with a dictionary definition is not essential, but thinking about and exploring the definitions of others is useful because it forces researchers to consider the boundaries of what they are doing. I ask students to write descriptions of what they think qualitative research is. Their responses may be a sentence, paragraph, or short essay. The form matters less than the act of organizing one's thoughts and establishing some conceptual boundaries.

CHARACTERISTICS

Many attempts have been made to characterize qualities that distinguish qualitative work from other research approaches. I have reviewed several widely cited sources to synthesize the following list of characteristics. The goal is not to provide a definitive list against which all qualitative work ought to be measured. Different research approaches within the qualitative domain emphasize certain characteristics, ignore others, and generate alternatives. The intent here is to give novice researchers a starting place for understanding the dimensions of qualitative work. Descriptions are brief, and readers are invited to search out original sources for a more comprehensive discussion (see also Hatch, 1998).

Natural Settings

For qualitative researchers, the lived experiences of real people in real settings are the objects of study. Understanding how individuals make sense of

their everyday lives is the stuff of this type of inquiry. When research settings are controlled or contrived or manipulated, as in traditional research, the outcomes are studies that tell us little more than how individuals act in narrowly defined and inherently artificial contexts. In qualitative work, the intent is to explore human behaviors within the contexts of their natural occurrence (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Erickson, 1986; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Jacob, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Participant Perspectives

Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it. It is axiomatic in this view that individuals act on the world based not on some supposed objective reality but on their perceptions of the realities that surround them. Qualitative studies try to capture the perspectives that actors use as a basis for their actions in specific social settings. Erickson (1986) identifies the key questions that qualitative researchers ask as: "What is happening here, specifically? What do these happenings mean to the people engaged in them?" (p. 124). The perspectives or voices of participants ought to be prominent in any qualitative report (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Jacob, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Researcher as Data Gathering Instrument

While traditional, quantitative methods generate data through the use of instruments such as questionnaires, checklists, scales, tests, and other measuring devices, the principal data for qualitative researchers are gathered directly by the researchers themselves. These data usually include field notes from participant observation, notes from or transcriptions of interviews with informants, and unobtrusive data such as artifacts from the research site or records related to the social phenomena under investigation. Even when mechanical or electronic devices are used to support qualitative work, data take on no significance until they are processed using the human intelligence of the researcher. The logic behind the researcher-as-instrument approach is that the human capacities necessary to participate in social life are the same capacities that enable qualitative researchers to make sense of the actions, intentions, and understandings of those being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979). As Hymes (1982) put it, "Our ability to learn ethnographically is an extension of what every human must do, that is, learn the meanings, norms, patterns of a way of life" (p. 29).

Extended Firsthand Engagement

I began my Ph.D. program with the expectation that I would refine the quasiexperimental study I did for my master's degree and complete the whole

study, write-up and all, within six months of finishing my coursework. I discovered alternative ways of thinking about the world and doing research in my doctoral program and became a convert. I remember sitting with my mentor and deciding that I needed to add at least 18 months to my timeline in order to follow my convictions and do a qualitative project. The unofficial standard for qualitative dissertations when I was in graduate school was at least one year in the field and an equal amount of time for analysis and writing. While I often negotiate back from that standard when working with most of my own students, extended engagement continues to be one of the hallmarks of high-quality qualitative work.

If researchers are to understand participant perspectives in natural contexts, it makes immanent sense that they must spend enough time with those participants in those contexts to feel confident that they are capturing what they claim (Erickson, 1986; Spindler, 1982; Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1993; Wolcott, 1992). The fieldwork tradition remains strong, and critics of the rising popularity of qualitative approaches worry that some researchers select data collection strategies from the ethnographic tradition but spend far too little time in research settings, a phenomenon Rist (1980) labeled "Blitzkrieg Ethnography." My own experiences as an editor and editorial board member lead me to believe that spending insufficient time in the field continues to be a serious flaw in the qualitative work I see. I understand the practicalities of doing research, especially doctoral dissertation research, but overall, qualitative researchers are not spending enough time being intensely engaged in the settings they are studying.

