TE 931
Qualitative Methods in Educational Research
Summer 2001
Final Draft
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T and Th, 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.
with 2 additional hours assigned
All office hours are by appointment only

Note: Most readings will be distributed in class. If everyone chips in $10, I will subsidize the remaining cost of the readings.

Introduction and Overview

So much to do, so little time. We’re in the business of learning something significant about qualitative research. There are many routes to explore, books to read, questions to consider. How do I formulate a question, design a study, develop skills for collecting and then analyzing data, and writing up a report? What assumptions about what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge matters lie between the lines of different traditions and modes for research? What’s the difference between field methods, ethnography, historiography, case studies, narratives, biographies, feminist research and the like? What do I need to understand about the ethics of research, relationships with participants, subjectivity and objectivity, validity, reliability, and voice? Who has written really wonderful studies and what made them so wonderful?

Although some of our purposes will be jointly constructed as we come to know one another, I have some assumptions and purposes of my own as your teacher. This is a beginning, not an end. As researchers, we are all works in progress. This course is not designed, nor am I qualified, to teach you to be an ethnographer or historian, sociologist or case writer. Instead, this course is designed more like a smorgasbord, a buffet of relevant issues, ideas, activities, endeavors. None of us will be experts at the end of these seven weeks, but hopefully we’ll have a deeper collective and individual sense of what qualitative research is about, what it feels like to try and do some, why it’s hard work, what the standards are to judge its quality, and the like.

Doing research is a way of thinking and acting that is deeply principled, tied to skills and knowledge, full of human flaw and imperfection. Dewey wrote of method:

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Every artist must have a method, a technique in doing his work. Piano playing is not hitting the keys at random. It is an orderly way of using them, and the order is not something, which exists ready-made in the musician’s hands or brain prior to an activity dealing with the piano. Order is found in the disposition of acts which use the piano and the hands and brain so as to achieve the result intended. (Dewey, The nature of method)

While Dewey was talking about teaching methods, his analysis holds true -- I think -- for methods of research. Methods don’t exist in any detachable, rational form that is somehow separable from either person or goal (topic, pursuit of inquiry). That is, what you want to study is intimately related to your method. Furthermore, who you are is also inseparable. Yet research methods are also part of the shared knowledge and work of a community, for anything does NOT go, and we are all accountable to some standards of morality and quality, rigor and discipline.

So how to study something about mind and hand, art and craft, individual skill and collective knowledge and commitments? There are several relevant areas of activity that we could engage in to be smarter about qualitative methods in educational research: We could read exemplars and, in so doing, acquire models of scholarship as well as deduce qualities of that work. Alternatively, we could dabble in the work ourselves, trying it on for size, learning about the issues inherent in it from the inside, rather than the outside. We could also read textbooks about "how it's done" that are organized, thorough, and complete examinations of the myriad issues inherent in the work. Or we could talk to people who’ve done it and hear what they have to say, lessons they’ve learned, warnings they’d provide, stories of the human sides of research that don’t find their way to the pages of academic prose. Finally, we could read essays and the like on significant issues like subjectivity or validity.

No one of these activities is more valuable than another, nor is one the quickest route to wisdom (or at least competence) in the qualitative methods terrain. There is, as Alfred North Whitehead once said of mathematics, "no royal road to learning." It is hard work, messy, alternatively frustrating and exciting. So we’re going to dabble and try to work back and forth between a few of these different sources of experience for understanding and insight.

Guiding Questions for the Course

Four questions will guide our work in the course. I will ask you repeatedly to correspond with me about these questions and how the readings inform these questions:

What do I need to know and be able to do - as a researcher - in order to do good qualitative research?
How can I learn those things (over the course of my career)?
What criteria help us judge the quality of qualitative research?
How do I determine the best method for my research questions?
My Entering Assumptions, Phrased As Assertions

All teachers have goals and aspirations, all teachers – and students – enter courses with assumptions and desires. I assume that part of my job this term is to come to understand your needs, interests, and desires. To help, I begin by making my own assumptions (and their implications) public. Doing so, I hope, will help us work together more productively.

I cannot responsibly prepare you to be researchers who use qualitative methods in one term.
Learning to be a researcher is a lifelong enterprise. Thus, please do not expect this course to prepare you to do a qualitative dissertation.

