QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS
ED/PY 851
Spring 2002

The concept of culture I espouse... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing... that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself [sic] has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface as enigmatical.
Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures

Instructor: Patrick McQuillan
Campion Hall, room 215
Phone: (617) 552-0676

Office hours: Monday 2-4;
Wednesday 2-4

Phone: (617) 552-0676

Teacher Education Themes

Programs in Teacher Education at BC have five unifying themes. Although no single course addresses all five themes in depth and every course has goals and objectives beyond these, each course is in keeping with the themes and addresses some of the five.

Promoting social justice: At BC, we see teaching as an activity with political dimensions, and we see all educators as responsible for challenging inequities in the social order and working with others to establish a more just society.

Constructing knowledge: At BC, we regard all teachers and students as active agents in their own learning, who draw on prior knowledge and experience to construct new knowledge in interaction with texts, materials, and other learners.

Inquiry into practice: At BC, the curriculum is intended to bridge the gap between research and practice by fostering critical reflection and by treating classrooms and schools as sites for teacher research and other forms of practitioner inquiry.

Accommodating diversity: At BC, we believe that one of central challenges of teaching is meeting the needs of all learners, especially as the school population becomes more diverse in race, culture, ethnicity, language background, and ability/disability.

Collaborating with others: At BC, prospective teachers are encouraged to collaborate with each of the stakeholders in the educational process (other teachers, administrators, human services professionals, parents, community members) and with fellow students and professors.

Course Overview

This course will provide students with opportunities to:

(1) Explore the practical dimensions of qualitative research, such as creating a research design, conducting interviews and observations, and analyzing qualitative data.
(2) Explore the central concepts, issues, and dilemmas associated with qualitative research.
(3) Provide opportunities for students to experience the full cycle of a research project—from initial design of the project to writing a final report.
(4) Analyze qualitative research studies.
(5) Become familiar with the principles and methodologies of a number of paradigms within qualitative research (e.g., ethnographies, case studies, applied research, critical studies, etc.).
(6) Understand a range of ethical considerations involved in conducting qualitative research.

**Course Readings**

Becker, H. Generalizing from Case Studies. Ibid.

**Course Requirements**

**Class Participation (15% of final grade)**

This includes class attendance as well as being an active and substantive contributor to class. Class attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to come to class having done the reading and ready to pose questions as well as answer questions. Moreover, the *quality* of participation is important. While students are encouraged to share ideas and opinions in class, not all contributions will be equally valued.

*Contributions that connect to course readings, that relate to previous topics discussed in the course, and that are tied to specific and relevant experiences are encouraged and valued more than random statements with limited and tentative connections to course topics and materials.*

If you miss a class, you need to do a two-to-three page write-up of your reactions to the readings assigned for that class (in journal form) and turn that paper in...
the next class. It will also be your responsibility to find out what the class activities were and if any additional materials were handed out.

“Teaching Team” Presentations (5% of final grade)
Once in the course of the semester students will, in groups of two, collaboratively plan and teach a 45 minute lesson on one of our course readings. Relying on whatever methods they prefer, this “teaching team” will (in no particular order and as applicable): (1) Summarize key findings from this reading; (2) Analyze the research methods employed in this study; (3) Discuss central issues or dilemmas that arise in the article; (4) Draw on the theoretical and methodological readings from the course to illuminate these studies; (5) Bring in any other concerns they deem important; and (6) Help the class engage in a critical examination of the texts through allowing time for Q&A. I will be available to help the teams plan instruction, access necessary resources, or generally assist in whatever way I can.

Research Presentations (5% of final grade)
Once in the course of the semester, each student will make a presentation to class outlining her/his research project and design, some tentative conclusions, and the data upon which those conclusions are based.

Research Project (75% of final grade)
The details of this project will be explained as the course progresses. The “tickets” you’ll do during the semester will be figured into this grade.

COURSE CALENDAR, OUTLINE OF TOPICS, & ASSIGNMENTS

January 16: Overview and Introduction to Course
Organizational meeting: Review syllabus; assignments and grading outlined; course requirements outlined; Lynch School of Education philosophy reviewed.

