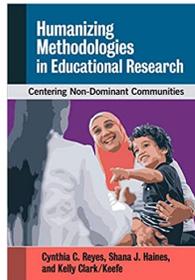


## Humanizing Methodologies in Educational Research: Centering Non-Dominant Communities

Reviewed by JERRY ROSIEK & SAGE HATCH



### Humanizing Methodologies in Educational Research: Centering Non-Dominant Communities

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We live in an era in which the need for reflexivity in research design and practice is, or at least should be, taken for granted. The questions we think are worth answering, the vocabulary we use to turn interest into formal inquiries, and our conceptions of knowledge that inform the purpose of those inquiries are all widely and frequently contested. The lack of a unified epistemic or methodological discourse that could provide final guiding principles for all research makes clear that some parts of social science research processes are ideologically and culturally contingent.

Nonetheless, there is no lack of articles and books about research methodology still being published that spend most of their time highlighting the culturally contingent nature of knowledge in general and do not go much further—as if the simple awareness that our research practices are shaped social dynamics will inevitably lead to a constructive humility and practically efficacious contributions to justice and participant wellbeing. That is why it is so refreshing to see a book that takes up this basic premise and then sets to work exploring in detail the practical and often complicated implications of reflexivity for qualitative research that addresses issues of inequality and justice. *Humanizing Methodologies in Educational Research*, by Cynthia C. Reyes, Shana J. Haines, and Kelly Clark/Keefe (2021), does exactly this, delving into the ethical and political implications of our social location as researchers for things like the formation of research questions and Internal Research Board review processes, as well as the power dynamics between principal investigators, student research assistants, and the communities in which research is done.

The book's introduction reviews multiple ways in which researchers need to consider the impact of their social location and related power dynamics when conducting educational research. This opening section will be of great value to introductory research methods courses. It introduces the book's primary case study, a research collaborative entitled "Centering Connections" that examined the educational experiences of Filipino refugee families and communities. It outlines a place-based approach to this inquiry project influenced by the Indigenous Filipino ethical framework *kapwa* (Enriquez, 1992; Stroebel, 2015, 2016), liberation psychological scholarship grounded in Filipino culture and history (Enriquez, 1992; Stroebel, 2015), as well as the inclusion of local community members on the research team. It models a way of thinking about research that takes the context of colonialism, racism, and material inequality as a central technical design consideration.

Chapter 1, titled "Listening with Heads and Hearts," reflects on the importance of understanding the inherent tensions of being a researcher working with refugee populations, specifically the challenges entailed with developing an awareness of one's own location in intersectional

colonialist/gendered/economic power dynamics. It illustrates what such awareness means in practice. The authors explain that “data from our study helped us dismantle ‘stock’ narratives that universalize the stories of refugees in both popular and academic literature. Instead, we listened to the possibilities of counter-narratives that emerged from the data centering on the cultural assets and resources of the families” (p. 28). This chapter establishes persuasively that researcher/researched relationships are not always benign, acknowledges dynamics at play, and outlines steps that can be taken to minimize the effect of those dynamics through critical reflexivity, humility, and reciprocity—including dealing with the occasional incommensurability that arises when pursuing the ideal of reciprocity.

In Chapter 2, entitled “Interrogating the Term Vulnerable Participant,” the book looks at the institutional implications of this reciprocal approach to research. It is notable that the book does not begin with data sources, units of analysis, theoretical frameworks, or modes of inference as one might expect of a standard methodological text. Instead, it takes up the discursive process of the Institutional Review Board’s (IRB’s) assessment of research on human subjects. It does not simply provide advice about how to “pass” an IRB review; the authors also critically examine the limitations of the vocabulary used by most IRBs. Specifically, the authors interrogate the concept of “vulnerable participant” around which most IRB reviews are organized, arguing that the concept risks reproducing a cultural deficit model of fairness and justice. The authors call for greater reflexivity from both IRBs and researchers in tracking the colonialist power dynamics that threaten to subvert any educational research that focuses on circumstances shaped by a history of colonialism. Although the authors do not stress this point, we would underscore that this would apply to *all* educational research.

Chapters 3 and 4 are an honest account of the tensions involved in undertaking a “humanizing research” project. These chapters accomplish this task by accounting for this Centering Connections project’s reliance on student researchers. The authors provide a very honest and thorough accounting of the project’s reliance on student researchers as cultural insiders. Attention is given to how student researcher cultural insiders made the project possible. Advice is given on how to enhance communication and transparency with participants and student researchers. Most of the critical attention is given to the PI’s ethical responsibilities and possible missteps.

