

Interpretive Research Methods

EDUC 3900 02, spring, 2005 (midcourse revisions are possible)

Instructor: Rogers Hall

Time & Location: Thursdays from 12:00 noon to 3:00 pm, 108 Payne

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Why a course on interpretive research methods? Approaches to the study of cognition, learning and teaching continue to change. To understand where the field is headed, you need to step outside any particular method for examining these human activities and look critically at claims made about the competence (or incompetence) of learners, the adequacy (or inadequacy) of modes of instruction, and the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of different settings for learning. A variety of qualitative/interpretive methods can help us to do this. But methods are more than “tools.” They are ways of working that drive the formation of disciplines: finding problems, securing resources, letting people in, and keeping or pushing people out.

Who should be taking this course? This course is designed with two kinds of graduate students in mind. The first is early in their graduate career, trying to figure out how research works, and looking for a reasonable first (or second) year project on which to start working. This student should leave the course (a) having a broad but critical familiarity with different interpretive methods (e.g., can read carefully, across different approaches) and (b) an informed opinion on the kinds of methods that would be productive for working on a research project in their area of interest. The second kind of student is further along with their research career, has decided to include qualitative/interpretive analysis in their work, may even be in the field, and is (perhaps) overwhelmed by the complexity of what they are seeing, hearing, or recording. This student should leave the course (a) with a defensible account of the methods they will be using in their analysis, (b) with some good ideas about how to organize their efforts to get that work done, and (c) with a network of similarly interested people in the university community to help in getting on with it. This is a tall order for a single, survey course on interpretive research methods, so we need active participation from all involved.

I am also, of course, trying to reproduce myself. So my hope is that some of you would keep an eye on how you might want to teach a course like this when you’ve taken a job at some other university (it happens).

What will we do? This course is assembled out of three activities: reading about the technical work of interpretive methods, reading and critiquing exemplary studies that demonstrate these methods in use, and doing interpretive analysis through assignments and projects that (should) provide experience with the actual work of using different methods. There is one book assigned for this course, and I recommend you purchase it under your own steam (amazon.com is where I went).

MaCleod, J. (1995). *Ain't no makin' it: Aspirations and attainment in a low income neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc.

Most of our readings will come from a collection of articles, book chapters, and manuscripts listed below. Here is the book, which we will read and discuss in two parts (Weeks 7 and 10). As possible, I would like you to use the E-Journals service at our library to gain access to readings (<http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/heard/ejournals.shtml>). If we need to use ERES or some other method, I will set that up after the first class meeting. Draft or in press papers will be mailed as electronic attachments. Supplementary readings can be found in the library or by asking to borrow copies from me. I recommend that you look into some of these and keep them in mind for future use.

How will your work be graded? There are three assignments that will be evaluated, in ascending order of importance (numbered items below), to count 20%, 30%, and 50% of the course grade.

1. *Observation and Description of an Informal Learning/Teaching Setting (20%)*. I want to get you “into the field” in order to have experiences against which our reading will make for interesting discussion. Thus, I’m asking you to conduct an *informal observation of a non-school learning and/or teaching setting* between the first and fourth weeks (Assignment 1 is described in the syllabus).
2. *Student Presentations and Moderated Discussions of Readings (30%)*. Present papers that review/critique methods or make exemplary use of qualitative methods to the class (from the syllabus reading list or from supplementary readings), including a summary annotation sent by email and provided in hard copy for other members of the class. Your presentation and summary annotation will be evaluated.

Your *presentations* should be compact (about 10 minutes), followed by discussion of what you see as key questions/issues (about 20 minutes; I will make suggestions for each reading, in advance).

A *summary annotation* should accomplish the following things: Can you write out a brief, critical review of the “little logic” that organizes a piece of research? In terms of the methods used to make inferences about human activity, where does this work fit and what’s the point of doing it? If you returned to your (or another’s) annotation three years from now, would you be able to judge whether or not this paper is something you could use in your dissertation literature review? Would you be able to recommend (or critique) this paper for a colleague or a student? Would the annotation help you use the paper in your own teaching? I will provide examples of summary annotations by presenting the first several assigned readings.

3. *Course Project (50%)*. Work individually or in a team to plan, conduct, write up, and present a study of learning and/or teaching in or out of traditional school settings. The choice of topic is yours (the learning and teaching angle is specific to my home department, so is up for negotiation), but some examples could include:
 - a. What happens when students do homework, by comparison with the rational images of student work present in instructional texts and cognitive theories of skill acquisition?
 - b. Who actually “knows” a student (and this may vary for different kinds of students) across grade levels in schools that form feeder systems within a organization like METRO; what would be required of teachers and organizational systems to keep track of learners in a way that is productive for their future (versus simply for the organization)?
 - c. How is learning and teaching organized in project teams, either in classrooms or workplaces? How are problems identified (versus given), how are different representational technologies used to make progress, and how are group/individual contributions assessed? Where do innovations arise, what demands do these place on individuals, and how is learning organized? [With graduate student, Jonathan Laughnan, I am developing two archival collections of field data sources, one from studies of project-based mathematics instruction in middle school (MLKN corpus), and the other from a field entomology research group (BugHouse corpus). These archives are available for use in your projects, if they interest you.]
 - d. How could you characterize the teaching/learning going on in highly visible (or audible) media events? Some examples might include NPR’s “Car Talk” program or the PBS News Hour with Jim Lehrer?

- e. So you have your own research project underway... how can you use the project assignment of this course to solidify your approach, to get a coherent analytic framework for finding questions and answers in your project, etc.? *Most graduate students choose this option, as it feeds your coursework directly into progress through your graduate program.*

The project will include (a) a written research proposal/plan that clearly describes a research question, a brief survey of literature bearing on this question, the site of your study and kinds of information collected as data, and your plan for analysis (due in class, Week 6), (b) a work-in-progress analysis session done in class (with feedback from students and instructor; these will be scheduled during Weeks 13, 14 and 15), and (c) a “final” written report of your project (due at last class meeting, Week 16 during finals week).

Week 1: January 13, 2005

We will discuss the course, do a round of introductions, and get set up for the semester. I will be traveling next week, so I'll need to make the first assignment and set out readings for discussion during Week 3.

I will distribute a paper by Howard Becker on why “A school is a lousy place to learn anything in” (either in class or through a course box in the Wyatt 160 Suite; Kenya Hale is the Administrative Assistant, 322 8274, kenya.hale@vanderbilt.edu). Becker's paper will help you think about the first assignment, and we will discuss this in class (along with 2 other papers) during Week 3.

Assignment 1 (20%, due Weeks 4 and 5): Form a group with two of your classmates (i.e., groups of three). Together, you will select a setting for learning and/or teaching out of school. You will work out a description of this setting in three parts:

1. Each member of your group should observe the setting and independently write a brief (3 ss pages max) memo describing what they've seen, insuring the anonymity of people in the setting. It would be optimal if each member of your group could observe at the same time, but in any case, do NOT DISCUSS what you choose to describe in this first memo. Your memo can include any materials you like (I encourage the use of drawings, excerpts from documents found in the site, photographs, artifacts, timelines, etc.).
2. Give a copy of your memo to me and to each member of your group (due Week 4). In looking over your peers' memos, have they seen things you did not? Do they make inferences about people's goals, knowledge, or competence that you find defensible/undefensible?
3. Meet as a group and discuss what you've found (every one should be able to talk in the meeting). Compose an integrated memo (5 ss pages max) that describes learning/teaching in the non-school setting you visited (due Week 5). Account for differences and similarities between your observations and include any integration of perspectives that you are able to achieve. In this group memo, describe what you would do next if you were to study this setting in more detail.

Every student will hand in a copy of their independent memo; each group will turn in a copy of their combined memo. Readings that may help you to get started are Becker's paper on “A school is a lousy place to learn anything in,” Schatzman and Strauss' chapter on “Strategy for recording” (to be discussed Week 8), and Atkinson & Delamont's paper on “Mockups and cockups” (suggested, but not assigned). Don't be terrified by this assignment, it should be fun.

Week 2: January 20, 2005 (Rogers traveling)

Sorry I cannot meet with you all. I will be at the *Winter Conference on Discourse, Text and Cognition* (<http://litd.psych.uic.edu/assoc/wintertext/>). You, in contrast, can be working on your first assignment. Again, Becker's paper on why "school is a lousy place to learn" may be very helpful to you.

