Review of Research in Educational Studies:
Qualitative Research Interviewing
EDST 508A, Section 941

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Term: Summer 1 (May 14-June 20, 2018)
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The simple thing to say is that interview research is research conducted by talking with people. . . This simple view, however appealing, neglects the fascinating complexity of human talk—the flexibility and productive powers of language; the subtle shades of meaning conveyed through the nuances of speech, gesture, and expression; issues of translation; the ineluctable locatedness of any moment or stretch of talk; the specialized vocabularies of particular settings and groups; the organizing effects of format and genre; the injuries and uses of silence; the challenges inherent in listening; and so on. The simple view also neglects the dynamics of power involved in any empirical research... (Devault & Gross, 2012, p. 206).

In this course, I aim to take a reflexive, pragmatic approach to qualitative research interviewing:

Reflexivity ... includes opening up the phenomena through exploring more than one set of meanings and acknowledging ambiguity in the phenomena and the line(s) of inquiry favored, and it means bridging the gap between epistemological concerns and method. Pragmatism means balancing endless reflexivity and radical skepticism with a sense of direction and accomplishment. (Alvesson, 2003, p. 14)

Just as in life, in research too we have to make choices in difficult, uncertain circumstances and cope with competing demands and responsibilities. It is these choices that ethical reflexivity brings to our attention. (Finlay, 2012, p. 328)

On a fundamental level, reflexivity is about giving as full and honest an account of the research process as possible, in particular explicating the position of the researcher in relation to the research. However, there is a paradox implicit in reflexivity. We explicate the processes and positions we are aware of being caught up in. But inevitably some of the influences arising from aspects of social identity remain beyond the reflexive grasp. (Reay, 2012, p. 637)

Course Description

This seminar will allow students to examine the methodological, technical, and ethical demands of doing qualitative research interviewing. Qualitative is an umbrella term used to encompass terms such as in-depth, narrative, and ethnographic interviewing. Course readings will draw primarily from anthropological, sociological, feminist, and critical educational studies approaches to explore how interviewing is understood and practiced. The seminar is built on the assumption that qualitative interviewers learn best by doing and then reflecting on those
experiences. Thus, the course will include practical activities and assignments aimed at helping students to develop or hone their research skills. Topics will include: the epistemological foundations of qualitative interviewing; designing a qualitative interview study; the ethics of doing interviews; strategies for interviewing; planning for fieldwork; the use of observations and field notes in interview projects; positionality and power dynamics; methods for managing, transcribing, and analyzing interview data; researcher reflexivity; and presentation of interview data in written reports. A theme in the course will be the importance of reflecting on, and articulating rationales for, choices as one designs, conducts, and communicates one’s research.

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Course Requirements & Evaluation

NOTE: I encourage you to work together with other members of the class on any assignment. If you elect to do this, you will receive a group mark.
OVERVIEW & WEIGHTING OF ASSIGNMENTS

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**Reflexive Review of an Interview-Based Study**

As we will discuss in class, the concept of *reflexivity* is understood differently within different traditions. The purpose of this assignment is to exercise your capacity for reflexivity by inquiring into the various key decisions that have been made (or not made) by researcher/s, as reflected in one refereed, scholarly journal article that uses interviews as the main data source. The article could be, for example, one you have read before, that is important or cited a lot in your area of interest, or that your program advisor or thesis supervisor has recommended.

As you read the article, ask yourself these sorts of questions: What is the author trying to do? Why did s/he conduct the interview study in the way that they did? How did their approach affect the research? Does the method reflect the research question/s posed? Was the theoretical approach to the study and to interviewing consistent with how the data were analyzed and represented? The main body of your paper should be focused on answering these kinds of questions. In your conclusion, please reflect briefly on the strengths and limitations of the particular approach to interviewing in evidence in the article that you have reviewed in relation to the approach you hope to take in your own study. 5-7 pages. At the end of your paper, please include a full citation, including DOI or stable URL, to the article you selected for analysis.

Due on: **May 30 via Canvas by noon (worth 30%)**

**NOTE:** Given the cumulative nature of the tasks in the next assignments and the steep learning curve, I emphasize *formative assessment*. It would be unfair to give students marks in the earlier stages (for mini-assignments). Equally, it is important to have close review of students’ work as you start to learn the skills of interviewing. Thus, the formative assignments are pass/fail.

