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FEATURE

**Eyes That See and Ears That Hear:
A Case for Qualitative Research**

Ella Smith Simmons

Abstract. *In a worldwide climate of misperception and illusion, the physical senses and mental perception skills are key to qualitative research. The researcher is the first instrument of qualitative inquiry and then, to a great degree, determines the effectiveness of all others throughout the research process, from entry into the research setting through to the publication of the research report. Qualitative researchers must possess keen abilities to see, hear, decode, and translate to the world the meanings of the messages and dynamics of their research settings. Further, they must hone those skills constantly. This article examines the importance and challenge of seeing, hearing, and portraying the world accurately through qualitative inquiry and scholarship.*

Keywords: qualitative research, naturalistic inquiry, grounded theory, constructivism

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO; 2016) maintains statistics on the pervasiveness of blindness and deafness in the world. The WHO reports that an estimated 180 million people worldwide are visually disabled. Of these, between 40 and 45 million persons are blind, by definition they cannot walk about unaided. They report also that there are 360 million people worldwide who have disabling hearing loss.

A familiar idiom says, there are none so blind as those who will not see. U. S. singer, Ray Stevens, has been credited with authoring this phrase in his song, "Everything Is Beautiful." Before him, however, a preacher by the name of Matthew Henry used the phrase around 1750 when he referenced the lyrics of a song by Asaph (Link, 2009). According to Link (2009), "Asaph's lyrics were not as upbeat as those of Stevens. His song was a rebuke to the Israelites for failing to

fulfill their God-given purpose. God had chosen them to show the world how to live right and judge justly, but they were failing miserably” (para. 2). Just prior to this, Jonathan Swift used the proverb in 1738 in his publication, “Polite Conversation,” and there is evidence of its use in the United States in the works of Thomas Chalkley in 1713. The earliest nonbiblical occurrence of this proverb is reported to be John Heywood’s use in 1546 (Titelman, 1996).

The complete statement is, “There are none so blind as those who will not see. The most deluded people are those who choose to ignore what they already know.” It echoes the biblical Old Testament verse, Jeremiah 5:21: “Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not” (KJV). It reflects also Isaiah 6:9-10 and the New Testament verse, Matthew 13:13. Henry’s (1994) commentary on Psalm 82, indicates, “A gift in secret blinds their eyes. They know not because they will not understand. None so blind as those that will not see. They have baffled their own consciences, and so they walk on in darkness” (p. 863). James Baldwin (1984) is conclusive, almost apocalyptic, in his work, “Notes of a Native Son,” where he says, “People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction” (p. 175).

Reality

Albert Einstein is credited with the commentary: Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one. Surely most will not agree with his cynicism; as indeed Einstein did not. This too is an illusion for he did not make this statement that appears to his credit in many publications and on many websites. His actual statement is, “For us believing physicists, the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion” (Calaprice, 2000, p. 75), illustrating the unbreakable reality of relationship between past, present, and future. Many struggle with perceiving, comprehending, and articulating reality. The book, “Empire of Illusion,” explicates several realms of illusion in the human experience as indicated by its chapter titles: The Illusion of Literacy, The Illusion of Love, The Illusion of Wisdom, The Illusion of Happiness, and The Illusion of America [or any nation or organization] (Hedges, 2009). These imply that we live in a world of illusions unable to see and hear that which is the real world.

A respected colleague, Shirley Freed (2016, pp. 4-6) asks the essential question in her editorial entitled, “What is Really Real?” in *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*. In it she wonders if her little granddaughter knows the difference between the rabbit nibbling on grass in her backyard and the rabbit in the Bugs Bunny cartoon she enjoys watching on television. Then she muses on adult perspective as she recalls today’s “reality television” shows. What is really real, and how do we know?

Most people truly are not cognizant of the illusions surrounding them or of the roles of the agencies that create them. Hedges (2009, p. 15) asserts, “The agents, publicists, marketing departments, promoters, script writers, television and movie producers, advertisers, video technicians, photographers, bodyguards, wardrobe consultants, fitness trainers, pollsters, public announcers, and television news personalities...create the vast stage for illusion.” Freed (2016) reported that the editorial staff of her journal asks with the development of each issue, “Are we portraying reality?” (p. 5). This is the question for every researcher, every scholar. Are we portraying reality? In addition, this indispensable question must be preceded by the equally essential question: Are we perceiving reality? Then for researchers, these are followed immediately with the related crucial question: How do we know?

