EPE 763: Advanced Field Studies in Education
Spring 1999

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Course Description and Requirements
This course continues an exploration of qualitative research in the study of education. As such, I assume that you already have some experience with qualitative research. We will focus on ways of knowing, thinking and writing about field research -- how do we analyze and conceptualize from field data, theorize, and represent these stories and ideas in writing to others. At the heart of this will be your individual field projects.

The specific assignments will be described in the full syllabus to be handed out the first day of class. The work will include readings (including of classmates' writings) and exercises that build on your field research projects. The written assignments should help you structure and pace any remaining fieldwork and also help you learn to write from qualitative data. You will probably incorporate segments of this writing into your final paper. Because of the way assignments, individual projects and in-class work are linked, the class depends on you completing assigned reading and writing on time. Much of class time will revolve around analysis of our ongoing, individual projects; we will often share written assignments from the projects. We will also invite other qualitative researchers to class to discuss their work with us.

Required Texts:

Recommended Texts:

Required and recommended books were ordered through the UK Bookstore and Kennedy Bookstore, and have been put on reserve in the College of Education library. Articles are also on library reserve. You will do additional reading pertinent to the topic of your own research project. You are responsible to plan ahead, identify and procure these readings; I will assist you as long as you give me adequate lead time. I expect you to read all the readings assigned for each class session before the class meets. I have tried to organize the readings so that we do more early in the semester and less later on as your writing assignments become more intense.
Schedule of Classes, Readings and Assignments

1/13   Review of qualitative research and your projects


   Work on your article-length, ethnographic piece related to your topic.
   Find a book-length or 2-3 article length qualitative studies for February.

1/20  What's in a title?

   Coffey & Atkinson, Ch.1.
   Golden-Biddle & Locke, Intro and Ch. 1.
   Peshkin, "From Title to Title: The evolution of perspective in naturalistic inquiry" Anthropology and Education Quarterly 16 (1985) 214-224.
   Article of your choosing (See assignment #1, Part 2).

   Recommended:

   Assignment #1:  Part 1: Bring your working project title to class and be prepared to explain its evolution/import. This of course implies that you know what your semester's project is.

   Part 2: Read an article length ethnographic article to be chosen by you that is topically pertinent to your research topic. Come to class prepared to discuss the structure of the article, its key concepts, what argument/s is/are presented and how, what the assertions are and how are they supported. Bring enough copies of one example of an assertion from the article to share with everyone in class.

   Plan ahead for the 2/10 assignment to read a booklength qualitative study pertinent to your area of research.

1/27  Re/Organizing Data

   Coffey & Atkinson, Ch.2.
   Boyatzis, Ch.1.
   Kvale, Ch.11 "Methods of Analysis" InterViews (Sage: 1996).
   Riessman, pp.v-24.

   Recommended:
   Richards and Richards, "Using Hierarchical Categories in Qualitative Data Analysis" in Kelle, 1995. (NUD*IST)
Assignment #2: For those of you continuing projects from EPE 663, bring to class a catalogue/inventory/list of everything you have collected to date, your research questions for this semester's project, and a research plan for that which remains to be collected. For those of you beginning new projects, bring to class a list of your guiding research questions and a proposal of the project. See pages 7-8 of this syllabus for more guidelines.

2/3 Arriving at Assertions/Thick Description

Coffey & Atkinson, Ch.3.
Boyatzis, Ch.2-3.
Kvale, Ch.12 "The Plurality of Interpretations," InterViews (Sage: 1996).
Geertz, "Thick description: Towards an interpretive theory of culture," The Interpretation of Culture (Basic, 1973), pp.3-30.

Assignment #3: From a set of fieldnotes or an interview, present in writing two assertions from a participant's point of view. Incorporate into each of these data from the interview, observation or conversation.

2/10 Ethnographic Work Related to Yours

Read a book length ethnography or 2-3 ethnographic articles that report on research related to yours. If you have asked in advance, I will have tried to help you identify pertinent reading.

Assignment #4: Come to class prepared to discuss what you learned from this reading: What story/stories were told? What major questions are asked? What was the research design? Any outstanding methods used? What assertions were made and how were they supported? What was the voice and structure of the narrative? What was the conceptual/theoretical framework and how was this woven into the narrative? Were any discrepant cases presented and, if so, how were they used?

2/17 Telling tales and narrative analysis

Coffey & Atkinson, Ch. 4.
Riessman, pp.25-70.

Recommended:
Van Maanen, pp.45-100

Assignment #5: Write a narrative vignette (2-4 pages) and interpretive comments.

2/24 What are other ways to tell the story?

Coffey & Atkinson, Ch. 5.
Boyatzis, Ch. 4 or 5.


Recommended:
Van Maanen, pp.101-144.
Wolcott, pp.9-36.

Be prepared to discuss what conceptual or theoretical framework is pertinent to your research.

3/3 Theorizing and the practice of qualitative research

Coffey & Atkinson, Ch. 6.
Boyatzis, Ch. 6-7.
Golden-Biddle and Locke, Ch. 2.

