

**EDRS 812**  
**QUALITATIVE METHODS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**  
Spring 2006

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**Class meeting:** Tuesdays 4:30-7:10, Science and Technology I, room 112

*Course Goals*

1. Understand the essential characteristics of qualitative research, and the key ways in which this approach differs from other research strategies.
2. Understand the assumptions embodied in the major approaches to qualitative research, and the implications of these for doing and evaluating qualitative studies.
3. Be able to design and carry out a small-scale qualitative study.
4. Be able to communicate (both verbally and in writing) the design, process, and results of such a study.

*Course Structure*

There are four main components of the course:

1. A **class meeting** once a week. The first part of each class will be devoted to mini-lectures on key topics, demonstrations, class exercises, and discussions.
2. The final hour or so of each class will be structured as a support group for your research project, during which you will receive **consultations** from me and the rest of the class on your own project, and provide feedback to others on their projects. More information on consultations is provided below.
3. **Assigned readings.** These readings are an essential part of the course; they provide necessary preparation for class lectures, activities, and discussions, and in addition they cover important aspects of qualitative research which there simply isn't time to discuss in detail in class.

4. An individual (or collaborative) qualitative **research project**. Guidelines for this project are provided below; guidelines for the final project report will be given out in class and posted on the course Blackboard site.

## Readings

### Assigned books

There are three main texts for the course:

Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*, 3rd edition. Longman, 2006.

Robert Weiss, *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. Free Press, 1994 (out of print, but used copies should be available).

Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, & Linda Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press, 1995.

My chapter-by-chapter commentary on these is posted on the course Blackboard site.

In addition, there are two other books that you should read if you have not already done so in EDRS 810 or other courses; I will refer to these at several points during the course, and several chapters of these books will be assigned reading.

Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (second edition). Sage Publications, 2005.

Howard S. Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. University of Chicago Press, 1986.

All of these books are available in the GMU bookstore.

**Other assigned readings** will be placed on electronic reserve, if possible. These include assigned articles, unpublished memos, and my commentaries on the Glesne and Weiss books. I will also put on electronic reserve three student project reports, which are assigned reading about midway through the course.

**Other recommended readings** (most will be on reserve in the Johnson Center) are listed in the course outline; full references are at the end of the syllabus. A number of additional project reports will be placed on electronic reserve.

The two most important journals for qualitative research in education are *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* and the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Many other educational research journals also publish the results of qualitative studies. The most important journal for papers dealing with qualitative methods is *Qualitative Inquiry*.

The major handbook for qualitative research methods is the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, third edition, edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Sage Publications, 2005). Many particular fields within education also have research handbooks that include chapters on qualitative methods (for example, the *Handbook of Research on Teaching*).

## Research Project

The research project is a major part of the work of this course. The range of possible projects that you can conduct is extremely broad. The main requirement is that the project has to be genuinely qualitative in nature. (We will discuss in detail what this means in the first class.) Almost any setting, or set of participants, is a potential source of data for your research, including a setting or topic with which you have a prior role or involvement. An initial “idea memo” for your project is due the second week of the course; I'll give you feedback on your ideas, and if I see any potential problems, we may need to meet to discuss these issues to make sure that you have a feasible project.

There are five additional specific requirements for your research project:

1. **No covert research.** This is 1) ethically problematic, 2) too difficult to manage for someone just beginning to learn qualitative research, 3) restricts your research options, and 4) doesn't allow you to learn the key skill of negotiation with those you study. You must have the informed consent of the participants in your research. This does not necessarily require a signed form from participants, but it does require that you be open and candid about the purposes, nature, and possible consequences of the research. We will discuss this in more detail in connection with one of the assignments, developing a simulated proposal for Human Subjects approval for your study (in most case you will not need actual HSRB approval for your project, unless you are collecting person-identifiable data from minors).
2. **No primarily comparative studies.** Your main research question can't focus on a difference between two groups or settings or between two categories of people; if your main interest is in such a question, I will usually recommend limiting your study to one of these settings or categories. (Differences that emerge from your study may be a legitimate focus; check with me.) While explicitly comparative studies are a valid and important form of qualitative research, they are not a good way to learn how to do qualitative research. Comparison is likely to 1) push you toward more quantitative questions and modes of thinking, 2) reduce the depth of understanding you can gain of one group, setting, or category, and 3) make it more difficult for you to learn what is essential in qualitative research. In most cases, a course project based primarily on observation should be limited to a single setting.
3. A minimum of **1) 3 hours of interviews, or 2) 3 hours of observations of a single setting, plus at least one hour of interview data with one or more participants in that setting.** For an interview study, you will need to record your interviews (using either audiotape or videotape), and to transcribe at least 3 hours of interview material. Normally, this will involve interviewing at least 3 different participants. In special circumstances, it may be possible to work with a single participant; check with me. For an observational study, you will need to do at least 3 hours of observations of your setting, taking written notes, and to reorganize, rewrite, and expand your rough notes to make them usable for analysis. Normally, this will involve at least 3 separate observations. The difference in the amount of material required for interview and observational studies is because interviews require more time to transcribe, and because they usually provide more material to work with for analysis. (Videotaped observations are a special case; if you plan to videotape some activity, talk to me about the amount of