These questions have been at the heart of both rejection and advocacy for qualitative research since its earliest challenges to conventional wisdom on research. Its opponents have charged that qualitative research is not “real” research, that it neither perceives nor reports reality. Unfortunately, these charges persist after decades of qualitative inquiry practice and publication. So, again, we must ask of qualitative research: Are we perceiving and portraying reality, and how do we know?

Discernment

Discernment is the ability to grasp and comprehend that which is obscure. It is the capacity to see and understand people, things, and situations clearly and intelligently. It involves demonstrating insight and understanding, an understanding of the true nature of something. It is the power or act of seeing into a situation (Discernment, 2016).

Further, spiritual discernment is sound judgment for distinguishing between good and evil. Discernment is required for comprehending spiritual realities and avoiding life’s snares and comes through the insight of a renewed mind (Manser, 2009). Discernment means to recognize the covert messages and to perceive the meaning of that which is observed. The qualitative researcher must ask constantly: Is there meaning in what we observe?

Meaning. Meaning is of essential concern in the qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research focuses on the assumptions people make about their lives. It looks into the aspects of life that they take for granted as being reality. In attempting to see and hear reality, qualitative research demands responses to three deceptively simple questions, constantly:

- What assumptions do people make about their lives?
- What do they take for granted?

- What do you, the researcher, take for granted? (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992)

Qualitative research demands discernment and wisdom. It requires special insight for seeing, hearing, and interpreting the routines and intricacies of life and its psycho-social-political interactions. The qualitative researcher must constantly improve and employ eyes that see deeply into personalities, structures, and behaviors; and they must develop ears that hear the concealed messages beyond sound bites and oratories. Typically, these require living in the other person's experience as observer and/or participant. Concomitantly, it requires standing apart from the experience as researcher and using heightened mental faculties and capacities of the senses, attention, language, understanding, and memory to perceive and decipher incoming messages.

Qualitative researchers must attach transmissible meaning to discrete actions and routines, accurately synthesizing findings in ways that shed light on specific behaviors and interactions, communicating honestly, precisely, and clearly to inspire appropriate desired actions. In short, qualitative research requires extraordinary perception, discernment, interpretation, and translational abilities.

Instructive Cases for Qualitative Researchers

A striking example of qualitative research dynamics is found in that classical spy story of scripture found in the Old Testament Book of Joshua in chapter two beginning at verse one (NKJV): "Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho.'" The assignment was to yield data and information that would encourage or discourage action and advancement.

No doubt Joshua recalled the time, approximately 38 years prior, when he had been sent out from Kadesh-barnea on a similar spy mission along with 11 others (see book of Numbers, chapter 13). That mission resulted in misfortune after 10 members of the research team returned with a fearful, discouraging report. They saw dangers where the minority saw opportunity although they all saw and heard the same things in the setting. This phenomenon continues today and is evident, for example, when several people witness an auto accident or crime at the same time in the same location, but report the dynamics of the event quite differently.

The report of his new research team (see Joshua 2:9–11, 23, 24) "must have encouraged Joshua and the people to advance without delay across the Jordan and against Jericho" (Nichol, 1976, pp. 184-193). This research report resulted in immediate advancement of the nation's strategic action toward its goals; whereas, the majority report from that earlier expedition resulted in delayed action and lost opportunities. The account of that disappointing commission for qualitative

inquiry is found in the Book of Numbers, chapter 13, again beginning at verse one:

¹And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel. It further instructs: ^{17b}“Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, ¹⁸ and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; ¹⁹ whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; ²⁰ whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land.” Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes. ²¹ So they went up and spied out the land . . . ²³ Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs. . . ²⁵ And they returned from spying out the land after forty days. ²⁶ Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ Then they told him, and said: “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸ Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. . . ” ³⁰ Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.” ³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.” ³² And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. ³³ There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

The research missions described in these passages (Josh 3–6; Num 13:30–33) contain many parallel elements. In both, the spy teams (a) are assigned to conduct a qualitative study of another culture (Josh 2:1; Num 13:1–16); (b) enter the land selected for spying for direct observation (Josh 2:1b; Num 13:17–22); (c) return to the people to report their findings (Josh 2:22; Num 13:25); (d) report on their

findings (Josh 2:23–24; Num. 13:27–29); and (e) influence a decision to act on the basis of their report (Dybdahl, 2010, pp. 265-266). The most glaring differences are the differences in the reports of what they saw and heard and, importantly, the differences in recommendations for actionable responses. Indeed, people can look at the same situations and some will see obstacles while others may see opportunities. What's the cause of the disparities in what one sees and what another sees? Perspective is at the root.