**Initial Triad Interviewing Experience** (2 parts) (pass/fail)

1. Informal reflections and preparatory notes for your initial role (to be assigned in class), keying off the assigned reading (Warner for the interviewer role, Foley for the respondent role, and Ellincon for the observer role). 1 page; due **May 23**

2. Field notes on your observations, insights, and questions in your initial assigned role. 1-2 pages; due **May 28** (later that night, ideally, but no later than **May 29 by 9 a.m.**)

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Qualitative Research Interviewing, version: 2018-08-14
Reflection on an Interview Experience (2 parts)

Formative-assessment part (pass/fail): Transcript of 20-minute audio-recorded interview where you were the interviewer (guidelines to be discussed in class); due 3 classes after your interview.

Transcription formatting guidelines: single-spaced, with 2 hard returns (line break) between interviewer and interviewee text; left margin 1 inch; right margin 3 inches (to allow for commentary); add line numbers (in MS Word: on the Page Layout tab, in the Page Setup group, click Line Numbers) running consecutively; add running header or footer on each page with your last name, the date of the interview, and page number included. (Example to be posted on Canvas and discussed in class.) This formatting will allow you to make easy reference to specific passages in your reflection (see description just below).

Summative-assessment part (graded): Reflect on the interview process, including the choices you made as the interviewer, the challenges and surprises you encountered, the nature of the role, and questions arising. For example, did the interview questions generate the kind of data anticipated? Would questions need to be reworded, rethought, or re-ordered? What parts of the interview worked well, and why? What parts worked less well, and why? Think about such things as rapport, flow, wait time, etc. You might also consider Donald Schon’s (1995) distinction between “reflection-in-action” (reflection exercised spontaneously during the interview when there were opportunities to change course) and reflection on those earlier reflections-in-action. Please make references to the Initial Triad Interviewing Experience, as appropriate, and especially to the interview transcript (including line numbers) in your reflection. Maximum 5 pages.

Due on: June 6 (Group B); June 13 (Group C); June 20 (Group A) (worth 30%)

Final Assignment: Choose one of four options

I recognize that you are all at different stages in your programs and come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. I see the final assignment as allowing you to synthesize and demonstrate what you have been learning and reading about this term. You can do this in a variety of ways. Please pick one of the following options. In all cases, your final paper should refer to course readings, activities, and discussions. Depending on which option you select, the final paper will be 5 to 10 pages.

Option 1: Arrange with me no later than June 4 an opportunity to generate another round of data, like what we have done as an in-class activity with a classmate. Reflect on the data-generating activity, considering the previous round of interviewing and course readings. This might be done as a compare-and-contrast or a comparison of two rounds of a similar form of interviewing (i.e., narrative, taxonomic, phenomenological).

Option 2: Select for analysis a subset (minimum of two, beyond the one where you were the interviewer) of the interview transcripts generated in class, which will be posted on Canvas as they are produced by you and your classmates. Reflect on the different kinds
of data generated, both based on different forms of interviewing and different interviewer-interviewee dynamics. In other words, make sure your discussion focuses not only on the interview transcripts as “vessels of topics,” but also as “speech events” and “social interactions” (Warren, 2012, p. 130). Be sure to give examples, citing the interviewer’s last name and transcript lines of each illustrative excerpt.

**Option 3:** Reflect on choices you have made, and those you still must make, in designing your own interview-based study. For example, what ethical dilemmas and questions have arisen thus far in your research project? What strategies might you use to address them? This assignment might take the form of a mini-proposal, where you indicate the problem or issue you wish to explore, why the type of interviewing that you propose to do is an appropriate method of data collection, your rationale for the people you want to interview, and how you will recruit and gain consent. Include a preliminary interview guide (list of interview questions and prompts).

**Option 4:** Pick an issue in interviewing that you want to learn more about and do some additional reading and reflection. An example might be interviewing people who speak English as an additional language. Another might be about how you plan to represent yourself and your participants in your research project: How will embodiment feature? In which contexts might exposing the researcher’s personal situation advance a research project, and in which contexts not? Present a synopsis and synthesis of key ideas across the readings you have selected, discuss how your understanding of this issue has expanded, and note questions arising from your inquiry. Be sure to discuss the implications for your future work.