Centrality of Meaning

The philosophical roots of qualitative research can be traced to the German intellectual tradition expressed in the social sciences in the "interpretive sociology" of Max Weber (Giddens, 1971, p. 143). In contrast to the nineteenth-century French positivist sociologists (e.g., Comte and Durkheim), Weber and his followers stressed the importance of *verstehen* (understanding) in their social analyses. They were interested in describing the meanings individuals used to understand social circumstances rather than trying to identify the "social facts" that comprise a positivist social theory (Hatch, 1985, p. 143). Blumer (1969) contributed symbolic interactionist theory as a conceptual tool for systematically exploring understandings. Three premises of symbolic interactionism signal the central importance of meaning: (a) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them; (b) the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; and (c) these meanings are handled in, and sometimes modified through, an interpretive process used by

individuals in dealing with the things they encounter (Blumer, 1969). Not all qualitative research is done within the symbolic interactionist framework, but all qualitative research is about understanding the meanings individuals construct in order to participate in their social lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Erickson, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979).

Wholeness and Complexity

Qualitative work starts with the assumption that social settings are unique, dynamic, and complex. Qualitative methods provide means whereby social contexts can be systematically examined as a whole, without breaking them down into isolated, incomplete, and disconnected variables. Qualitative data are objects, pictures, or detailed descriptions that cannot be reduced to numbers without distorting the essence of the social meanings they represent. Qualitative reports are usually complex, detailed narratives that include the voices of the participants being studied. They build the case for the researcher's interpretations by including enough detail and actual data to take the reader inside the social situation under examination (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Erickson, 1986; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Peshkin, 1988).

Subjectivity

Qualitative research is as interested in inner states as outer expressions of human activity. Because these inner states are not directly observable, qualitative researchers must rely on subjective judgments to bring them to light. Wolcott (1994) draws distinctions among qualitative studies that emphasize description, analysis, and interpretation. Subjective judgment is necessary in all three but more is required as researchers move from description toward interpretation. Most qualitative researchers would deny the possibility of pure objectivity in any scientific endeavor. Most would argue that all their findings, including interpretations, are grounded in empirical evidence captured in their data. Instead of pretending to be objective, the stance of qualitative researchers is to concentrate on reflexively applying their own subjectivities in ways that make it possible to understand the tacit motives and assumptions of their participants (Hamilton, 1994; Jacob, 1987; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Emergent Design

It is characteristic of qualitative research that studies change as they are being implemented. Because the goal is to get inside a social phenomenon in a special social setting, it is impossible to construct a design *a priori* that takes into account what the researcher finds out upon actually entering the social setting

to be studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This often becomes a sore spot between doctoral candidates and their committees. Many committees expect a research proposal that represents a contract specifying exactly what students will do, when and for how long they will do it, and what questions will be answered in the doing. Some students prepare proposals that specify very little or nothing, claiming that the design will emerge once they are in the setting. Although they differ on the extent to which research designs should be left to emerge (cf., Wolcott, 1992), most qualitative researchers would agree that research questions, methods, and other elements of design are altered as studies unfold (Jacob, 1988).

Inductive Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers do not begin with a null hypothesis to retain or reject. They collect as many detailed specifics from the research setting as possible, then set about the process of looking for patterns of relationship among the specifics. In Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) words, "You are not putting together a puzzle, whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts" (p. 29). Findings generated from this process are said to be grounded in the data—generated from the ground up. Qualitative data analysis involves a deductive dimension. As patterns or relationships are discovered in the data, hypothetical categories are formed, and the data are then read deductively to determine if these categories are supported by the overall data set (see Erickson, 1986). Still, the overall pattern of data analysis in qualitative work is decidedly inductive, moving from specifics to analytic generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Reflexivity

In qualitative work, it is understood that the act of studying a social phenomenon influences the enactment of that phenomenon. Researchers are a part of the world they study; the knower and the known are taken to be inseparable. For Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), "this is not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact. There is no way to escape the social world in order to study it; nor, fortunately, is that necessary" (p. 15). Being reflexive places qualitative researchers in a distinctly different position than that of the "objective scientist" usually prescribed in more traditional research activities. The capacities to be reflexive, to keep track of one's influence on a setting, to bracket one's biases, and to monitor one's emotional responses are the same capacities that allow researchers to get close enough to human action to understand what is going on (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1993). Reflexivity, "the process of per-

sonally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal deep connections between the writer and his or her subject" (Goodall, 2000, p. 137), is essential to the integrity of qualitative research.

