

Conclusion

These ideas about how to collect information apply to teachers as well as administrators, to teacher educators as well as student teachers. Any educator who wants to be a better inquirer or learner can use their role as insider participant to gain access to activities and people that outsider researchers would have difficulty even knowing about. Likewise, educators-as-inquirers can conduct informal and formal interviews and use creativity in identifying artifacts, literature, and unobtrusive indicators that will be serve as information sources.

Looking back to Chapters One through Six, it should be clear now that all the questions discussed in Chapter Six can be asked in different ways through these various gathering approaches. And the collection procedures you use will vary depending on the level of trust you have developed with people you want to observe or interview, as discussed in Chapter Four. What you choose to record, as discussed in Chapter Three and your assumptions about yourself as an inquirer and your relationship to what you are inquiring into also shape what and how you collect. The point is, that you are designing your own study as you make all these choices and as you act out your beliefs as a person. Remember to keep track of all these decisions in your audit trail so others can decide how credible your work is.

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Questions for Consideration

1. Why is it important to observe yourself as the observer as well as to observe the situation you want to study?
2. Do you agree that no two observers can ever observe exactly the same things? What are the implications of this statement?
3. Do you agree that observing is a creative rather than a passive act? What are the implications of this statement?
4. If we are selective in what we observe and in what we record based on those observations, is there any such thing as objective data? What are the implications?
5. How can you discover the patterns of selectivity that you use in observing and recording data?
6. Do you agree that information taken out of context is meaningless? What are the implications for doing a study?
7. How can you pay more attention to context?
8. What is the difference between labeling and describing? How can you learn to describe rather than label when recording your observations?
9. Why is nonverbal information just as important as verbal information? How can you obtain both?
10. Why is emic information just as important as etic information? How can you obtain both?
11. How do ordinary participants and participant observers differ from one another? What are the implications for your own research project?
12. What are the different levels of involvement in which a participant observer can engage?
13. Why does this presentation concentrate on descriptive observations?
14. How are observations and questions related?
 - a. If you are observing, rather than interviewing, of whom do you ask questions?
 - b. What kind of questions should you ask?
15. What are some differences between grand tour and mini tour observations and questions?
16. When should descriptive questions be asked in a qualitative inquiry?

17. How often should a particular informant be interviewed?
18. How can interviewers encourage informants to reveal their emic perspectives rather than use the researcher's etic views?
19. Why is it important to pay attention to the rapport process during interviewing? Can't rapport be taken care of through gate keepers before even meeting with the informants?
20. Why should a qualitative inquirer try to go beyond interviews and direct observation to gather the other kinds of data described in this chapter?
21. What are some possible documents, records, artifacts, etc. that might be available to qualitative researchers in educational settings?
22. How would you go about gathering such materials?
23. How would you combine the information gathered from such materials with the observation and interview data you collect?
24. How could photographs and/or videotaping be used in studying educational problems?
25. Are the suggestions made in this chapter regarding photos and videotapes feasible or would the people under study be too distracted by the equipment?
26. Are the ideas presented in this chapter applicable in your situation?
27. How are you using or planning to use the ideas in this chapter in your own qualitative inquiry project?

Suggested Activities

Activity #1

This activity is adapted from Hunter and Foley (1976) As part of your study, observe a social situation in the following ways:

During a 15 minute period, do not take any notes or attempt to record the situation in any way.

During another 15 minutes, record your observations using paper and pencil while you continue observing.

Based on this observation exercise, answer the following questions in your fieldnotes:

- a. Where was the scene you observed?
- b. Where were you in relation to the scene you observed?
- c. Why did you choose the kind of scene you chose to observe?
- d. Why did you choose the particular scene you observed?
- e. Attempt to recall and describe in writing your train of thought- both about yourself and the scene- during the first 15 minutes you were observing (when you weren't taking notes).
- f. Did you move around? Stay still? Why?
- g. Were you interested in the scene? Easily distracted? Both? Why? What are the implications for what you saw?

- h. Were you bored? How might that affect your observation?
- i. Stop a moment. Think about the scene you observed. Did you notice the:
 - o time?
 - o temperature?
 - o weather conditions?
 - o materials of which things were made?
 - o colors of materials?
 - o clothes people wore?
 - o sounds in the background (e.g., cars going by)?
 - o person speaking each phrase?
 - o people's positions in relationship to one another?
 - o way people moved their bodies?
 - o gestures?
 - o spatial arrangements of people and objects?
 - o Answer these questions. Then try to think of other items to which you now know you did not pay attention. Include these items with the list above.
- j. What things about the situation can you remember now that you didn't record in writing during the second 15 minutes of your observation activity? Make a list of those items too.
- k. Carefully review the two lists in "i" and "j" above. What kinds of things are on the lists. What kinds of things do you tend to overlook when you are observing? When you are recording your observations? Why do you think you didn't record or observe these things? What similarities and differences there are in your observation and recording selectivities.

Activity #2

Select one situation you want to study as part of your project and write out a series of questions that will lead to both grand tour observations and mini-tour observations for that small project. With these questions in mind, conduct a period of participant observation in which you make both grand tour observations and mini-tour observations. Write an expanded account of these descriptive observations in your field notes.

Activity #3

Review the examples given in this chapter of the various kinds of descriptive questions and prepare several of each type for informants in your project setting.

Activity #4

Conduct an interview with an informant, using descriptive questions and taking condensed notes during or immediately after the interview.

Activity #5

Expand the condensed notes taken during the interview into full fieldnotes.

Activity #6

Write about this interview in your audit trail.

- a. Did the interview have an explicit purpose? What was it?
- b. Did you give any explanations to the informant regarding the purpose of the interview, the fact that responses were being recorded, that native language was needed, the kinds of questions that were being asked, etc.?
- c. Were descriptive questions asked? If so, which of the five types described in this chapter were used and how useful were they?
- d. Did you do most of the asking and the informant most of the answering? Who did most of the talking?
- e. Did you express interest and/or cultural ignorance in what the informant was saying? How?
- f. Did you repeat back what the informant was saying to show understanding of the responses?
- g. Did you repeat questions several times to give the informant plenty of opportunity to say all they wanted?
- h. Did the informant expand or abbreviate what he or she was saying? What did you do to encourage expansion?
- i. Did you ask friendly questions, especially at the beginning of the interview? Were the greetings and ending comments appropriate?

Activity #7

You should think about the qualitative project you are conducting in terms of the ideas presented in this chapter to identify existing documents, records, or unobtrusive residues you might use to gather data. Make a list of such artifacts, pick at least one item from the list that you need, and obtain access to it. Summarize information from that data source into your fieldnotes.

Activity #8

You should also think about how you might appropriately use photographs, audiotapes and/or videotapes in your project. How would you use these techniques and for what purposes?



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