QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION:
TENSIONS IN ITS PROPOSAL, DEVELOPMENT, WRITING AND PUBLICATION

INVESTIGACIÓN CUALITATIVA Y EDUCACIÓN: TENSIONES EN SU PROPUESTA, DESARROLLO, ESCRITURA Y PUBLICACIÓN

PESQUISAS QUALITATIVAS E EDUCAÇÃO: TENSÕES EM SUA PROPOSTA, DESENVOLVIMENTO, ESCRITA E PUBLICAÇÃO

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the tensions in qualitative research and education. With this objective, it offers a brief introduction to qualitative research in education, a vision of the historical link of these two fields of study, to lead to a reflection between the thematic and the methodological when we talk about qualitative methodologies in education. Under that approach, the text focuses on the tensions that appear in the formulation of a proposal, development, writing and publication of a qualitative research in education. The tensions in the proposal are concentrated in the formats of formulation and presentation of research projects when we construct the object of study from a qualitative perspective. In the development of the research, time appears as a central concern from various points of view, as well as the tension between the order of analysis and the order of presentation. The writing is approached from the tension between the option for an argumentative text and a narrative text. Finally, the tensions in the publication focus on sending manuscripts to thematic journals or journals specialized in methodology. The tensions in each of these moments of qualitative research in education are explored from the point of view of their possibilities.

Keywords: Qualitative Research, Qualitative Analysis, Qualitative Writing, Educational Research.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo explora las tensiones en investigación cualitativa y educación. Con ese objetivo, el texto parte ofreciendo una breve introducción a la investigación cualitativa en educación, una visión del vínculo histórico de estos dos campos de estudio, para desembocar en una reflexión entre lo temático y lo metodológico cuando hablamos de investigación cualitativa en/y educación. Sobre esta base, el escrito pasa a centrarse en las tensiones que aparecen en la formulación de una propuesta, desarrollo, escritura y publicación de una investigación cualitativa en educación. Las tensiones en la propuesta se concentran en los formatos de formulación y presentación de proyectos de investigación cuando construimos el objeto de estudio desde la perspectiva cualitativa. En el desarrollo de la investigación, el tiempo aparece como una preocupación central desde diversos puntos de vista, así como la tensión entre el orden del análisis y el orden de la presentación. La escritura es abordada desde la tensión entre la opción por un texto argumentativo y un texto narrativo. Por último, las tensiones en la publicación se centran en el envío de manuscritos a revistas temáticas o revistas especializadas en metodología. Las tensiones en cada uno de estos momentos de la investigación cualitativa en educación son exploradas desde el punto de vista de las posibilidades.

Palabras clave: Investigación Cualitativa, Análisis Cualitativo, Escritura Cualitativa, Investigación Educacional.

RESUMO

O presente trabalho explora as tensões em introdução qualitativa e educação. O objetivo desse trabalho é oferecer uma breve introdução sobre a introdução qualitativa em educação, uma visão do vinculo histórico destes, dos campos de estudos, para levar á uma reflexão entre o tematico e o metodologico quando falamos de metodología qualitativa na educação. Com este contexto o manuscrito passa a centrar-se nas tensões que aparecem na formulação de uma proposta, desenvolvimento, escrita e publicacao de uma introdução qualitativa na educa-

ção. As tensões da proposta se concentram nos formatos de formulação e apresentação de projetos de introdução quando construimos o objeto de estudo desde **a** perspectiva qualitativa. No desenvolvimento da pesquisa, o tempo aparece como uma preocupação central á partir de diversos pontos de vista, assim como a tensao entre a orden das analises e a ordem da apresentação. A escrita é abordada desde a tensão entre a opção por um texto argumentativo ou um texto narrativo. Por fim, as tensões quanto a publicação se concentram no envio de manuscritos para as revistas temáticas ou revistas especializadas em metodologia. As tensões em cada um destes momentos da introdução qualitativa em educação são exploradas a partir dos pontos de vistas das posibilidades.