The foregoing discussion is meant to portray characteristics of qualitative research in broad strokes. As will be evident later in this chapter (and throughout the book), not all qualitative approaches feel bound by these characteristics. Across the spectrum of qualitative research possibilities, some approaches will include attention to all these characteristics, some will pick and choose from among these, and some will include alternative characteristics that seem to be in opposition to those listed here. Still, understanding the characteristics listed provides a starting place for understanding qualitative research in relation to more traditional forms of scholarship.

RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Paradigm is one of those words that is overused to the point that its meaning has been lost. Writers of popular books about everything from business to gardening use the notion of a paradigm shift to sell the importance of their products or ideas. I've heard television preachers use the term, seen it on the backs of trucks going down the highway, and read a brochure that touts a new paradigm in termite control.

In the social sciences, the notion of scientific paradigm was brought to the fore by Thomas Kuhn (1970) in his landmark book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn argued that the history of science is a history of revolutions wherein scientific paradigms have emerged, suffered crises, and been replaced by competing paradigms. In order for a school of scientific thought to ascend to the status of "normal science," it must meet the criteria for paradigms. That is, it must have generated firm answers to the following questions: What are the fundamental entities of which the universe is composed? How do these interact with each other and with the senses? What questions can legitimately be asked about such entities and what techniques employed in seeking solutions? Answers to these questions reveal sets of assumptions that distinguish fundamentally different belief systems concerning how the world is ordered, what we may know about it, and how we may know it. It is in this sense that *paradigm* will be used here.

Based on Kuhn's notion, I have organized the following discussion around five research paradigms: positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical/feminist, and poststructuralist. For each paradigm, I present an abbreviated answer to the ontological question (What is the nature of reality?), the epistemological question(s) (What can be known, and what is the relationship of the knower to what is to be known?), and the methodological question (How is

knowledge gained?). In addition, I outline what forms knowledge takes when produced within the assumptions of each paradigm.

The objective is to give novice qualitative researchers a framework for exploring their own assumptions about what research is and how it works. Having tried to help scores of advanced graduate students, I have learned that unpacking assumptions is no simple matter. The very nature of assumptions is that they are unexamined, so it gets intellectually tricky right away. Plus, graduate students who are at the stage of thinking about dissertation research often want to start with research questions. They have been told or have assumed that you begin with a question then shop around for the kind of research approach that best allows you to answer that question. Many professors and some institutions encourage this research-question-first approach. For example, Metz (2001, p. 13) begins her description of a "common anatomy for social scientific research" by identifying the research question as "the starting point and most important issue in developing research." As will be seen throughout this book, I agree that research questions are central to the inquiry process; but they ought not be the starting point. Starting with a research question begins in the middle and ignores the fundamental necessity of taking a deep look at the belief systems that undergird our thinking. For me, struggling with paradigm issues, exploring assumptions, and coming to grips with differences in worldviews and what they mean for doing research are essential first steps. Too few doctoral-level students actively confront these issues at any point (see Pallas, 2001), but when such considerations don't come early in the process, researchers risk producing work that lacks logical consistency at the least or flies in the face of theoretical integrity at the worst.

As the paradigms are discussed, I recommend that the reader consider his or her own answers to each set of questions. This can be a good starting place for digging inside what we all take for granted. Figure 1.1 offers a schematic representation of the basic ideas in the sections that follow. Although my labels and organization are different, and I have added "products" to the analysis, the discussion travels the same path as chapters by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) and Guba and Lincoln (1994). The reader will find it useful to explore these frameworks as well.

