

University of Southern California
EDHP 700: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS IN EDUCATION
Spring, 2004

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COURSE OVERVIEW

This course helps students to develop knowledge about conducting research using qualitative methods. It focuses on fostering a knowledge about methodology, not just methods. Students must align their methods with a particular research tradition or paradigm. Methodological issues focus on the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of research. We will compare and contrast various paradigms and qualitative traditions. Through reading, discussion, and exercises linked to individual research projects, students will gain firsthand experience with a range of issues, including design characteristics of different types of qualitative research; issues related to study focus, data collection, data analysis and representation, and narrative reporting; and issues related to ethical and verification standards.

COURSE METHODS

A major part of the course will revolve around readings and focused exercises that foster the development of each individual's personal research plans and personal competencies in qualitative research. Over the duration of the course and with support from their peers and the instructor, each student will design a qualitative research project. Students will use their developing knowledge of qualitative research to inform their proposal plans, and in turn, use their plans and activities to enhance their knowledge of qualitative research in general.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. to develop philosophical, theoretical, and methodological expertise with regard to qualitative research issues;
2. to develop a general understanding and appreciation of several traditions within qualitative research;
3. to explore the distinctions among, and the strengths, challenges, limitations, language, of data collection approaches, analysis strategies, and reporting approaches of these traditions;
4. to foster students' personal research skills, competencies, and plans using a range of experiential and reflective learning strategies.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

It is assumed that every class member will: complete assignments in a timely fashion, contribute freely and meaningfully to class discussions, and as appropriate, prepare critiques of research, readings, and class efforts. This is a *high demand* reading and assignment class. It is imperative that you not get behind. You will need to keep up with assignments. In addition to these common expectations, each student will prepare and present:

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Presentation of Research Methodology

10%

As a group you will develop a presentation of a research methodology. The presentation should review: unique aspects of the methodology, its origin, and how research design, data collection, and analysis are affected by the assumptions of this methodology.

2. Qualitative Research Project Proposal

60%

Due the weekend of

Length: approximately 20 pages (double spaced; references in APA 5th ed, or style appropriate to tradition). This will be developed based on your earlier assignments. The proposal should be developed through exercises in one tradition (based on research interests): biography, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, case study, or another methodology undertaken throughout the course. The proposal may include the following elements:

Introduction

- Overview
- Topic and Purpose
- Potential Significance
- Framework and general research questions
- Research Questions and Focus

Review of Related Literature (use any of the following)

- Theoretical traditions
- Essays by informed experts
- Related research

Design and Methodology

- Overall approach and rationale
- Site or population selection
- Description of Setting
- Pilot Studies proposal
- Data collection procedures
- Data analysis plan
- Limitations

Validity or Trustworthiness (standards of quality)

- Personal Biography (optional)
- Ethical and political considerations
- Implications (optional)

Evaluation Rubric:

You will develop an evaluation rubric by which you wish your proposal to be judged. The evaluation rubric will be given to your proposal committee (comprised of three fellow students) to guide their preparation of feedback to you on your proposal. It should include items such as does my methodology frame the research design? Is the methodology tied to my research questions?

Draft Proposal Presentation: You will email your proposal to members of your committee one week before class the final class. You will be responsible for reading one proposal and providing feedback. However, committee members should share copies of their proposals with all members of the committee and committee members are responsible for reading every proposal (so they are familiar at the time of the presentation). You will have twenty five minutes to review your proposal. At the end of each presentation, there should be a question period and opportunity for the whole committee to offer feedback to the candidate. Please limit this question/advice period to 25 minutes. Your goal should be to finish all members of the committee in 4 hours. We will spend the remaining time discussing any themes across the groups.

Feedback report from Proposal hearings

Due via email the day after the last session

You will be responsible for developing feedback for one member of the group you work with to evaluate proposals. Each member of the proposal committee will act as a chair for another member.

Responsibilities include managing the proposal presentation, timing, and recording feedback, preparing a feedback report summarizing the feedback provided by other members to the “candidate.” Please provide a copy of your feedback to the candidate as well as a copy to me for grading purposes. You will be graded on:

- Thoroughness of notes
- Follows the standards established in the evaluation rubric
- Demonstrates thorough review of the proposal
- Feedback is both critical and constructive

Final Proposal

The final proposal should incorporate in feedback from the presentation of the proposal and the feedback report. The final proposal will be due one week after the last class session – June 19th.