Recommended:

Assignment #6: Write up one new assertion since the last assignment, with multiple sources of evidence (narrative vignettes, quote/paraphrase, photograph...). The assertion should be supported by research/theoretical literature. Also, what themes are you working on?

NOTE: By the end of this week you should be done collecting any new data and should be able to concentrate solely on its analysis. If you are not yet done in the field, GET DONE SOON!

3/10 Discrepant cases

Coffey & Atkinson, Ch. 7.
Everhart excerpts as examples of discrepant cases.

Assignment #7: Write up a discrepant case for an assertion made earlier. Incorporate a vignette or narrative excerpt that shows the discrepancy and interpretive comments that reflect on its implications for your conceptual analysis.

3/17 UK Spring Break: No class.

3/24 Writing Stories

Golden-Biddle and Locke, Ch. 3.

Recommended:
Wolcott, pp.36-end (especially 36-70).

Assignment #8: Bring to class an updated inventory. You should review and further catalogue your data after you leave the field. Doing this helps you get a feel for what you do and do not have, and gets you organized so that finding particular data will be easier. How do the inventory categories compare with your coding categories? What themes do you have at this point?

3/31 No class.

4/7 Writing Continued

Golden-Biddle and Locke, Ch. 5.

4/14 Author's Persona
Golden-Biddle and Locke, Ch. 4.

Assignment #9: Bring a complete list of assertions (often 5-15) showing the key evidence you have for each, how they are related to one another and to overarching themes, and how you plan
to sequence them into the line of argument for your final paper. Arrange the assertions to show how they fit together; this might look like a taxonomy, a tree diagram, an outline.

4/21 As needed since we'll undoubtedly fall behind or change plans.

4/28 and 5/5 Presentations.

Final paper is due 4/28.

Grading Criteria and Practices

This is primarily a methods course in which you are expected to expand your understanding of qualitative research and improve your practice of both inquiry and writing. The course is developmental in nature; the assignments reflect this. They are intended to provide practice with various aspects of analyzing and writing qualitative research and to give you feedback as you go along.

Therefore, I will comment on the assignments and assessed with a check/check +/check- system. A simple check signifies that you have incorporated the course material at an acceptable level of understanding and attentiveness; a "check +" signifies work above that level and a "check -" at a less than acceptable level. Concerted effort, progress, improvement and timeliness are key to the assignments. You will not be penalized if these are evidenced during the course of the semester.

The major written requirement for the course is the written report of your project. The form of the paper will vary depending on what goals you have set for the semester: an article, a preliminary proposal, a self-contained project, or some other variation on these themes. In whatever form the paper takes, you must include a reflective component on yourself as researcher. The paper will be graded using traditional letter grades and will be most heavily weighted in your final course grade.

Class participation is the final component of your grade. Again, we are all learners in this class. What is important is that we support one another's learning by being attentive, providing constructive feedback, being willing to share our work, and being prepared to share it on time.

All written work should be typed and double spaced unless otherwise noted. Please include a heading with name, date and assignment number on everything submitted.

All written work will be assessed on the basis of demonstrated understanding and application of ideas, concepts and techniques covered in the course. Also critical are your analytic care, clarity of writing, and attentiveness to grammar, spelling and punctuation.
Assignment #2: The Catalogue or Inventory

A catalogue or inventory is an organized list of all the research materials you have at hand to work with. Creating and maintaining an inventory is a critical step in the analytic process because it forces you to begin to establish categories that enable you to see patterns in the data. It enables you to efficiently use your materials for analysis and presentation.

One way to summarize what you have is in a chart form, using columns for recording different features of what you have. List information in as many columns as you like, since there is likely to be some overlap in the categories your columns represent. Another way is to use index cards and label/code the tops of the cards as you might columns. What you choose for your columns or cards will depend on the nature of your project as it has evolved, but will likely include at least the following:

- the type of data gathering activity (e.g., observation, interview, audio or video-taping, focus groups, document collection, journals, writing samples, photographs);
- the setting and/or the event in which the data collection take place;
- the people involved, including descriptors of who they are (position/role);
- the focus/foci of the data collection (e.g., the kinds of events, native terms, routines, interactions, people being included, the topics of conversations and interviews, the content of documents and artifacts).

Include in the inventory everything that seems important to remember or keep track of, especially your ideas about emerging patterns, assertions, and/or themes. Be sure to keep a list of key quotes and critical incidents (from which you can develop narrative vignettes). You may also incorporate into the inventory documents and artifacts you've collected and articles/books pertinent to your analysis.

At least as important as the specific inventory that emerges, is the process of reviewing and thinking about everything you have so far. This is an essential part of your on-going, grounded, reflexive data analysis. You should use this process to look for possible assertions, hypotheses or patterns that you either have evidence enough to support or need to pursue further. It is also a time to note initial coding categories and assertions or themes that are emerging from the data.

This is a tool for yourself. Find the most effective means to organize and keep organized your data for analytic purposes, to help you remember clearly what you already have, record ideas and questions that occur as you go along, and see and link emerging patterns with supporting evidence.