Week 3: January 27, 2005

Why a course on interpretive research methods?

Becker, H. (1996). The epistemology of qualitative research. In R. Jessor, A. Colby & R. Schweder (Eds.), *Essays on ethnography and human development* (pp. 53-71). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [online at www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/hbecker/qa.html]

Whitehurst, G. (2003). The Institute of Education Sciences: New wine, new bottles. AERA presentation. <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/ies.html>

Becker, H.S. (1972). A school is a lousy place to learn anything in. In H. Becker (Ed.), *Doing things together* (pp. 173-190). Evanston, ILL: Northwestern University Press.

Further reading:

For other (mostly wonderful) writing by Howard Becker see:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~hsbecker/>

Atkinson, P. and Delamont, S. (1977) Mock-ups and cock-ups: the stage-management of guided discovery instruction. (pp. 87-108) In P. Woods and M. Hammersley (Eds.) *School experience : explorations in the sociology of education*. New York : St. Martin's Press.

For a stunning contrast in problem choice, methods, and inference read the following two papers together:

Simon, H.A. (1973) The structure of ill-structured problems. *Artificial Intelligence 4*, 181-201.

Lave, J., Murtaugh, M. and de la Rocha, O. (1984) The dialectic of arithmetic in grocery shopping. In B. Rogoff and J. Lave (Eds.) *Everyday cognition: its development in social context* (pp. 67-94). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

These papers mark major turning points in studies of cognition and learning. If these issues (and the history) get you going, see also:

Lave, J. (1988). *Cognition in practice: mind mathematics and culture in everyday life*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. (see in particular Chapters 1 and 4)

Simon, H. A. (1982). *The sciences of the artificial*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Star, S. L. (1989) The structure of ill-structured solutions: boundary objects and heterogeneous distributed problem solving. (pp. 37-54) In M. Huhns and L. Gasser (Eds.) *Distributed artificial intelligence 2*. Menlo Park, CA: Morgan Kaufmann.

Week 4: February 3, 2005

Traditions in interpretive research and how might you choose among them.

- Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp.119-161). New York: Macmillan.
- Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1993) Competing paradigms in qualitative research. (pp. 105 - 117) In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- McDermott, R.P. and Hood, L. (1982). Institutionalized psychology and the ethnography of schooling. In P. Gilmore and A. Blatthorn (Eds.) *Children in and out of school* (pp. 232-249). Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Further reading:

- Jacob, E. (1987). Qualitative research traditions: A review. *Review of Educational Research*, 57, 1-50.

Assignment 1(a): Independent memos describing teaching/learning out of school due in class. Briefly share field experiences in class. Group memo due (next) Week 5.

Week 5: February 10, 2005

How will you find, get access to, and get along in a field research setting?

- Ball, D. L. (1999). Working on the inside: Using one's own practice as a site for studying teaching and learning. In D. Lesh & A. Kelley (Eds.) *Handbook of Research Design in Mathematics and Science Education* (pp. 365-402). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Sacks, H. (1984). On doing "being ordinary". In J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (Eds.) *Structures of social action: Studies in conversational analysis* (pp. 413-429). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Spradley, J.P. (1980). The ethnographic research cycle; Locating a social situation; Descriptive question matrix. *Participant observation* (pp. 26-52, 82-83). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Further Reading:

- Eisner, E. W. (1998). Ethical tensions, controversies, and dilemmas in qualitative research (Chapter 10). In *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice* (pp. 213-226). Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Ethical Standards and the American Educational Research Association. (1992). *Educational Researcher*, 21 (7), 23-26.

Assignment 1(b): Group memo due in class. Discussion of different perspectives.

Activity: Review existing IRB-approved research protocols and letters of informed consent. Discuss IRB policy on course projects in relation to this course.

Week 6: February 17, 2005 (Karen Wieckert for Rogers, traveling)

What is so complicated about participant observation?

- Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play* (Chapters 1 and 2). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Roy, D. (1959). Banana time: Job satisfaction and informal interaction. *Human Organization* 18, 158-168.
- Wieder, D.L. (1974/1983). Telling the convict code. In R.M. Emerson (Ed.) *Contemporary field research: a collection of readings*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, pp. 78-90, 1983. Reprinted from Wieder, D.L. (1974). *Language and social reality: the case of telling the convict code*. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton & Co. N.V., Publishers.

