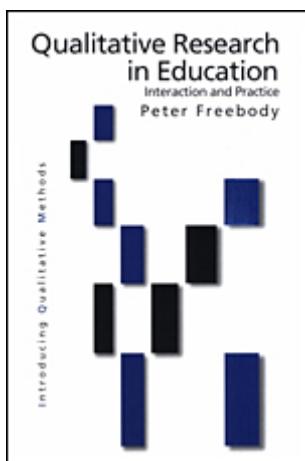


**Book review**



**Qualitative Research in Education: Interaction and Practice**

Peter R. Freebody  
London: Sage Publications (2003)

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**Review by Maria Papapolydorou**

The great development of educational research, especially after the second half of the twentieth century, brought forward the need for the improvement and refinement of research methods. Qualitative methods in research have long been considered to be 'second class' methods by many groups, including academics. Nevertheless, these perceptions are nowadays not appreciated by the academic community, at least not by the great majority. Peter Freebody, in his book **Qualitative Research in Education - Interaction and Practice**, draws on qualitative educational research and focuses, in particular, on qualitative research methods.

The book comprises nine chapters. Even though each one of them discusses a distinct topic, all parts bond in a coherent way to form an interesting and easy-to-read text. At the end of each chapter, there is a small section devoted to discussion topics, questions and exercises. This section can be a very useful guide for students in doctoral classes, as it stimulates discussion of the issues examined in the chapter, putting them at the same time in the context of each student's topic of interest. Nonetheless, it could be very helpful, even when used by doctoral students individually, as it encourages the organisation of their ideas in relation to the framework of the chapter.

Chapter One discusses the character of educational research in general. The perception of the author is that educational practice is both *social and cultural*. This is a structural point for Freebody's educational research understanding and is obvious throughout the whole book. Freebody arrays some scenes that despite deriving from different contexts all relate to educational ideas and practices. As he states 'they draw our attention to the variety of activities we consider educational, and to the life and work of this concept in significant cultural, economic, political and moral discourses' (p 8 - 9). Moreover, Freebody believes that educational practices occur in both institutional and non-institutional settings. A strong point of this chapter was the illustration of the relationship between schooling functions and philosophical positions, and their implications for educational research.

Chapter Two underpins the historical development of educational research, maintaining the proposition of it having both a social and a cultural nature. The progress of research in education should be seen in parallel to the progress of other sectors of the society. 'Educational research as we now observe it did not evolve independently from other cultural, political and economic developments' (p 17). Yet, their relationship is dynamic and consequently educational research itself has strong implications on society in a number of ways. Furthermore, Freebody quotes and discusses a summary of an educational research study to point out the inevitable limitations of research. As a beginner researcher, I found this part to be very useful in that it calls attention to the critical issue of the relationship between handling events, in the framework of a research, and drawing legitimate conclusions from them.

Chapter Three juxtaposes the characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research, underlining at the same time the different epistemologies with which they are identified. As in Chapter Two, this chapter employs a research study example to draw on the compatibility of quantitative and qualitative research. He goes on adopting and adapting a classification of Heap (1992) to distinguish research into four categories, namely *natural, social, cultural and critical science*. Personally, I was unable to identify my research with one of these categories; I found their borders somewhat fuzzy and generally I considered the labelling of science by these types unnecessary.

Chapter Four engages in the various *programmes of qualitative research*, as presented in the previous chapter. Here the author gives more details about what encompasses each category, drawing at the same time some links between qualitative research and methods. At the end of the Chapter, Freebody expresses his own stance, which is that of cultural science.

Chapter Five is concerned with three methodologies, namely *Ethnography, Case Study and Action Research*. A research example is given for each methodology, followed by an articulated discussion of their nature and qualities. Particular attention is drawn to important issues such as validity and reliability. One of the chapter characteristics is that no previous knowledge of the topic is required for the reader to understand the concepts explained. Taking that into account, this chapter could be very suitable for students who are in early stages of their PhD/EdD.

Chapter Six focuses on talk as an *educational interaction* and portrays six analytical practices for conversational analysis. Using examples of educational interaction, Freebody not only depicts with clarity some important transcription conventions but also illustrates the importance of a systematic conversational analysis. The chapter exemplifies the author's view that all events and even the researcher are part of a culture and thus they matter.

Chapters Seven and Eight move on in the same direction as Chapter Six, offering an approach toward *interviews* and *texts*, respectively. Chapter Seven portrays the complexities of conducting and analysing interviews. According to Freebody interviews should be seen as both a 'particular interactional event' and as a 'reflection of social order that the speakers construct' (p 137). Chapter Seven discusses various approaches of text analysis stemming from both linguistics and sociology traditions. Both chapters are remarkable.

Finally Chapter Nine gives an overview of the author's assessment for educational research and in particular qualitative educational research. One of the most interesting parts of the chapter is the final one, which refers to 'what counts as 'quality' qualitative research' (p 215).

On the whole, I found this book informative and engaging. The author writes well and the issues he discusses are interesting and well analysed. Despite my disagreement with Freebody's classification of research types in Chapter Four, I thought that his overall assessment of qualitative research was coherent and rigorous. I would have expected some engagement with other types of methodology, for example grounded theory. Nevertheless, I particularly enjoyed his discussion on methods and methodologies in Chapter Five. This book could be used, either whole or selectively, as a class material in doctoral courses, but it could make for good reading for individuals as well. I would definitely recommend it to students interested in qualitative research.

## References

Heap, J. L. (1992) Ethnomethodology and the Possibility of a Metaperspective on Literacy Research, in Beach, R. Green, J. L. Kamil, M. L. and Shanahan T. (eds) *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Literacy Research*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, pp.35-56