

513X8 Introduction to Qualitative Methods (15 credits)

Silverstone 317

0900 – 1200 on Wednesdays from 26th September

Teaching Convenor:

Prof Geert De Neve

This course is suitable for all postgraduate students in social science and related professional disciplines. The course aims first, to introduce students to the nature and characteristics of qualitative social research, and second, to equip students with some key personal and practical skills relevant to successful qualitative research.

The course begins by introducing the variety of methodological positions and research practices associated with qualitative research strategies (week 1). Then, three key research approaches to data collection are explored in more depth. A first session (week 2) will focus on the key data collection method of interviewing, with an additional focus on elite interviews. Students will also be set a practical task on which they will report back in week 5, during which we will return to a range of practical and theoretical issues around interviewing. The following week (week 3), we will consider the nature of ethnographic fieldwork and discuss participant observation as a key social science research method. This is followed by a session (week 4) on narratives and life-histories as particular types of (as well as ways of eliciting) qualitative data. This will be followed by a session (week 5) on collecting and analysing life histories and narratives. A final session will focus on ethics, engagement and positionality in qualitative research, with a review of the debate around militant and engaged research.

Programme of Seminars:

Week 1	Introductory session to Qualitative Research
Week 2	Conducting Interviews and Elite Interviews
Week 3	Focus Groups and other participatory research techniques
Week 4	Collecting Qualitative Data through Participant Observation
Week 5	Collecting and Analysing Narratives and Life Histories
Week 6	READING WEEK – NO CLASS
Week 7	Ethics, engagement and positionality

Recommended general texts for this course:

***Pandian, A. and Mariappan, M. P. (2014). *Ayya's Accounts: A ledger of hope in modern India*. Bloomington: University of Indian Press.**

- Clifford, J. and Marcus, G. (eds.) (1986), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Coffey, A & Atkinson, P (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data*
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) (1998/2001/2005) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, London, Sage.
- DeWalt, K. and B DeWalt (eds) (2002). *Participant Observation: A guide for fieldworkers*. Walnut creek: AltaMira.
- Dixon, B.R, Bouma, G.D. and G.B. Atkinson (1995), *A Handbook of Social Science Research* (second edition), Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Dunne, M., Pryor, J. & Yates, P. (2005), *Becoming a Researcher: a research companion for the social sciences*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Ellen, R. (ed.) (1984), *Ethnographic Research - A Guide to General Conduct*, London: Academic Press.
- Fielding, N., Lee, R. and Blank, G. (2008). *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gubrium, J. & Holstein J. (2002) *Handbook of Interview Research*, London: Sage.
- Hine, C. (2013) *Virtual Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications Limited
- Hine C. (2012) *The Internet. Understanding Qualitative Research*. Oxford University Press
- Hammersley, M.(1992) *What's wrong with Ethnography*.
- Harding, S. (ed.) (1987) *Feminism and Methodology: social science issues*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press (Introduction)
- Harvey, L. (1990) *Critical Social Research*, Boston: Unwin Hyman. [for instance the A. Oakley example p114.]
- Kvale, S. (1998/2009) *InterViews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*, London: Sage.
- Schostak, J. (2006) *Interviewing and Representation in Qualitative Research*, Maidenhead: Open University Press
- Skinner, Jonathan. (ed.) (2012) *The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach*. London: Berg.
- Somekh B. and Lewin, C. (2005) *Research Methods in the Social Science*. London: Sage.
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Method*. Sage Publications.

Course Assessment

A 2500-word essay (due in January.) Students can choose one of two types of exercise to submit for assessment. You are strongly advised to consult with your course tutor or doctoral supervisor before you make your choice.

Submission: Please see your 'Assessment Deadlines and Exam Timetable' in Sussex Direct for submission information. Late submission will be penalised unless acceptable exceptional circumstances have been submitted.

Assessment Option A:

A methodological reflection on developing and using a research instrument

This assessment option comprises a critical and reflective account of the process of developing and using a research instrument. You can choose any method that interests you (e.g. participant observation; unstructured interview; life story; focus group interview) for this exercise –‘instrument’ here being a generic term which refers to the means by which data are produced and including unstructured approaches to observation or interviewing.

The instrument could relate to a research project which you intend to engage in future, for example your doctoral thesis research; in that case, it might be seen as a pilot or starting point for the wider project. Alternatively, you might like to situate your instrument within a project which you devise expressly for the purposes of the assignment but which will never proceed any further. In either case the research instrument will have to relate to the logic and aims of the wider project.

The assignment will need to reflect critically on all phases of the enterprise as a means to enable you to learn as much as possible about the nature and potential of the particular method and also to become aware of its limitations. It is hoped that you will also learn about yourself as a researcher.

The written assignment is not a research report of substantive findings but an account of the process of applying this research method. In other words, remember that the focus of your discussion is methodological not substantive. Your experiences in designing and trying out the instrument are to be used as examples which enable you to discuss broader methodological issues and the way that they interact with social theory. Your developing identity as a social researcher will be an important aspect of the assignment.

In doing this option you are recommended to keep a reflective journal. This will certainly guide your thinking and aid in recalling the details of the process but parts of it can also be used to illustrate the points you make within the text or within an appendix.

Assessment Option B:

Write a short term paper on one of the following topics:

1. How do researchers using qualitative methods ensure the validity and reliability of their findings?
2. What specific sorts of knowledge can be gathered through participation and observation?
3. Ellen refers to participant observation as an “oxymoron”. Has the idea of participant observation outlived its usefulness as a method?
4. What sort of knowledge can we generate through the collection and analysis of narratives?
5. Analysing published examples, explore the strengths and weaknesses of the life (hi)story as a tool for social understanding.
6. In what ways does the ‘post-modern turn’ affect fieldwork and research practice?
7. Ethnographic writing is shaped by personality, politics, audience and style? Discuss at least one of these with examples.
8. As a method of data collection, focus group discussions have both strengths and weaknesses. Discuss at least one of each.
9. Discuss at least two practical issues around interviewing and reflect on how they relate to epistemological questions.
10. What distinguishes the elite interview from interviews with less powerful research participants?