Further reading:

- Frake, C. O. (1977/1997). Plying frames can be dangerous: Som reflections on methodology in cognitive anthropology. *The Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition* 1(3), 1-7. Reprinted in M. Cole, Y. Engestrom, & O. Vasquez (Eds.), *Mind, culture, and activity: Seminal papers from the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition* (pp. 32-46). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- McDermott, R. P. (1993) The acquisition of a child by a learning disability. (pp. 269-305) In S. Chaiklin and J. Lave (Eds.) *Understanding practice: perspectives on activity and context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thorne, B. (1987). Re-visioning women and social change: Where are the children? *Gender and Society* 1, 85-109.

Course Project: Proposals due at beginning of class. Reviews by following Monday. You will be required to revise and get my approval to proceed.

Week 7: February 24, 2005

Reading/writing ethnographic accounts (part 1).

- MaCleod, J. (1995). *Ain't no makin' it: Aspirations and attainment in a low income neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc. [Part 1, through p. 150]

Further reading:

- Eckert, P. (1989) *Jocks and burnouts*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Harper, D. A. (1987). *Working knowledge: Skill and community in a small shop*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Ferguson, A. A. (2000). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race and family life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Rose, M. (2004). *The mind at work: Valuing the intelligence of the American worker*. Viking.

Stack, C. B. (1997). *Call to home: African Americans reclaim the rural south*. New York: Basic Books.

Willis, P. E. (1977). *Learning to labor: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Farnborough, England: Saxon House.

Week 8: March 3, 2005

Some useful strategies for recording and analysis.

Schatzman, L. and Strauss, A.L. (1973). *Field research* (pp. 94-107). Strategy for recording. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Hall, R. (2000). Video recording as theory. In D. Lesh & A. Kelley (Eds.) *Handbook of Research Design in Mathematics and Science Education* (pp. 647-664). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

McDermott, R.P., K. Gospodinoff, and J. Aron (1978). Criteria for an ethnographically adequate description of activities and their contexts. *Semiotica* 24, 245-275.

Further reading:

Erickson, F. and Schultz, J. (1977/1997). When is a context? Some issues and methods in the analysis of social competence. In M. Cole, Y. Engestrom, & O. Vasquez (Eds.), *Mind, culture, and activity: Seminal papers from the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition* (pp. 22-31). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Originally appeared in *Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition* 1, 5-10, 1977.

Goodwin, C. (1993). Recording human interaction in natural settings. *Pragmatics* 3(2), 181-209.

Hutchins, E. (1995). *Cognition in the wild*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Ochs, E. (1979). Transcription as theory. In E. Ochs and B. B. Schieffelin (Eds.), *Developmental pragmatics* (pp. 43-72, and references 415-429). New York: Academic Press.

Roschelle, J. (2000). Choosing and using video equipment for data collection. In D. Lesh & A. Kelley (Eds.) *Handbook of Research Design in Mathematics and Science Education* (pp. 709-732). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Sanjek, R. (1990). *Fieldnotes: the makings of anthropology*. Ithaca, NH: Cornell University Press.

Week 9: March 10, 2005, Spring Break

Week 10: March 17, 2005

Reading/writing ethnographic accounts (part 2).

MaCleod, J. (1995). *Ain't no makin' it: Aspirations and attainment in a low income neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc. [Part 2, including Appendix on "making of"]

Week 11: March 24, 2005

Why interviews and how to conduct them as conversations.

- Burgess, R. G. (1984) Interviews as conversations. *In the field* (pp. 101-122). London: George Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd.
- Becker, H.S. and Geer, B. (1969) Participant observation and interviewing: a comparison. [and commentaries] In G.J. McCall and J.L. Simmons (Eds.) *Issues in participant observation: a text and reader*, 322-341. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Clayman, S. (1992). Footing in the achievement of neutrality: the case of news-interview discourse. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings* (pp. 163-198). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Further reading:

Ginsburg, H. (1997). *Entering the child's mind: The clinical interview in psychological research and practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Suchman, L. and Jordan, B. (1990) Interactional troubles in face-to-face survey interviews. *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 85, 232-253.

