

The Researcher’s Choice of Diverse Methodologies – “*Principal*” Considerations

Corinne Barrett DeWiele

University of Manitoba

Université de Saint-Boniface

Abstract

Which research model will you choose for your next research project in educational administration? The diversity of approaches for qualitative study is vast. Choosing an appropriate model for research can prove challenging both on a philosophical and practical level. In this paper, I revisit Creswell’s (2013) book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, to provide a brief introduction to qualitative research in general and to analyse and summarize the key points of each of the theoretical approaches (narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, case study). I provide conceptual images of each of the approaches and a table regarding how the organization and presentation of the approaches differ. The merits of the five qualitative theoretical models will be enumerated through the use of concrete examples of published research studies that show excellence in application of each of the models from the field of educational administration. Further, I will use ideas stemming from Wolcott’s (2003) work, *The Man in the Principal’s Office: An Ethnography*, to illustrate how the book would have changed had it been written using a different one of Creswell’s five theoretical approaches to research the idea. In conclusion, I will show that a concise understanding of the models allows researchers in educational administration to select an appropriate methodological lens for inquiries in educational administration.

The Researcher’s Choice of Diverse Methodologies – “Principal” Considerations

In this paper, I provide an in-depth description of each of the five qualitative approaches to inquiry (narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, case study) that Creswell (2013) discusses in his work, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. I also offer my conceptual image of each approach to inquiry. Further, I present a table which illustrates the contrasting elements for nine different components of the qualitative research process. Using this table, I compare and critique relevant articles from the field of educational administration that claim to use the specific inquiry approaches. Finally, I offer four adaptations of ideas from Wolcott’s (2003) work, *The Man in the Principal’s Office: An Ethnography*, as examples of how a research project can change depending on the methodological lens that the researcher chooses. My goal is to provide a document with easily understood information for all readers who are looking to choose an approach to suit their qualitative research endeavours.

General Introduction to Qualitative Inquiry

Researchers interested in the opinions and thoughts of human participants and how these humans understand the realities of their everyday lives use qualitative research in order to glean detailed information regarding how the human participant experiences the world. Information such as this cannot easily be obtained using quantitative methods as explanations and stories are lost when the research must be labelled in terms of variables and configured in percentages and standard deviations. As Creswell (2013) explains, “[q]ualitative inquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparisons to quantitative research” (p.6). Qualitative inquiry is chosen most often by researchers who are studying in the

humanities – sociology, psychology education, behavioural studies and health sciences as every human processes life experiences differently.

All qualitative studies are underpinned by one or more of the following philosophical assumptions. The four possibilities include: ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological (Creswell, 2013). If a researcher is working from an ontological base, she or he would be questioning the nature of reality and how different participants present different perspectives regarding the research question; “what is reality?” (Creswell, 2013, p.40). From an epistemological point of view, the researcher minimizes the distance between herself or himself and the participants in order to look at the subjective experiences from the inside; “how is reality known?” (Creswell, 2013, p.40). A researcher realizes that all conclusions drawn from inquiries involve results which are affected by the researcher’s values and as such the researcher must “position” (Creswell, 2013, p.20) her or himself. This is the axiological assumption where the researcher freely admits bias; “how are values of the research expressed?” (Creswell, 2013, p.40). Next, the researcher controls how she or he chooses to do the research. The researcher may change the research questions, make logical suppositions or modify the analysis style as she or he continues to work on the study; “how is the research conducted?” (Creswell, 2013, p.40). This choice of methodology is referred to as the methodological assumption and can be “characterized as inductive, emerging and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analysing the data” (Creswell, 2013, p.22).

Further, all qualitative inquiries link the underpinning philosophy with a particular interpretive framework. The possibilities for frameworks continue to expand, but some of the most popular ones include: feminism, critical (race) theory, positivism, postpositivism, realist, interpretivism, transformative, constructivism, queer, hermeneutics, postmodernism, racialized

discourses, disability, pragmatism, cultural studies and an important one in education research today, social justice (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Regardless of the researcher’s philosophical positioning and choice of interpretive framework, “[q]ualitative research truly has an interpretation element that flows throughout the process” (Creswell, 2013, p. 278). The researcher takes what the participants say as indications of what the participants are thinking. The researcher is called upon to reason inductively and deductively using what she or he sees and hears from the participants, and to organize this data into broader themes. In all qualitative research, the researcher is looking to present a “complex picture” (Creswell, 2013, p. 47) using the data and perspectives (voices and actions) of the participants to guide him or her. What, then, are the principle components of each approach to inquiry when doing research on principals or in educational administration?

In-depth Description of Each of the Five Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry

In this section, I will discuss the key components and distinguishing features of each of the five inquiry approaches: narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. For each process, I will identify the defining features, the possible forms of study within that approach and the procedures for completing each type of inquiry. Each sub-section will close with a comment regarding possible challenges to the researcher when choosing a particular approach to inquiry. A conceptual image for each approach concludes the section.

