

George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development

EDRS 812
QUALITATIVE METHODS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
Fall 2011

Instructor: Joe Maxwell
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Class meeting: Thursday 4:30-7:10, Robinson B 203
Prerequisites: Successful completion (with a grade of B or higher) of EDRS 810, or equivalent coursework or experience.

Course Goals

1. Understand the most important characteristics of qualitative research, and the key ways in which this approach differs from other research strategies.
2. Understand the most important methods and strategies used in qualitative research, and how to use these in doing a qualitative study.
3. Be able to use these understandings to evaluate published qualitative research.
4. Be able to design and carry out a small-scale qualitative study.
5. Be able to effectively communicate the design, process, and results of such a study.

Expectations

Students are expected to exhibit professional behavior and dispositions at all times.

Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>].

Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html>].

If you are a student with a disability, please let me know how I can best adjust the course to your strengths and needs. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>, or call 703-993-2474 to access the ODS].

Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account. Please let me know if you have a preferred email address other than your .gmu address to use for course communication.

Campus Resources

- The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].
- The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].

Course Structure

This class will be collaborative and interactive; be prepared for discussion. Questions are encouraged and expected, and alternative viewpoints are welcome. I value a diversity of contributions to our discussions, and I expect all of us to create an educational climate that is respectful of differences. Your participation as a class member will be evaluated, not by the *quantity* of your contribution, but by the *value* and *thoughtfulness* of your contribution (see Grading, below).

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 discussion of the readings and mini-lectures.
2. The final hour or so of most classes 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. The **assigned 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 that there simply isn't time to discuss in detail in class. I expect you to come to class having thought about the readings assigned for that week and their implications for your research. I will email my notes and discussion questions on each week's readings prior to each class.
4. An individual (or collaborative) qualitative **research project**. A brief description of, and requirements for, this project are provided below; guidelines for the final project report, and for the assignments leading up to this report, will be given out in class and posted on the course Blackboard site (see Written Assignments, below).

Readings

Required Books

- Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (4th edition). Longman, 2011.
- Robert Weiss, *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. Free Press, 1994.
- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, & Linda Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (2nd 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 (2nd edition, 2007). All of the assigned chapters are essentially the same in the first and second editions.

All of the required books should be available in the GMU bookstore. My chapter-by-chapter commentary on the first three of these books is posted on the course Blackboard site.

Recommended Books

- Harry Wolcott, *Writing Up Qualitative Research* (3rd edition). Sage Publications, 2001.
- Carolyn Mears, *Interviewing for Education and Social Science Research: The Gateway Approach*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Other assigned readings will be placed either on Blackboard or on electronic reserve. These include assigned articles, unpublished memos, and my commentaries on the Glesne, Weiss, and Emerson et al. books. I will also put on Blackboard three student project reports, which are assigned reading about midway through the course. **Reading assignments are listed for the day on which they will be discussed.**

The two most important journals specifically devoted to 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 journals for papers dealing with qualitative methods in general are *Qualitative Inquiry* and *Qualitative Research*.

The *SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (2 vols, 2008), edited by Lisa Given, is a very useful reference on many specific topics in qualitative research. Another major reference is the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, third edition (2005), edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln. This is also useful, but many of the chapters deal with very specialized approaches or issues that you may never need to know about, and I have serious disagreements with some of what Denzin and Lincoln say in their Introduction. Thomas Schwandt's *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* is actually a mini-encyclopedia, with good entries on many key issues. The latter two works are available in Fenwick's reference section. 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, and 90% of your grade will be based on this. The range of possible projects that you can conduct is extremely broad, and the focus does not have to be specifically educational, since the main goal of the course is to learn how to do qualitative research. However, since one purpose of the project can be as a pilot study for your dissertation research, it is useful to think about how this project can inform your dissertation.

