



OBSERVATION AND QUALITATIVE FIELDWORK

ScWk 242 – Session 5 Slides

Summary Guidelines for Qualitative Fieldwork

- Design fieldwork to be clear about your role as observer (degree of participation); the tension between insider (emic) and outsider (etic) perspectives; degree and nature of collaboration with co-researchers; disclosure and explanation of the observer's role to others; duration of observations (short vs. long); and focus of observation (narrow vs. broad).
- Field notes are descriptive, thick, deep and rich descriptions.
- Stay open. Gather a variety of information from different perspectives. Be opportunistic, follow leads and sample purposefully to deepen understanding. Allow the design to emerge flexibly as new understandings open up new paths of inquiry.
- Cross validate/ triangulate: observations, interviews, documents, artifacts, recordings and photographs. Use multiple & mixed methods.

Additional Observation Guidelines

- Use participant quotations and own words to capture views and experiences.
- Select key informants wisely and use them carefully. Use wisdom of drawn perspectives, but realize that their perspective is selective (like everyone else).
- Be aware of the different stages of fieldwork
 - Build trust; since you are being evaluated as well
 - Attend to relationships throughout fieldwork e.g. hosts, sponsors, co researchers, participants in collaborative and participatory research
 - Stay alert and disciplined during the more routine, middle phase of fieldwork.
 - Focus on pulling together a useful synthesis as fieldwork draws to a close. Move from generating possibilities to verifying emergent patterns and confirming themes.
 - Be disciplined and conscientious in taking detailed field notes at all stages of fieldwork.
 - In evaluations and action research, provide formative feedback as part of the verification process of fieldworks. Time that feedback carefully. Observe its impact.

More Observation Guidelines

- **Be as involved as possible in experiencing the setting as fully and as appropriate and manageable while maintaining an analytical perspective grounded in the purpose of the fieldwork.**
- **Separate description from interpretation and judgment.**
- **Be reflective and reflexive. Include in your field notes and reports and your own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Consider and report how your observations may have affected the observed as well as how you may have been affected by what and how you've participated and observed. Ponder and report the origins and implications of your own perspective.**

Taking Field Notes

➤ *Go with the flow*

- Does not need to be cohesive – can move around some.
- Reminders to yourself about what you saw, felt, observed, and interpreted for your self.
- Leave space of additions/corrections to all observations

➤ *Protect Identities/Confidentiality*

- Use pseudonyms from the beginning
- Change identifying details but not substance (e.g. do not change race, but change number of children or siblings, do not change setting such as home, but change objects or types of furniture in the home that are not character relevant.

Taking Field Notes

- *Use yourself as a filter to describe your reactions to a situation and a means to describe the difference in the reactions of others*
 - *Example:* You observe a car accident in the course of studying an urban community. I am horrified and taken by surprise. I am caught between thought and action, call the police, call an ambulance; you observe a man in his mid 30's pull over and get out his cell phone while walking toward the overturned vehicle.
 - Challenge your own perception with the perspective of others
- *Notes can be written in the field or sometime soon after the observation period*
 - No hard fast rules about when the notes should to be written.
 - Reread your notes a few days later and make or notes any corrections, impressions or interpretations

Taking Field Notes – Example

Observation Protocol Example (Creswell, 2007, p. 137)