Positivist Paradigm

Ontology. What is the nature of reality? Positivists are realists who believe in an objective universe that has order independent of human perceptions. Reality exists and is driven by universal, natural laws. Positivism treats reality as being componential, that is, consisting of components that can be taken apart for study, separately verified, then put back together again.

Figure 1.1:

Research Paradigms

	Ontology (Nature of reality)	Epistemology (What can be known; Relationship of knower & known)	Methodology (How knowledge is gained)	Products (Forms of knowledge produced)
Positivist	Reality is out there to be studied, captured, and understood	How the world is really ordered; Knower is distinct from known	Experiments, quasi-experiments, surveys, correlational studies	Facts, theories, laws, predictions
Postpositivist	Reality exists but is never fully apprehended, only approximated	Approximations of reality; Researcher is data collection instrument	Rigorously defined qualitative methods, frequency counts, low-level statistics	Generalizations, descriptions, patterns, grounded theory
Constructivist	Multiple realities are constructed	Knowledge as a human construction; Researcher and participant co-construct understandings	Naturalistic qualitative methods	Case studies, narratives, interpretations, reconstructions
Critical/Feminist	The apprehended world makes a material difference in terms of race, gender, and class	Knowledge as subjective and political; Researchers' values frame inquiry	Transformative inquiry	Value mediated critiques that challenge existing power structures and promote resistance
Poststructuralist	Order is created within individual minds to ascribe meaning to a meaningless universe.	There is no "Truth" to be known; Researchers examine the world through textual representations of it.	Deconstruction; Genealogy; Data-based, multivoiced studies	Deconstructions; Genealogies; Reflexive, polyvocal texts

Epistemology. What can be known, and what is the relationship of the knower to the known? The world has order, and it is possible to discover that order. The world is, in effect, giving off signals regarding its true nature, and it is the job of science to capture that immutable truth. Positivists claim to be objective in their search for the truth. Researchers and the objects of their study are assumed to be mutually independent, so researchers do not influence and are not influenced by the phenomena they study.

Methodology. How can knowledge be gained? Methods of choice within the positivist paradigm are those that allow for careful measurement, manipulation, and control. A deductive model built on empirically verifying propositional hypotheses dominates, and experiments, quasiexperiments, correlational studies, and surveys are widely used. Sophisticated sampling and statistical techniques are in place to ensure reliability, validity, and generalizability.

Products. What forms of knowledge are produced? For positivists, knowledge equals accumulated "facts" that have been scientifically verified and generalizations, theories, and laws based on those facts. Most reports have a cause-and-effect dimension, and prediction is the ultimate product. If conditions are controlled, positivist science can predict what will happen when certain changes are introduced.

Postpositivist Paradigm

Ontology. Postpositivists agree with positivists that reality exists, but they operate from the assumption that, because of the limitations of human inquiry, the inherent order of the universe can never be known completely. Reality can be approximated but never fully apprehended. Postpositivists are critical realists who subject truth claims to close critical scrutiny in order to maximize chances of apprehending reality as closely as possible—but never perfectly (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Epistemology. Postpositivist researchers work to capture close approximations of reality. They seek to maintain an objective position in relation to the phenomena they are studying. Researchers in this paradigm see themselves as data collection instruments, and they use disciplined research techniques such as "constant comparison" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or "analytic induction" (Robinson, 1951) to ensure that empirical data, and not their impressions, drive their findings.

Methodology. Qualitative methods that prescribe rigorous techniques to improve validity and reliability are used by postpositivists. Low inference, systematic procedures dominate data analysis processes (e.g., Glaser & Strauss,

1967; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1994), and frequency counts and low-level statistics are sometimes used. Postpositivists are interested in capturing participant perspectives but in rigorously disciplined ways.