Narrative

A narrative inquiry affords the analysis and understanding of “stories lived and told” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70) and is excellent for capturing details of a participant’s life. Connelly and Clandinin in Short (1991) confirm that “people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of

those lives, while narrative researchers describe such lives, collect stories of them and write narratives of experience” (p. 121). This type of inquiry focuses on one or two individuals and gives an account of series of events, experiences or actions. The narrative researcher produces the final account in a chronological order, one of the definite defining characteristics of this type of research. According to Creswell (2013), “[n]arrative stories are analysed in varied ways. An analysis can be made about what was said (thematically), the nature of the telling of the story (structural), or who the story is directed toward (dialogic/performance)” (p. 72). A narrative story often will include an epiphany of understanding or turning point for the participant and/or researcher during the research process. There are many types of narratives such as: biography, autoethnography, life history or oral history (Creswell, 2013), historical or folklore. Key procedural aspects for completing a narrative inquiry include: the selection of an appropriate individual who has a story to tell and artifacts to share, data collection via observation, collection of artifacts and open-ended interview questions, data analysis and theme identification from transcriptions and field notes, and “restorying ... the process of organizing the stories into some general type of framework” (Creswell, 2013, p. 74). Possible challenges to the researcher when choosing to do a narrative inquiry include the time needed to collect an extensive amount of data, the ability to identify the importance of certain themes in the story and the relationship building and amount of collaboration needed with the participant.

Phenomenological

The phenomenological study “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Reality becomes what the participants explain it to be based on their experiences. Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) state that, “[t]he goal in phenomenology is to study how people make meaning of their

lived experience” (p. 1372). The choice of participants is crucial as each person must have experienced the phenomenon under scrutiny. Interviewing the participants will show “what” and “how” the participants experienced the phenomenon. The researcher then identifies the essence, or as van Manen (1990) states, “the very nature of the thing” (p. 177). In a phenomenological study “the researcher *brackets* himself or herself out of the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 78) by stating his or her personal experience with the concept or phenomenon under study before beginning the analysis of the data. This is to allow the researcher to understand his or her preconceived notions and then, to be as impartial as possible when drawing out the implications or “essence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80) from the data. Data collection for this type of study incorporates observations and interviews with many participants who have experienced the phenomenon. There are two types of phenomenological study: hermeneutical and empirical/transcendental/psychological. The difference between these two types is that the hermeneutical study provides the opportunity for the researcher to interpret as well as describe the phenomenon, based on the participants lived experiences, whereas the empirical study includes a more rich description of the experiences by using significant statements to support selected recurring themes. The researcher provides an overall “essence” at the end of an empirical study. Key procedural aspects for completing a phenomenological inquiry include: selecting a phenomenon to be studied, selecting 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, interviewing the participants using broad open-ended questions to discover the “what” and “how” of the phenomenon, analyzing the data by focusing on significant quotes or statements that enhance the understanding of the phenomenon and creating a written report highlighting the stories told and providing the “essence” gleaned from the research. Finally, as with all research, there are challenges to a phenomenological researcher. This type of research

requires the use of a clear structure and question guide, very careful selection of participants and an ability to “bracket” out one’s own experiences.

Grounded Theory

A researcher chooses a grounded theory approach when he or she wishes to generate a theory from the garnered data; that is to say that the theory is ‘grounded’ in the findings of the researcher. Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) note that “grounded theory develops explanatory theories of basic social processes studied in context” (p. 1372), therefore, ‘grounded in the context’. The creation of this theory “might help explain practice or provide a framework for further research” (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). The focus of the researcher is on a process or action that could change over time. The researcher makes constant comparisons between the data and his ideas and then these ideas are articulated, after many revisions, as a process theory. There are two types of grounded theory: systematic and constructivist. As the names imply, a researcher using the systematic approach will use a structured or systematic process to develop the theory and try to position himself or herself as absent during the process. Meanwhile, the constructivist approach allows more flexibility for the researcher to construct his or her own theory during the coding process as “more emphasis [is placed] on the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions and ideologies” (Creswell, 2013, p. 87) held by the participants as well as the researcher. Data collection in grounded theory inquiry is through repeated interviews with the same 20 to 30 participants in order to reach a ‘saturation’ of the data. Data analysis employs the categorization of ideas with the use of “open,” “axial” and “selective coding” (Creswell, 2013, p. 89). Challenges to grounded theory inquiry for the researcher include the need to reason inductively and in a systematic manner. For some researchers, grounded theory has too much of an innate inflexible nature.