There are multiple qualitative traditions, any of which might be of use to you sometime in your career. Thus, you will need to learn all you can about different traditions and which ones best suit your background and interests.

The principles that guide good qualitative research are no different than those that guide good quantitative research. People should not think that qualitative research is easier, or preferable to, quantitative research. Thus, please do not assume that you should do qualitative work because you don’t like numbers or quantitative work. A good educational researcher understands and embraces all traditions, and uses them strategically to answer different sorts of questions.

Some of you are hoping that this course is a "how to" course in the doing of qualitative research. It is not. We will dabble in doing some research in order to explore issues and develop a principled understanding of qualitative traditions, but it is not a "how to" course.

One learns to be a researcher both through doing research (and critically reflecting on it) and reading (good and bad) research. Thus, you are expected to have done all of the reading for each class. Although our lives may be busy, by agreeing to take this class, you are agreeing to do the reading. All of it. The quality of our discussions and work together depends on it. During class discussions, we may choose to focus on one thing or another, but I need to be able to count on the fact that we have all read the materials. This will liberate me, allowing me to call on anyone during class discussions. You need to understand that I am a reader – a big fan of reading – and I assume that you will be better researchers if you read often and widely on method.

Course Content

Now, on to the work. We’re going to do three different kinds of things as a group (and another one as individuals). I have designed these tasks that we have an opportunity to develop as a larger community, in smaller more intimate groups, and so that there is sufficient time for you to carve
out independent work. In order to provide some predictability and structure, we’re going to do these different activities on certain days of the week. During this whirlwind tour of ours, you’ll at least be able to say, “If it’s Tuesday, this must be issues.”

Tuesdays: Collective Readings. Every Tuesday we will meet as a large group to discuss a particular issue related to qualitative research. I’ve put together a reading package of articles about various issues. This list is not a comprehensive list of the issues we might cover, but it’s a start. Every week I will assign a small set of readings that the entire class will read and then discuss in whole group discussions.

Tuesdays: Practices of Research Small Groups. In addition, every Tuesday I will give small groups a chance to work on their own investigations into what there is to learn about a particular aspect of qualitative research: We will have groups that look into (a) interviewing; (b) observing; (c) data analysis; (d) ethics; and (e) validity/generalizability/reliability. These groups will be called – for lack of a better term – “the practices of research” groups. Each week, these groups will have one task to complete and share among themselves:

Week 1: Develop an interview for using with faculty; nominate 3 faculty to interview and delegate responsibilities.
Week 2: Report on interviews with faculty, bring transcripts to class. Develop a plan for searches on web, MAGIC, reference lists in books and papers, and other libraries.
Week 3: Report on MAGIC, amazon.com, bn.com, internet, etc. searches for qualitative methods courses and resources.
Week 4: Analyze data collected through interviews and web searches. Delegate responsibility for reading (skimming) and writing annotations of various resources.
Week 5: Report back to small group of what you have found. Decide on how to present the findings.
Week 6: Develop annotated bibliography and any other resources you think you should offer to your colleagues.
Week 7: Make a 30-minute presentation to the rest of the class about what you found.

NOTE: Throughout your search for references and resources, you should all take responsibility for reading (skimming) and annotating several resources each week. This will allow you to present to the class an annotated bibliography of resources at the end of the term. Electronic versions of those bibliographies will be given to every person in the class.

Tuesdays/Wednesdays/Thursdays: "Kamikaze Research Workshop. We’ll split into six smaller working groups for the term (these will be called the "research workshop" groups). Within these groups, each person will work on a small (tiny), manageable project in which you ask a question: collect some document, interview, or observational data; and analyze the data in two rounds. Each group will meet with me for one or two hours (depending on the size of the group) once a week. Usually this will happen on Wednesdays and Thursdays, but sometimes we might meet
on another day or another time. Each week, members of those groups will have a homework assignment, including:

- **Week 2:** Bring copies of a draft topic or question to class for discussion
- **Week 3:** Bring copies of a two "designs" for a research project.
- **Week 4:** Bring copies of a drafted instrument for an interview or observation
- **Week 5:** Bring copies of one page of some "data"
- **Week 6:** Bring copies of an analytic memo about your thinking re: the data
- **Week 7:** Bring copies of a more developed analytic memo about the data

We will spend approximately 10 to 15 minutes on each person's work, deliberating over issues that arise as we dabble with these various stages of research. I will improvise, that is, I will wait to see what you bring and then work to help you all see how that attempt at doing research helps us all learn things about being a researcher. One reason why we have these groups is because I believe, as a researcher, that such groups are a powerful support for learning research and I hope that you all go off and create your own groups in the future. Sometimes such groups benefit from the insights of an experienced researcher, but -- in the end -- your best teachers will be your peers.