Perspective

Perspective, by general definition, “is a particular way of considering something; a way of thinking about a situation or problem in a wise and reasonable way; a way to compare something to other things so that it can be accurately and fairly judged” (Perspective, 2016). Along with the understanding of factual information, perspective includes emotional reactions related to facts and opinions. Regarding organizational behavior, Nicholson (1998, p. 138, 139) claimed that “emotions can never be fully suppressed” (p. 138) and that “human beings put confidence before realism and work hard to shield themselves from any evidence that would undermine their mind games” (p. 139). Perspectives—the individual's own mental lenses—determine what she or he perceives, that is what they see and hear.

In his 1961 declaration that still bears relevance today, Boorstin (1992) speculated, “We risk being the first people in history to have been able to make their illusions so vivid, so pervasive, so *realistic* that they can live in them. We are the most illusioned people on earth. Yet we dare not become disillusioned, because our illusions are the very house in which we live; they are our news, our heroes, our adventure, forms of art, our very experience” (p. 240). While he spoke of Americans, anecdotal observations indicate that his claim holds true for large sectors of populations throughout the world. These observations are of particular concern for qualitative researchers because of its primary goal to live personally and then describe the experiences of the subjects from the subjects' perspectives.

Perspective in Research

Humanity has been deceived into blindness and deafness, perhaps due to overstimulation. There are so many visual stimuli and so much noise there is a tendency to tune out everything, including that which we really need to see and hear. Qualitative research requires sharp perceptions for seeing and hearing, and sharpens these perceptions through practice.

Research perspective seeks to translate abstractions into real life meanings and understandings. This demands several presumptions that pose related questions for perceiving reality. According to Vidal (2008), the forms of study are

the traditional philosophical disciplines; the questions are summarized as their corresponding worldview questions.

1. Ontology (model of reality as a whole): What is?
2. Explanation (model of the past): Where does it all come from
3. Prediction (model of the future): Where are we going?
4. Axiology (theory of values): What is good and what is evil?
5. Praxeology (theory of actions): How should we act?
6. Epistemology (theory of knowledge): What is true and what is false?

For qualitative research specifically, Lincoln and Guba (2013, p. 37) offer a set of four philosophical perspectives with research related questions: (a) The ontological questions: What is there that can be known? What is the nature of reality?; (b) The epistemological question: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower and the knowable?; (c) The methodological question: How does one go about acquiring knowledge?; (d) The axiological question: Of all the knowledge available to me, which is the most valuable, which is the most truthful, which is the most beautiful, which is the most life-filled?

Meaning from Perspective

Qualitative research seeks to illuminate the inner dynamics of situations that are not typically visible to the outsider. It must capture perspective thoroughly and accurately. It must discover what the *other* is experiencing and capture how the *other* structures and defines the world in which they live (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Maxwell, 2013; Psathas, 1973). Qualitative research, when performed well, contributes to the whole of human understanding in unique ways. Hiebert (2008) declared, “We look at the structure of reality through a slice of time, examining the plots and how these relate to one another” (p. 71). In addition, he observed that, “we focus on the story of each individual, community, and nation and how they fit into one comprehensive human history” (Hiebert, 2009, p. 127). Thus, it is incumbent upon the qualitative researcher to conduct the research at the highest levels of quality.

Tracy (2010) provides a helpful perspectival scheme of eight key markers of quality for achieving the aims of qualitative research: (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence (pp. 837-851). None can be neglected and all require keen insight.

Insight

Insight is crucial to qualitative research. In the original language, Joshua 1:7 carries a promise of prosperity that results from acting wisely, or more precisely, acting insightfully. To this end, Firebaugh (2008) offered Seven Rules for Social Research. For precision and insight, researchers must (a) be prepared for the possibility of surprise in social research; (b) look for differences that make a difference, and report them; (c) build reality checks into your research; (d) replicate where possible; (e) compare like with like; (f) study individual and social change; and (g) let method be the servant, not the master.