Ethnography

Creswell (2013) tells us that “[a]n ethnography focuses on an entire culture-sharing group” (p. 90). It is, according to Johnson and Christensen (2012), “the discovery and comprehensive description of the culture of a group of people” and in the field of education “...cultural scenes as they relate to educational issues” (p. 389). Normally, the number of participants in the study is very large, with many studies including more than 20 participants. However, Johnson and Christensen (2012) speaking specifically about the field of education, accept “educational ethnographers [who] usually study the cultural characteristics of small groups of people” (p. 389). Regardless of the number of participants, extended observations of the group in the field in its natural setting are a necessity. In fact, the researcher must immerse himself or herself in the culture such that the observations and interviews and the collection of artefacts and symbols are extensive. The researcher completing an ethnography describes the pervasive patterns discovered in the study of the cultural group. The researcher looks for patterns regarding beliefs, language, behaviour, interactions, issues, tensions and ideas in an effort to provide as complete a description of the group as possible and to confirm or negate what he or she expected to find at the outset of the study. There are two types of ethnography: realist and critical. A realist ethnography gives “an objective account of the situation, typically written in the third-person point of view ... on the information learned from participants at the site” (Creswell, 2013, p. 93), whereas a critical ethnography affords the authors the opportunity to advocate on behalf of marginalized groups in the society being studied in terms of inequality, repression, hegemony, victimization and the like. The researcher analyzes the data by discovering common topics or patterns amongst members of the group. The final report reflects “a working set of rules or generalizations as to how the culture-sharing group works; ... a

cultural portrait of the group” (Creswell, 2013, p. 96). There are three possible challenges to the researcher doing an ethnographic inquiry. First the researcher must decide who will own the data at the end of the study and thus, must remember to work with the cultural group in a manner of respect, sensitivity and reciprocity. Secondly, the fieldwork for an ethnography is very time-consuming. Finally, after spending so much time with the cultural group, a researcher may over-identify with the group to the extent that he or she can no longer work objectively with the data.

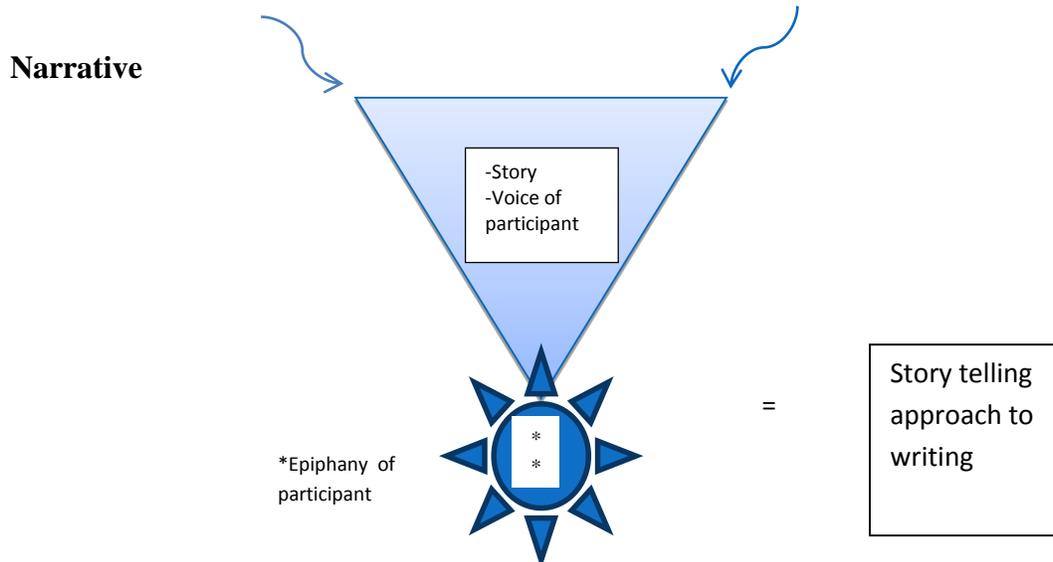
Case Study

A case study, as the name implies, is an inquiry that focuses the research on a particular case. A case could be one person, a small group of people, a partnership or an organization. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), it is “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (p. 59). Thus, the researcher “explores a real-life-contemporary bounded system (a case)” Creswell (2013, p. 97). The researcher collects data from observations, physical artefacts, interviews, reports, documents and other audio-visual materials from the current real-life scenario. The researcher then identifies themes specific to the case and proceeds to write a rich description of it, concluding, often, with a statement of overall meaning. Creswell (2013) distinguishes three types of case studies, recognized according to the intent: intrinsic, to study one unique case, instrumental, to study a specific concern, or collective, to study the issue amongst multiple group members. Each case study can be one of explanatory, exploratory or descriptive. The first possible challenge to a case study researcher is finding an interesting case to explore. The second possible challenge is for the researcher to recognize that one case is not often generalizable to a greater population as each case has its own context. Finally, “[d]eciding the ‘boundaries’ of a case – how it might be

