

EDRS 812
QUALITATIVE METHODS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
Spring 2012

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| Instructor: | Helene Kalson Cohen |
| Office: | West Building 2201 |
| Office hours: | Wednesdays 12:00-4:00, by appointment |
| Phone: | 248-866-0336 |
| Email: | hcohen@gmu.edu |
| Class meeting: | Wednesday 4:30-7:10, January 25 – May 2 |
| Location: | Innovation Hall 316 |
| Prerequisites: | Successful completion (with a grade of B or higher) of EDRS 810, or equivalent coursework or experience. |

Course Goals

1. Understand the distinctive 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.

If you are a student with a disability, please let me know how I can best adjust the course to your strengths. If you need specific academic accommodations, please contact both me and the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

Course Structure

This class will be collaborative and interactive – a true Learning Community. Be prepared for discussion! Questions are encouraged and expected, and alternative viewpoints are welcome. I value a diversity of contributions to our discussions; however, I also expect all of us to create an educational climate that is respectful of differences. Further, you should be familiar with the [GMU Honor System and Code](#). Your participation as a class member will be evaluated, not by the *quantity* of your contributions, but by their *value* and *thoughtfulness* (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 each class will be structured as a support group for your research project, during which you will receive group **consultations**, from me and the rest of the

class, on your project, and provide feedback to others on their projects (see Consultations, below).

3. **Required 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 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.
4. An individual (or collaborative) qualitative **research project**. A 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, are 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, 2007 (2nd edition; the first edition is also OK, since the only changes are a few additional comments in the last chapter).

Other assigned readings will be placed either on electronic reserve or on Blackboard. These include assigned articles, unpublished papers, and student memos. **Reading assignments are listed for the day on which they will be discussed.**

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 journals for papers dealing with qualitative methods 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 *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (fourth edition, 2011), edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln. This is also useful, but many of the chapters deal with very specialized approaches or issues about which you may never need to know. Thomas Schwandt's *SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* (3rd ed., 2007) 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 80% 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 helpful 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 in terms of methods and relationships, 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 and nature of the research, and what participation in it involves. 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 plan to publish the results.
2. **No primarily comparative studies.** Your main research questions can't focus on a difference between two groups or settings or between two categories of people; if you are strongly interested 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; we'll discuss this in class.) 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. (All of this will be discussed in class.) 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 in real time, 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 can be used as preliminary drafts of pieces that, with revision, can be incorporated in your final project report. Guidelines for all of these assignments will be posted on Blackboard or given out in class. The final written assignment for the course is a 5500-6500 word (22-26 page) *project report* that describes your fieldwork process and results. Specific

guidance for your final project report is in “Guidelines and Checklist for Final Project Report,” to be handed out and discussed in the first class, and the example reports assigned for later in the course.

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 second week of the course, 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 at least two 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 round (and third, if we have time) 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 consultation 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 (80%), and secondarily on class participation (20%). 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 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 for the report will be the average of the initial grade and the grade on the revised report.

Course Outline

Date Topic and assignments

1) Jan 25 The Nature of Qualitative Research

Required Reading:

“Introductory Notes”

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapters 1 & 2

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2

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

Supplemental Reading:

Weiss, Learning From Strangers, Chapter 2

Levine, "Qualitative Research in Academic Decision Making" (electronic reserve)

Hammersley and Atkinson, Ethnography: Principles in Practice

Maxwell, Preface to A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research (Blackboard)

2) Feb 1 Site and Participant Selection, Research Relationships, Observation, and Ethics

Required Reading:

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" (Blackboard)

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

Case: "The Unlucky Anthropologist" (Blackboard)

Supplemental Reading:

Joseph Maxwell, "Gaining Acceptance from Participants, Clients, and Policy-makers for Qualitative Research" (Blackboard)

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chapters 1-3

Tillman-Healy, “Friendship as method” (Blackboard)

Deborah Ceglowski, “Research as relationship” (Blackboard)

Maruyama and Deno, Research in Educational Settings, Chapters 2 and 3

Rosalie Wax, Doing Fieldwork, Part 1 and Chapter 31

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"
(electronic reserve)

3) Feb 8 Qualitative Interviewing

Project Idea memo due

Required Reading:

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" (Blackboard)

Supplemental Reading:

Seidman, Interviewing as Qualitative Research, Chapters 6-7

Dexter, Elite and Specialized Interviewing

4) Feb 15 Focusing Your Study

HSRB approval form due

Required Reading:

Strauss and Corbin, "Theoretical Sensitivity" (electronic 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.