Products. Knowledge forms produced in this paradigm include analytic generalizations, descriptions, patterns, and grounded theory. Data collection and analysis processes lead to descriptions of patterned behavior that participants use to make sense of their social surroundings. Generalizations are induced from systematic analyses of data that take the form of searches for patterns. When potential patterns are discovered, deductive processes are used to verify the strength of those patterns in the overall data set. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is the archtypical product of this type of inquiry.

Constructivist Paradigm

Ontology. Constructivists assume a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality. While acknowledging that elements are often shared across social groups, constructivist science argues that multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points. Realities are apprehendable in the form of abstract mental constructions that are experientially based, local, and specific (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Epistemology. It follows that individual constructions of reality compose the knowledge of interest to constructivist researchers. They assert that "knowledge is symbolically constructed and not objective; that understandings of the world are based on conventions; that truth is, in fact, what we agree it is" (Hatch, 1985, p. 161). Researchers and the participants in their studies are joined together in the process of coconstruction. From this perspective, it is impossible and undesirable for researchers to be distant and objective. It is through mutual engagement that researchers and respondents construct the subjective reality that is under investigation (see Mishler, 1986).

Methodology. Naturalistic qualitative research methods are the data collection and analytic tools of the constructivist (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers spend extended periods of time interviewing participants and observing them in their natural settings in an effort to reconstruct the constructions participants use to make sense of their worlds. Hermeneutic principles are used to guide researchers' interpretive coconstructions of participant perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Products. Knowledge produced within the constructivist paradigm is often presented in the form of case studies or rich narratives that describe the

interpretations constructed as part of the research process. Accounts include enough contextual detail and sufficient representation of the voices of the participants that readers can place themselves in the shoes of the participants at some level and judge the quality of the findings based on criteria other than those used in positivist and postpositivist paradigms. As Denzin & Lincoln (1994) explain, "Terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity" (p. 14).

Critical/Feminist Paradigm

In earlier drafts, I divided critical and feminist approaches into their own paradigms. As I have thought them through, studied others' conceptualizations (e.g., Lather, 1991a), and taught students about them, I have concluded that it is useful to think of them as being in the same research paradigm, but having different emphases. I place them in the same paradigm because they share the metaphysical elements that make up a paradigm. Even as I do this, I hesitate because I know that there are critical and feminist scholars who operate within each of the other paradigms identified (see Reinharz, 1992). Still, the worldview represented by the metaphysical assumptions below qualifies as a research paradigm (Carr, 1995), and sufficient work has been done based on this worldview to qualify for inclusion in a book about qualitative methods in educational research. As these elements are addressed, I will acknowledge the emphases that distinguish critical from feminist perspectives.

Ontology. For critical theorists and feminists, the material world is made up of historically situated structures that have a real impact on the life chances of individuals. These structures are perceived to be real (i.e., natural and immutable), and social action resulting from their perceived realness leads to differential treatment of individuals based on race, gender, and social class. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), "these structures are, in the absence of insight, as limiting and confining as if they were real" (p. 111). Feminist scholars are most interested in exposing material differences gender makes in women's life chances, and critical scholars focus on issues related to race and social class.

Epistemology. Knowledge within this set of assumptions is subjective and inherently political. Knowledge is always "value mediated" in the sense that "the investigator and the investigated object are assumed to be interactively linked, with the values of the investigator inevitably influencing the inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). This is in sharp contrast to the objective stance taken in positivist and postpositivist work. In critical/feminist work, philosophies and values are seen as "integral rather than anti-

thetical" to the research process (Carr, 1995, p. 97). In this worldview, it is assumed that knowledge is always mediated through the political positionings of the researcher.

Methodology. One of the purposes of this kind of inquiry is to raise the consciousness of those being oppressed because of historically situated structures tied to race, gender, and class. With raising consciousness comes providing understandings that lead to social change. Such methods have been called "transformative" (Carr, 1995; Giroux, 1988), in that they require dialogue between researchers and participants that can lead to social change that transforms the lives of the participants in positive ways. Data collection takes many of the same forms as constructivist research, but the emphasis for critical researchers is to improve life chances for individuals at the bottom of the social hierarchy, while feminists' primary focus is on making conditions better for women.