material required, which depends on the kind of analysis you'll be doing.) Copies of your transcripts or rewritten observational notes must be handed in with your final report.

4. **Data collection must take place through a significant part of the semester.** You can't rely mainly on previously collected data, or conduct all of your observations or interviews in a brief period (1 week or less). You need to be able to learn from your experiences, and to make corrections to your study design and techniques as you proceed.
5. **You will need to share your work for feedback.** Any arrangements that you make with participants in your study must not prevent discussing your fieldnotes and interview transcripts (with names deleted if necessary) in class. (Class members will be required to respect the confidentiality of this information; this is discussed in a separate handout on class participation.) Sharing your work in class is the only way that I can really assess the actual process of your research, and is also an important part of that process. You can't do the work of this class in isolation.

If you are studying a setting where you have a prior role, or are interviewing people with whom you have a prior relationship, you need to **discuss with me the special issues that this raises**, and will need to address these issues in your final report. You are free to use as a setting for your research project the same site that you are using in work for another course or for an internship. However, if you do this, the amount of work involved must be appropriate for the total amount of credit--normally, you can't use the same work (e.g., turning in the same report) to get credit for two courses. In any case, if you are using the work to satisfy two different courses or requirements, you **must submit, both to me and to the other instructor or supervisor, a written description of how you will use your work in this setting to satisfy the requirements of both courses**, and get our signatures indicating our approval of your plans.

### Written Assignments

A number of short written assignments reporting on your research project will be required during the course. I will return these assignments to you with my feedback. Most of these assignments are intended as preliminary drafts of pieces that, with revision, can be incorporated in your final project report. The final written assignment for the course is a 5500-6500 word (22-26 page) project report that describes your fieldwork process and results. Guidelines for all of these assignments will be posted on electronic reserve or given out in class.

If you don't complete the course assignments and project on time, you won't be able to participate adequately in class discussions, and you won't get as much out of the course. This also creates problems for me in giving you timely feedback on your work. For these reasons, **late assignments and reports will not be accepted** without a good reason.

### Consultations

Beginning with the third class, the final hour or so of each class will be devoted to students' consultations with the entire class on their research project. These consultations will normally be about 20 minutes long, depending on the size of the class and the other things on the agenda for that day; everyone will have three consultations during the semester. The purpose for these consultations is for you to get feedback on what you are doing in your project, and advice on dealing with questions or problems that you have. The first round of consultations (starting in week 3) will deal mainly with your ideas for a course project, selecting a setting and/or participants, and negotiating research relationships. The second and third rounds will deal more with data collection and analysis.

These consultations are not presentations, and will not affect your grade, except as described below under "Grading". Their main purpose is to help you do a better job on your project, both through feedback in your own consultation and by learning from others' consultations. Try not to spend too much of your allotted time talking about your project; at least half of your time should be used for getting feedback. (I'll be a strict timekeeper, since any extra time you take will come out of someone else's consultation.) Bringing in short handouts (planned research questions, a draft interview guide, short excerpts from interview transcripts or observation notes, examples of your data analysis methods, tentative conclusions, etc.) is helpful.

**I recommend audiotaping your consultations**, so that you can listen to others' ideas and suggestions without having to try to write these down as they're given.

### Grading

Grading will be based primarily on your final project report, and secondarily on class participation. The guidelines for the final report (we'll discuss this in class) are fairly detailed about what the report needs to cover and how this will be evaluated. Class participation will be assessed not on how brilliantly or how often you talk, but on the value of the feedback you provide to others in the class, and how well you take account of feedback from others; attendance will be a factor in this part of the grade. Your grade for the course is essentially a measure of how well I believe you have achieved the course goals, based on the evidence you provide in your assignments, report, and class contributions.