5) Feb 22 Initial Analysis and Interpretation

Researcher Identity memo due

Required Reading:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapter 7

Delamont, "The Basic Rules" (electronic reserve)

Lofland et al., "Developing Analysis" (Blackboard)

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 5, section on Data Analysis

Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chapter 6,

"Processing fieldnotes: Coding and memoing"

Supplemental Reading:

Geer, "First Days in the Field" (electronic reserve)

Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis, particularly chapter 4

6) Feb 29 Qualitative Research Project Reports: Three Examples

Required Reading:

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

Supplemental Reading:

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) March 7 Interpretive, Narrative, and Case Analysis***Research Relationship and Data Collection memo due***

Required Reading:

Weiss, Learning From Strangers, Chapter 6
 Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chapter 5, "Pursuing members' meanings"
 Becker, "Understanding Strange Talk" (Blackboard)
 Maxwell and Miller, "Categorizing and Connecting Strategies in Qualitative Data Analysis" (Blackboard)

Supplemental Reading:

Geertz, "From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding" (Blackboard)
 Herbert Menzel, "Meaning: Who Needs It?" (Blackboard)
 Coffey and Atkinson, Making Sense of Qualitative Data
 Seidman, Interviewing as Qualitative Research, Chapter 8, pp. 98-112 (electronic reserve)

March 14 Spring Break (no class meeting)**8) March 21 Drawing Conclusions and Developing Theory*****Data Analysis and Conclusions memo due***

Required Reading:

Maxwell, "Theory" (Blackboard)
 Chambliss, "The mundanity of excellence" (Blackboard)
 Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapter 8
 Case: "Summing Up a Qualitative Study" (Blackboard)

9) March 28 Presenting Qualitative Findings

Required Reading:

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" (Blackboard)
Phelan, Davidson, and Yu, "Donna Carlyle" (Blackboard)

Supplemental Reading:

Lamott, Bird By Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life
Wolcott, Writing Up Qualitative Research, 3rd edition
Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapters 9 & 10

10) April 4 Validity and Generalizability

Deliver draft project report to your partner

Required Reading:

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 6
Weiss, Learning From Strangers, pp. 147-150
Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, pp. 37-38 and 166-170
Wolcott, "Emphasis on Interpretation" (Blackboard)

Supplemental Reading:

Maxwell, "Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research" (Blackboard)
Dexter, "What Kind of Truth Do You Get?", in Elite and Specialized Interviewing
Becker, Sociological Work, Chapters 2, 3, & 5

11) April 11 Independent work on your research project**

****No face-to-face class meeting**

I will be available from 12:00 – 7:00 for individual consultations – by appointment

12) April 18 Critiquing and Revising a Qualitative Report

Return draft project report to your partner with feedback

Required Reading:

Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapters 4-5
Maxwell, "Reflections on rewriting my paper on 'Diversity, Solidarity, and Community'" (Blackboard)

Supplemental Reading:

Page 10 of 11 - 10 -

Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Chapters 6-7Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Conclusion**13) April 25 Research Project Presentations****14) May 2 Research Project Presentations***Final project reports due***George Mason University Policies and Resources for Students**

Mason Email: Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their GMU email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, division, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account. Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301ge.html>].

Core Values Commitment: The College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles.

Counseling and Psychological Services: 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/>].

Office of Disability Services: 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 <http://ods.gmu.edu/>].

Sound Emitting Devices: Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

The Writing Center (Optional Resource): 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/>].

University Libraries (Optional Resource): The GMU Libraries provide numerous services, research tools, and help with using the library resources [See <http://library.gmu.edu/>].

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website [See <http://gse.gmu.edu/>].

Supplemental 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* (4th ed.). Sage Publications, 2011
- 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.
- 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*, 3rd edition. Sage Publications, 2008.
- William F. Whyte, *Learning from the Field: A Guide from Experience*. Sage, 1984.