<i>Length of Activity: 90 Minutes</i>	
<i>Descriptive Notes</i>	<i>Reflective Notes</i>
General: What are the experiences of graduate students as they learn qualitative research in the classroom?	
See classroom layout and comments about physical setting at the bottom of this page.	<i>Overhead with flaps: I wonder if the back of the room was able to read it.</i>
Approximately 5:17 p.m., Dr. Creswell enters the filled room, introduces Dr. Wolcott. Class members seem relieved.	<i>Overhead projector not plugged in at the beginning of the class: I wonder if this was a distraction (when it took extra time to plug it in).</i>
Dr. Creswell gives brief background of guest, concentrating on his international experiences; features a comment about the educational ethnography “The Man in the Principal’s Office.”	<i>Lateness of the arrival of Drs. Creswell and Wolcott: Students seemed a bit anxious. Maybe it had to do with the change in starting time to 5 p.m. (some may have had 6:30 classes or appointments to get to).</i>
Dr. Wolcott begins by telling the class he now writes out educational ethnography and highlights this primary occupation by mentioning two books: <i>Transferring Qualitative Data</i> and <i>The Art of Fieldwork</i> .	<i>Drs. Creswell and Wolcott seem to have a good rapport between them, judging from many short exchanges that they had.</i>

Taking Field Notes - Example

Observation Protocol Example (Creswell, 2007, p. 137)

While Dr. Wolcott begins his presentation by apologizing for his weary voice (due to talking all day, apparently), Dr. Creswell leaves the classroom to retrieve the guest's overhead transparencies.

Seemed to be three parts to this activity: (1) the speaker's challenge to the class of detecting pure ethnographical methodologies, (2) the speaker's presentation of the "tree" that portrays various strategies and substrategies for qualitative research in education, and (3) the relaxed "elder statesman" fielding class questions, primarily about students' potential research projects and prior studies Dr. Wolcott had written.

The first question was "How do you look at qualitative research?" followed by "How does ethnography fit in?"

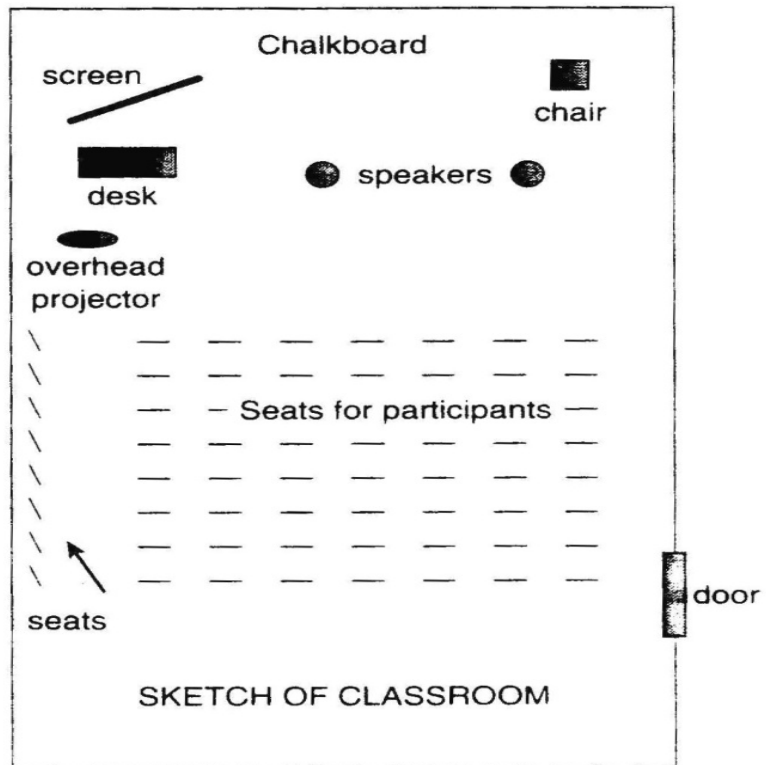


Figure 7.5 Sample Observational Protocol Length of Activity: 90 Minutes

Content Analysis

- ***What is a content analysis?***
 - **Standardized means of analyzing text/field notes/minutes/documents**
 - **Software programs**
 - **Most frequently used analysis**
 - **Quantifies qualitative data**
 - **Objectifies qualitative data**
 - **Advantages**
 - **Unobtrusive measure**
 - **Inexpensive**
 - **Analyze past occurrences/history/personal letters/diaries**
 - **Disadvantages**
 - **Questionable validity**
 - **Only permanent records/recorded data/secondary source analysis**

