Reflection/Commentary on a Past Article: “A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated”

Where There Any Surprises That Came From This Publication?

Receiving the notice that “A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated” resorted among the top 20 papers the past 20 years, of The International Journal of Qualitative Methods, has been a tremendous surprise.

I have been surprised years ago when I received a request to verify, and approve of, a translation of the article to Afrikaans (Groenewald, 2004). Smaller surprises, among others, include the academic department through which I completed the DPhil having acknowledged my methodology as the best qualitative research design. However, if a fellow scholar perceived a need for a translated version of your work, I does convey a clear message about the perceived value thereof among a particular population. My initial intent had been to be thorough (read “prone to perfectionism”) for the sake of my own research undertaking. Enthusiasm to get published, inspired the conversion of the research chapter, of my dissertation, into an article which illustrated the research design and methodology.

I’ve been pleasantly surprised by the number of scholars, from a variety of fields (e.g., counseling psychology, public administration, maternity nursing, and practical theology), in different parts of the world (such as Texas, Ghana, and South Africa), who approached me personally over the years about the article. Some lasting friendships were established.

How Did It Fit Into Your Career Path?

During 1995, I was headhunted by a higher education institution which had been found wanting with regard to its cooperative and work-integrated education practices and had noticed my accomplishments with regard thereto.

The first decade and a half of my career had been in industry. Having completed, end of 1981, undergraduate studies in humanities, I started as human resource management graduate-intern with a group of mines and industrial companies. After an onboarding period within gold-mining operations, my career path veered into training and development, steadily taking on expanding responsibilities. Professionalization included the furthering of studies in the field, as well as immersing in relevant communities of practice, often in leading positions.

I found that accomplishment in academia works quite different from industry. Challenged by resistance, a colleague encouraged furthering of postgraduate studies, in order to be regarded an expert in the field. Having accomplished extensive literature syntheses, did result in international acknowledgment and publishing opportunities.

How Did It Impact Your Work?

Getting into mainstream academia, while at a reasonably substantive level in academic support, I found, is not that easy. Gaining relevant teaching experience needs to be accomplished part-time. Furthermore, the longer one remains in academic support, the more difficult it gets to revert to path of origin.

Upon completion of the DPhil, I aspired to get into teaching others in especially qualitative research methodology. Unfortunately, the opportunities I explored demanded also a command and teaching of quantitative application. I settled for part-time research supervision and continued with informal research guidance and support.

Other than having acquired the title “Doctor” in academic circles, from achieving a Philosophiae doctor, the publication of “A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated,” unfortunately appear not to have had a significant impact on my work, or my career.

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1 University of South Africa, Roodepoort, South Africa

Corresponding Author:
Thomas Groenewald, University of South Africa, Room 0-076 NB Pityana Building, Science Campus, Private Bag X6, Florida, Roodepoort, Gauteng 1710, South Africa.
Email: tgroenew@unisa.ac.za
How Did It Impact the Field?

I maintain that aspiring scholars need “a grasp of a vast range of research methodologies in order to select the most appropriate design, or combination of designs, most suitable for a particular study.”

The number of citations and references, according to Research Gate, escalated over the years to more than 400. A word cloud, created through Wordle, of a significant selection of titles that cited or referenced “A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated” is presented in Figure 1. This cloud portrays with greater prominence words that appear more frequently in titles. Equally significant is the assortment of words that are contained in the word cloud. Note that titles in languages other than English were excluded.

The literature synthesis chapters of my dissertation further impacted other fields, namely, cooperative and work-integrated education, as well as graduateness, and also talent development. My literature searches were intense (read again “perfection to prone”) and the syntheses spanned many years. This in turn leads to, and resulted in, other opportunities and forms of acknowledgment.

What Is the One Thing That You Think Has Changed the Most in This Area Since You Published This Manuscript?

Having naively pursued bracketing, I subsequently realized that although intent might be sincere, accomplishment thereof “in a sense that in its regard no position is taken either for or against” (Lauer, 1958, p. 49) is quite another matter. Chilisa (2011, p. 7) advocates four guiding Rs, namely, “accountable responsibility, respect, reciprocity, and rights and regulations of the researched.” All parts of a research process are indeed related and the researcher has a relational accountable responsibility. Respectful representation by the researcher implies an overall mind-set influencing how spaces are created for the voices of the researched to surface, the way of listening, the way of paying attention, and the way of acknowledging. There is a need for sensitivity for the sensemaking process to unfold. Good qualitative research entails getting dirt under fingernails to actively engage. Reciprocity entails the ethical emphasis on ownership of intellectual property and extends to the rights of the lived experiences of research participants. Denzin (2001) advocated the seventh moment in qualitative research. The going beyond making clear own value position as researcher, which includes the so-called objective facts (ontology) and ideological assumptions (epistemology) attach to that position, to taking sides with the underdog. During the research process, researchers should listen to the voices of different stakeholders and identify perspectives and values positions contrary to their own and analyze these.

The world we live in is fleeting, indefinite, and irregular; meaning methodological rule following is counterintuitive.
Established research methods might be fit for specific purposes; however, there is a need to “find ways of knowing the indistinct and the slippery without trying to grasp and hold them tight” (Law, 2004, p. 3).

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