Insightful actions are products of keen perspective. Hiebert (2008, p. 15) offers a critical acknowledgement that poses a challenge, “As scholars studied human nature and culture over time: It became increasingly clear that people do not live in the same world with different labels attached to it, but rather people live in radically different conceptual worlds.” From these *worlds* emerge one’s reality—worldview, then one’s philosophy of life, and then values and behaviors, just to name a few (Vidal, 2007; Wolters, 1989). Perspective—particularly philosophy and worldview—that derives from insight is key to qualitative research.

Worldview

According to Vidal (2008), “The term ‘worldview’ is often used to emphasize a personal and historical point of view” (p. 3). It is the collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group. Whether it is apparent to them or not, all human beings have certain presuppositions and biases that affect the way they view life and reality. Their worldview is like a set of lenses which skew their vision or alter the way they perceive the world around them. This worldview is formed by their education, their upbringing and the culture in which they live, including the books, media, and movies they experience (Wayne, 2012).

Worldview is an all-encompassing aspect of life. Yet, “for many people their worldview is simply something they have absorbed by osmosis from their surrounding cultural influences. They have never thought strategically about what they believe and would not be able to give a rational defense of their beliefs to others” (Wayne, 2012, para. 1). Nevertheless, it is this worldview that defines, perhaps creates, reality for individuals and people groups.

Vidal (2008) draws on a definition from Apostel which portrays worldview as an ontology, a descriptive model of the world. This description includes six elements that have implications for qualitative research: (a) an explanation of the world; (b) an eschatology—answering the question, where are we heading?; (c) a praxeology, methodology, or theory of action—How should we attain our goals?; (d) an epistemology or theory of knowledge—What is true and false?; (e) an

etiology and a constructed worldview that contains an account of its own *building blocks*, its origins and construction.

Knowledge construction is integral to qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (2013) define a construct as a “mental realization—‘a making real’—of an apparently singular, unitary entity or relationship” (p. 47). They show that a construction is an intelligible, consistent, expressed set of constructs in a pattern of interconnections that make sense of the world, and communicate how an individual or group sees the world through their symbols and interactions.

Symbolic interactionism views human actions as constructing self, situations, and society. The symbolic interactionist perspective assumes that prior interactions (a) constitute society and collective life, (b) precede the individual, and (c) form the conditions in which action and interpretation occur. It assumes that language and symbols play a crucial role in forming and shaping our meanings and actions. It views interpretations and action as reciprocal processes, each affecting the other (Charmaz, 2014, p. 262). In his discussion of *methodological faith*, Shults, (2003) asserts that all researchers operate by faith to some degree and bring their own beliefs and assumptions to experimentation, data-gathering, and theory building (p. 41).

Limitations of Scientific Worldviews

There are significant limitations of scientific worldviews. Although research training in the natural sciences tends to view qualitative methods with skepticism and as being of merely exploratory value, if any, qualitative methods have now become a core part of a methodological options throughout the social sciences (Boyd, Petts, Stirling, Jakson, & Sturgis, 2015).

Those who support qualitative research methods point out the shortcomings of quantitative approaches to inquiry, particularly their lack of subjective insights (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Patton, 2015; Shults & Waters, 2010). Noblit’s (1981) long-standing assertions for policy research, contend that quantitative methods are weak in at least five areas. First, quantitative research is not sufficiently sensitive to the issues of meaning. He says, “It is, in part, the deliberate use of meaning and, in part, the serendipitous use of meaning that end up defining the state of affairs” (Noblit, 1981, p. 44). Additionally, with its reductionalistic goals, quantitative research is not sufficiently sensitive to issues of process. It does not consider the unfolding of events and meanings (Patton, 2015). Next, it is not sufficiently sensitive to context (Creswell, 2013). It is *context-stripping* (Mishler, 1979). Furthermore, it is inflexible and too tightly defined for loosely coupled social settings (Miles & Huberman, 2014; Weick, 1976). Last, it is poorly adapted to a fundamental understanding of decision making (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Some researchers question the attainability of true objectivity in quantitative research. They attribute this to the effect of the *Zeitgeist*—of the given language and the cultural linguistic basis of thinking—on the researcher's and research consumer's comprehension of phenomena in social settings (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Therefore, many reason that quantitative research, standing alone, is inadequate in social settings; that more comprehensive modes of investigation are required, namely naturalistic or qualitative methodology.

