

Book Reviews

Diane Janes, Editor

Critical Issues in Qualitative Research by Janice Morse (Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994. ISBN O-8039-5043-8,395 pages, \$26.95 (US)

Reviewed by Mary F. Kennedy

This book was meant to supplement and complement *Qualitative Nursing Research: A Contemporary Dialogue*. However its application is neither limited to those in the nursing profession, nor to supplementary reading status. It is a stand-alone reference and an important addition to the shelves of all qualitative researchers.

Critical Issues in Qualitative Research targets the issue of quality in qualitative research. The book is a series of papers - the result of a two day think tank, in which participants prepared and circulated papers beforehand. Papers were then discussed and debated. Review and revision incorporated points raised, and the resulting papers are the sum of the group's thinking. Each chapter contains a paper preceded by a dialogue out-take, which is a portion of the think tank discussion.

There are 19 chapters covering broad-ranging issues: methodology, interpretation, phenomenological knowing, ethnography, mentoring in qualitative research, post-structuralism, collaboration, ethics, and academic integrity. These and other issues are dealt with on a theoretical, rather than a practical level, but the research experiences of the various authors inform their understanding.

The initial papers deal with the status of qualitative research. This still seems to be an issue in the health professions, where the long history and supremacy of scientific/experimental research has resulted in a stigma against qualitative research - a stigma that Morse, as contributing editor, feels is not totally undeserving. Qualitative researchers are sometimes guilty of not explaining clearly what they do and how conclusions are reached. In fact Kathryn May, in Chapter 2, argues for the *magic* element - "rigorous implementation and explication of method alone never explains the process of abstract knowing" (p. 13).

Morse herself focuses on the cognitive processes of analysis - the synthesis that leads to aggregation of categories, linkages between them, and the process of falsification and confirmation - usually "a mystery to all but the qualitative researchers" (p. 24). She blames qualitative researchers for not making explicit

their cognitive struggle of model or theory construction, claiming that this oversight has led to the belief that qualitative research is both easy and unscientific. She delineates the four cognitive processes integral to all qualitative research: comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing. While clearly delineating the cognitive processes involved in doing qualitative research, there is nothing within the four processes that hasn't already been said by Cuba and Lincoln in past texts.

The book argues for generalizability of results through recontextualizing the development of emerging theory that is applicable to other settings and other populations. The goal of qualitative research is to place the results in the context of established knowledge, and to claim new contributions. This is an acceptable goal, but the issue of generalization is still a thorny one for qualitative researchers, with no agreement as yet. Some would disagree with Morse, claiming that context specificity, or particular-case knowing is an end in itself, and that the only generalization possible is through meta-analysis of whole series of studies.

Critical Issues in Qualitative Research contains one of the most enlightened discussions of grounded theory in practice that I have read. Chapter 11 by Stern points to the confusion over the interpretation of Glaser and Strauss' original work, and the erosion of the idea by novice researchers and by those who mentor them, many of whom have never read the original work. The point is made, however, that Glaser and Strauss discovered grounded theory in their own efforts to understand their data - in the act of interpretation. Maybe each researcher arrives at his/her discovery uniquely, without formula.

I have been a qualitative researcher for fifteen years, and I have taught qualitative research and evaluation methods for over a decade. I have numerous books on qualitative research, and have studied them all assiduously. I had thought that I would not need to add to my repertoire. But Morse's book has become one of my favorites, and I am convinced that it is a must for all qualitative researchers. And while it is not for the novice, it should be essential reading for graduate students who are contemplating doing a qualitative thesis. I trust the numbers of educational technologists undertaking qualitative studies will continue to grow. It is a fascinating path to the truth - to someone's truth.

Dr. Mary F. Kennedy is an educational consultant and part-time faculty member living in Victoria. She continues to be qualitative, and to do research, even in semi-retirement.