EPE 663: Field Studies in Educational Institutions  
Fall 1999  
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Course Description  
This course introduces the use of qualitative research methods in educational research. We will review the types of questions which are addressed by qualitative research methods and the various approaches within qualitative research. We will then consider step by step design, conduct and initial analysis of a qualitative research project. Major topics will include defining the research questions, entree to a research setting, participant observation, interviews, data record-keeping, subjectivity and reflexivity, ethics, data analysis and interpretation, and writing of a qualitative research paper. We will examine these topics through readings and class discussion done in conjunction with your individual field research project.

Course Requirements  
The course assignments are described in detail in the following pages. These include readings, class discussion, a field research project, and field exercises. The readings are of three types: "how-to" discussions of qualitative research; issues and dilemmas -- both theoretical and practical -- entailed in this type of research; and examples of qualitative research projects. You should complete the assigned readings prior to the class for which they are assigned. Hands-on experience is the best way to learn how to do research. The field project and related exercises are intended as an experiential initiation into qualitative research. For some of you, this will be an opportunity to explore a thesis or dissertation topic. Because we learn from and with one another, each of us should be willing to share the ups and downs, uncertainties, foibles, conundrums and successes of our field experiences.

Required Texts  
Jennifer Mason, Qualitative Researching. Sage, 1996.

Recommended References  

For those of you who will use extensive interviews, I also recommend:

*Required and *recommended texts have been ordered at UK and Kennedy Bookstores. Required and recommended readings are on reserve in the Education Library, 205 Dickey Hall. In many cases, I have asked the library to place on reserve not only the specific article or excerpt but also the book from which the reading is taken. Sample project papers from previous years are also on reserve in the Ed Library.

Schedule of Classes, Readings and Assignments
8/25 Introduction to Qualitative Inquiry
Recommended: Hammersley and Atkinson, Ch.1 "What is ethnography?"

9/1 Forms and Dimensions of Qualitative Inquiry
Corrine Glesne (CG), chapter 1.
Jennifer Mason (JM), chapter 1.
Recommended: Marshall and Rossman (M&R), 1-37. Bogdan and Biklen (B&B), ch.1.
Exercise #1 due.

9/8 Research Design and Gaining Entree
CG, chapter 2.
JM, chapter 2.
Carol Stack, "Writing Ethnography" in Wolf, Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork (1996), 96-106.
Recommended:
M&R, 38-59. Bogdan and Biklen, Chapters 2 and 4. Hammersley and Atkinson, Ch.2 "Research design" and Ch.3 "Access."
Exercise #2 due.

9/15 Generating Data: Observation and Field notes
CG, chapter 3.
JM, chapter 4.
Michael Patton, "Fieldwork Strategies..." Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, 199-237.
Roberta Schnorr (1990), "'Peter? He comes and goes...': First graders' perspectives on a part-time mainstream student" Journal of the Association for Severe Handicaps, 15:4, 231-240.
Highly recommended:
James Clifford, "Notes on (field)notes" in Sanjek (1990), 47-70.
Recommended:
B&B, Ch. 3 and 4, 135-144. Hammersley and Atkinson, Ch.7 "Recording & organizing data" Bruce Jackson, Fieldwork (1987), Part 3 on Mechanical Matters (tapes, film, etc.).

9/22 Generating Data: Unstructured Interviews
CG, chapter 4.
JM, chapter 3.
Choose two:
Janet Finch, "'It's great to have someone to talk to...'" in Hammersley (1993), 166-180.
Lynda Measor, "Interviewing: A strategy in qualitative research" in Burgess (1985), 55-77.
Martyn Denscombe, "Interviews, accounts and ethnographic research on teachers" in Hammersley (1983), 105-128.
Recommended:
Exercise #3 due.

9/29 Generating Data: Structured Interviews and Focus Groups
JM, chapter 5.
Spradley, 1979, Chapter 2 "Interviewing an informant."
Spradley, 1979, Chapter 4 "Asking descriptive questions."
Recommended:

10/6 Rapport and Subjectivity
CG, chapter 5.
M&R, 59-77
Yvonna S. Lincoln, "I and Thou: Method, Voice, and Roles in Research with the Silenced" in McLaughlin and Tierney (1993), 29-47.
Mary Haywood Metz, "What can be learned from educational ethnography?" Urban Education 17:4 (Jan 1983) 391-418.
Exercise #4 due.

10/6 10/13 Ethical Codes, IRB
CG, chapter 6.

Recommended:
Michal McCall, "Who and where are the artists?" in Shaffir et al (1980), 145-158.

10/20 Organizing Data
JM, chapter 6

Recommended:
Coffey and Atkinson, "Complementary Strategies of computer-aided design" Making Sense of Qualitative Data (1996), 165-188.

