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Foreword: From Quantitative to Qualitative and Half Way Back

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As a classically trained statistician (M.Stat., 1971), I found limitations imposed by having only quantitative methodologies in my toolbox a hard pill to swallow. That realization came quickly in the early 1970s as I became more involved in evaluation. At that time, good qualitative references were scarce and most qualitative people seldom spoke with quantitative people and vice versa. In addition, most of the material on qualitative methods was from disciplines that were foreign to me at the time. However, it was obvious that different types of evaluation questions (or research questions) required different methodologies and many evaluation questions could only be addressed with qualitative methodologies. It is interesting that among my first references for qualitative methods were those of Michael Q. Patton. Indeed, my first formal training in qualitative methods was a workshop given by Michael Patton at a professional meeting in the early 1970s. Over the years, it has been refreshing to see many of the barriers come down and a new generation of researchers marrying qualitative and quantitative methods into the mixed methods approach.

While I never considered myself to be a "mixed methods" person (a term that did not exist in the 1970s), I must admit that my applications began to use a greater combination of quantitative and qualitative methods after my epiphany in the early 1970s. Fortunately, my involvement with the Evaluation Network and the Evaluation Research Society from their beginnings (1975 and 1976 respectively) allowed me the opportunity to interact regularly with many of the qualitative pioneers (e.g., Michael Patton, Egon Guba, & Yvonna Lincoln). These two groups merged to become the American Evaluation Association in 1988. By the end of the 1980s, the concept of mixed methodology was taking shape. In 1997, even the National Science Foundation was on board having published a book on mixed methods titled *User-Friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations* (Frechtling & Sharp, 1997). Beginning in January 2007, a new journal titled the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* is scheduled for publication (Sage Publishing). This is to say that the *Research in the Schools (RITS)* special issue on mixed methods is very timely, indeed. This issue should be even more successful than the two previous special issues of *RITS* (Statistical Significance Testing, Fall 1998 and Creativity, Fall 2002), both of which were referenced often (Please note that while I was not the guest editor for either of these special issues, I was a Co-Editor of *Research in the Schools* at the time they were published and was the author of two of the articles.). That being said, let me turn my attention to some specifics of this issue.

A special issue of a journal on a topic should cover the topic in depth as well as provide a diversity of viewpoints. First, I will address the issue of coverage. The special issue provides a philosophical rationale for the existence of mixed methods research beyond that of qualitative methods (Creswell, Shope, Plano Clark, & Green). It also provides a discussion of a number of issues surrounding the logic of mixed methods as a mode of inquiry (Teddlie & Tashakkori; Sandelowski, Voils, & Barroso; Yin; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson). The special issue provides some guidelines for the practice of mixed methodology including a description of computer software that might address mixed methods needs (Bazeley) and a theoretical rationale for combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a study (Chen). In addition, the policy implications (Caracelli) and the future of mixed methods are addressed (Greene). While all of the authors demonstrate support for the idea of mixed methods, they differ markedly in their theoretical conceptualizations, approaches, and applications. Thus, I would conclude that the special issue addresses breadth, depth, and a diversity of viewpoints.

The timing of this special issue is excellent. As noted in my earlier comments, the movement towards mixed methods has been gaining steam since the early 1970s. Like movements of the past (e.g., action research), its future is not insured. In fact, a number of recent events threaten that future. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 specified "scientific research" a number of times in the law. This has been interpreted to mean that the use of quantitative methods with random assignment is necessary (the so-called "gold standard"). This interpretation has been further supported by its incorporation into guidelines developed by the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES). Thus, it is very important to keep the dialog going.

A strong argument in favor of using a mixed method approach is that it could go beyond the guidelines established by the IES. Such an approach does not negate the use of "random trials" as specified

by the IES, but may not only address the efficacy of a procedure (Did it work?) using a random trials quantitative approach, the qualitative component could be used to determine why it did or did not work. Both types of information are very important depending on the outcomes of the statistical approach. Answering the "why" or "why not" question can save money by providing the information to improve an effective treatment or by identifying the problems to fix a treatment that is not effective. This argument does not even consider the contributions that the qualitative component of a mixed methods approach can bring to theory development. This special issue provides a wonderful framework for promoting a continued dialog about mixed methods and for helping researchers take the best advantage of what both qualitative and quantitative methods have to offer. It also helps us move mixed methodology one step closer to becoming a "discipline" in itself.

References

Frechtling, J., & Sharp, L. (1997). *User-friendly handbook form mixed method evaluations.* Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation.