

Evaluating qualitative methods (10 lectures with embedded seminar elements)

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Qualitative methods are ubiquitous in development research – partly out of conviction, partly for lack of reliable quantitative data. Either way, qualitative studies can arguably be done well or poorly. Unfortunately, it is often not so easy to say which is which.

That's why this module is a little different from the methods course you may have taken in your undergraduate studies. While it does cover the same familiar areas of research design, different kinds of qualitative material and analytical strategies, its aim is not primarily to teach you how to *conduct* qualitative research, but to enable you to *evaluate* the quality in qualitative research.

After taking the module you will be able to tell whether the case selection in that last paper that you read was any good – even if you don't conduct case study research yourself. You will be able to read an ethnographic account of development policy and judge whether it is up to standard, methodologically speaking – even if you are quantitatively trained. You will also better understand the ethics of fieldwork, have developed a yardstick to assess the quality of interviews, and know how scholars might in principle attempt to make sense of what they experienced. And perhaps you will even have developed a new perspective on the methodological aspects of your own work, for instance in preparing for your dissertation...

To that end, most sessions are split in two parts. The first half runs in seminar style and revisits what we discussed the week before; the latter half introduces new material in the form of a lecture. Over the remaining week, you will then adopt the role of a scientific peer reviewer and evaluate (in writing) the methodology of a published piece of research that works with whatever kind of material, analytical approach, etc was introduced that week; these reports will, in sum, also make up the assessment for this module, replacing the standard essay. Our next session then begins by jointly working through a sample of these 'peer review reports', revisiting whatever we discussed the week before and discussing any issues encountered in the writing process – before moving on to the next substantive lecture.

1. Introduction: Quality in qualitative research

In the first hour, we will revisit your undergraduate days, recap the fundamentals of qualitative research, discuss how it is different (or not) from quantitative approaches, and ensure that everybody is essentially on the same page irrespective of disciplinary background.

- Almond, Gabriel A and Genco, Stephen J, 1977: Clouds, clocks, and the study of politics. *World Politics* 29(4), 489-522.
- Geertz, Clifford, 1977: Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In: *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Perseus, 3-30.

The second hour will more specifically address the various ways in which scholars propose to evaluate quality in qualitative research, and introduce the format of 'peer review reports'.

- Trainor, Audrey A and Graue, Elizabeth (eds), 2013: Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences. Routledge (*chapter 1*).
- Silverman, David, 2013: Doing qualitative research. Sage (*chapters 14 and 15*).

There won't be homework for this week – that only starts in week 2...

2. Case studies: one, two, many – and which ones?

In the first hour, we will recap the basic process from planning through data gathering, analysis and writing based on qualitative material – and discuss why this is often much more of a messy and cyclical back-and-forth than textbooks tend to suggest.

- Becker, Howard, 1998: *Tricks of the trade*. Chicago University Press. (*chapters 1-2*)
- Law, John, 2003: *Making a mess with method*. On-Line Papers Series, Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University.

The second hour is devoted to one of the most fundamental design decisions for many qualitative studies – and one that is most frequently ill conceived: the selection, contrasting and comparison of cases. When is it better to study a phenomenon in one single case study, when are several cases of advantage – and either way, how can one select good ones?

- Becker, Howard, 1998: *Tricks of the trade*. Chicago University Press. (*chapter 3*)
- Hammersley, Martyn and Atkinson, Paul, 2007: *Ethnography*. Routledge. (*chapter 2*)

Homework for next week is to evaluate in writing the case selection in Evans 1995.

- Trainor, Audrey A and Graue, Elizabeth (eds), 2013: *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences*. Routledge. (*chapter 5*)
- Evans, Peter, 1995: *Embedded autonomy: The politics of industrial transformation*. Princeton University Press.

3. Research ethics, collaboration, assistants

During the first hour we will jointly work through a sample of your 'peer review reports' of Evans 1995 and recap our discussion of case studies and case selection.