### Assessment Criteria that Apply to All Assignments

For all assignments, I will be looking at organization, clarity, and conciseness. You should carefully proofread for grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.

**Development & Organization of Argument:**
- Develops coherent, defensible, and original argument;
- Includes various perspectives, including those developed from experience, and is appropriately critical (believing and doubting) of those perspectives;
- Creates cogent argument that provides logical and fully articulated transitions;
- Provides suitable evidence and examples.

NOTE: Please follow APA (6th edition) style for all written work for this class. This includes double-spacing and margins (1 in. or 2.54 cm on each edge). Please number all pages.

### Class Participation and the Importance of Journaling

Everyone should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Class members will learn as much from the exchange of views inside the classroom as we will from analyzing the readings on our own. Furthermore, and especially in an activities-rich class such as Interviewing, the success of our work as a collaborative venture depends on respectful and attentive class participation by all members. For example, each of you will rotate among the
interviewer, interviewee, and participant-observer roles over the course of the term. In some moments, you will need to be open to constructive feedback. In other moments, you will need to be sensitive to the tone and manner with which you offer feedback.

I strongly encourage you to begin keeping a research journal. At this stage, it may be more focused on ideas that come to you, based on your reading and class participation. Journaling serves as an aid to reflexivity, because it creates a record of how and why your thinking is evolving. Use your journal to capture ideas and feelings through writing, drawing, and mapping. Use it to record and explain the multiple and evolving decisions that will comprise part, or all, of the design of your interview-based study. In later stages, you can use it as a place to jot down possible themes and codes and the sources of your ideas about these. Eventually, you will be able to draw on your journal when you write the methodology section or chapter of your thesis.

**Course Readings**

The readings are available free of charge as e-journal articles or e-book chapters through UBC library. Some book chapters will **only** be available through the Library Course Reserve section of the course shell in Canvas; available at: [http://lthub.ubc.ca/guides/canvas/](http://lthub.ubc.ca/guides/canvas/)

*For additional course policies, please see Syllabus Addendum posted on Canvas.*

**Detailed Schedule of Topics, Readings, & Activities**

May 14: Introduction and Overview. Possibilities and Limitations of Interviewing. Logistics of In-Class Interviewing Experience

Please make sure that you are familiar with the Tri Council Policy Statement (TCPS); you are required to complete the TCPS Tutorial Course on Research Ethics (CORE), if you have not already done so. Here is the link: [http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/education/tutorial-didacticiel/](http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/education/tutorial-didacticiel/)


May 16: Debates; Reflexivity as a Lens


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May 21: Victoria Day Holiday – no class

May 23: Roles and Reflexivity: Interviewer, Interviewee, Participant-Observer


May 28: Theorizing the Research Interview — Reflexive Review assignment due


Optional:

May 30: Designing Interview Studies; Group-Interview Considerations


Optional:


June 4: Doing interviews: Question Types and Elicitation Techniques


Optional:

June 6: Doing Interviews: Recruitment, Selection, Observation, and Field Notes


Review Roulston, 2010, section on Approaches to selection and sampling of participants (pp. 81-83).


June 11: Doing Interviews: Ethics and Insider-Outsider Continuum


June 13: Positionality and Power Dynamics: Interviewing Across Difference
Possible guest panel to discuss distinct respondents (e.g., elites)


**NOTE WELL:** If we do NOT have a guest panel on distinct respondents, we will instead do an in-class jigsaw activity, in which you will be assigned one of the readings listed below. We will discuss this in class and make a decision, based on students’ needs and interests.


June 18: Transcription, Data Management, and Preliminary Data Analysis


Review Lareau, especially pages 204-219.


June 20: Data Analysis and Presentation; Judging Quality


Optional:


Further Reading

Introduction and Overview:


Reflexivity:


Theorizing the Interview:


Archer, Margaret S. (2003). Investigating internal conversations *Structure, agency and the internal conversation* (pp. 153-166). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <example of exploratory interviewing within a critical realist philosophy of science>


**Doing Interviews: Technical Matters**


**Group Interviewing:**


**Question Types and Elicitation Techniques**


**Ethnographic Interviewing:**


**Ethics:**


**Positionality and Power Dynamics:**


**Transcription:**


**Data Analysis:**


**Presenting Data, Writing:**


**Assessing Quality:**


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