REVIEW OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND PRINCIPLES OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS
**Review of Qualitative Designs**

**In Qualitative Research:**

- We do not test hypothesis or previous theories.
- We may try to develop new theories based on what happens in specific situations.
- We do not try to generalize our findings.
- We often rely on data collected from interviews, observations, and content analysis of newspapers, books, videos, case records, and other already developed documents.
- We usually do not know or try to develop response categories prior to conducting the study.
Qualitative Research Tends To

- Answer research questions rather than test a hypothesis.
- Seldom look at the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Examine the perceptions, actions, and feelings of participants.
- Obtained detailed information from interviews, content analysis, or observations.
Types of Qualitative Research

- Grounded theory
- Ethnography
- Phenomenology
- Field research
Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Strengths**
  - Depth of understanding
  - Flexibility

- **Weaknesses**
  - Subjectivity
  - Suggestive, not definitive
  - Limited generalizability
  - Mixed methodology is possible
Qualitative Research Terms

- Structured interview
- Semi-structured interview
- Unstructured interview
- Informal conversational interview
- Interview protocol (or guide)
- Standardized open-ended interview (a.k.a. structured interview)
- Closed, fixed response interview
- Thick description
- Field Notes
- Self reflective comments (respondent’s as well as researcher’s)
Qualitative Data Collection Methods

- Observations in Ethnographic Research
- Choosing What to Observe & Your Observer Role
- Role of Gatekeeper(s)
- Obtrusive vs. Unobtrusive Observation
**Ethnographic Data Collection**

- **Observations are the main form of data collection in ethnographic research.**

- **How do you choose what to observe?**
  - Depends on your overall research question (purpose of study)
  - “A single site in which a culture-sharing group has developed shared values, beliefs and assumptions is important.” (Creswell)
  - “Researcher needs to identify a group (or individuals representative of a group) to study…”

- **How do you gain access to the site? (role of “gatekeepers”)**
  - Access usually begins with a “gatekeeper” an individual who is a member of, or has a close connection to the group and the site to be observed. Researcher contacts this initial gatekeeper in order to gain access to the site and other members of the group.
Creswell recommends six pieces of information to give the gatekeeper when you are trying to gain access to a site:

1. Why was the site chosen for the study?
2. What will be done at the site during the observation?
3. How much time will be spent at the site by the researchers?
4. Will the researcher’s presence be disruptive?
5. How will the results be reported?
6. What will the gatekeeper, the participants and the site gain from the study?
Using Field Notes

- Creswell recommends using an observational protocol in order to record field notes while you are in the field.

- The field notes should include your descriptive and reflective notes.

- **Descriptive notes** detail factual information about what is occurring. The focus should be on “thick description” of all aspects of the site and the individuals. This includes a physical description of the site and the individuals, events and activities that are occurring, social interactions between individuals, etc...

- **Reflective notes** describe how you are reacting and feeling about what you are observing, as well as initial interpretations about what you are observing.
Class Exercise: Taking Field Notes

- Take about 5 minutes to write down all of the things that you notice about the physical aspects of this classroom.

- Take both descriptive and reflective notes—what are the facts, and how do you feel about these facts?

- We will discuss responses after this period.
Issues in Recording Field Notes

Warren (2000) describes two main tensions in the process of recording field notes:

- Tension between thick description and not revealing people’s identities in the field notes.

- Tension between the ethnographer revealing or concealing aspects of him/herself that might be relevant in the interpretation of the data.
Common Challenges in Observation

- Deciding on what role the researcher will assume: (participant, unobtrusive or middle-ground observer).

- Remembering to take field notes

- Recording quotes accurately

- Feeling overwhelmed with information and the need to decide what to record in the field notes.
Decide on Your Observer Role

Ranges on a spectrum from **full participant observer** to **unobtrusive observer**:

- **Participant Observer**: A researcher who participates in a group, while also observing the group.
  -- What are the benefits and drawbacks to using a participant observer approach?

- **Unobtrusive Observer**: Pure observation with no participation
  -- What are the benefits and drawbacks to using an unobtrusive observer approach?

- **Variations between participant and unobtrusive observer**: not full participant, but participates at times and is an unobtrusive observer at times.
  -- What are the benefits and drawbacks to moving between participant and unobtrusive observer?

- **Your presence as an observer in the group/setting will be obvious to the people in the setting -- make sure to introduce yourself and your role, or have the gatekeeper introduce you, and explain your role.**
Principles of Qualitative Analysis

Steps in Analyzing Qualitative Data:

- Preparing & organizing the data (transcripts, field notes, etc.)
- Reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes
- Representing the data in figures, tables or a narrative

- A theme is a category of information that you as the researcher identify and name and that may include a variety of coded information. This involves a process of “coding” the data and then condensing or classifying the codes into larger families of themes.

- Qualitative analysis is an iterative process—meaning that a final analysis of the data is achieved by repeatedly reading and re-reading the data and repeatedly developing themes and refining themes.
Steps in Qualitative Analysis (Cont.)

- Developing themes involves a process of classifying, describing and interpreting the data. The data are reduced into meaningful chunks of information. During this process, some information will inevitably not be included in the analysis.

- In biography or narrative research, the researcher is typically coding people’s stories, life events or life transitions.

- In ethnographic research, the researcher is typically coding the functions of the culture-sharing group, the social norms of the group (interactions between participants).