The short assignments during the course, though required, are ungraded; their purpose is to give you feedback on what will become parts of your final project report. Written assignments can, however, raise your grade (not lower it) if an assignment clearly indicates that you had achieved a course goal that was not demonstrated in your final report. The passing grades given in the course are A+, A, A-, B+, B, and B-. (Because doctoral students are required to maintain a 3.0 grade point average, a B-, though technically a "passing" grade, must be balanced by a B+ or higher grade in another course.) If you receive a grade of B+ or lower on the final report, you may rewrite the report to raise your grade, and your final grade on the report will be the average of the initial grade and the grade on the revised report.

### Course Outline

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic and assignments</u>
<b>1) Jan 24</b>	<b>Introduction to the Course</b>
<b>2) Jan 31</b>	<b>The Nature of Qualitative Research</b>

#### *Project "idea memo" due*

##### Assigned:

"Introductory Notes" (on Blackboard)  
 Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2  
 Coles, "Method", in The Spiritual Lives of Children (on electronic reserve)  
 Levine, "Qualitative Research in Academic Decision Making" (on electronic reserve)  
 Strauss and Corbin, "Getting Started" (on electronic reserve)

##### Recommended:

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapters 1 & 2  
 Weiss, Learning From Strangers, Chapter 2  
 Rosalie Wax, Doing Fieldwork, Part 1  
 Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Preface and Chapters 1, 2, and 6  
 Hammersley and Atkinson, Ethnography: Principles in Practice



**3) Feb 7      Observation**

Assigned:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapter 3  
Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chapters 1-3  
Corsaro, "Entering the Child's World" (on electronic reserve)

Recommended:

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chapter 4

**4) Feb 14      Participant Selection, Research Relationships, and Ethics**

*Observation exercise due*

Assigned:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapters 5 & 6  
Weiss, Learning From Strangers, pp. 33-37, 121-141, and Appendix D  
Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 5, sections on "Developing Research Relationships" and "Site and Participant Selection"  
Eckert, "Field Work in the High School" (on electronic reserve)  
Simonds, "Talking with Strangers: A Researcher's Tale" (on electronic reserve)  
Case: "The Unlucky Anthropologist" (on Blackboard)

Recommended:

Joseph Maxwell, "Gaining Acceptance from Participants, Clients, and Policy-makers for Qualitative Research" (on Blackboard)  
Maruyama and Deno, Research in Educational Settings, Chapters 2 and 3  
Rosalie Wax, Doing Fieldwork, Chapter 31  
W. F. Whyte, Learning from the Field, Chapters 3-4, 11  
Howard Becker, "Whose Side Are We On?" in Becker, Sociological Work  
Maurice Punch, The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork  
Alasdair MacIntyre, "Ethical Dilemmas: Notes from Outside the Field" (on electronic reserve)

**5) Feb 21      Interviewing**

Assigned:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapter 4  
Weiss, Learning From Strangers, Chapters 1, 3, & 4  
Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 5, section on Data Collection  
Nancy Flanagan Knapp, "Interviewing Joshua" (on electronic reserve)

Recommended:

Seidman, Interviewing as Qualitative Research, Chapters 6-7  
Dexter, Elite and Specialized Interviewing

**6) Feb 28      Focusing Your Study**

*HSRB approval form due*

Assigned:

Strauss and Corbin, "Theoretical Sensitivity" (on electronic reserve)  
Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapters 3-4  
Barbara Noël, "Researcher Identity Memo for a Study of Educational Reform in Bolivia." Pp. 28-31 in Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design.

Recommended:

Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapter 8

**7) Mar 7      Initial Analysis and Interpretation**

*Researcher Identity memo due*

Assigned:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapter 7  
Delamont, "The Basic Rules" (on electronic reserve)  
Lofland et al., "Developing Analysis" (on electronic reserve)  
Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 5, section on Data Analysis  
Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chapter 6,  
"Processing fieldnotes: Coding and memoing"

Recommended:

Geer, "First Days in the Field" (on electronic reserve)  
Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, chapter 4

**Mar 14      Spring break**

**8) Mar 21      Qualitative Research Project Reports: Three Examples**

Assigned:

Kristin Percy Calaff, "In El Salvador We Don't Have Dreams" (on electronic reserve)  
Patricia Kridler, "Being in the 'Middle' in Middle School" (on Blackboard)  
Enid Irwin Madaras, "The Right People to Stick By You" (on electronic reserve)

**9) Mar 28 Interpretive, Narrative, and Case Analysis**

*Research Relationship and Data Collection memo due*

Assigned:

