

University of Maryland, College Park
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

EDCI 684: Introduction to Field Methods in School and Community

Fall, 2005
Wednesdays, 4:15-7:00pm Room 1210B

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Course Purpose

This course serves primarily as introduction to the use of ethnographic, field-based research methods in education. However, there is much debate about what constitutes ethnographic research, or fieldwork. This has been particularly evident over the last decade with developments associated with postmodernism and its general critique of knowledge production in all disciplines. Different fieldwork methods and perspectives have proliferated. This course will also examine elements within this debate.

This course is organized around several facets of fieldwork research. First, the course examines the theoretical and epistemological moorings of different types of qualitative research. Second, it considers the practical dimensions of qualitative research. Third, it looks into some of central issues and dilemmas that arise while engaging in qualitative research.

Course experiences include reading articles that explore the debates in qualitative research, studying several monograph-length examples of field-based studies (traditional and hybrid), and undertaking various aspects of the research process (e.g., constructing a research focus, collecting various types of data, recording it, analyzing and writing up emerging patterns and themes). These experiences are designed to help you develop and sharpen your capacities as a field researcher and at the same time provide you opportunities to become conversant with current debates and issues in qualitative research.

Readings:

For some class meetings, you will be required to read all the readings listed. On other occasions, specific assignments will be made to groups of students. We will use the following texts in our course:

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An Introduction to theory and methods*. (3rd Ed.) Boston: Allen and Bacon.

- Eisner, E. W. and Peshkin, A. (Eds.) (1990). *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fordham, S. (1996). *Blacked out: Dilemmas of race, identity, and success at Capital High*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Home advantage: Social class and parent intervention in elementary education* (updated edition). (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Price, J. N. (2000). *Against the odds: Exploring meanings of school and relationships in the lives of six African American young men*. Hartford, CT: Ablex Publishers.
- VanSledright, B. (2002). *In search of America's past: Learning to read history in elementary school*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Note: There will be a few additional readings that I assign. I will provide these for copying. They are indicated by a **(P)** on the Calendar.

Requirements

Class Participation and Attendance:

You will be expected to attend all scheduled classes and participate actively in discussions. You are expected to be a collaborative participant of all the work in class. Our discussions serve as a place for you can sharpen your thinking, test your ideas, exchange insights and perceptions, and contribute towards others' ideas. You will be assigned a participation grade for this strand of the course. You cannot participate and engage in ideas in the class if you do not attend.

Assignments:

Seminar Presentations/Discussions

In groups of 3 or 4 you will be required to craft a **presentation/discussion** around one of four studies that we will use in our class: Fordham, Lareau, Price, and VanSledright. Because these presentations will occur later in the semester, you will be expected to draw from the theoretical and methodological discussions we have held previously. You will be expected to (1) present the main arguments of the study as well as to (2) discuss its methodological features, and (3) compare and contrast the text to other reading in the course. You can ask members of the class to read the text in its entirety or only selected chapters/sections as preparation for the class presentation/discussion. See the calendar for dates.

“Bar Assignment”

For this assignment I would like you to go to a bar (or a place you seldom if ever frequent). Bring a pad of paper and a writing tool (no laptops). I would like you to hang out as inconspicuously as possible for no less than 60 minutes and observe activity, taking notes as necessary. When you get home, I would like you to write a detailed “thick description” of what you saw, felt, heard, smelled, and thought was going on. Your written description will be due on **September 14**. (no more than 8 pages)

Research Project

During the semester, you will be expected to develop and carry out a *very small-scale* research project in a field setting. The project is intended to provide you with *beginning experiences* in ethnographic research. Qualitative research typically requires many months (years?) of field research. However, given the constraints of the semester, and other course demands, this project provides you with only an initial opportunity to try out conceptualizing a study, practicing methods and techniques, and undertaking initial forms of data analysis (EDCI 692, a sequel to this course, provides expanded and detailed opportunities to learn more sophisticated data analysis approaches).

The various assignments described below are designed to provide you with windows into learning about different aspects and stages of field research. A brief outline of each assignment is provided below as well as the due dates. We will discuss the details of these assignments more fully in class.

(1) Proposal. In this paper you will lay out your research problem, explain the who, what, where, when, and how you will study this problem. No literature review is required. This assignment will be due on **September 21**. (2-3 pages, no more)

(2) Site Access/Setting/Observation. The **first part** of this paper will provide a brief account of how you intend to accomplish (or did accomplish) research site access. The **second part** of this paper will provide an account of your initial entree into the field, including a description of the setting. The **third part** will include a write up of an observation you do based on your fieldnotes. This assignment is geared towards learning how to take and organize fieldnotes, and write up a detailed description drawn from those fieldnotes (raw fieldnotes can be attached as an appendix, but this is not required). The **fourth part** of your paper should include a reflection of helpful techniques and problems that emerged collecting the fieldnotes during the observation. This assignment is due on **October 12**. (8-10 pages, no more)

(3). The Interview. This assignment requires you to conduct an interview with one of your informants and transcribe the tapes. The heart of the paper requires you to analyze the interview data and write up this analysis vis-à-vis one or more of your research questions (2-3 pages). As a postscript (1 page), you should also include a brief account of the interview techniques you used, and elements of the interview process that you found interesting or needs further inquiry. This assignment is due on **November 2**. (4 pages maximum, with interview transcription attached as an appendix)

(5) Data Analysis/Assertions. The final assignment requires you to provide a written account of an emerging pattern or theme from your fieldwork. You are asked to develop at least one assertion (but no more than 2) from your data that center on one key theme (8-10 pages, no more). In addition you will be required to add a postscript (2 pages, no more) describing the changing nature of your research,

how you might go about narrowing your focus, how and what disconfirming evidence might you need to pursue. Note: This paper is not intended to be a final report, but rather represents a small but significant part of the larger story you might tell. This paper's main focus will be on your analysis of the data you have collected and the convincing evidence (data) you marshal to support your assertions. This paper is due on **December 14**.