Exercise #5 due.

10/27 Data Analysis: Emerging Patterns
Project status reports
CG, chapter 7.

Recommended:
M&R, chapter 5; B&B, chapter 5. Hammersley and Atkinson Ch.8 "The process of analysis."

11/3 Theoretical Analysis, Trustworthiness and Credibility
JM, chapter 7.
Michael Patton, "Enhancing the Quality and Credibility..." Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, 460-494."


Recommended:

11/10 Writing and Interpretation,
CG, chapter 8.
JM, chapter 8.
Howard S. Becker (1986), Ch.2. "Persona and Authority."

Recommended:

Exercise #6 due.

11/17 Writing and Interpretation, II
CG, chapters 9 and 10.

11/24 No Class: Thanksgiving

12/1 Project presentations.
Exercises and assignments:
I. Field research project

As the major experiential requirement of this course you will conduct a qualitative research project. Responsible qualitative research typically requires months of field research. Given the time constraints of a semester, this project is actually just a taste of qualitative research, a chance to begin to try its various methods and techniques, modes of conceptualization and analysis. The topic for the project should be developed in consultation with me. For those of you who are beginning to think about a thesis or dissertation, I encourage you to consider this an opportunity to undertake exploratory research towards your thesis topic. Those of you who embark on an extended project or anticipate using qualitative methods for further research, may continue work begun this semester in next term’s course EPE 763 Advanced Field Research.

As part of the project you will complete a set of 6 exercises and, at the end of the semester, you will make two presentations from the project: orally to the class and in writing. The exercises (described below) are designed to guide and pace you through the field research project. This to avoid the fate of many a term paper; a paper to be written from an qualitative research can not be completed from start to finish in the week before it is due (I'll leave to you whether any paper can be so written)!

The final paper is a substantive presentation of your field research project. Since the purpose of this course is to learn about qualitative field methods, the paper will consist of two parts. It must include descriptive and analytic findings from the project and a reflection on the research as you experience it. It may be appropriate in your analysis to discuss how the research can be continued. This is especially true for those of you planning to continue in the spring semester qualitative research course. Or it may be most appropriate to discuss why the project did not accomplish what you had intended. The experiential reflection should include discussion of issues faced in the field, decisions made, dilemmas yet to be resolved. You should draw from your field experiences, class discussions and assigned readings. More will be said on this later in the semester.

II. Field exercises
Due dates are given in the above class schedule (noted at the end of day's assigned readings). The written assignments must be handed in on time as we will use them as a basis for class discussion. The exercises include sample field observations, interview transcripts, miniproposal and components of data analysis. As indicated in the individual assignments, not all have to be written in polished prose; however, they do have to be accurate, complete and - where noted - reflective. The intention is for you to practice gathering, recording, organizing and presenting field data.

#1: Visual+ observation: Write up a description of the setting you observed on 8/25 using your observational notes. Remember to focus on what you saw. You may include other sensory information but exclude conversational stimulus. You should also include a reflective statement based the discussion you had with your "co-observers": how did your observations differ and overlap? Why might you have noted different dimensions of the setting than your classmates? Turn in your handwritten field notes, the narrative description you construct from these (paragraph form) and your reflective statement.
#2: Speech observation: Listen to a conversation. Listen to a conversation without participating. In your written account, summarize the conversation and reproduce a portion of it verbatim (1-2 pages). How do you keep records of turn-taking, timing, interruptions, non-verbal cues? What's challenging about this exercise?

#3: Write a miniproposal for your term project: This includes choosing a research setting/people and outlining the research question and design. As part of this, you will need to conduct a reconnaissance study of the setting/people for your term project. What are the characteristics of your research setting/people? Initial impressions of the place, people, research points of interest and questions. Impressions of entree and personal involvement issues. I will hand out a more detailed outline for the miniproposal in class.

#4: Participant observation: learning to keep field notes. Hand in field notes with annotations from one session of observation. Your annotations should include points of observational, theoretical and methodological interest -- impressions of what needs follow-up, how this observation relates to past ones (if any) or to other research, successful techniques and problems that arose doing the observation. For any of you undertaking an oral history project, talk with me about redefining this assignment.

#5: Interview. Conduct an interview with one of your informants. Hand in the text of this interview -- either a transcription of a recorded interview or else a reconstruction from notes (indicate which you have done and why) -- and your analysis of the interview. Your analysis should include discussion of the types of interview techniques you used, flow of the conversation, and points of information that you now find of particular interest or in need of further inquiry.

#6: Initial analysis. Compile a list of your emerging research focal questions, hypotheses/arguments, and coding categories. With these, hand in a set of field notes or an interview transcript that has been annotated and coded. (You may use the same field notes or interview transcript as for exercise #4 or 5.)

