

Mixed methods: the third methodological movement

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Mixed methods research is an emerging methodological movement with a growing body of trans-disciplinary literature. Prominent research methodologists/authorities from across discipline fields are emerging and guiding the commentary and the movements' momentum. Creswell and Plano Clark have concluded that 'today, we see cross-cultural international interest, interdisciplinary interest, publication possibilities, and public and private funding opportunities for mixed methods research' (2007: 18).

Definitions

Mixed method research is a growing area of methodological choice for many academics and researchers from across a variety of discipline areas. Several definitions of mixed methods exist. For example the *Journal of Mixed Methods* (2006), in its call for papers defines mixed methods as 'research in which the investigator collects, analyses, mixes, and draws inferences from both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a program of inquiry'. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) prefer to define mixed methods research as that in which the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study.

Purpose of mixed methods: why use it?

The overall purpose and central premise of mixed methods studies is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007). Mixed methods research designs are said to add value through providing a more comprehensive and richer understanding of the research problem being investigated. This is because the approach explores the problem through the different lenses and perspectives of qualitative and quantitative research techniques.

Authorities and publications

Mixed methods grew in popularity in specific discipline fields (education, health, nursing and social sciences) and emerged out of the UK and continental Europe before catching the eye of academics and researchers in the USA. Interest in mixed methods in Australian based research to date has come from the social sciences, nursing and health and business and management studies. Several authorities have been emerging as mixed methodologist researchers and theorists. The most comprehensive publication of mixed methods to date has been the edited *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research* (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003). Another very practical guide to conducting mixed methods is a book by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Academic journals dedicated to mixed methods research are:

- *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*
- *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*

- *The International Journal of Mixed Methods in Applied Business and Policy Research*

Research design and typologies

Over the last several years there have emerged over 40 mixed methods research designs. This can be very confusing for doctoral candidates, early career researchers and even established researchers. In response to this Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2006) have come up with a three dimensional, integrated typology of mixed methods research designs. The authors saw the need to limit the level of confusion related to the plethora of mixed methods research designs available and to assist researchers in simplifying their choices when first deciding to engage in mixed methods research

Practical issues

In practical terms those wishing to utilise mixed methods research designs need to be proficient in both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In addition to this they need to be very familiar with a small but growing body of literature on mixed methods. No matter what research method employed the researcher needs to rigorously defend their methodological choices. Recent editorial comments from the latest issue of the *Journal of Mixed Methods* (2009, Vol. 3, No. 9) and my own research into the use of mixed methods in business studies, points to a ground swell movement for mixed methods coming from postgraduate research students themselves.

Creswell JW & Plano Clark VL (2007) *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Johnson RB & Onwuegbuzie AJ (2004) 'Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come', *Educational Researchers*, 33(7): 14-26.

Leech, NL & Onwuegbuzie AJ (2006) 'A typology of mixed methods research designs', *Quality and Quantity*, 42(2): 265-275.

Tashakkori, A & Teddlie C (eds.) (2003) *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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