3. Assignments for each weekend

30%

Two page description of issue to study (due prior to class)

5 page description of research paradigm and tradition you are working within (due first weekend)

Research design overview: questions, focus, access, ethics, sample, and setting (due second weekend)

Interview protocol and description of interviews (due second weekend)

Conduct 3 interviews; Transcribe portion of tape (due third weekend)

Observation and field notes (due third weekend)

Proposed methods for data collection and analysis (due third weekend)

Data analysis exercise (conduct in class)

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Spradely, J. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York, Harcourt Brace.

Van Manen, J. *Tales from the field*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Course pack with supplemental readings. They are mostly from the Handbook of Qualitative Research. Denzin and Lincoln, 2001. Thousand Oaks, Sage.

RECOMMENDED READING

Bogdan, R.C. & Biklin, S.K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*, 3rd ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Mischler, E. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage.

Potter, W. J. (1996). *An Analysis of Thinking and Research about Qualitative Methods*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

EVALUATION

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| 1. Qualitative proposal/evaluation rubric | 60% |
| 2. Weekend assignments | 30% |
| 3. Presentation of research methodology | 10% |

COMMENTS REGARDING INTERNET

Students are encouraged to expand their knowledge of qualitative research by learning about and using various Internet resources.

1. Listservs and web sites

You may choose to locate and consider subscribing to a listserv where qualitative research issues are being discussed. A good list of listservs can be found at:

<http://osiris.Colorado.edu/SOC/RES/qualist.html>

Also, the web site: www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/web.html Provides an extensive list of interesting sites related to qualitative research. As you surf the net, if you come upon some particularly helpful web sites, please tell all the rest of us.

2. Specialized web sites.

Students may wish to locate, examine/download resources located on specialized sites. For example, companies that have developed computer software for qualitative data management and analysis often have web sites, which describe the capabilities of the software. Regarding demos---BEWARE!!

Some students have had great difficulty trying to download demos. Examples of these sites include:

- Web site for Atlas software: <http://www.atlas.de/>
- Web site for The Ethnograph: <http://qualisresearch.com/>
- Web site for Nud*ist: <http://www.qsr.com.au>

In surfing the net, you can also easily find short articles dealing with qualitative research issues. These types of resources can be very useful, but always be a critical reader. This is particularly true for internet manuscripts and web sites, since the content has usually (though not always) undergone the peer review process that is typically associated with scholarly writing. Remember, too, that companies providing information on analysis software products will likely be biased toward their product. Be a critical consumer.

OVERVIEW OF SCHEDULE

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| Session 1 | April 30/May 1st – Topics: what is qualitative research; research paradigms; five traditions |
| Session 2 | May 21 st /22 nd – Topics: Research design & Data collection |
| Session 3 | May 27 th /28 th – Topics: Reflection of Data collection; Analysis techniques; Trustworthiness |
| Session 4 | June 11 th /12 th -- Writing up research; Proposal presentations |

June 13th – email critique to committee member

June 19th final proposal due

WEEKEND SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

SESSION 1

Assignments due prior to this session: Turn in a two-page description of an issue you will develop a research proposal on. Focus on reviewing a limited amount of relevant literature.

Assignments due this session: 5 page description of research paradigm and tradition you will use to frame your research proposal

Section 1 – Introduction to qualitative research (2-3 hour)

Goals for the section: Introductions, share research interests, describe what qualitative research is,

Readings: Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, chapt 5
Course pack: Eisner, The enlightened eye, what makes qualitative research
Stake, The art of case study, chapter 3

Questions: What are the six qualities of qualitative research outlined by Eisner? What is experiential understanding? What does it mean to be interpretive? Please begin to think about the underlying assumptions of conducting qualitative research.

Section 2 – Research Paradigms (3 hours)

Goals for the Section: The first step to beginning any research study is to understand what assumptions about the nature of reality and human beings, what counts as knowledge and how knowledge is developed. Taken together these concepts are called a **research paradigm**. Each of us have notions about these various concepts, but we seldom examine or challenge these assumptions. These assumptions make up a philosophy or paradigm of how we believe the world operates and how knowledge can be developed. This week we review the main paradigmatic stances: positivism, post positivism, constructivism, critical theory/feminism, and participatory research. Your goal is to understand the various paradigms and identify which one will guide your work as a researcher.