Palavras-chave: Pesquisa Qualitativa, Análise Qualitativa, Escrita Qualitativa, Pesquisa Educacional.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

The relationship between qualitative research and education has nuances that go beyond the mere application of a methodological perspective in what is commonly called the educational field. In fact, there is a historical link between qualitative research and education. Important authors that we today locate in the field of qualitative inquiry gave their methodological turn to this field when they were working in education. This is clearly noticeable in the the Anglo-Saxon world. Consider, for example, the cases of Stake and Scriven who, working in the educational field, live a break with their quantitative approaches to study educational phenomena and begin a search that leads them to develop qualitative proposals in the field of educational assessment. According to William Schubert, "current perspectives in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) evolved from this literature in (educational) evaluation" (1). The extent and character of the historical relationships between qualitative research and education are yet to be made explicit and probably it will require a study that is expected to be carried out and which should also incorporate an international consideration of the influence and autonomous developments of regional and written contexts in different languages.

In addition to that historical link, qualitative research and education share a feature that is substantial. Both are fields of study and relational practices. Both also problematize subject-object relationship-definition as a substantial part of their occupations. This subject-object relationship becomes a central characteristic of a way of thinking about the practices in which we can generically call modernity. The logic of the constitution of an object of study by a cognoscent subject is not exclusive to modernity. However, the exacerbation of this relationship in the search to consolidate scientific thinking is a properly modern characteristic. Yet, as far as the study of human societies is concerned, the subject-object relationship requires at least some qualifiers. The main of these is perhaps the claim that in these studies the subject-object relationship is a subject-subject one. This point appeared with force in the disputes around the social knowledge and scientific statute of this knowledge carried out by positivists and hermeneuticists. While the for-

mer thought the scientific statute of social knowledge adhering to the model of the natural sciences, and particularly of mathematical physics, the latter departed from this model by criticizing its methodological monism and claiming a distinction about scientific work in the case of young women Social or human sciences. Dilthey's argument is particularly suggestive here. For him, the own method of the sciences of spirit is understanding, an empathic understanding and one from within. Dilthey argued that such an understanding was possible because the scholar of these sciences was part of what was studied. In other words, social knowledge is possible given that the subject is part of the object of study. The subject-object relationship is questioned insofar as social knowledge is only possible because this relation is not fixed, in terms of which the subject can only know the object as it is object.

This postulate finds its methodological development in the idea of reflexivity. Reflectivity can be understood, according to Jupp (2004), as "the process of monitoring and reflecting on all aspects of a research project from the formulation of ideas to the publication of results and, where appropriate, of their use" (2). This process can also form an important part of the report or research article. It is, in the words of Given, a commitment of qualitative researchers "with the examination and explanation continues on how they have influenced the research project" (3). According to this author, reflexivity "plays a key role in many types of qualitative methodologies, including feminist research, participatory action research, ethnographies, and hermetical and poststructuralist approaches" (3). This is what has been called the reflexive turn.

Following this tradition in the unfolding of the subject-object relationship in the investigator-researched binomial, qualitative research to problematized this relation (4). The subject-object relationship gives way to a redefinition of it in subject-subject terms in which the researcher is placed in the tension of being part of the social and thinking not only his interaction with the participants but his own this role. This tension then moves the studied object of study to the pole of the researcher himself. This movement is at the base of different approaches in qualitative research; Such as, narrative research, autoethnography, narrative forms of action research, to name a few (5-16). Many of the authors working on these approaches were also in the educational field.

Moreover, the subject-object relationship, and its questioning, is also central to education. In this field the subject-object relationship unfolds in the teacher-student relationship. The liminal relationship in education is similar to liminality that we find in relationality in qualitative research. The questioning of this relationship as it objectifies a subject, the student, has been questioned by reformulating, for example, teacher-student-student-teacher (17). This concept of liminality is associated with the anthropologist Victor Turner who uses it to refer to the "cognitive and emotional state of being in between" (18). It is about being on a threshold that connects two spaces.

For Gadamer this state of liminality corresponds to our condition of being in familiarity and strangeness. It is in this limin-

al space that we seek to understand what others do and say. This attitude is opposed to a certain way of understanding the social sciences and as a methodological attitude based on a disinterested contemplation of the object of study. The liminal relationship in which the encounter between the qualitative researcher and his participants takes place recognizes the limitations in all knowing. Not even in understanding, to understand from within to Dilthey, we are completely within the world of another or completely outside of our own. The world we share is a liminal experience.

Besides the historical link between these two fields of study and the liminal relationality in which their work is based on, thinking about the relationship between qualitative research and education leads us to a reflection upon the relationship between the thematic and the methodological. In fact, if we think of these two fields from this point of view; education appears as a thematic field in which the production of knowledge requires a methodology among which we rely on qualitative inquiry. Notwithstanding this, qualitative inquiry in its reflection upon itself becomes a research topic on its own right. That is to say when we speak of qualitative research we find that it is also its object of study. It would be interesting to reflect, and another moment, on whether the thematic in the case of education leads to turn the field of education itself into an epistemological place that leads it to think as a methodology or have its own methodological postulates.

After this brief introduction, we will focus on the following sections in some of the tensions that we can appreciate in the proposal, development, writing and publication in qualitative research, thinking particularly in the educational field. It should be said, however, that this focus does not reduce the scope of reflection to qualitative research in education, but these can serve for different fields in which academics define as qualitative their investigative work in one or more specific areas of knowledge.

TENSIONS IN THE PROPOSAL

To think about the tensions in the proposal we will concentrate on the formats of formulation and presentation of research projects when we construct the object of study from the qualitative perspective. A first point to make explicit here is the existence of a "form" that the researcher must complete in order to obtain approval, authorization, or funding for a particular research project. The existence of this device is not necessarily a problem in itself, but if it becomes a problem as in general these forms are based on a quantitative rationale of research. Consider, for example, the hypotheses. An important part of researchers in qualitative research work without hypothesis, explicit at least. This is because the emphasis is not to impose an early response to the question or problem, but to wait for it to emerge from the analysis of the data produced. Of course, there are others in which they advance working hypotheses that allow them to define dimensions or categories to be used in the qualitative analysis. This is a tension and not a dichotomous choice between two poles.

A common feature of qualitative projects is that they seek to create an interpretation from the data as the analysis proceeds. This means that the research design of a qualitative study differs from that which begins with an interpretation to be tested, where hypotheses often dictate the form, quantity, and scope of the data required (19).

Let us now bring this tension in the devices of research proposal exemplified in the hypothesis to a more radical plane. While we have stated that it is possible to find qualitative research without hypotheses, we may wonder whether or not it is possible to think about a qualitative research design without objectives. The question seems more of theoretical interest than a practical one. In fact the research is teleological. Moreover, in qualitative research we tend to say that it is the objectives that help us to keep research controllable during the data analysis cycle. However, we also know that many times during the development of research, and given this same cyclical nature between the theoretical and the empirical, the objectives are reformulated. But beyond that, is it necessarily necessary or desirable to have goals as part of a research proposal? Even better, what do we gain by not having goals as part of a qualitative inquiry proposal? If we think about the theoretical possibility of this, we could argue that by renouncing the objectives the researcher puts himself in a listening arrangement in front of the data. The investigative voice is silent to make this listening possible. Then the search for the contents of the human experience is guided by the availability of the contents of the research subjects performs for the researcher. We insist that such an anti-design seems difficult to justify, but this does not detract from the interest of thinking the objective-content tension in the research proposal devices, also expression of subject-object tension at the design level. A practical consequence of this epistemological suspicion is the necessity that in the production and analysis of data that suspicion becomes epistemological vigilance.

TENSIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT

As far as the development of research is concerned, our focus will be on time first. This appears as a central concern from various points of view in the development phase of qualitative research. Perhaps the main of these views is the extension of fieldwork. If we take ethnography, for example, we find that the work that is presented as the first work considered "scientific" in ethnography is the work of Malinowski. An investigation whose fieldwork had a time period of limited to a few months became a several year stay, given the outbreak of World War I that left this Polish anthropologist and British subject in the territory of an enemy power. Without the time spent there *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* might have been a different book and it is not possible to say that it would have had the impact it had on Malinowski's life and the development of ethnography as a methodology in the social sciences. Evidently the temporal duration of the presence is not today, as it was not for Malinowski, decided only by methodological considerations.

However, methodological thinking must certainly involve the consideration of the time necessary to make possible the level of understanding of a phenomenon reaching certain level of quality in their results, whatever may be understood in the specific by such.

In relation to the time, we also find the subject of the presence in the field work. It is not only the temporal duration of the presence but the actual presence of the researcher in the production of data of any kind. It is necessary that the researcher is physically present or it is sufficient that he or she has designed, collaboratively or not, the instruments through which the data are to be produced for him or her. In other words, how mediated can be the relationality that qualitative research claims as proper to its way of investigating. Again, not only methodological considerations are taken into account in the process decision-making in this regard. This relationality is clearly definitive in some qualitative approaches and certainly does not admit the possibility of not being physically present during the field work. In part, this is due to the fact that relationality has a main role in the researcher's self-reflection experience in terms of his involvement in the experience of the encounter with the investigated other.

Before going on to discuss some tensions in writing it is important to say that in relation to this and to the development of research there is a tension also in what is the order of analysis and the order of representation. That is, the way I do the research is not necessarily how your results are presented to the public. Somehow this also relates to the temporal. While the presentation of research results in general follows certain linearity, it related to the linear structure to which the scientific method tends, which does not reflect the cyclical logic of the qualitative research process.

TENSIONS IN WRITING

The tensions in writing in qualitative research are approached from the option of an argumentative text and a narrative one. That is, between following in the text the more or less frequent structure of a scientific argument by considering the main stages of the construction of knowledge in the social sciences or renounces that format to advance to narrative forms that are often closer to literature than of a writing that wants to be scientific.

Although it is true that following the outline of the research article in qualitative writing reflects as we have said the steps of scientific research, as does the format that could be called classic of a dissertation or thesis, the subject of the construction of a Textbook goes beyond that reflection. "Writing an article requires following the general procedures for writing a thesis or dissertation" (19). The critique, from different fronts, of qualitative research has led several authors to propose the model of an argument as a way to at least rhetorically justify the nexus between the produced data and the author's interpretations. A privileged place has been occupied in this trend by the argumentative model of Toulmin. In the Latin American

context Rodríguez has exemplified the use of this model in the construction of inductive arguments that aspire to convince the reader (20). For Rodríguez, the "scheme of Toulmin is effective in planning the writing. It enables the encounter and delimitation of an assertion, a core part of the process of generating new knowledge" (19). While the way the argument unfolds through the text of the research article Toulmin's model offers a structure that allows connecting the theoretical reflection with the data, turning it into evidence to base the affirmations contained in the text.

The other pole in this tension is narrative writing. In this sense, Jerome Bruner argues that there are two modes of thinking that have different ways of ordering human experience (21). For Bruner a good story is different from a well-constructed argument, but both are valid means to convince another. The imaginative application of the narrative "mode leads to good stories, captivating dramas, credible (not necessarily "true") stories" (21). In the same vein, Richards and Morse argue that a "good ethnography will guide the reader and will flow like a good novel; a phenomenological article or grounded theory has the asir of a good story, trapping the reader in a trance" (19). As we see the model here ceases to be the argument with its scientific resonances but rather the narrative and its connections with literature.

