

**EDUC 3912**  
**Methods of Educational Research: Qualitative**  
**Spring 2006**

Instructor:  
Debbie Rowe, Ph.D.  
Department of Teaching and Learning  
Office: 363 Wyatt Center  
Direct phone: 322-8044  
Nancy Middleton (faculty assistant): 322-2010  
Home Phone: 794-8941  
Home FAX: 794-5086

Office Hours:  
Fri. (and other days) by appointment  
  
E-mail: Debbie.rowe@vanderbilt.edu  
  
Please leave voice mail at my home number.

**Course Description:**

This is an introductory course in qualitative research methods. The primary focus of the course will be the assumptions and related research techniques of qualitative research framed by the postpositivist paradigms of ethnographic and naturalistic/constructivist inquiry. This course will cover issues and strategies involved in research design, data collection, data analysis, and reporting of qualitative research. Primary emphasis will be given to learning to collect data through depth-interviewing and participant observation. Strategies for organizing and analyzing qualitative data will also be introduced, as will strategies for writing academic critiques and reports of qualitative research. Students will gain an introductory knowledge of computer-based analysis of qualitative data.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To compare and contrast the guiding assumptions and techniques of the positivist and postpositivist research paradigms.
2. To design a qualitative research study reflecting constructivist assumptions about research.
3. To develop skill in collecting data through depth (ethnographic) interviews and participant/observation.
4. To develop skill in analyzing qualitative data generated by naturalistic and ethnographic techniques.
5. To develop skill in using appropriate quality criteria to critique qualitative research studies.
6. To develop skill in writing critiques and reports of qualitative research for academic audiences.
7. To develop skill in using NUD\*IST qualitative data analysis software.

**Course Content and Sequencing:**

Content for this course is arranged in two major sections. Topics for reading and discussion have been arranged so that students get an overview of the method and then revisit selected topics a second time for in-depth study during the second half of the semester.

Overview of Constructivist/Naturalistic Research

The first part of the course provides an overview of the constructivist/naturalistic research paradigm and associated methods. We are essentially doing a "quick read" and discussion of

*Doing Naturalistic Inquiry* (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). This provides a starting point for designing and conducting your own mini-inquiry, and for critiquing qualitative studies.

### In-depth Study of Data Collection and Analysis Techniques/Current Issues in Qualitative Research

The second part of the course revisits the data collection and analysis techniques already introduced, providing additional readings, examples, and opportunities for application and discussion.

### **Class Format:**

It is my goal to plan each class period to involve both an informational presentation (by me, your classmates, or a guest speaker) and a Workshop experience or discussion that will involve your active participation. Specific preparation is often necessary for these experiences/discussions, and discussion assignments will be provided in advance.

### **Background Readings:**

In addition to the required readings, I sometimes list "background reading." We will not be discussing these articles in class, but you may want to access them now or in the future to gain a deeper understanding of topics covered in this introductory course. You should ask for additional references on other course topics you would like to explore in more depth. I'll be glad to provide them.

### **Course Assignments:**

#### 1. Class Interview Project (5% of Final Grade)

Students will interview a classmate and another peer to develop a shared set of data to be used for discussion in workshop sessions. This project involves:

- conducting 1 interview in class and 1 interview of a non-class peer outside of class
- writing detailed field notes summarizing the interviews
- writing 2 methodological memos addressed to Rowe concerning your insights/questions about the research process
- transcribing one 5 minute segment of one interview
- working with a small group to analyze portions of the data

The primary purpose for this project is raising questions about research methods and developing initial strategies that will be used in your own "mini" research project. I'm more concerned here with what you learn about research processes, than with the quality of the products that result from this project. Additional written guidelines will be provided.

#### 2. Institutional Review Board Proposal: (5% of final grade)

Students will submit a mock IRB proposal for the "mini" research project they conduct as part of this course. I will respond to your proposal and ask for one round of revisions. Students should remember that data and results of class projects may not be shared beyond the confines of EDUC 3912. Students who plan to make the findings of their project public beyond the confines of this course **MUST** also submit an official proposal to the **Vanderbilt IRB** for approval. If you fall into the latter category, see me immediately to discuss your study.