Flexible Worldview Benefits of Qualitative Research

The values of qualitative research are varied and many. Qualitative research can provide information and insights that are not available from quantitative methods. It allows flexibility and subjectivity that develop and enhance a given study as it progresses taking advantage of opportunities for expanding acquisition and wisdom for practice. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) point out several beneficial distinctions of qualitative research. First, qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument (insight). Second, it is descriptive (all things are clues for understanding; yields words/pictures, rather than numbers). Third, qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products (questions all interactions). Last, meaning is of central concern to the qualitative approach (inner dynamics of situations illuminated; often invisible to outsiders).

Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively (bottom up, emergent theories from abstractions—grounded theory). Charmaz (2014) asserts that “grounded theory and symbolic interactionism travel well across disciplines and professions” (p. 281) and that they “constitute a useful theory-methods package for facilitating the researchers’ ability to see and hear the ‘reality’ of the research setting” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 343). According to Charmaz (2014), in qualitative inquiry, the traditional sharp distinctions between data collection and analysis are blurred intentionally and are engaged simultaneously for flexibility as the study develops. These inform and shape each other in an interactive process during inquiry.

Perceiving and Portraying Reality in Qualitative Research

Clear perceptions are critical to research quality, particularly in qualitative research which is built and turns on perceptions, insights, and worldview of the researcher. The search for reality in qualitative research is guided by continuous questioning by the researcher. These questions create an internal dialog in which the researcher engages with himself/herself. Vidal (2008, pp. 4-5) offers a full set of defining questions for the qualitative researcher, in summary:

The first question is the question of ontology or a model of reality as a whole. It can be typified with the question, What is? (What do I see? What do I hear?). It calls for probing questions that guide the inquiry: (a) What is the nature of our world? (b) How is it structured and how does it function? (c) Why is there something rather than nothing?

The second question explains the first component. Why is the world the way it is, and not different? Its typical guiding question is, What kind of global explanatory principles can we put forward? It digs deeper with (a) How did the Universe originate? Where does it all come from? This is to explain how and why such phenomena occurred. The aim is to determine antecedents or backgrounds, previous circumstances, experiences for undergirding the study and its results.

The third question is a complement to the second one. Instead of focusing on the past, it focuses on the future. Where are we going? It presses for vision, What will be the fate of life in the Universe? It is search for probabilities, the possible futures. The emphasis here is on decision since there are multiple options, thereby uncertainties. The researcher is guided and challenged to decide between alternative options with the question, Which options should be promoted and which ones should be avoided? These decisions require intentionality in the recognition and employment of values.

The fourth question leads into this valuing and asks, How do we evaluate global reality? What should we strive for? It is here that the researcher is faced with the question: What is good and what is evil? This question gets at the central question for qualitative research: What is the meaning of life? It is axiological in that it is value-driven and looks at morality, ethics, and esthetics in inquiry and reporting. This line of questioning and decision-making yields direction, purpose, and goals to guide research actions.

The fifth question is about the theory of action, praxeology. How should we act? It asks, What general principles should organize actions in inquiry and analysis? Inquiry actions will flow from pervading values for solving problems in practice. It is often said that a philosophy is of no use because it is too far from reality, that it does not give any precise answer to concrete questions. This is often true and a praxeology correctly developed should fill this gap.

The sixth question is about the theory of knowledge, epistemology. How are we to construct our image of this world in such a way that we can come up with answers to questions 1, 2, and 3? These direct methodologies by asking, How can we acquire knowledge? Then pin down the study with (a) What are the principles of valid inferences or demonstrations? and (b) How can we characterize truth, deduction, existence, necessity, among others? These can guide logical decision-making based on the previous determinations. Here challenges of language come to light. The question is, What language should we use for our purposes of knowledge acquisition, and what are its limitations?

There is a seventh question: It is a meta-question that asks, Where do we start in order to answer those questions? This question is foundational and it invites the researcher to expose the hegemonic forces operating in the research setting by examining the history of ideas and civilizations with an awareness of traditions of thought, considering both obvious and hidden assumptions. Here is built a world philosophy to guide inquiry perspective. This meta-level of questioning allows a broader analysis of different worldviews.