The process of construction of these narrative texts has been described by Connelly and Clandinin in the context of narrative research as a relational methodology that "when working in the field, we move from the field to field texts and texts of Fields to research texts" (5). Indeed, these authors continue,

> *the time to start writing a research paper is full of tensions. There is, on the one hand, a tension associated with leaving the field and wondering what to do with these quantities of field texts. There are, on the other hand, tensions when considering our audience and knowing whether or not our texts speak to our readers, and what form. There is tension as we turn inward to think about voice problems and whether we capture and represent, or not, the shared stories of ourselves and our participants. There is tension in flipping outward to think about audience and form problems. And there is tension in considering how to present the situationality of research within the place (5).*

An interesting point to discuss at least briefly is the relationship between writing and interpretation. The question might arise in terms of whether the interpretation is something that occurs after the writing or if it constitutes an act of interpretation. In this sense, Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St. Pierre have spoken of writing as a form of inquiry. In her celebrated text "Writting a Method of Inquiry", included in the Handbook of Qualitative Research, these authors tell us about their formative experience, perhaps also ours, of "Not to write until he knew what we meant, that is, until the ideas were well orga-

nized" (22, 23). However, they continue,

> *During the last decade (1990s), however, instead of suppressing their voices qualitative researchers have been fine-tuning their writing skills. This learning to write in new ways has not led to losing the writing skills of each other traditions than learning a second language reduces fluency in our first language. On the contrary, multiple forms of writing have flourished (22).*

In this sense, Elizabeth St. Pierre tells us, "I have called my academic work a "nomad research" (...), and much of this research is accomplished in writing; Because for me, writing is thinking, writing is analyzing, it is indeed a seductive and challenging method of discovery" (24). This line of work, of which St. Pierre is one of the main exponents, has led to the development of an approach that participates in the conversations in qualitative research defines itself as post-qualitative research.

TENSIONS IN THE PUBLICATION

At this point the tension between the methodological and the thematic reappears, being expressed here in the existence of thematic magazines and methodological journals. The qualitative researchers' overturning of their own work has led to the emergence of specialized journals in methodology. Among these we can mention in the context of English-speaking Qualitative Inquiry (eISSN 1552-7565, ISSN: 1077-8004), Qualitative Research (eISSN 1741-3109, ISSN: 1468-7941). In the Spanish-speaking world we find, for example, Qualitative Research (eISSN 2473-4985) and Journal of Qualitative Studies (eISSN 0719-4781). In the thematic, mainstream journals have increasingly accepted, depending on the specific fields, manuscripts based on qualitative research. Moreover, there are a number of thematic journals that focus particularly on qualitative research in specific fields. These journals include: Qualitative Health Research (eISSN1552-7557, ISSN 1049-7323), Qualitative Research in Education (eISSN: 2014-6418), International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (eISSN: 1366-5898, ISSN: 0951- 8398). In this way an initial decision when preparing a manuscript or deciding which journal to send a prepared manuscript is to choose which journal to send and whether it will be thematic or methodological.

In this way, the revision of the editorial line of the journal is important. In this review, it is important to consider in the case of thematic journals that the percentage of manuscripts based on accepted qualitative research varies depending on the academic field and the specific journal. Although, as we said, there has been an increase in the acceptance of qualitative research in some journals this percentage is still very low. Therefore, the probability of acceptance and the waiting time from the sending to the actual publication, if accepted, must be considered. This is not a minor point considering that a large part of the research today is funded by funds that consider within their surrender the publication of the research results within spe-

cific deadlines. These considerations should also be taken into account when we think of sending our manuscript to a journal that focuses on qualitative research, whether methodological or thematic. To this, however, we must add in this case whether the manuscript is theoretical-methodological or whether it is the results of an empirical investigation. The methodological journals only publish a small number of empirical studies, and in general they do so when it presents characteristics that make it remarkable precisely in terms of the theoretical-methodological approach of which it appears as a key example. On the other hand, qualitative qualitative journals concentrate on qualitative empirical research in a given field of study, including also in a greater or lesser percentage theoretical-methodological articles.

CONCLUSION

The tensions in each of these moments of qualitative research have been briefly explored particularly in their relationship with the educational field. The tensions in the proposal, development, writing and research have been treated from the point of view of possibilities. The next step in this work would be the development of each of these tensions in detail and with consideration of recent qualitative research publications in thematic and methodological journals.

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