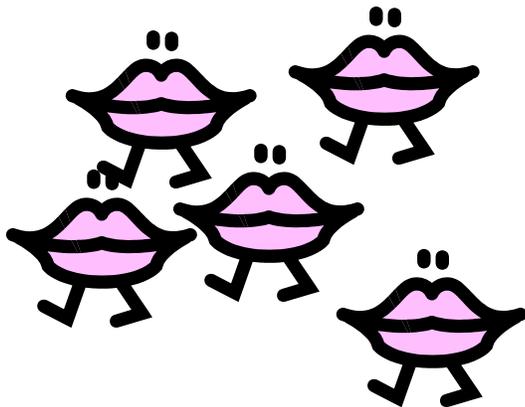
constrained in terms of time, events, and processes – may be challenging” (Creswell, 2013, p. 102).

Conceptual images of each approach

As is evident from the descriptions, each of these five conceptual approaches to qualitative research is similar, as each “begins with a research problem and proceeds to the questions, the data, the data analysis, and the research report” (Creswell, 2013, p. 102), and yet divergent in its own way. To distinguish easily between the five approaches, I have created conceptual images representative of each approach. These images can be used to assist the researcher in seeing the differences amongst the approaches. Each image identifies how the data is collected and what is produced as a result of the data analysis.



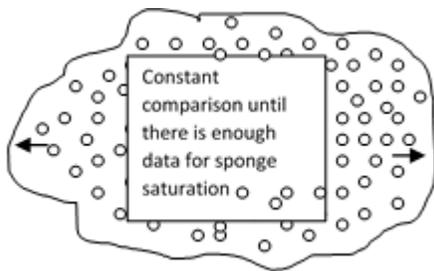
Phenomenology



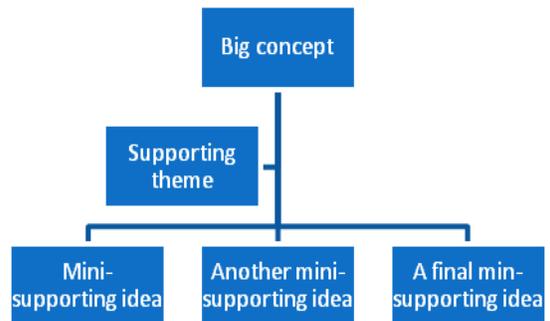
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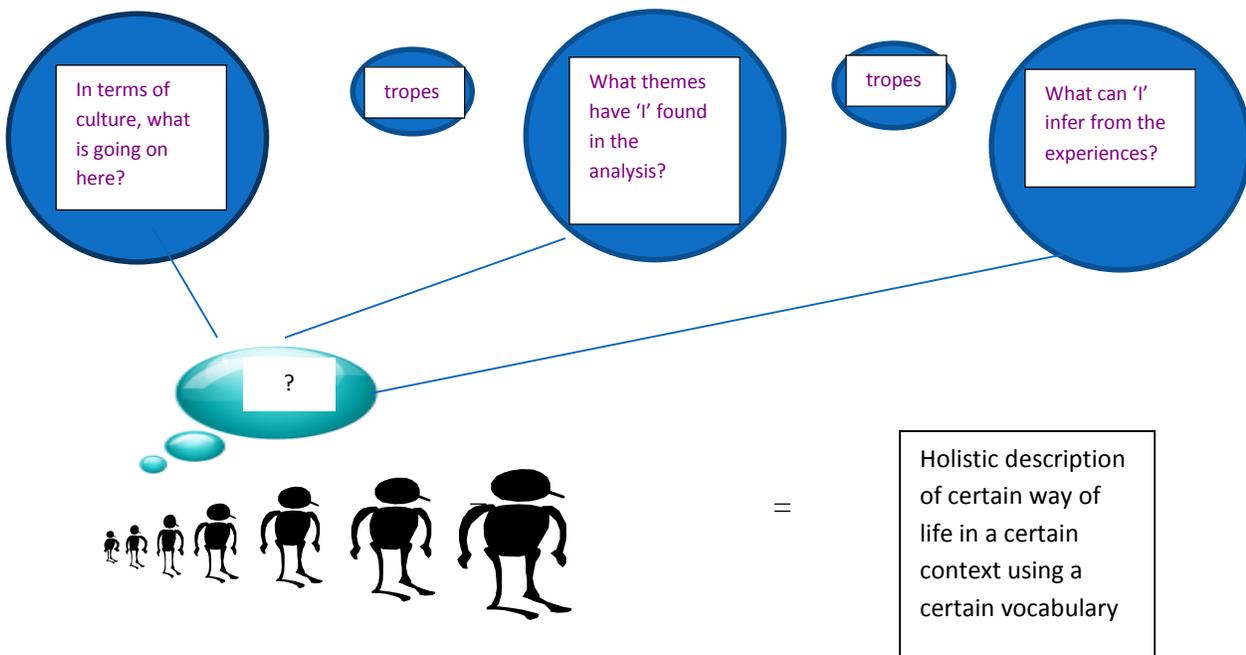
Grounded Theory



