


Mantras and Myths: The Disenchantment of Mixed-Methods Research and Revisiting Triangulation as a Perspective

Qualitative Inquiry
1-12
© The Author(s) 2016
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1077800416655827
qix.sagepub.com


Uwe Flick¹

Abstract

Critiques about the development in mixed-methods research (MMR) by some of its protagonists mention the following: ignorance of earlier developments, too much focus on designs rather than issues, more a metaphor than a mode of research, the belief in paradigms, and too much focus on methods instead of theoretical and methodological issues. Myths and mantras in the MMR literature are discussed here. For overcoming the limitations of MMR becoming evident in these critiques, myths, and mantras, triangulation is discussed. A revitalization of this concept in recent formulations (triangulation 3.0; systematic triangulation of perspectives) outlines triangulation as a framework of a critical and reflexive MMR.

Keywords

critiques of mixed-methods research, limits of paradigms, selection of mixed methods, triangulation 3.0, systematic triangulation of perspectives

Introduction

Mixed-methods research (MMR) has been a booming field of methodological and theoretical discussion over the years. The boom has manifested in the establishing several journals (such as the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*), three Handbooks so far, a growing number of publications in special issues, edited books, textbooks, and single papers also in journals concentrating on qualitative research (*Qualitative Inquiry*; *Qualitative Research*, etc.). In particular, this boom has led to expectations and requirements on the side of funding agencies that research in many fields should include a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and a readiness to preferring such projects and proposals. Members of review committees in the context of calls for proposals in medical and health sciences, but also in education and social sciences, are increasingly confronted with proposals, including qualitative legs of projects coming from researchers with a quantitative background and lacks of knowledge about qualitative research traditions and practices. There may be researchers and research administrators who are happy about these developments. But there are researchers—and among them more and more MMR protagonists—who take such developments as a starting point for critically reflecting this boom and the developments it has inaugurated in a broader way. Perhaps these critical reflections and in particular who they are coming from can be seen as a slowly but continuously intensifying disenchantment of MMR. This disenchantment

may be the result of a number of mantras as statements repeated over and over again and creating certain myths about MMR and about competing approaches. In particular, issues of such reflections focus on questions such as the following: What developments were there in similar directions before the boom of MMR and what could be the contribution of the discussion about triangulation to the broader field of using multiple approaches in research? How far does the current discussion about MMR take a rather narrow perspective on this field? What is (still) lacking in this discussion? What are the limitations that have developed in it concerning conceptualization, methodology, planning, and doing mixed methods? and How could an integrative perspective on MMR advance the discussion including that on MMR? Integration here is not so much focusing on the integration of qualitative and quantitative research or methods (Morgan, 2014) but the integration of mixed methods and triangulation into a more comprehensive and more adequate concept of using multiple approaches in social research. Such questions will be discussed in this article. It takes a critical qualitative inquiry stance for interrogating the taken-for-granted assumptions

¹Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Corresponding Author:

Uwe Flick, Freie Universität Berlin, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, Berlin 14195, Germany.
Email: Uwe.Flick@FU-Berlin.de