An understanding of the concept and importance of worldview is an imperative for qualitative research. Creswell (2013) emphasizes that whether one is aware or not, we bring our beliefs and philosophical assumptions into the research process, that these determine even our choice of research design (p. 15). Qualitative researchers have a responsibility to become aware of and acknowledge their own worldview persuasions and to pursue comprehension of the worldviews of others who are integral to their inquiry.

Recommendations for Qualitative Research

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) equate the qualitative researcher to the bricoleur, one who engages in construction, as of a sculpture or a structure of ideas, achieved by using whatever comes to hand (Bricolage, 2016). The bricoleur produces a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. They equate the qualitative researcher to a quilt maker, or one who uses montage to produce an interpretation by stitching, editing, and putting slices of reality together.

Eyes That See

Just as in quantitative research, the qualitative researcher's aim is to answer descriptive questions of who, what, where, when, how, and why. Leung (2015) points out, however, that, "Unlike quantitative research which deals primarily with numerical data and their statistical interpretations under a reductionist, logical and strictly objective paradigm, qualitative research handles nonnumerical information and their phenomenological interpretation, which are inextricably interwoven with human senses and subjectivity" (p. 324). While qualitative research focuses in on fine details, its outcomes expand visions of reality. In qualitative research, the emotions and perspectives of both subjects and researchers are indispensable and unavoidable. Indeed, they are valued in that they add scope and color—richness to processes and findings (Leung, 2015).

The George Barna's (2010) book "The Power of Vision" is aimed at visioning for ministry development. However, its principles have translatable value for qualitative research which requires perfect, perhaps X-ray vision—both physical

sight and insight. Barna (2010) attempts to define vision. Though imprecise, his definitional elements have merit and are a good fit for qualitative research.

Barna (2010) defines vision as “foresight with insight based on hindsight,” and acknowledges that this definition “underscores the importance of looking to the future, emphasizes the significance a keen awareness of current circumstances and possibilities and notes the value of learning from the past” (p. 13). He also defines vision as “seeing the invisible and making it visible;” while he also suggests that “vision is an informed bridge from the present to the future” (p. 13). Finally, the last definition offered in Barna (2010) is that “vision connotes a visual reality” (p. 14). Barna (2010) says vision is clear, reflects a realistic perspective, and is built on reality; and although these were offered for future visioning, they aptly describe expectations for “seeing” in qualitative research. Clear and accurate requirements for vision include the following:

1. Comprehending God [One’s worldview of truth] – Understand the perspective upon which your inquiry is based.
2. Knowing Oneself - Know your own abilities, gifts, limitations, values, and desires to increase the accuracy of your perspective for vision.
3. Understanding Your Circumstances - Dreams sidestep reality; vision builds upon it. Be sensitive to the environment through a process of applied, pragmatic imagination.
4. Seeing the Big Picture – Look for and acknowledge the gestalt of the research environment.
5. Utilizing the Visionary Mentor – Rely on knowledgeable, wise colleagues and others in the research setting to help you see clearing what is happening.
6. Surrendering the Heart - Surrender the sense of personal ambition, the natural tendency for self-promotion.

Finally, (a) be wary of vision killers: tradition, fear, stereotypes, complacency, fatigue, short-term thinking, and selfish pride (Barna, 2003, pp. 109-114); and (b) constantly verify vision, what you think you see. “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 11:14).

Ears That Hear

Many have learned techniques that are considered good listening skills, and yet, seem to miss the messages directed to them. Often the words themselves are missed or misinterpreted and even more often the message behind the words is missed altogether. Leung (2015) asserts, “The essence of qualitative research is to

make sense of and recognize patterns among words in order to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its [the study's] richness and dimensionality" (p. 324). Qualitative researchers must have the keenest sense of hearing and most profound listening skills if they are to capture the facts and dynamics of their research setting.

Zenger and Folkman (2016) offer advice in their article, "What Great Listeners Actually Do", based on their research of good listening techniques. They assert, "While many of us have thought of being a good listener being like a sponge that accurately absorbs what the other person is saying, instead, what these findings show is that good listeners are like trampolines. They are someone you can bounce ideas off—and rather than absorbing your ideas and energy, they amplify, energize, and clarify your thinking" (para. 6). They outline several levels of good listening dynamics that are helpful for qualitative researchers (para. 7).