- Weiss, Learning From Strangers, Chapter 6
- Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chapter 5, "Pursuing members' meanings"
- Maxwell and Miller, "Categorizing and Connecting as Components of Qualitative Data Analysis" (on Blackboard)
- Seidman, Interviewing as Qualitative Research, Chapter 8, pp. 98-112 (on electronic reserve)

Recommended:

- Geertz, "'From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding" (on electronic reserve)
- Herbert Menzel, "Meaning: Who Needs It?" (on electronic reserve)
- Coffey and Atkinson, Making Sense of Qualitative Data
- Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis

**10) Apr 4 Drawing Inferences From Qualitative Data**

Assigned:

- Becker, Tricks of the Trade, pp. 150-157, "Understanding Strange Talk" (on electronic reserve)
- Case: "Summing Up a Qualitative Study" (handed out in class)

**Apr 11AERA—no class**

**11) Apr 18 Validity and Generalizability**

*Data Analysis and Conclusions memo due*

Assigned:

- Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 6
- Weiss, Learning From Strangers, pp. 147-150
- Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, pp. 32-33 and 151-152
- Wolcott, Transforming Qualitative Data, pp. 255-260, "Emphasis on Interpretation" (on electronic reserve)

Recommended:

- Joseph Maxwell, "Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research." Harvard Educational Review 62 (3): 279-300, Fall 1992 (on Blackboard)
- Dexter, "What Kind of Truth Do You Get?", in Elite and Specialized Interviewing

Becker, Sociological Work, Chapters 2, 3, & 5

**12) Apr 25 Writing Up a Qualitative Study**

Assigned:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapter 8  
Weiss, Learning From Strangers, pp. 42-45 and Chapter 7  
Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chapter 7  
Phelan, Yu, and Davidson, "Navigating the Psychosocial Pressures of Adolescence" (on electronic reserve)  
Phelan, Davidson, and Yu, "Donna Carlyle" (on electronic reserve)

Recommended:

Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapter 3 & 7  
Lamott, Bird By Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life  
Wolcott, Writing Up Qualitative Research, 2nd edition  
Lofland & Lofland, Analyzing Social Settings, Chapter 10  
Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapters 9 & 10

**13) May 2 Evaluating and Revising a Qualitative Study**

*Deliver draft project report to your partner*

Assigned:

Maxwell, "Reflections on rewriting my paper on 'Diversity, Solidarity, and Community'" (on Blackboard)  
Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapters 4 & 5  
Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Conclusion

**14) May 9 no class**

*Return draft project report to your partner with feedback*

**15) May 16 Research Project Presentations**

*Final project reports due*

**Recommended Readings**

- Howard S. Becker, *Sociological Work: Method and Substance*. Transaction Books, 1970.
- Robert C. Bogdan and Sari Knop Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, fourth edition. Allyn and Bacon, 2003.
- Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson, *Making Sense of Qualitative Data*. Sage, 1996.
- Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, Eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications, 2005
- Lewis Anthony Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*. Northwestern University Press, 1970. (out of print)
- Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine, 1967.
- M. Elizabeth Graue and Daniel Walsh, *Studying Children in Context: Theories, Methods, and Ethics*. Sage Publications, 1998.
- Judith L. Green & Cynthia Wallat, ed., *Ethnography and Language in Educational Settings*. Ablex, 1981.
- Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Routledge, 1995.
- Anne Lamott, *Bird By Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. Doubleday, 1994.
- John Lofland, David Snow, Leon Anderson, and H. Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings*, 4th edition. Wadsworth, 2006.
- Geoffrey Maruyama and Stanley Deno, *Research in Educational Settings*. Sage, 1992
- Joseph Maxwell, "Gaining Acceptance from Participants, Clients, and Policy-makers for Qualitative Research", in D. Fetterman (Ed.), *Speaking the Language of Power* (on Blackboard)
- George J. McCall & J. L. Simmons, *Issues in Participant Observation: A Text and Reader*. Random House, 1969.
- C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* Sage, 1994.
- Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd edition. Sage, 2000.
- Maurice Punch, *The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork*. Sage, 1986.
- Thomas Schram, *Conceptualizing Qualitative Inquiry: Mindwork for Fieldwork in Education and the Social Sciences*. Merrill Prentice Hall, 2003.
- I. E. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 3rd edition. Teachers College Press, 2005.
- Rosalie Wax, *Doing Fieldwork: Warnings and Advice*. University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Harry Wolcott, *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition. Sage Publications, \*
- William F. Whyte, *Learning from the Field: A Guide from Experience*. Sage, 1984.