Products. Critical and feminist scholars produce critiques of the perceived material world in an effort to expose the structures that ensure the maintenance of control by those in power (e.g., capitalist economics for critical theorists and male hegemony for feminists). The object is to reveal for others the kinds and extent of oppression that are being experienced by those studied. With the exposure of oppression comes the call for awareness, resistance, solidarity, and revolutionary transformation.

Poststructuralist Paradigm

It is not easy to capture the complexity of poststructuralist approaches to inquiry in an analysis such as this. In some ways, poststructuralism is an antiparadigm because its tenets can be used to deconstruct all of the paradigms above. In a broader sense, it offers a fundamental challenge to all "modernist versions of social science" (Graham, Doherty, & Malek, 1992, p. 11). Further complicating matters, many contemporary critical and feminist scholars have moved in the direction of poststructuralist thinking in their work. I have some reservations about the logical consistency of being a "critical poststructuralist" or "feminist poststructuralist" because poststructural theory deconstructs grand narratives, including critical theory and feminism (see Hatch, 1999). Poststructuralism also rejects the ideal of emancipation as it rejects the notions of progress and perfectibility and therefore problematizes the critical and feminist project at a fundamental level (see Graham, Doherty, & Malek, 1992). Some critical theorists acknowledge the incompatibility of the two perspectives, reject the claims of poststructuralists, and favor returning to a more purely Marxist form of critical theory (see McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2000). Some feminist scholars argue that a strategically

refigured poststructural feminist "hybrid" is developing that goes well beyond a simple synthesis of feminist and poststructuralist thought (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 477). The issues are complex, but the reader should know that many poststructuralist scholars in the social sciences identify themselves as critical theorists or feminists. In order to provide a beginning sense of how poststructuralist thought relates to other worldviews, I will identify paradigmatic elements using the same format as above. As will be evident, distinctions between ontological and epistemological assumptions are blurred in poststructuralist thinking (see Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Ontology. Sartre (1964) wrote: "Nothing really happens when you live. The scenery changes, people come in and go out, that's all. There are no beginnings. Days are tacked on to days without rhyme or reason, an interminable monotonous addition" (p. 39). These powerful sentences capture poststructuralists' view of the nature of reality. They believe that order is created in the minds of individuals in an attempt to give meaning to events that have no "intrinsic or immanent relations" (Freeman, 1993, p. 95). Thus, there are multiple realities, each with its own claims to coherence, and none can be privileged over another (Graham, Doherty, & Malek, 1992). Those claims take form in the discourses that we construct to make sense of our lives. Those discourses are, in effect, texts that represent our lives, and we can only know the world through textual representations of it.

Epistemology. What *cannot* be known is Truth with a capital T. Poststructuralists start by deconstructing the notion of universal Truth. Their analyses reveal how grand narratives are constructed in particular social-historical circumstances to serve the purposes of those in power. For poststructuralists, multiple truths exist, and these are always local, subjective, and in flux. Researchers do not have direct access to the truths experienced by their subjects; they can never know or represent the lived experiences of those they study—hence, the crisis of representation discussed above. For some, this means that research is impossible (see Clough, 1998). Others are working at the fringes between poststructuralist and other paradigms to produce alternative forms of inquiry that include queer theory (Warner, 1993), performance theory (Phelan, 1993), postcolonial theory (Moore-Gilbert, 1997), critical race theory (Parker, Deyhle, Villenas, & Nebeker, 1998), and cultural studies (Peters, 1999),