Level 1: Create a safe environment in which difficult, complex, or emotional issues can be discussed.

Level 2: Eliminate distractions to focus attention on the other person with eye-contact, thus drawing the other person into the exchange.

Level 3: Seek to understand the substance of what the other person is saying, keying in on ideas, asking questions, and restating messages to confirm understanding.

Level 4: Listen with the eyes as well as the ears, being mindful of nonverbal cues and other body language, that are considered up to 80% of what is being communicated.

Level 5: Strive to understand the other person's emotions and feelings about the topic of communication, identify and acknowledge them, and validate the feelings in nonjudgmental ways.

Level 6: Ask questions to clarify assumptions the other person holds and open up new ways of seeing the issue, perhaps by injecting some new ideas on the topic, but never taking over the conversation so that the other person or their issues become the subject of the discussion.

The reliance of qualitative inquiry on interviews makes imperative heightened listening skills and techniques. Auditory perceptions and perspective are absolutes that must be sharpened and maintained at all times.

Maintaining Eyes That See and Ears That Hear

Do you see the forest or only the individual trees? Qualitative researchers must be able to see both. Do you hear the song or only the individual notes? Qualitative researchers must be able to hear both. Scripture asks, "Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" (Mark 8:18, NIV).

Patton (2015) provides sound advice for accurate discernment and sharp perception. He notes that qualitative researchers must consciously maintain honest objectivity and receptivity in the search for truth that is the reality of what is present and happening in the research setting. In addition, qualitative researchers must seek generalizations in individual cases as they pertain to comprehending worldview perspectives, while not proposing the generalizability of their research findings. Further, qualitative researchers must ensure the legitimacy of their inquiry methodologies; that is, they must match appropriate methods to the questions and issues related to the particular study.

Scripture, as well, provides guidance for honest objectivity as an imperative: And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous (Exod 23:8). It also offers a related promise for believers:

So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright. (Psalm 2:2-7)

Therefore, the greatest desire of the qualitative researcher should be that of King Solomon who is reputed to be the wisest man who ever lived: “Therefore, give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (1 Kgs 3:9).

Summary

The value of a qualitative research project is related to far more than the collection of accurate data, though this is important. Rather, the researcher gives meaning to the data and information collected in the field. In symbolic comparison, quantitative research is to qualitative research as old black and white silent films are to color talking films of today. Quantitative research provides the black and white of a situation while qualitative research reports the situation in living technicolor and stereo sound. Contemporary technology may call for different terminology but surely the message is clear nevertheless.

The aim of qualitative research is to see the world and see into the world, to hear what the world has to communicate and then to interpret these messages, including their patterns, trends, and implications, back to the world to ultimately make it a better place. Qualitative research requires highly developed abilities for perceiving, discerning, understanding, portraying, and applying the dynamics and truths of the real world and their meanings to others. Worldview plays a major

role in these processes. It determines how we perceive others, settings, situations, and actions. Worldview is the overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world, and although it is an intimate part, a seemingly static element of each person, it can change.

In the late 1980s an announcer on National Public Radio in the USA declared that information had doubled over a period time to that date. Then he went on to proclaim that at the same time knowledge—understanding of that information had halved. Then he argued that wisdom had quartered. In his article, *Predicting the Unpredictable*, Bonabeau (2000) commenting on the emerging future, quotes T. S. Eliot: ““Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”” He says, “People today are awash in information, but does that make them necessarily any more knowledgeable—never mind wiser?” (p. 116). While true, this situation need not necessarily be reality. Conscious, intentional thoughtfulness can make a difference.

When King Solomon of the Bible’s book of First Kings asked for wisdom to lead the people, according to the original language he was asking for discernment and wisdom; that is, he was asking for the ability to see and hear reality and then to make decisions and take action based on that information and understanding. Qualitative researchers must constantly seek after the same high level of discernment and wisdom and must exercise this high level of perception, judgement, and wisdom before, during, and after the practice of qualitative inquiry. To be successful qualitative researchers must have eyes that see and ears that hear the real world.

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Ella Smith Simmons
General Vice President
General Conference

International Forum