Mini-proposal
If you are beginning a new project for this course, you must get organized quickly so as to have data to analyze and write from. For that purpose, I want you to provide a research mini-proposal. It should describe the following for your semester project:

- Major topic, area of focus and research question;
- Guiding questions;
- Primary site(s)/people for data collection;
- Major data sources (these may include data from earlier research;
- Access plan;
- Project timetable (keep in mind the course assignments and include time for coding, analysis, follow-up and writing).

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**Developing Assertions**

An assertion is a statement about any regularity you see in your data. At the foundational level, 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 under study or the conditions under which something occurs.

An example of an assertion about a routine is: "When entering and leaving the classroom as a group, the children form a single line." An even more specific assertion delineates 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).

Ms. Harkins announces to the class that it is time for P.E. class, "Please make a line so we can go quietly to p.e." The children jump from their seats and move quickly to the classroom door where Ms. Harkins is standing. Keito goes to the front of the line, right next to Ms. Harkins; it was his turn to be line leader today. The rest of the children line up single file behind him, jockeying to stand next to their friends. Sue argues with Jay about him pushing ahead of her. Meanwhile, Minta is still at her desk putting something inside. Ms. Harkins urges her to hurry so they won't be late. She then reminds the group to be quiet as they walk through the hall.

An example of an assertion about rights and duties is: "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 example of an assertion about category inclusion is: "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, who they are interacting with, and who hears the noise).

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

It is math time and Ms. Harkins is demonstrating long division at the front board. She says they will do the first two worksheet problems together on the board and the remainder by themselves. Sue turns to Minta who sits next to her in the front of the room and whispers for help on the first worksheet problem. Minta begins to show Sue how to do it. Ms. Harkins notices the two girls and tells them to pay attention at the front.

When asked about this incident after class, Ms. Harkins explained that she has a particular method of doing long division that she wants the children to learn. It will only confuse them if they try to figure it out for themselves or with each other. If Minta does Sue's work for her, Sue will never learn to do it. Furthermore, it is distracting for her and for the rest of the class when some group of students doesn't pay attention.

Notice how 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 from, say, that of a Montessori or a Foxfire classroom.

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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 in terms of 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. When you make an assertion, be able to cite the specific events, interactions, quotations that lead you to make
that particular assertion. Keep your research questions in mind. At the same, time assertions can help you modify your questions.

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Assertion Exercises  

Assignment #3:A Quote

Use an assertion that shows a participant's point of view about some aspect of your study. Look through your data to find a quotation (a sequence of speech or conversation) that supports the assertion. Use the assertion and a research question as your introduction, then give the quote or paraphrase of a conversation, and finally your interpretive comments that focus on why you feel the quote supports the assertion.

Assignment #5:A Narrative Vignette

Think of a narrative vignette as a story with a point, as all good stories have (at least one). It is drawn from what you have seen, heard, participated in during your field research.

Using one of the assertions you developed for assignment number 2 or a new one (but different from the one used in the "quote" assignment), search your data to find an outstanding example that you can use as evidence to support the assertion. Write the assertion and the research question to which it applies. Then write a thickly detailed, narrative vignette and an interpretive commentary that links the vignette to the assertion -- that shows how the vignette is an appropriate example of what is being asserted. The interpretive comments should focus on the salient points of the vignette and explain how those points support the assertion.

Given the level of detail necessary to write the vignette and comments, you'll probably need a few pages to do this.

Assignment #6:Multiple Sources of Evidence

Present an assertion, (different again from either you've elaborated on to date) with a variety of evidence drawn from different sources. This assignment should include the research question, the assertion, observational evidence presented in a
vignette, quotations or paraphrased talk of a participant's point of view, other data as you have, and interpretive commentary that explains how each type of evidence supports the assertion. Try to do this in an integrated narrative.

Again, given the level and variety of detail entailed, you'll need a few pages to write this.

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Assignment #7: Discrepant/Negative Cases

Keep track of any evidence, data that does not fully support your emerging assertions, hypotheses or argument. These discrepant cases should be incorporated into your ongoing analysis and eventually into the report of your findings. This is one way to further refine, test or elaborate your assertions, to test their boundaries. In the final report the discrepant cases can lend rigor and credibility to your presentation of the evidence that does support your assertions.

In order to practice discrepant case analysis, take one of the assertions that you have already formulated and preferably for which you have already written a vignette), and find an example from your observations and/or interviews that seems to contradict the assertion in some way. Then write a vignette or present the quote that illustrates the case, and write interpretive comments that point out the discrepancy between this case and the assertion.

On the basis of this analysis, you should then reflect in writing on how the discrepant case affects your assertion. Among other things, the assertion itself might be rephrased so as to take into account the discrepant case; alternatively, a subassertion dealing with the discrepancy might be formulated. You should understand that the way in which you present your discrepant case analysis here may differ from how it is presented in your final report given that discrepant cases reshape our analysis.

How do we decide on the impact of the discrepant case? Take into account what evidence you have overall in support of versus counter to the assertion. Think about whether you need to gather additional data pertinent to this point; reread/explore the data you already have to think about it. In the written reflections for this assignment, include what you already know and what you might need to do still to assess how the discrepant case affects your assertion.