Readings: Crotty, The foundations of social research

Questions: What is epistemology, ontology, and axiology? What is the historical debate about subjectivity and objectivity? What is the orthodoxy or scientific worldview that many authors discuss? Can you describe the history of the qualitative research tradition? Why is this history important? Are paradigms commensurable (and what does that mean)? What are some dilemmas within paradigms and how are they being resolved, e.g., control, validity? What are the three underlying features of interpretivism? When postmodernism is mixed with interpretivism, what happens?

Section 3 – Methodology: The Five Traditions (5 hours)

Goals for the Section: Researchers must also identify a methodological tradition to work within that is aligned with their research paradigm. This week we review some of the major methodological traditions and the paradigms with which they are associated. Methodology differs from methods. Methodology entails the whole set of assumptions, e.g., ethnography, that one brings to research, whereas, methods are techniques – such as interviewing, observation.

Readings: Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, chapt 1, 2, 3, 4, Appendix B-E

Questions: What are the epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions of each tradition? Is it easy or difficult to determine? Think of your research topic, how could you envision different studies on the topic within each of the traditions. How would the study look similar or different? What information might you likely discover based on the tradition you used. What sorts of questions or topics lend themselves to particular traditions?

Activity: Group presentations of research methodologies

SESSION 2

Assignments: Research design overview: questions, focus, access, ethics, sample, and setting; Interview protocol

Section 1 – Research Design - designing research questions and focusing the study (2 hours)

Goals for the Section: In addition to carefully outlining a research paradigm and matching methodology, the research must take these assumptions into account as they develop a research design. We will examine the elements of a research proposal. We will also focus on how a research focus or question is developed in qualitative research. Within the qualitative tradition, the researcher needs to consider their role as a research instrument. Reflection on your own views of the issue studied are important ways to consider these issues as you develop the research design.

Readings: Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, chapt 6
Course pack: Maxwell, *Research proposals*

Activity: Bring in a proposed set of research questions and focus to be discussed in class

Section 2 – Research Design: sample and site, access, and ethics (2 hours)

Goals for the section: This section continues to evolve your understanding of the elements of research design. Once you have identified a topic or research question, you have chosen a methodology, and documented your own perspective on the topic, then you need to move on to some of the finer details of methods, who you will interview or observe, access and ethics. One way to determine some of these more fine-tune issues is through a pilot study.

Readings: Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, Chapt 6 &7
Course pack: Kezar, *the importance of pilot studies*

Activity: In groups, review major design features of studies within the tradition you analyzed last week within the journal article and how you think you will use it (or another tradition) to approach your study proposal.

Questions: What methods seem to fit within your methodology and would help illuminate your topic? How might you design a pilot study for the topic under consideration? What do you think some of the major concerns and issues are that you might test out in a pilot study? What are some the ethical concerns that you need to consider?

Section 3 – Data Collection: Interviews & Focus Groups (3 hours)

Goals for the Section: One of the primary methods used by qualitative researcher is the interview. This week we explore different approaches to interviewing. Your paradigm and methodology affect the way interviews are conceptualized and conducted. Think about a positivist versus a constructivist interview...how would they look different? What are structured interviews, semi or unstructured interviews, elite interviews, life history interviews, postmodern interviewing? We examine the pros and cons of conducting focus groups, the various types of focus groups and the best ways they can be structured. We will review the key challenges and issues you need to examine as you conduct interviews this next week.

Readings: Spradley – The Ethnographic interview, part 2 – 45-78; part 2 – 92-185 (just sections on asking questions)

Coursepack: Fontana & Frey, The interview

Morgan, Focus groups as qualitative research

Activity: Role play an interview and focus group. Review protocol in groups.

Section 4 – Data Collection: Observations, Document analysis, Observation of Physical space, Videotaping, and Field Notes (3 hours)

Goals for the section: We will examine when observation, field work and participant observation are helpful to use. Many of these techniques are used within ethnographic and case study research. Because case study and ethnography are so commonly used in educational research, we will review these methodologies in greater depth as part of the next two weeks readings, supplementing our earlier discussions about the five traditions. These readings also start to touch on issues of presentation and validity that we will examine in depth later in the term. You can begin to envision these issues as part of the research design.

Although less commonly used in education (especially higher education) research, document analysis, observation of space and videotaping are important data collection techniques. Document analysis is usually conducted as part of a case study, but a review of documents can be a study in itself. It is often easy to understand power relationship and status in a school or campus by observing office size and placement. Videotaping is a helpful approach to study teaching techniques. We will examine the uses and advantages of using these research methods.