Activity: View documentary film, *The Fog of War*, followed by a panel discussion with advanced graduate students who are using interviews in their research.

Week 12: March 31, 2005

Analyzing talk as the contents of mind.

- Chi, M. (1997) Quantifying qualitative analyses of verbal data: a practical guide. *Journal of the Learning Sciences* 6(3), 271-315.
- Ericsson, K. A., & Simon, H. A. (1998). How to study thinking in everyday life: Contrasting think-aloud protocols with descriptions and explanations of thinking. *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 5(3) 178-186.
- Smagorinsky, P. (1998). Thinking and speech and protocol analysis. *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 5(3) 157-177

Further reading:

Chi, M.T.H., Lewis, M.W., Reimann, P. and Glaser, R. (1989) Self-explanations: how students study and use examples in learning to solve problems. *Cognitive Science* 13, 145-182.

Ericsson, K.A. and Simon, H.A. (1984) *Protocol analysis: verbal reports as data*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Hutchins, E. (1995b) How a cockpit remembers its speeds. *Cognitive Science* 19, 265-288.

Siegler, R.S. and Crowley, K. (1991) The microgenetic method: A direct means for studying cognitive development. *American Psychologist* 46(6), 606-620.

Week 13: April 7, 2005

Analyzing mind as talk-in-interaction.

- Goodwin, C. (2003). Pointing as situated practice. In S. Kita (Ed.), *Pointing: Where language, culture, and cognition meet* (pp. 217-241). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Hall, R. (1999). The organization and development of discursive practices for “having a theory”. *Discourse Processes*, 27(2), 187-218.
- Jordan, B. and Henderson, A. (1995) Interaction analysis: foundations and practice. *Journal of the Learning Sciences* 4(1), 39–103.

Further reading:

- Goldin-Meadow, S. (1997). Transitions in concept acquisition: Using the hand to read the mind. *Psychological Review* 100, 279-297.
- Goodwin, C. and Heritage, J. (1990) Conversation analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19, 283-307.
- Hanks, W. F. (1996) *Language and communicative practices*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc.
- McNeill, D. (1992) *Hand and mind: what gestures reveal about thought*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1, “Images, inside and out” (pp. 11-35)
- Pomerantz, A. & Fehr, B. J. (1997). Conversation analysis: An approach to the study of social action as sense making practices. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as social interaction: Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction*, Volume 2 (pp. 64-91). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1991) Conversation analysis and socially shared cognition. (pp. 150-171) In L. Resnick, J. Levine, and S. Teasley (Eds.) *Perspectives on social shared cognition*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- ten Have, P. (1999). *Doing conversation analysis: A practical guide*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Course Project: In-class working session on student projects.

Week 14: April 14, 2005 (Karen Wieckert for Rogers at AERA Meetings)

Developing grounded theory.

- Charmaz, K. (1983). The grounded theory method: an explication and interpretation. In R.M. Emerson (Ed.), *Contemporary field research: a collection of readings* (pp. pp. 109-126). Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.
- Star, S. L. (1985). Scientific work and uncertainty. *Social Studies of Science* 15, 391-417.
- Strauss, A. (1987) Integrative diagrams and integrative sessions. In *Qualitative analysis for social scientists* (pp. 170-183). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Further reading:

- Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, Illinois: Aldine Pub. Co.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Course Project: In-class working session on student projects.

Week 15: April 21, 2005

Pulling apart writing up.

Geertz, C. (1973) Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture. In R.M. Emerson (Ed.) *Contemporary field research: a collection of readings*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, pp. 37-59, 1983. Reprinted from Geertz, C. (1973) *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. New York: Basic Books Inc.

Clifford, J. (1990) Notes on (field)notes. (pp. 47-70) In R. Sanjek (Ed.) *Fieldnotes: the makings of anthropology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Further reading:

Becker, H.S. (1986) *Writing for social scientists: how to start and finish your thesis, book or article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Becker, H. S. (1998). *Tricks of the trade: How to think about your research while you're doing it*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Clifford, J. & Marcus, G. E. (1986). *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Course Project: In-class working session on student projects.

Week 16: April 28, 2005 (examination period)

Final paper due in class. Course evaluations and redux completed in class. No assigned reading.