= Theory



Ethnography



Case Study

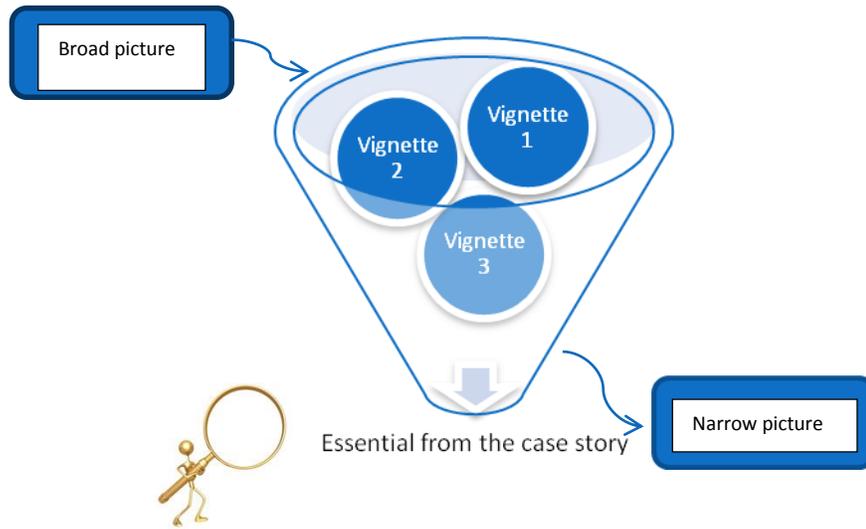


Table Representation that Compares and Contrasts the Five Approaches

The following table of comparison provides a synthesis of the information from *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, by Creswell (2013). I chose what I believe to be the nine most important components regarding the approaches and assembled the information to create this table.

Approach →	Narrative	Phenomenology	Grounded Theory	Ethnography	Case Study
Component ↓					
Focus of the study, objective	Recount an individual portrait/story & his or her history in a specific place	Explore and analyse a phenomenon (occurrence) as a single concept	Produce a theory that shows a process	Recount a shared cultural/group portrait	Describe a complex in-depth confined case
Words in purpose statement	Story, chronology	Describe, experience	Generate, develop, process	Cultural themes, shared patterns	Event, program, understanding

Participants	One or two	Several individuals (5-25) with same lived experience	Groups of people	Entire ‘cultures’	An individual, a tiny group in a social setting - very small number
Leadership, control, communication and interaction	Researcher collaborates with participants	Researcher must ‘bracket’ him or herself out of the study	Researcher memos during process regarding ideas; sets aside previous theories	Researcher uses respect and reciprocity in terms of data collection and use; is sensitive to those being studied; is present, having constant interaction	Researcher is an outsider who actively listens and respects participants
Procedures and decision-making	Systematic	Systematic; inductive and deductive	Systematic; inductive	Systematic	Systematic
Data Collection	Interviews, documents	Observation and interviews	Repeated interviews to reach saturation	Extensive fieldwork using interviews, observations, symbols, artifacts	Observation and interviews, documents, audio-visual materials, and physical artifacts
Data Analysis	Less structured; analyzed by theme, structure (nature of the story) or	Very structured; recurring significant statements and descriptions chosen	Very structured; detailed categorical analysis and coding;	Less structured; look for patterns in ideas and beliefs that correspond to	Well structured; analyze many units/details of the case;

	performance (to whom it is directed)		compare and contrast	behaviours to create understanding	compare and contrast
Report Writing/ Output	Extensive description; story of a life	Less description; ends with a description of the phenomenon’s ‘what and how’ or its ‘essence’	Very little description; creation of a theoretical graphic or figure	Substantial description; describes how the culture works	Substantial description; ends with conclusion of overall meaning
Standards of credibility, dependability and confirmability (known as validation in a quantitative study)	Negotiated meaning with researcher; contextualization reveals the story	Well-grounded and well supported by data; accurate portrait	Well defined, theoretical links between categories; survives hypothesis testing	Distinct and accurate picture of the group; care taken not to over-identify with participants	Clear sense of the story conveyed; assertions are sound

**Articles of Each Approach to Inquiry from the Field of Educational Administration:
Comparison and Critique**

After surveying approximately eighty research articles in educational administration, I chose ten examples of well-done studies, two per inquiry approach, eight of which I believe exemplify the distinguishing features of each type of inquiry. It was very easy to find case studies; this type of inquiry abounded in the research. It was much more difficult to find grounded theory inquiries as many of these inquiries did not terminate with what I believe to be an important feature of a grounded theory: “a visual model” (Creswell, 2013, p. 103) of the theory, so I went outside of educational administration to find what I hoped would be better examples. These studies simply ended with explanations of what a theory might be like. The

most difficult inquiries to identify were those that use a phenomenological approach as most of these studies were simply identified as qualitative, not specifically phenomenological. I read the method carefully for many studies in order to discern whether the study was a true example of a phenomenology. I am sure there are many more examples of outstanding work in educational journals; these are simply the articles that met the criteria as I have listed in the table created from Creswell's (2013) book.