### 3. "Mini" Research Project: (50% of final grade)

This is the major project for the course and will be ongoing throughout the semester. As noted above, this assignment is not intended to yield publishable research. It is intended to provide you with an opportunity to try out research methods that might be used in future studies. You will select a research question, collect and analyze data using qualitative techniques discussed in class, prepare a written report of findings, and a self-critique of your study. These projects may be individually completed or developed in collaboration with classmates. All students are required to serve as a peer debriefer for a classmate, and to provide feedback to his/her written drafts of the research report. Additional written guidelines will be provided.

Interim Research Products due during the semester: So that you can receive feedback on methods and writing, you will be asked to submit various kinds of written products *during the course of the semester*. These include:

Statement of Problem and Guiding Questions

Field notes for one Interview or observation

Draft of written report for one strand of data analysis

Grading of Research Projects: Interim written products of your research will not be graded at the time they are handed in, but will receive responses from me and your peer debriefer. These comments are intended to help you make revisions that will be incorporated in the final report of the research project. Preparation for in-class discussion of the project and the timely production of the written products listed above is important.

### 4. Methodological Critique of Qualitative Study: (35% of final grade)

Each of you will individually complete a written critique of one qualitative research study selected by the instructor. The focus of the assignment will be critiquing the study's methods (rather than its findings). Academic writing will also be evaluated.

### 5. "Famous" Researcher Project: (5% of final grade)

Students will identify a well-known qualitative researcher in their field or a field of interest and read several of their qualitative research reports. The focus of the assignment is to look at HOW they have designed, conducted and reported their studies. Students will identify one research report to be used as a class exemplar study. This should be an article-length research report (or shorter sections taken from a longer report) and must be made available one class period before your presentation. Please select reports that are available electronically, if possible. Students will lead a class discussion of the researcher's methods and writing. A 1 to 2 page handout containing key points and an annotated reference list should be prepared for the class (16 copies) on the day of your presentation/discussion. One or two students will present to the class, beginning on Week 4.

**Required Books:**

The following required texts are available from the Vanderbilt University Bookstore:

1. Erlandson, D., Harris, E., Skipper, B., & Allen, S. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry. A guide to methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
2. Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
3. Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research. Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
4. Other required course readings are on electronic reserve (OAK) or available on the Web.

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**Required/Background Readings on Reserve:**

(EJ): available through VU library electronic journals

(OAK) available through OAK electronic reserves for EDUC 3912

Childress, H. (1998). Kinder ethnographic writing. *Qualitative Inquiry*, **4**, 249-264. (EJ)

De Munck, V. C. (1998). Participant observation: A thick explanation of conflict in a Sri Lankan Village. In V. C. De Munck & E. J. Sobo (Eds.), *Using methods in the field: A practical introduction and casebook* (pp.39-54). Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press. (OAK)

Dewalt, K., Dewalt, B., & Wayland, C. (1998). Participant Observation. In H. R. Bernard (Ed.), *Handbook of methods in cultural anthropology* (pp. 259-299). Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press. (OAK)

Erickson, F. (1992). Ethnographic microanalysis of interaction. In M. D. LeCompte, W. L. Millroy, & J. Preissle, (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research in education* (pp. 201-225). (OAK)

Green, J., Dixon, C., & Zaharlick, A. (1999). *Ethnography as a logic of inquiry*.

Heath, S. B. (2000). Linguistics in the study of language in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, *70*(1), pp. 49-59. (EJ)

Metz, M. (2000). *Sociology and qualitative methodologies in educational research*. . *Harvard Educational Review*, *70*(1), pp. 60-74. (EJ)

Rogers, A. (2000). When methods matter: Qualitative research issues in psychology. . *Harvard Educational Review*, *70*(1), pp. 75-85. (EJ)

Spradley, J. (1990). *Participant observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston. (pp. 73-84). **(OAK)**

Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Chapters 2-5) **(OAK)**

Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Chapter 5) **(OAK)**

## **TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE**

### **About this Outline:**

The outline of class sessions that follows is tentative. Developing needs of class participants, and other factors often require changes. Readings are listed by first author's last name. If readings come from sources other than the required books, full references are listed in the bibliography on pages 4-5 of the syllabus.