Grading:

Participation and attendance	15%	Grading scale: (+/- might be used)
Presentation	20%	90-100 = A
Bar Assignment	10%	80-89 = B
Research Project:		70-79 = C
Proposal	10%	60-69 = D
Site Access/Setting/Observation	15%	00-59 = F
Interview	10%	
Data Analysis/Assertions	<u>20%</u>	
Total	100%	

Note: For the course, if you require any special accommodations due to a documented disability, please let me know.

Calendar

(subject to changes as necessary)

August 31: **Introductions, Syllabus, Logistics, Readings, etc.....**

September 7: **Intellectual moorings in qualitative research: Objectivity/Subjectivity**

Have Read—

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). Foundations of qualitative research in education: An introduction. (Chapter 1)

D. C. Philips, (1990). Subjectivity and objectivity: An objective inquiry, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 19-37).

Roman, L. G., & Apple, M. A. (1990). Is naturalism a move away from positivism? Materialist and feminist approaches to subjectivity in ethnographic research, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 38-73).

Guba, E. G. (1990). Commentary on papers by Phillips and by Roman and Apple, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 74-91).

September 14: **Intellectual moorings in qualitative research: Validity and ethics**

Have Read—

Grumet, M. R. (1990). On Daffodils that come before the swallow dares, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 101-120).

Wolcott, H. F. (1990). On seeking—and rejecting—validity in qualitative research, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 121-152).

Jackson, P. W. (1990). Commentary on the papers by Grumet and Wolcott, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 153-166).

Soltis, J. F. (1990). The ethics of qualitative research, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 247-257).

Smith, L. M. (1990). Ethics in qualitative field research: An individual perspective, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 258-276).

Lincoln, Y. S. (1990). Commentary on the papers by Soltis and by Smith, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 277-295).

Bar Assignment Due

September 21: **Research design, fieldwork practice, and site access**

Have Read—

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998/2003). Research design (Chapter 2), AND Fieldwork (Chapter 3) in *Qualitative research for education: An Introduction to theory and methods* (pp. 49-72). Boston: Allen and Bacon.

Proposal Assignment Due

September 28: **Observations and fieldnotes**

Have Read—

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998/2003). Qualitative data (Chapter 4), in *Qualitative research for education: An Introduction to theory and methods* (pp. 106-156).

VanSledright, B. (2002). Appendix A, pp. 157-158, in *In search of America's past: Learning to read history in elementary school*.

October 5: **Exploring ethnography: Studying class, race, and identity in high school.**

Have Read—

Fordham, S. (1996). *Blacked out: Dilemmas of race, identity and success at Capital High*.

Presentation Due

October 12: **Intellectual moorings in qualitative research: Issues of generalizability**

Have Read—

Donomoyer, R. (1990). Generalizability and the single case study, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 175-200).

Schofield, J. W. (1990). Increasing the generalizability of qualitative research, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 201-232).

Becker, H. S. (1990). Commentary on papers by Donomoyer and by Schofield, in E. W. Eisner and A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 233-242).

October 19: **Interviewing**

Have Read—

(P) Patton, M.Q. (1990). Qualitative interviewing (Chapter 7), in *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park (CA): Sage.

Site Access/Setting/Observation Assignment Due

October 26: **Exploring ethnography: Race, class, gender and schooling**

Have Read—

Price, J. N. (2000). *Against the odds: Exploring meanings of school and relationships in the lives of six African American young men*.

Presentation Due

November 2: **Beginning analysis in qualitative research**

Have Read—

Bogdan, R. C. and Biklen, S. K. (1998). Data analysis (Chapter 5), in *Qualitative research for education: An Introduction to theory and methods* (pp. 157-186).

VanSledright, B. (2002). Appendix A, in *In search of America's past: Learning to read history in elementary school*.

Interview Assignment Due

November 9: **Exploring teacher research as ethnography: History education and teaching reforms**

Have Read—

VanSledright, B. (2002). *In search of America's past: Learning to read history in elementary school*.

Presentation Due

November 16: **No class**

November 23: **No class**

November 30: **Exploring a full-scale ethnography: The role of home and class in schooling**

Have Read—

Lareau, A, (2003). *Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education.*

Presentation Due

December 7: **Intellectual moorings in qualitative research: Feminist approaches, power and alternative methodologies...**

Have Read—

(P) Harding, S. (1997). Introduction: Is there a feminist method? In S. Harding (Ed.), *Feminism and methodology* (pp. 1-14). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

(P) Fine, M. (1994). Dis-tancing and other stances: Negotiations of power, in A. Gitlin (ed.), *Power and method: Political activism and educational research.* (pp. 13-35). New York: Routledge.

(P) Foster, M. (1994). The power to know one thing is never the power to know all things: Methodological notes on two studies of Black American teachers, in A. Gitlin (Ed.), *Power and method: Political activism and educational research* (pp. 129-146). New York: Routledge.

(P) LeCompte, M. and McLaughlin, D. (1994). Witchcraft and blessings, science and rationality: Discourses of power and silence in collaborative work with Navajo schools, in A. Gitlin (Ed.), *Power and Method: Political activism and educational research* (pp. 147-165). New York: Routledge.

December 14: **Discussions of Individual Research Projects**

Come to class prepared to briefly (8 minutes) and informally talk about the project you undertook and how it went. Tell us a little bit about the results of your work and any special considerations that arose, circumstances or issues about which you think we might all learn valuable lessons. The paper you will turn in can serve as a basis for your presentation/discussion.

Data Analysis/Assertions Assignment Due