January 23: Experience, Interpretation, and Qualitative Research
Reading: Rossman & Rallis, Chapters 1 (Qualitative Research as Learning) and 2 (The Researcher as Learner); Stake, Chapter 3 (The Nature of Qualitative Research); McQuillan, Preface and Chapter 1 (Educational Opportunity Through the Lens of American Culture).

January 30: Research Design
Reading: McQuillan & Muncey, Why ethnography?; Ogbu, School ethnography: A multilevel approach; Rossman & Rallis, Chapter 3 (Planning the Research); McQuillan, Chapters 6 (Respectability Lost: An Historical Perspective on Russell High), 7 (Affirming the Myth of Educational Opportunity), and 8 (Eastown: A City Divided).
Ticket: Identify your research site and define a possible focus (question) for your research. Submit your Human Subjects Review proposal to me.
February 6: Research Methods

Reading: Rossman & Rallis, Chapters 4 (Entering the Field) and 5 (Gathering Data in the Field); Stake, Chapter 6 (Case Researcher Roles); McQuillan, Appendix: Methodological Reflections; McQuillan & Muncey, Interview Techniques (access through “mcquilpa” folder).

February 13: Research Methods (cont.)

Reading: Agar & MacDonald, Focus groups and ethnography; Rossman & Rallis, Chapter 6 (Issues that Arise in the Field) and 7 (Analyzing and Interpreting Data); Stake, Chapter 2 (Research Questions); Muncey & McQuillan, Observation, Description, and Interpretation (access through “mcquilpa” folder).

Ticket: Submit a research design for your study.

February 20: Research Methods (still cont.)

Reading: Stake, Chapters 4 (Data Gathering) and 5 (Analysis and Interpretation); Rossman & Rallis, Epilogue and Appendices A, B, and C; McQuillan & Muncey, Data Analysis Guidelines (access through “mcquilpa” folder).

February 27: Validity and Reliability

Reading: Stake, Chapter 7 (Triangulation); House, Realism in research; Maxwell, Understanding and validity in qualitative research; Emerson & Pollner, On the use of members’ responses to researchers’ accounts.

Ticket: Conduct a formal observation and bring write up to class.

March 6: Spring Break

March 13: Research Ethics

Reading: Dobbert, Ethical Considerations in Field-Based Research; and Muncey & McQuillan, Professional Responsibilities and Obligations; McQuillan, Chapter 5 (Reform that Reproduced: The 1992 Committee).

March 20: Generalizability

Reading: Stake, Chapter 1 (The Unique Case); Schofield, Increasing the generalizability of qualitative research; Becker, Generalizing from case studies; and McQuillan, Chapters 2 (Winning the Battle and Losing the War), 3 (Low Cultural and Social Capital Continued), and 4 (One Student’s World at Russell High: A (School) Day in the Life of Rafael Jackson).

Ticket: Conduct an interview and bring write up to class.

March 27: Applied Research

Reading: Huberman, Linkage between researchers and practitioners: A qualitative study; Wagner, Administrators as ethnographers; McQuillan, Chapter 9 (So What?).

April 3: No Class
April 10: Critical Ethnography  
*Reading:* Stake, Chapter 8 (Writing the Report); Rossman & Rallis, Chapter 8 (Presenting the Learnings); Brodkey, Writing Critical Ethnographic Narratives; Lather, Research as praxis.

April 17: Postmodernism  
*Reading:* Miller & Fredericks, Postpositivistic assumptions and educational research: Another view; Sangren, Rhetoric and the authority of ethnography: ‘Postmodernism’ and the social reproduction of texts.

April 24: Computer Software & Qualitative Research  
*No reading.* Class will include a presentation from Professor Martinez-Aleman on using software packages for conducting qualitative analysis.

May 1: Future Directions for Qualitative Research  
*Reading:* Brantlinger, Inward gaze and activism as moral next steps; and Qualitative Research Dialogue (access through “mcquilpa” folder)

May 6: Research Report due.