### **TOPICS**

### **READINGS**

<b>PART 1: OVERVIEW OF CONSTRUCTIVIST/NATURALISTIC RESEARCH</b>
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#### **Week 1: January 17**

**TOPICS:** Introductions: The Participants

Introductions: The Course

Institutional Review Board

[//www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/irb/](http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/irb/)

Review of Research Proposals: An Introduction

[Note: Follow links to "forms." Download and read the following:

Behavioral/social Sciences Application with Informed consent Document

Behavioral/social Sciences Application Instructions

Behavioral/social Sciences Sample Protocol

Continuing Review Instructions,

Continuing Review Form #1101

Pre-review checklist for the IRB application

Informed Consent, Short Form, & Assent Form Instructions

Vulnerable Populations Instructions (see those that apply to your work/children, cognitively impaired, etc.)

We will return to discuss IRB issues again on Week 4]

**DUE: Name of your Peer Debriefers**

**Week 2 : January 24**

**TOPICS (Theory):** The Big Picture: Postpositivist Approaches to Social and Educational Research  
Erlandson, Ch. 1  
Guiding Axioms for Naturalistic Inquiry

**TOPICS (Method):** Recording Field Notes, Transcribing Tapes, Organizing Field Data, Writing Summary Memos

**Exemplar Study #1:** Moje, E. B., McIntosh Ciechanowski, K., Kramer, K., Ellis, L., Carrillo, R., & Collazo, T. (2004). Working toward third space in content area literacy: An examination of everyday funds of knowledge and discourse. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39(1), 38-71.

**Workshop Preparation:** Prepare to discuss Exemplar 1 in relation to the guiding axioms and other characteristics introduced in this week's readings.

**Assignment for Workshop:** Examining Studies from your own field of study

1. Consult with your advisor or other experienced scholar knowledgeable about research in your field. Ask for help in identifying researchers in your field (or a related field) who would describe their methodology as "ethnography", "naturalistic inquiry", "qualitative research", "phenomenological research", "case study", or with another term that may indicate that it is a postpositivist approach to qualitative research. You may also want to ask which journals are most likely to report such studies.
2. Identify one qualitative study that you believe to be an exemplar of post-positivist qualitative research and bring it to class. It may be a research monograph or a research article.
3. Choose a study that reports as much information about research methods as possible.
4. Turn this study into Rowe for possible selection as an Exemplar Study.

*Background Reading:* Disciplinary Perspectives on Qual. Inquiry  
Anthropological Approaches: (Green, Dixon, Zaharlick)  
Linguistic approaches (Heath)  
Sociological approaches (Metz)  
Psychological approaches (Rogers)

**Week 3: January 31**

<b>TOPICS:</b>	Designing Naturalistic/Constructivist Inquiries	
	*posing problems and identifying research questions	Clark Worksheet
	*emergent design	Strauss, pp. 35-42, Ch. 13
	*field entry	Erlandson, Ch. 3, 4
	*Site Selection	

**WORKSHOP 1: Analyzing problems of Qualitative Studies****Workshop Preparation:**

1. Prepare to discuss the broad problems posed in Exemplar Study #1. Try to identify the principal proposition, interacting, and specifying propositions (explicit or implicit) in the researchers' problem statements.
2. Prepare to discuss the problem and broad guiding research questions for your class "mini-research project". Write your problem as a "knowledge void" using the Clark format of PP, IP, and Specifying Proposition.

**DUE FRIDAY FEB. 3 (via e-mail): FIRST DRAFT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM AND GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR MINI RESEARCH PROJECT****WORKSHOP 2: Peer Interview #1 (conducted in class) Rubin & Rubin , Ch. 6****Workshop Preparation:**

1. Plan for interview.
2. Prepare to take notes and tape record this interview.
3. After interview: Write Field Notes. Transcribe one 5 minute segment. Write a one - two page methodological memo addressed to Rowe. (These notes are due on Week 4.)

**Week 4 : Feb. 7**

<b>TOPICS:</b>	Data Collection: Key Techniques	Erlandson, Ch. 5
	Ethical Responsibilities of Researchers	//www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/irb/
	Institutional Review Board Proposals: Part 2	(materials from Week

1)

**DUE:** Complete the VU Human Subjects Training Program. The web address is:  
<http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/irb/CITIWebinstructions.htm>

This get's you to the CITI training, and then you choose the "Group III: Social Behavioral Course" option.