The primary requirement for the project is that it has to be genuinely qualitative in nature. (In the first class, we will discuss in detail what this means.) 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 third 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 consent 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 cases you will not need actual HSRB approval for your project, unless you are collecting person-identifiable data from minors or plan to publish the results).
2. **No primarily comparative studies.** Your initial research question(s) 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 research 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 a) 3 hours of interviews, or b) 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 before contacting potential participants**, and will need to address these issues in your final report. In addition, while getting an early start on selecting a setting and participants is desirable, you should not begin actual data collection before we've discussed your planned method (interviewing or observation) in class, except by special arrangement with me.

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., turn 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. These assignments are ungraded; I will return them to you with my feedback. Most of these assignments are intended, in part, 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 6000-7000 word (24-28 page) *project report* that describes your research process and results. Guidelines for all of these assignments will be posted on Blackboard and/or sent to you as email attachments. All assignments should be submitted electronically as email attachments (Microsoft Word preferred, so I can insert comments using Track Changes).

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 prior permission.**

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 15-20 minutes long; everyone will have the opportunity for 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 2) 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 recording 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 (90%) on your final project report, and secondarily (10%) on class participation. The guidelines for the final report (we'll discuss these 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 1) on the value of your contributions to class discussion and of the feedback you provide to others in the class, and 2) 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

Week Topic and assignments

1) Sept 1 Introduction to the Course and to Qualitative Research

Assigned:

“Introductory Notes” (emailed)

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Introduction and Chapter 1

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapters 1 & 2

Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Preface and Chapters 1-2 and 6

2) Sept 8 Planning a Qualitative Study

Assigned:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapter 2, pp. 27-52

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapters 3 & 4

Coles, "Method", in The Spiritual Lives of Children (on e-reserve)

Corsaro, "Entering the Child's World" (on e-reserve)

Strauss and Corbin, “Getting Started” (on e-reserve)

Recommended:

Hammersley and Atkinson, Ethnography: Principles in Practice

3) Sept 15 Site and Participant Selection, Research Relationships, Observation, and Ethics

Project “idea memo” due

Assigned:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapters 3, pp. 53-62, and Chapters 5 & 6

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 5, sections on “Developing Research Relationships” and “Site and Participant Selection”

Weiss, Learning From Strangers, pp. 33-37 and Appendix D

Simonds, “Talking with Strangers: A Researcher’s Tale” (on e-reserve)

Eckert, "Field Work in the High School" (on e-reserve)

Case: "The Unlucky Anthropologist" (Blackboard)

Recommended:

- Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapter 3
 Maxwell, "Gaining Acceptance from Participants, Clients, and Policy-makers for Qualitative Research" (Blackboard)
 Tillman-Healy, "Friendship as method" (Blackboard)
 Deborah Ceglowski, "Research as relationship" (Blackboard)
 Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chapter 4
 Rosalie Wax, Doing Fieldwork, Part 1 and Chapter 31
 Howard Becker, "Whose Side Are We On?" in Becker, Sociological Work
 Deborah L. Tolman and Mary Brydon-Miller, From Subjects to Subjectivities: A Handbook of Interpretive and Participatory Methods.

4) Sept 22 Qualitative Interviewing

Assigned:

- Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapter 4
 Weiss, Learning From Strangers, Chapters 1, 3, & 4, pp. 121-147, and Appendix D
 Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 5, section on Data Collection
 Nancy Flanagan Knapp, Interviewing Joshua (on e-reserve)

Recommended:

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

5) Sept 29 Focusing Your Study***HSRB approval form due***

Assigned:

- Strauss and Corbin, "Theoretical Sensitivity" (on e-reserve)
 Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapters 3-4
 Goldenberg, The Limits of Expectations: A Case for Case Knowledge About Teacher Expectancy Effects (Blackboard)
 Barbara Noël, "Researcher Identity Memo for a Study of Educational Reform in Bolivia." Pp. 28-31 in Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design.