After using the term throughout the book, Chapter 5 delves into the significance of the concept of “reciprocity” and attempts to break away from a traditionalist view of reciprocity as a simple transaction between the researchers and the community participants. Through a series of vignettes and references to prior chapters, the authors acknowledge the questions that arise when conducting educational research, especially in the context of a history of colonialism. The book consistently recommends centering relationships. It wrestles with the ideal of avoiding influencing the participants, questioning whether the role of the researcher should be to avoid influencing or to advocate and amplify participants’ efficacy in their social worlds. Chapter 5 calls the reader’s attention to the need for an ethic of reciprocity. In practice, they acknowledge that some aspects of the relationship with participants may be transactional, but the goal of reciprocity is to center relationships in a way that allows for humility and mutual respect, rather than a simple exchange of favors or actions.

Chapter 6 steps back from the “Centering Connections” project that was used to develop and illustrate the humanizing methodological framework the authors endorse, and endeavors to expand these considerations when conducting research with “vulnerable” communities. It explores the application of the principles of a “humanizing approach to educational research” to inquiry in students with significant disabilities and with undocumented immigrant students.

The closing chapter of this book synthesizes and reflects upon the purpose of these chapters, attempting to capture the essence of each and its utility. Upon completion of a summation of these chapters, it offers a critical view of traditional, linear IRB practices, and offers concrete ways to instill a practice that values a more dynamic, hybrid critical reflexivity which emphasizes humility and reciprocity (p. 129). The authors encourage readers to slow down and be fully present in interviews, and stress the importance of follow-up interviews. The authors also emphasize the importance of mentorship of student researchers, who need to be coached on how to avoid operating with a deficit-based understanding of the communities they are working alongside. The chapter closes with a reflection on the iterative process of qualitative research

and the need to intentionally slow down and fully realize relationships with participants despite the ubiquitous temptation to hurry the process and finish the research study.

Overall, *Humanizing Methodologies in Educational Research* makes a distinctive and very valuable contribution to the educational research methodology literature. Most qualitative methodology texts focus primarily on the structural relation between theoretical frameworks, units of analysis, types of data and manner of data collection, and modes of representation. More critical methodological texts dwell at length on the limitations of those traditional elements of research design but rarely explore the lived experience of navigating the ethical and political indeterminacies of conducting educational research and the personal vulnerabilities that entails.

Departing from this pattern, *Humanizing Methodologies* provides an in-depth account of the ethical, political, affective, and personal landscape of conducting educational research. The authors provide both a framework for and illustrations of conducting research responsibly in the context of power dynamics that cannot be avoided and should not be ignored. We particularly appreciated the iterative approach the authors took throughout the book to describing the work of ethical research. Their stories of research practice make it clear that research ethics are not adequately addressed through a single discrete practice (such as consent forms) or clever critical conceptualization. Instead, they present research ethics as an open-ended process of showing up repeatedly for conversations about mutual benefit and risk with project participants, reciprocally negotiating the relationships, and being willing to return to questions of what ethics means in the particular context as conditions change and new things are learned. They make clear that such conversations are not just additions to the research process, but will and should have an impact on a research project's design.

Two other praiseworthy features of this book deserve specific mention. This book has one of the most careful and critical accounts of navigating the IRB process we have seen. The author's interrogation of the concept of a "vulnerable population" will be valuable to both beginning and experienced educational researchers. Finally, the authors' engagement with Indigenous Filipino philosophies is not just informative in its own right but also models their commitment to place- and community-based research practice.

If we were pressed to identify a limitation in the book's analysis of research processes, it would be that the reflexivity seemed to be applied almost exclusively to the primary researchers and their relationships with research assistants and participants. It was not, however, applied as rigorously to the relationship between the student research assistants and community participants. The reliance on persons who stood in a liminal insider/outside position in the research process warranted more critical examination. This, however, is a relatively small consideration given the book's many virtues.

*Humanizing Methodologies in Educational Research* will be a useful resource for educational researchers at all stages of their career. It is especially well suited for introductory and advanced courses in research methods, especially those that seek to scaffold deep thinking about the ethics and politics of educational research.

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