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One possible key for transcriptions: background information
(inaud)part of sentence inaudible
description relating to collective activity___
....long pause
....pause
..short pause
..phrase not completed
..phrase completed, then pause
(..)phrase edited out
(...)sentence edited out
(....)passage edited out
--speaker interrupting or at same time as another speaker
---transcription from a different discussion follows
---name of speaker not identified
from Paul Willis, p420 in Bredo and Feinberg
Guidelines for the final written report

This guideline is intended to give you one idea of reasonable structure and contents for your final report. It is also a framework that you can use to organize your materials as your data analysis proceeds. Remember that this is simply a suggestion; it describes what might be included, not what must be included -- it is neither inclusive nor exclusive. Your individual presentations will depend on the nature of your project, its evolution, and your findings.

I. Introduction: The research problem, research questions, and the significance of the topic, including a brief summary of where your research questions originated and how they changed. (For this paper you are not required to situate your project with a literature review, though you may; this would certainly be a required part of a formal proposal or research article. You are certainly encouraged throughout to draw upon your own and course readings, and discussion.)

II. Overview of the Site, Settings, and People: The place of the site/topic in the larger institutions and community; the range of settings in which you gathered data; the people who participated in your study; a summary of your data collection activities and your role relationships; background on the nature and functions of the setting/s in which you concentrated your work. In general, use this section to set the stage for presenting your central discussion and observations.

III. Description and Interpretation of Major Findings: Presentation of your major assertions and larger connecting themes, accompanied by particular evidence (vignettes, quotes, transcripts, documents, diagrams/photos) and more summary descriptions of patterns and their typicality. Provide sufficient interpretive commentary to link themes, assertions and the various types and levels of evidence for them.

IV. Summary and Methodological Reflection: Summary of major findings, and conclusions you can and cannot draw from them -- what are alternative interpretations of the findings, unanswered questions, future directions. What are the implications of your analysis? What is important to share with the participants in your study? Methodological reflection of issues faced in the field, decisions made, dilemmas yet to be resolved. What did you learn about yourself as a researcher and about doing research of this sort? (approximately 30-45 pages total)
Developing assertions in analyzing fieldwork data

An assertion is a statement about any regularity you see in your data. An assertion may simply describe a rule for a routine, a right and/or duty in a role relationship, or a relation of inclusion between something and a category. Assertions may also express the points of view of participants in the community under study. Examples follow.

An assertion about a routine: "When entering and leaving the classroom as a group, the children form a single line."
One could get even more specific and make an assertion delineating the sequence of line formation (e.g., the teacher asks the children to line up, some children immediately move into a line while others straggle or jockey for position, the teacher makes a second call for order, etc.).

An assertion about rights and duties: "When one student is speaking it is inappropriate for other students to interrupt." That is, the student who is speaking has the right not to be interrupted, and the other students have the duty not to interrupt.

An assertion about category inclusion: "Any sound or movement outside a student/teacher dyadic exchange which is noticed by the teacher is called noise." (e.g., the level of sound students are allowed to produce before they make "noise" depends on who they are and who they are interacting with).

An assertion about point of view: "This teacher believes that students learn from the teacher, not from each other."

All of these hypothetical assertions can be connected at some higher level. A common thread runs through them about maximizing teacher/student dyadic relations while minimizing students' interactions with one another. The culture of this classroom would be very different, for example, from that of a Montessori classroom. We tend to want to make profound generalizations. These, if they come at all, will do so when you connect your assertions together at higher levels of abstraction. Initially, assertions should be such that you can provide direct evidence for them using specific events, instances, and quotations. None of these low level assertions should be phrased in causal fashion (e.g. the teacher does such and such because); they should not refer to psychological or motivational states or be evaluative. This type of interpretation of patterns and assertions comes later. In any setting, large numbers of assertions can be made. From the beginning, you should try to make assertions around some particular topic or theme. Keep your research questions in mind. At the same time assertions can help you modify your questions. (These guidelines are adapted from Elliot Singer and Doug Campbell of Michigan State University.)
GROUP OBSERVATIONAL EXERCISE

For the remaining time of tonight's class, I ask that you divide yourself into groups of 3-4 people. Each group is to find a place nearby where people congregate fast food joint, coffee shop, library, mall... Spend at least 20 minutes individually observing at this site and taking detailed notes of what you see. You may also note information received through your other senses. However, do not focus on conversations (we'll save eavesdropping for another time). After your agreed upon observation time, meet with your "co-observers" and compare your notes. What was easy to observe and note, what challenging? In what ways do your observations coincide? Where do they differ? Why might they be different, one person's observations from another's? What do you learn from making these comparisons?

You are each to write up your notes and a reflective comment for next week's class. See assignment #1 for details.