6) Oct 6 Qualitative Research Project Reports: Three Examples

Researcher Identity memo due

Assigned:

Kristin Percy Calaff, "In El Salvador We Don't Have Dreams" (e-reserve)
Roberta Morse, "Is it Good Enough? Student Perceptions of Project Based Learning" (Blackboard)
Enid Irwin Madaras, "The Right People to Stick By You" (e-reserve)

Recommended:

Sarah Daily, "'Writing It Helps Me': Young Children's Metacognitive Awareness from the Perspective of Three Teachers" (Blackboard)
Patricia Kridler, "Being in the 'Middle' in Middle School" (Blackboard)
Kathleen Reilly, "From the Fourth Estate: Perspective of Three Education Reporters" (Blackboard)

7) Oct 13 Initial Analysis and Interpretation

Assigned:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapter 7
Delamont, "The Basic Rules" (on e-reserve)
Lofland et al., "Developing Analysis" (on e-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 e-reserve)
Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, chapter 4

8) Oct 20 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"
Becker, "Understanding Strange Talk" (e-reserve)
Maxwell and Miller, "Categorizing and Connecting as Components of Qualitative Data Analysis" (Blackboard)

Recommended:

- Seidman, Interviewing as Qualitative Research, Chapter 8, pp. 98-112 (e-reserve)
- Geertz, "'From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding" (e-reserve)
- Tobin, Wu, and Davidson, excerpt from *Preschool in Three Cultures* (e-reserve)
- Herbert Menzel, "Meaning: Who Needs It?" (e-reserve)
- Coffey and Atkinson, Making Sense of Qualitative Data

9) Oct 27 Drawing Conclusions and Developing Theory

Assigned:

- Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapter 8
- Becker, Generalizing From Case Studies (Blackboard)
- Chambliss, "The Mundanity of Excellence" (Blackboard)
- Case: "Summing Up a Qualitative Study" (Blackboard)

Recommended:

- Maxwell, "Theory" (Blackboard)

10) Nov 3 Presenting Qualitative Findings

Data Analysis and Conclusions memo due

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" (e-reserve)
- Phelan, Davidson, and Yu, "Donna Carlyle" (e-reserve)

Recommended:

- Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapter 3 & 7
- Wolcott, Writing Up Qualitative Research, 3rd edition
- Lofland & Lofland, Analyzing Social Settings, Chapter 10
- Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapters 9 & 10

11) Nov 10 Validity and Generalizability

Assigned:

- Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 6
- Weiss, Learning From Strangers, pp. 147-150
- Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, pp. 49-50 and 210-214
- Wolcott, "Emphasis on Interpretation" (e-reserve)

Recommended:

Maxwell, "Understanding, Evidence, and Validity," in *A Realist Approach to Qualitative Research* (Blackboard)

Dexter, "What Kind of Truth Do You Get?", in Dexter, Elite and Specialized Interviewing

Seale, The Quality of Qualitative Research

12) Nov 17 Critiquing and Revising a Qualitative Report

Deliver draft project report to your partner

Assigned:

Maxwell, "Reflections on rewriting my paper on 'Diversity, Solidarity, and Community'" (Blackboard)

Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapters 4 & 5

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Conclusion

Recommended:

Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapters 6-7

Nov 24 Thanksgiving holiday

13) Dec 1 Feedback and Consultations; Looking Ahead

Return draft project report to your partner with feedback

14) Dec 8 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*, 2nd 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.
- Alasdair MacIntyre, "Ethical Dilemmas: Notes from Outside the Field." *Anthropology Newsletter* 34 (7): 5-6, 1993.
- 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)
- Joseph Maxwell, "Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research." *Harvard Educational Review* 62 (3): 279-300, Fall 1992 (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.
- Clive Seale, *The Quality of Qualitative Research*. Sage, 1999.
- 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*, 3rd edition. Sage Publications, *
- William F. Whyte, *Learning from the Field: A Guide from Experience*. Sage, 1984.