Work through the modules required for Social/Behavioral Sciences Research and submit your tests for approval. Be sure to print a copy of the certificate showing you've completed the

training. Keep this for your records. If you have already completed this in the past, you will need to update your training for the academic year.

**DUE: FIELD NOTES FOR INTERVIEW WITH CLASSMATE**

\*one copy for each member of your group, plus one for Rowe

\* I suggest that each member of the group print his/her FN's for each interviewee on a different color of paper.

**WORKSHOP:** Analyzing Field notes from Peer Interview: Discovering Broad Themes

**Week 5: Feb. 14**

**TOPICS:** Data Analysis

Erlandson, Ch. 6

Manual and Electronic Coding

Demonstration: QSR NUD\*IST

**Exemplar Study #2: TBA**

**WORKSHOP:** Analyzing Fieldnotes From Peer Interview

**DUE: FIRST DRAFT INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PROPOSAL**

**Week 6: Feb. 21**

**TOPIC:** Quality Criteria: Trustworthiness  
Authenticity

Erlandson, pp. 28-35; Ch. 7

**WORKSHOP:** Data Analysis of Class Data Set (Cont.)  
Design Conferences on Mini-Projects

**DUE: Field notes from Peer Interview #2** (conducted outside of class); Methodological Memo to Rowe

**Week 7: Feb. 28**

**TOPIC:** Critiquing Qualitative Research

**WORKSHOP: Critiquing a qualitative study (Exemplar #3)**

**Preparation for Discussion:**

1. Come prepared critique the Exemplar Study #3 study in terms of design, trustworthiness, and authenticity issues.
2. Bring to class your copy of the study, and notes addressing the following topics:
  - \*your evaluation of the study's methods (focus on methods not findings)
  - \*Points of Clarification: questions about method, etc. that need answers from classmates or Rowe

\*Questions for Discussion: at least one question you'd like to discuss with the class. This question should address a major issue raised by your reading of the study, course readings to date, and/or connections to your previous experiences.

**Copies of study for written critique will be available.**

**DUE: FIELD NOTES FROM ONE MINI-PROJECT INTERVIEW OR OBSERVATION**  
(includes field notes/description; theoretical notes/analysis; methodological notes/reflections on methods) These notes may be handed in earlier than this date for my feedback.

**SPRING BREAK: MARCH 6-10**

**PART II**  
**REVISITING QUALITATIVE METHODS: IN-DEPTH STUDY OF SELECTED**  
**TECHNIQUES AND TOPICS**

**Week 8: Mar. 14**

**TOPIC:** Interviewing Strategy and Tactics

Rubin & Rubin, Chs.1-5  
Spradley handout

**DUE: WRITTEN CRITIQUE OF QUALITATIVE STUDY**

**Week 9: Mar. 21**

**TOPIC:** Interviewing (cont.)

Rubin & Rubin, 6-9

**Week 10: Mar. 28**

**TOPIC:** Participant Observation  
Relationships in the Field: Researcher Roles

Spradley (1990), (pp. 73-84)  
DeWalt (1998)

Choose: Wolcott (1994), Ch. 5.  
OR DeMunck (1998)

**Week 11: April 4**

**TOPIC:** Data Analysis

Strauss, Ch. 5-9, 14  
Rubin & Rubin, Ch. 10

**Week 12: April 11 (AERA)**

**TOPIC:** Data Analysis  
Ethnographic Micro-analysis of Field Data

Strauss, Ch. 10-14  
Erickson (1992)

**DUE TO PEER DEBRIEFER: DRAFT WRITE UP OF ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS FROM AT LEAST ONE STRAND OF DATA ANALYSIS**

**Week 13: April 18**

**TOPIC:** Writing Qualitative Research

Erlandson, Ch. 8  
Rubin & Rubin, Ch. 11

*Background Reading:*

VanMaanen, Ch. 2-5  
Childress (1998)

**Week 14: April 25**

**Round Table Presentations of Mini-Research Projects**

<p><b>DUE FRIDAY APRIL 28, 2:00 PM</b> <b>WRITTEN REPORT OF MINI RESEARCH PROJECT</b> <b>THIS DATE IS FIRM. PLAN ACCORDINGLY!</b></p>
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