Narrative

The two narrative inquiries that I chose as superior examples of educational administration research are: Parylo, Zepeda and Bengtson's (2013) "Career Paths in Educational Leadership: Examining Principals' Narratives" from the United States as well as Oplatka's (2007) study entitled, "The School Principal in Late Career: An Explorative Inquiry into Career Issues and Experiences in the Pre-Retirement Working Years" from Israel. The researchers identified both studies as life history research. The narrative stories in both articles are very appealing and engaging and include substantial descriptive passages, some of the hallmarks of narrative research. The researchers' data collection procedure for both articles included lengthy interviews of more than an hour, and in the case of Oplatka's (2007) research, there were two sessions of more than an hour each. Data analysis for the Parylo, Zepeda and Bengtson (2013) article was structural while the data for the Oplatka (2007) article was thematic; both are acceptable narrative inquiry techniques. These differences, however, made for divergences in the final article product where the Parylo, Zepeda and Bengtson (2013) article gave a much more structured, categorized reporting of the data than the Oplatka (2007) article. Where the two samples differed from typical narrative inquiry was in the number of participants in the study. The usual number of participants for a narrative is one or two but these researchers interviewed

eleven and twelve participants respectively. I wonder if the stories would have been richer and more profound if fewer people had been interviewed but in more depth. On the other hand, by using inductive analysis of the data, the authors of the studies are able to present the readers with major comparative themes amongst participants, thus confirming parallels for those in the principal role.

Phenomenology

As the first example of a phenomenological inquiry in the educational administration domain, I chose de Wet's (2010) article using South African data, "The reasons for the impact of principal-on-teacher bullying on the victim's private and professional lives." The second article I chose is Canadian research by Cherian and Daniel (2008) entitled, "Principal Leadership in New Teacher Induction: Becoming Agents of Change." As can be readily noted from reading the titles, both of these articles explore a phenomenon in education – workplace bullying and the role of the principal in the induction process, respectively, and both are interpretive studies. For these studies, groups of people were selected as participants by using either snowball sampling or purposeful sampling. The group sizes ranged from 10 in the de Wet (2010) study to 22 on the Cherian and Daniel (2008) study. In both instances, the researchers used open-ended questioning from an interview protocol and a "semi-standardized interview format," (Cherian & Daniel, 2008, p. 5) including observation, to allow the participants to describe the phenomenon. In the Cherian and Daniel study, the researchers interviewed 22 participants regarding new teacher induction and mentoring – some novices in the classroom, some veterans and three principals. The researchers also analyzed documents regarding policy and programs in the particular school district to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon. Data analysis in both studies included categorizing and coding transcripts based on significant sentences and recurring ideas. There are

excellent supporting citations from the participants in the studies to support the findings. Both articles conclude with a description of the ‘essence’ of the study. de Wet (2010) concludes by stating that the “bullying extends beyond individuals and specific schools, perpetuating patriarchal authority and the disintegration of teaching and learning” (p. 1458). Cherian and Daniel (2008) state that principals should “embrace mutual engagement in creating a community of practice” (p. 9) in the process of inducting new teachers. These two examples of phenomenological inquiries follow the standards of a phenomenological study to the letter.

Grounded Theory

Finding articles using a grounded theory approach to explain themes in educational administration was indeed a challenge. Therefore, of the two articles that I chose as examples of grounded study only one is specific to educational administration. The first article is very current research by Ong and Dimmock (2013) entitled, “Principals’ Engagement of Low Ability Students in Singapore Secondary Schools.” In this article, ten principals were interviewed once in a face-to-face setting and follow-up and clarification were done through email and telephone conversations in an attempt to saturate the data given by the ten principals. This article is an excellent example of a grounded study. The researchers interpret the data inductively and do a detailed categorical analysis of the findings using the codings as suggested by Creswell (2013) as imperative to a grounded theory: open, axial and selective. Given that they repeat interviews with the same sample of participants, they assure that they have as much data as possible before creating the theory. Further, Ong and Dimmock (2013) provide a very detailed graphic of their “theory of Selective Engagement” (p. 228) which addresses the maintenance of streaming principles in schools in Singapore. The second study that contains some components that Creswell (2013) lists, while not in educational administration but still in the field of education is

“The Evolution of a Teacher Community of Practice: Identifying Facilitating and Constraining Factors,” by Borg (2012). This Australian study of middle years’ teachers reports on the establishment and support for teacher professional development through communities of practice, more commonly known as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Borg (2012) explains that the “paper reports on initial findings from a grounded theory exploration” (p. 301). True to the grounded theory approach, three interviews were conducted with each participants and observations, documents and other materials were analysed. Unfortunately, no visual graphic is included with this study to represent the grounded theory and therefore, this grounded theory study gives the reader the impression of being unfinished. The description, complete with participants’ voices shown through direct quotes, reads more like a phenomenological study than a grounded theory which, according to Creswell (2013) should include very little description. Given that the paper is a report on initial findings, perhaps the final version will include the graphic and less descriptive writing.