Methodology. I divide poststructuralist researchers into three camps: (a) deconstructivists who, following Derrida (1981), use deconstruction as a methodological tool to examine textual representations of the world, searching for aporia, inconsistencies, or gaps where the internal logic of the text unravels (see Sarap, 1993; Tobin, 1995); (b) genealogists who, using histori-

cal methods developed by Foucault (1977), problematize particular practices by revealing "the ways in which the practice was historically justified, the discourses that were used for that justification, and the assumptions underlying forms of representation that are part of the practices" (Cannella & Bailey, 1999, pp. 23–24; see also Meadmore, Hatcher, & McWilliam, 2000); and (c) poststructuralists doing data-based research. I agree with Graham, Doherty, and Malek (1992) that the latter are searching for new ways to do social science but that those new ways are still poorly worked out. As a result, they are using many of the methods of other qualitative paradigms. What makes poststructuralists distinct is their focus on understanding data as texts that represent one of many stories that could be told. They acknowledge distinctions among lives as lived, lives as experienced, and lives as told (Bruner, 1984). They accept that they create lives as they hear lives told, process them through their own perspectives, and put them to text as lives as written (see Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995).

Products. Deconstructivists produce analyses that reveal the internal incongruities of discourses and expose the consequences of actions taken based on the assumed Truthfulness of those discourses. Poststructuralists doing genealogical work produce critiques that reveal historical ruptures that challenge the foundations of modern structures, institutions, and discourses. Other poststructuralist researchers generate research reports that attempt to include multiple voices, that acknowledge the specific, local, situational, partial, and temporary nature of the stories being told (see Van Maanen, 1988), and that are framed within a reflexive mode that acknowledges the researchers' prominent place in the research and writing process.

As Kuhn (1970) made clear, when you are standing within the circle of logic created by the assumptions of your paradigm, the positions taken by those working in other paradigms simply do not make sense. Paradigms are indeed completing ways of thinking about how the world is or is not ordered, what counts as knowledge, and how and if knowledge can be gained. It's logical, for example, that critical/feminists will not count the apolitical subjective stance taken by positivist researchers as legitimate (e.g., Lather, 1991a), or that poststructuralists will not buy into constructivist notions of mutually constituted realities (e.g., Garrick, 1999). I have tried to identify key elements that define the conflicted territories dividing the paradigms outlined. The goal is to give beginning researchers a starting place for exploring their metaphysical beliefs. Of course, each paradigm has its own defenders and detractors, and students are encouraged to explore paradigms much more deeply based on the beginning structure provided here.

Should I do a qualitative study? What if my answers to the ontological and epistemological questions indicate that I'm a positivist. Can I still do a qualitative study? What if I'm not sure? I have spent many hours talking with students about these and related questions. Most students, like most individuals socialized into Western belief systems, hold a taken-for-granted metaphysical view that fits best within the positivist paradigm. When they start to think about what that means about them and about research, it is often a troubling experience. For some, such contemplations include a religious dimension—they are intellectually attracted to belief systems that challenge the notions of absolute Truth while at the same time holding that certain truths are unquestionable. Some just don't buy into the notion that a researcher's methodological choices ought to be bound by his or her assumptions about how the world is ordered and how it can be known. This is especially common among students who want to mix quantitative and qualitative methods.

I don't stand in the way of students who are unable to find a natural fit within one of the paradigms associated with qualitative research. I sometimes decline invitations to serve on doctoral committees, and occasionally I do so because students do not seem able to articulate their metaphysical assumptions. But when students generate their own answers to these tough questions and, where necessary, acknowledge the potential conflicts in mixing paradigms and/or methods, I do my best to help them chart a reasonable path.

KINDS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

It could be said that there are as many kinds of qualitative research as there are qualitative researchers. Each qualitative study has its own unique character that develops and often changes as studies are implemented. Still, students new to the field want to know what are the kinds of qualitative research from which to chose. I include this section because it is useful to think about some specific kinds of qualitative research that will give potential researchers an idea of what has been done and what it is possible to do. Again, this is territory that is hard to describe because of its complexity and dynamic nature. The attempt is not to be comprehensive, but to offer examples of the array of possibilities. I give brief descriptions of each type of qualitative study and provide citations that will make it possible for readers to find examples and more detailed discussions. I also note the relationship of each kind of research identified to the paradigms discussed above. As will be seen, most kinds of qualitative research fit within multiple paradigms, excluding the positivist.