Readings: Creswell chapt. 7

Course pack: Bogdan & Biklen, chapt. 3& 4

Hodder, The interpretation of documents and material culture

Harper, Visual methods

Atkinson and Hamerselsy, Ethnography

Questions: As a participant observer or after working for months in the field you will become very familiar with people in that setting. What are the advantages of such contact? What about the development of relationships with the people you observe? Who holds power in such relationships? What are the key stages and problems of observation? How are observations or focus groups conceptualized differently within varying methodologies or paradigms? What are instrumental and intrinsic cases? What research design considerations emerge in the articles on case study? What research design considerations emerge in the articles on ethnography? Do texts speak for themselves? What is material culture? Are there different standards for confirming interpretation of material culture? What

films have you seen that had a significant affect on your understanding of an issue? What is captivating about film or photography?

SESSION 3

Assignments: Conduct 3 interviews; Transcribe portion of tape; Observation and field notes; Proposed methods for data collection and analysis

Section 1 – Reflection of Data Collection (1-2 hours)

Having conducted the interview and observation, this first section will review the experience and lessons learned. Discussion of any method of data collection you are still unclear about.

Activity: discussion of issues related to conducting interviews. What issues emerged for you?

Section 2 – Analysis Techniques (General data analysis strategies) (5 hours)

Goals for the section: In this section we will examine techniques for analyzing different types of data. We will draw on readings from earlier weeks, for example, the article on visual method or interviewing also described ways to think about analysis. Analysis techniques need to be aligned with your paradigm and methodology. You should utilize information from both earlier readings as well as this week to help develop a plan for analysis in your own project. We will also review some very specific techniques and concepts such as coding, themes, concept maps, categorical and componential analysis, data management, and qualitative software programs. This will be a broad overview of a whole series of analysis techniques and concepts that you will need to research at a deeper level once you conduct a study.

Readings: Creswell chapter 8

Spradley – The Ethnographic interview, part 2 – 92-185 (just analysis sections)

Coursepack: Bogdan & Biklin, chapt 5

Ryan and Bernard, Data management and analysis methods

Weitzman, Software and qualitative research

Activity: In groups review proposed methods for data collection In class, bring interview transcripts for use in assignment practicing analysis.

Session 3 – Trustworthiness (3 hours)

Goals for the section: This is perhaps one of the most contested issues in qualitative research. We will read different perspectives on criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research. Some scholars suggest that qualitative research can meet the same standards of traditional science (validity and reliability). Others argue for criteria that are commensurate with the paradigm chosen by the researcher. Others struggle to define new notions for judging qualitative knowledge. One scholar asks us to re-examine the new criteria for ensuring trustworthiness such as member checking and triangulation. Some suggest that the search for a set of criteria to judge the work is inherently imbedded with power and is a false search. Some suggest that there are many truths and various criteria, no one size will fit all. Some suggest that self-reflection is a key component of the criteria for assessing knowledge. In other words, who we are affects what we know, so who we are is an integral part of the trustworthiness of knowledge

claims. In this section, we return to many of the epistemological questions we reviewed earlier in the term.

Readings: Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, chapt 10
Coursepack: Smith and Deemer, Criteria in an age of relativism
Lincoln, Nature of qualitative evidence
Stake, Triangulation
Altheide and Johnson, Criteria for assessing qualitative research

Activity: Debate of approaches to trustworthiness

Questions: Given the paradigm/methodology you are working within, what criteria are used to assess interpretations or data as knowledge claims? Do you feel comfortable with the assumptions of your paradigm and methodology. If not, what are your concerns and how are you reconsidering them based on the readings.

SESSION 4

Section 1 - Writing up (3 hours)

Goals for the Session: Another one of the most contested issues for qualitative research is how to write up the findings of a research project. Van Mannen presents three different styles for writing up data that are aligned with the various research paradigms. Richardson asks you to consider the writing process as more emergent and coming from your analysis and interaction with the data. It is a more unique and less formulaic approach, but gives little direction. Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong ask the researchers to examine how representation of situations and people affect research subjects in the social world. They ask us to be careful in our writing up and rendering of research.

Readings: Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, chapt 9
Van Mannen, Tales from the field
Coursepack: Richardson, Writing
Fine, Weis, Weseen, Wong, For whom (ethics & writing up)

Questions: How might you imagine writing up the results of this study? What questions would you ask yourself to make this type of decision?

Section 2 -- Presentations of Proposal – Proposal Hearings (6 hours)

June 19th – Final Proposal Due