Content Analysis (Continued)

- ***Purpose of Content Analysis***
 - **Make inferences to the source of communications**
 - **Understand the motives, values or intensions of those who wrote them**
 - **Understand the symbolic meaning/communication**
- ***Diaries/personal documents***
 - **Letters to the editor**
- ***Inferences to populations***
 - **Used to ascribe the values of the audiences intended for the communication to reach (the demographic)**
 - **Movie content**
- ***Evaluate the effects of communications***
 - **Treatment effectiveness**
 - **Notes, video of behavior/interactions (reduction in behavior based upon certain types of responses by therapist to client)**
- ***Structured observations***
 - **Use with other data collection methods**
 - **Content analysis of observational data can specify what is observed and what measurements are to be used**

Process of Content Analysis

➤ *Systematic:*

- Follow the same procedures to examine each occurrence
- Reliable, can be replicated by someone else

➤ *Objective:*

- Ensure validity and avoid bias
- Rules to count an observation must be impartial
- Define the criteria to be applied
- Make explicit the rules to be applied to control for any special interest or ideology that might impact analysis

Steps in Content Analysis

- ***Develop the research question***
 - **Establish what you want to study**
 - **Ask the appropriate questions**

- ***Select a sample***
 - **What is the sampling strategy?**
 - **What is the available universe?**
 - **How best to represent the population?**
 - **Which has the best content?**
 - **What is the best cohort?**

Units of Analysis

Select the Unit of Analysis

Specify what you will count:

- **Words, phrases, or concepts**
- **Establish complex categorical systems**
- **Coding rules (pictures of minorities)**
- **Procedures**

Coding, Tallying and Data Analysis

Coding is dependent upon the unit of analysis

- **Gender: 2 categories, (e.g., male = 1 female = 2)**
- **Grade Level Completed: (e.g., up to 20)**

Construct a tally sheet

Latent vs. Manifest Content

➤ *Latent vs. Manifest Content*

- ◆ Latent content is an indicator of the underlying meaning of what is communicated.
- ◆ Manifest content is specific, objective and easy to record.
- ◆ Developments during the review of manifest content
 - recurring themes
 - keep reviewing the content
 - look for similarities
 - look for what makes this consistent
- *Have another rater use same criteria for coding the manifest content to establish inter-rater reliability*
- *Report the results*

Qualitative Analysis Lab # 3: Observations

The class will review the the five brief video clips listed on the next page in class. These provide a variety of perspectives on observational research and examples of settings and situations. The class will watch the videos using observational data collection procedures, and will have a brief discussion after each clip going over the items listed below.

The first video is a quick summary about observational research. The other four clips involve specific observational examples. For each of these, students should take field notes that include your observations (descriptive notes), and your reactions or interpretations of those observations (reflective notes). In your field notes, describe and reflect on the following components (as applicable):

- *Physical setting*
- *Activities that are occurring*
- *Social interactions (verbal) between individuals*
- *Non-verbal communication*
- *Behaviors*
- *Things you might have expected to see—but didn't*

Observational Videos to be Viewed in Class

Video Clip 1: Understanding Observational Research – Dr. Nancy Dreyer – 1.40 minutes

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6xgINQobUw>

Video Clip 2: Pregnancy Assessment and Observation Unit and Birth Suites

– Mater Health Services in South Brisbane, Australia – 5.01 minutes

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QffUoAom4m8>

Video Clip 3: Homeless Veteran Demands Housing at Giant VA Campus – 1.45 minutes

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0Q54E--9ss>

Video Clip 4: Ethnography for design: Handicapped aboard plane in China – 9.33 minutes

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzNLdN44r7Y&feature=related>

Video Clip 5: Some American families and the way they eat – Lincoln, Nebraska – 5.38 minutes

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMdwGxreYcM&context=C31f8039ADOEgsToPDskKD-PosDJR29mcunGFmJR2z>