Ethnography

I found many excellent ethnographic inquiries while doing this research. I selected these two simply because of my interest in the topics. Having been a middle years’ principal for seven years, I was curious to read the article by Hertberg-Davis and Brighton (2006) regarding “Support and Sabotage: Principals’ Influence on Middle School Teachers’ Responses to Differentiation.” I chose the second article by Blakesley (2012) because of the Canadian context, “Juggling Educational Ends: Non-Indigenous Yukon Principals and the Policy Challenges that They Face.” Hertberg-Davis and Brighton (2006) spent three years completing this “ethnographic case study” (p. 92) where “principals and faculty ... were interviewed and observed” in three different middle schools in in the United States of America. The study was a

sub-study of a larger project. The researchers chose multiple methods of data collection apart from the interview and observation processes. These varied approaches included focus group interviews of students, content analysis of documents such as lesson plans, assignments and work samples, as well as teacher reflective journals regarding differentiation and assessment practices. This approach does indeed give the opportunity to provide a well-rounded group portrait of the experiences of this cultural group. This well-written ethnographic report includes rich description of each principal and how his or her commitment to differentiation creates changes in the teachers' approaches. The researchers take extensive care explaining triangulation for trustworthiness and credibility in data analysis. The second study, by Blakesley (2012) is a “critical ethnography” (p. 1), although he also identifies the interviews of the four principals as “nested case studies” (p. 4). This study can be considered as ethnography as Blakesley (2012) does provide a group portrait of how non-indigenous principals work with and against Yukon education policy to better the school experience for their northern Canadian students. A critique of this ethnography would be that the sample size is relatively small and the researcher, albeit present, did not note that he had constant interaction with this cultural group. The researcher interviewed the principals five times in a six month time frame. He kept a reflective field log of observations and other thoughts regarding ideas and artefacts. He used the ATLAS t.i. computer program to help him sort and code the data. Blakesley's (2012) description of how these principals work in their environment is very detailed, as a good ethnography should be.

Case Study

The two case studies that I cite below inform the reader regarding strategies used in inclusive schools. These two articles are: Hoppey and McLeskey's (2010) article, “A Case Study of Principal Leadership in an Effective Inclusive School,” and Murakami-Ramalho and

Wilcox’s (2011) article, “Response to Intervention Implementation: A Successful Principal’s Approach.” The case study inquiry by Hoppey and McLeskey (2010) is an exemplary example of a case study. They “conduct a case study of one principal who had a record of success in leading school change efforts and developing a model inclusive program in his school” (p. 245). The second article, by Murakami-Ramalho and Wilcox (2011), reveals “an exploratory case study approach” (p. 483) regarding classroom interventions by teachers for students at risk due to unparalleled principal support. This case is unique because interviews were conducted in focus group settings and during classroom observations rather than with individuals. These two inquiries have all the components that Creswell (2013) defines as essential to the case study: a description of one in-depth bounded case by outsiders who listen actively to the participant; interviews, observations and use of physical artefacts as data collection instruments; and a detailed description of the case ending with a conclusion of the overall meaning which in this case is that leadership practice is the essential element for success.

Adaptations of Ideas from an Already Written Study to Other Forms of Inquiry

After choosing articles that revealed exemplary studies and reading Wolcott’s (2003) book, *The Man in the Principal’s Office: An Ethnography*, I thought it would be an interesting to “turn the story” (Creswell, 2013, p. 270). I challenged myself to use the criteria set out by Creswell (2013), that I had summarized into the table, along with ideas presented in Wolcott’s work to create four new inquiries, each using a different approach. During the reading of Wolcott’s (2003) book, I generated a list of twenty ideas for possible study in the future. From this list of possibilities, I chose four ideas. Here, I suggest how an inquiry could be facilitated for these ideas using one of the four other approaches to inquiry; narrative, phenomenology,

grounded theory and case study. I am not using an ethnography as the book is already written, according to Wolcott, as an ethnography.