And as you teach one another how to do research, you will make more explicit -- iteratively and gradually, sometimes halting -- your own understanding of research method.

**Additional hours: Independent Study, Reading, and Reviewing Exemplars.** You will also be asked to read two book-length exemplars of qualitative research and two article-length exemplars. You will then write an analysis of the exemplars in which you explore a set of criteria that might help you determine quality in qualitative work. You must pick one book from the following list:

- *Among the Thugs*, Bill Buford
- *Street Corner Society*, William Whyte
- *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Anne Fadiman
- *Translated Woman*, Ruth Behar
- *Basin and Range*, John McPhee

For your other selection, you are required to ask a faculty member who you respect for a recommendation. Ask a question something like this: "What is the best book-length qualitative study you ever read?" or "What is a seminal piece of qualitative research that I should read as an aspiring educational researcher?" You are free to read more than one other exemplar. You are also free to read an exemplar inside or outside of education. However, you must read at least two book length exemplars. You will discover, inevitably, that the pieces are quite different. You might even decide that they are not all exemplars. That is okay, for you can still use their differences to generate a set of criteria for judging good work.

**Interconnections.** While these separate strands of activity -- readings and issues, kamikaze research, investigating the extant literature about various aspects of doing research, and reviews...
of exemplars -- might proceed independent of one another, it is also possible that they will intertwine, interact, and shed light on one another. I encourage you to look for, examine, question, and discuss such possible connections. For instance, how is the story a researcher tells in his or her appendix similar to or different from one that you might write about your own experiences with research? Alternatively, is the kind of description that Geertz talks about relevant to your research project or the research that one of our guest's discusses with us? I will try point to connections whenever I see them, for learning to make such connections is as complicated an endeavor as learning to do research.

However, I would also like you to raise questions and make observations. Your questions and tentative ideas will likely help us all. Every Friday you will be required to send me a two single-spaced page note of your reflections on things that you are struggling with, wondering about, or putting together. This lifeline between your thinking and me should help us all surface themes, issues, and questions. I will then use these musings to tie you into the larger group discussions, to get to know you more intimately (as limited as we might be by seven weeks), and to track anything that you are thinking that you don't make public in the larger discussions or small group work.

Assessment

So, how will I assess your learning and work?

- Research report: 25%
- Participation and reading (including Friday emails): 25%
- Analysis of exemplars and criteria for judging good research: 25%
- Annotated bibliography and presentations from practices of research group: 25% (group grade)

There will be no extensions on assignments or incompletes given for the course. Due dates are, indeed, set in stone. I will hold true to this for two different reasons. First, it does no one a favor to let work drag on. We only have 7 weeks and piling stuff up -- even over one week -- can be hazardous to your intellectual health. Second, all of our work -- at every level -- is work in progress. Nothing is final, perfect, complete. If courses work, they launch into a line of inquiry, thought, and writing that doesn't end when the course does. So hand the stuff in, embarrassing as it may be, and think about where you want to go from there.

If you know you will be missing a class, you are expected to call me in advance. Your attendance is expected every day that the class meets as a whole. For the small group work you will do, you are also expected to communicate well with your colleagues, hold up your end of the responsibilities, and attend all meetings.

All writing must be sent to me as MS Word attachments. I will respond to all writing electronically, using the "track changes" feature of Word. If you do not know how to use that feature, please let me know. Please make sure to send all attachments with standard labels. They should read:
### Tuesdays
**Issues and Readings**

**May 15**

**Introductions, or learning a little something about what we already know and who we are**

**In class, read:**
Shulman, "Disciplines of inquiry: An overview"

**Small group work:** Create the "practices of research" groups:
1. Interviewing
2. Observing
3. Data analysis
4. Ethics of research
5. Generalizability/validity/reliability

Plan interviews with three faculty.