Narrative

The title of this narrative would be, “The Dawning of a Principal: A Biography of a Middle Years Leader.” The study would focus on one individual who had risen through the ranks of student teacher, to teacher, to divisional consultant, to vice-principal, to principal of a middle years school. The focus of this biographical study would be, through chronological storytelling, to show the portrait of this individual and his or her historical rise to the principalship. The researcher would use interviews and other documents provided by the participant for data collection. Possible research questions for the study would be: What are the life experiences of the principal that cause him or her to want to assume the role of principal? How do these life experiences shape his or her reactions to the ascension up the hierarchical ladder? How important are GASing behaviors during the journey up the ladder and do the GASing behaviours continue once this principal has succeeded in getting the appointment? According to Wolcott (2003), “GASing behavior [is] [G]etting the [A]ttention of [S]uperiors so that one would be identified as someone special” (p. 208) in order to receive a promotion to a principalship. The participant would, of course, provide input regarding his or her reaction to a draft version of the final narrative. The final written version would “‘restory’ the stor[y]” (Creswell, 2013, p. 74) to include substantial description of the “life events or epiphanies” (Creswell, 2013, p. 272) in this narrative of a person who becomes a principal.

Phenomenology

The title of this phenomenological inquiry would be, “Disciplinary Behaviour Techniques of Principals: Beliefs Regarding Disciplinary Strategies.” For data collection purposes, the researcher would hold extensive individual interviews of ten to twelve principals from all levels; elementary, middle and high school, with the same “lived experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 77) of disciplining students in their schools. The researcher could also observe these principals in their schools as they are in the process of disciplining students. The focus of this study would be to explore the beliefs and attitudes of principals regarding the discipline they mete out in their schools in order to describe the “‘essence’ of the experience” (Creswell, 2013, p. 105) in the final written report. The researcher’s assumption would be that all principals use some type of disciplinary strategy in their buildings in order to control the students and that these strategies stem from their own human experiences. Possible research and focus questions for the study would be: Describe your discipline style. On what factors does the type of discipline you choose rest (age, socio-economic status, etc.)? Does consultation with other actors in the school community play a role in your discipline style, and if so, how? Describe some parent reactions to your disciplining of students. For this phenomenological study, if I were the researcher, I would have to assure that I “bracket out, as much as possible, [my] own experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 81) by explaining that I, as a principal, have my own discipline style but that I should not allow my previous experiences to affect an objective interpretation of the data I am analyzing.

Grounded Theory

The title of this grounded study would be, “A Grounded Theory Explanation of the Rationale for Principals’ Disregard for Written Policies.” This study presupposes that principals

do, at times, disregard policies, as Wolcott (2003) indicated in his study of Principal Bell. The study would be used to generate a theory regarding the process of principals' choice as to whether or not they adhere strictly to the written policies of a school division. A group of five to ten principals would be interviewed over an extended period of time. There would be multiple interviews with the same principals as each change made to advance the theory must be validated with the participants. Possible research questions to begin the study would be: For what reasons would principals disregard certain school division policies? Which policies are more frequently 'overlooked'? What strategies of rationalization do principals use when discounting particular policies? What are the decision-making criteria which principals use when deciding to flout a policy? Further questions would arise from the first set of interviews and would be difficult to predict at the outset of the study. From the data, the researcher would attempt to create a theoretical graphic or figure to demonstrate the decision-making and rationalization process used by principals in determining whether or not a specific school division policy should or must be followed to the letter.

Case Study

The title of this case study would be, "The Dilemma of Interactions: A Principal's Need for Communication Skills." The study would focus on one principal in a public school and his or her numerous face-to-face interactions, whether formal or informal and pre-arranged or spontaneous. The problem for this inquiry would be to discover if specific characteristics or training are needed in order for a principal to communicate/interact effectively in the school setting. Observations of the principal in interaction in the school, a written log or journal of the conversations, contexts, situations, and with whom the interactions take place, as well as other artefacts (agendas, notes) from the encounters, interviews with all actors, including the principal,

would be the likely sources of data collection. Possible research questions could include: What happens during an interaction? What is said during the interaction, and in what tone? Who is involved in formal and informal encounters? What themes of response emerge as more and more interactions are observed? The final written report would “describe and interpret” (Creswell, 2013, p. 400) the principal’s method of communication for all types of face-to-face communications in the school setting and suggest what could be learned from the case study regarding school setting interactions and possible principal professional development.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to allow the reader a concise understanding of and a way to distinguish between the five types of qualitative inquiry as described by Creswell (2013) in his book *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. I provide written summaries, conceptual images and a table to succinctly illustrate the similarities and differences amongst narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, case study and ethnographic inquiry. Further, I indicate some exemplary examples of research already published in journals using these methods of qualitative research. Finally, I take ideas disseminated in Wolcott’s (2003) book, *The Man in the Principal’s Office: An Ethnography*, and adapt them to create possible future research inquiries in educational administration. Choosing the type of inquiry for a study is one of the ‘principal’ decisions that the researcher has to make and the goal of this paper is to help the researcher make this decision wisely.

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