### Thursdays
**"Komikaze" Research Workshop**

**May 17**

**Guest teacher:** Philip Cusick

**Toward formulating a research project**

**For class, read:**
Required: Cusick, "Appendix, Notes on method"
Okey and Cusick, "Dropping out: Another side of the story"
Whyte, "Appendix, On the evolution of Street Corner Society"

**By Friday:** Write me a two page, single spaced memo
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May 22</th>
<th>May 24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting the lay of the land: A historical perspective on educational research</td>
<td>(arranged kamikaze meetings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading:</strong></td>
<td>Finding a question/topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erickson, &quot;Qualitative research in research on teaching&quot;</td>
<td>Assignment due: Bring a version of your question or topic to pass out to your group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoenfeld, &quot;The core, canon, and the development of research skills&quot;</td>
<td><strong>By Friday:</strong> Write me a two page, single-spaced memo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagemann and Shulman, &quot;The improvement of education research: A complex, continuing quest&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Practices of research small group:** Report out on your survey of faculty concerning good resources for your practice of research group topic. Select one or two readings, find them, and annotate them for the rest of your group.

Plan out your search of other resources (courses on the web, MAGIC search, amazon.com or bn.com search, examining the references in relevant research reports).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May 29</th>
<th>May 31</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description, and other things we might learn from Geertz</td>
<td>(arranged kamikaze group meetings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading:</strong></td>
<td>Designing research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geertz, &quot;Thick description&quot;</td>
<td>Assignment due: Bring a one-page description of two possible designs for a study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geertz, &quot;Deep play: Notes on a Balinese cockfight&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Reading:</strong> Stanley and Campbell, Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs For Research</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Practices of research:** Report out on what you found out in your web search and MAGIC search about relevant literature for your topic. Analyze the materials that you have collected. Select one or two readings, find them, and annotate them for the rest of your group.

**By Friday:** Write me a two page, single-spaced memo.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes and Assignments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 5</td>
<td>The role of the self in social science and research as a life of learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Readings:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Booth et al., &quot;Part 2&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Krieger, Social science and the self, selections</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geertz, &quot;Disciplines&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Practices of research: Continue analysis of materials on your topic. Continue skimming and annotating relevant resources. Delegate responsibility for locating and skimming potential resources. Create paragraph annotations for the rest of the class.</td>
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<td>June 7</td>
<td>(arranged kamikaze group meetings)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Learning from data</td>
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<td>Assignment due: Bring a draft instrument</td>
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<td>By Friday: Write me a two page, single-spaced memo reflecting on what you are wrestling with re: analyzing data.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 12</td>
<td>Display the data</td>
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<tr>
<td>Readings:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tufte, <em>Envisioning data</em>, selections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miles and Huberman, <em>Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook</em>, selections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Booth et al., &quot;Making a claim and supporting it&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practices of research group: Sort your annotations into clumps of issues or themes (that is, do a qualitative analysis of the materials you have accumulated).</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 14</td>
<td>(arranged kamikaze group meetings)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Data analysis: Round one</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Assignment due: Bring one display of your data.</td>
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<td>By Friday: Write me a two page, single-spaced memo</td>
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<td>June 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Readings:</td>
<td>Coles, <em>Documentary work</em></td>
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<td>Putnam et al., &quot;Chapter 8: Social capital&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geertz, &quot;Deep play&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practices of research group: Delegate responsibility for the collation of the resources you have found and will share with the class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 21</td>
<td>(arranged kamikaze group meetings)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data analysis: Round two</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assignment due: Bring a write up of a second attempt at data analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>By Friday: Write me a two page memo</td>
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June 26

Ethical considerations and generalizability

Readings:
Campbell, "Degrees of freedom and the case study"
Peshkin, "In search of subjectivity -- one's own"

Practices of research group meetings:
Prepare for Thursday presentations

June 28

In the end, is our beginning

Readings:
Geertz, "The state of the art"

Presentations by practices of research groups

Assignments due:
Exemplars paper
Group bibliographies
Final reflection
Lessons learned paper

Class Bibliography

Required readings:

Okey, T., & Cusick, P. A. Dropping out: Another side of the story. *Education Administration Quarterly*.


**Supplementary readings:**