The second hour will address the many ethical concerns around qualitative research in development, including how to work with governmental and non-governmental partners, research assistants and translators, how to navigate power balances, safeguarding data and conducting research in difficult, sensitive or outright dangerous situations.

- Hammersley, Martyn and Atkinson, Paul, 2007: *Ethnography*. Routledge. (*chapters 3, 4 and 10*)
- Desai, Vandana and Potter, Robert B, 2006: *Doing development research*. Sage (*chapters 3-11*).

Homework for next week is to evaluate in writing the ethical reflections in Sen 2007.

- Trainor, Audrey A and Graue, Elizabeth (eds), 2013: *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences*. Routledge. (*chapter 7*)
- Sen, Atreyee, 2007: *Shiv Sena women. Violence and communalism in a Bombay slum*. Indiana University Press

4. Interviews: semi-structured, narrative, focus group

During the first hour we will jointly work through a sample of your 'peer review reports' of Sen 2007 and recap our discussion of research ethics.

In the second hour we will turn to the undoubtedly most prominent kind of qualitative material analysed in studies of development, for better or worse: interviews. These come in different forms: expert interviews, biographical interviews, focus groups, etc – and they are frequently embedded in the kind of collaborations with translators and assistants that we discussed last week. How are these different kinds of interviews different, what are their shared fundamentals, and what makes a good interview in which circumstance?

- Hammersley, Martyn and Atkinson, Paul, 2007: *Ethnography*. Routledge. (*chapter 5*)
- Desai, Vandana and Potter, Robert B, 2006: *Doing development research*. Sage (*chapters 15-17*).
- Roulston, Kathryn, 2010: Considering quality in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research* 10(2), 199-228.

Homework for next week is to evaluate in writing how Susewind 2013 used interviews.

- Trainor, Audrey A and Graue, Elizabeth (eds), 2013: *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences*. Routledge. (*chapters 9 and 11*)
- Susewind, Raphael, 2013: *Being Muslim and working for peace*. Sage

5. Action research and Rapid Rural Appraisal

During the first hour we will jointly work through a sample of your 'peer review reports' of Susewind 2013 and recap our discussion of different kinds of interview research.

The second hour will lead on from focus group interviews to a related set of methods often used in development research – and in applied development practice. Depending on who you ask, these methods might go by the name of 'Action Research', 'Rapid Rural Appraisal' or 'Participatory Rural Appraisal'. What are they and how are they implemented at their best?

- Desai, Vandana and Potter, Robert B, 2006: *Doing development research*. Sage (*chapters 12, 21 and 31*).

Homework for next week is to evaluate in writing how Pratt 2012 applied action research principles.

- Trainor, Audrey A and Graue, Elizabeth (eds), 2013: *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences*. Routledge. (*chapter 3*)
- Pratt, Geraldine and Philippine Women Centre of B.C., 2012: *Families apart. Migrant mothers and the conflicts of labor and love*. Univ. of Minnesota Press.

6. Ethnography and (non-)participant observation

During the first hour we will jointly work through a sample of your 'peer review reports' of Pratt 2012 and recap our discussion of action research and RRA/PRA.

The second hour will turn to a more holistic set of qualitative methods (some would even say: to a whole distinct methodology) – ethnographic research. What are its core principles, as developed in

the discipline of (social) anthropology? How has ethnography been adopted in other social sciences? And what makes a good ethnographic account of development good?

- Hammersley, Martyn and Atkinson, Paul, 2007: *Ethnography*. Routledge. (*chapters 1 and 7-9*)
- Wikan, Unni, 2012: *Resonance. Beyond the words*. Chicago Univ. Press (*preface*)
- Wedeen, Lisa, 2010: Reflections on ethnographic work in political science. *Annual review of political science* 13, 255-272.

Homework for next week is to evaluate in writing the ethnography of Wikan 2012 (chapter 5)

- Trainor, Audrey A and Graue, Elizabeth (eds), 2013: *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences*. Routledge. (*chapter 3*)
- Wikan, Unni, 2012: *Resonance. Beyond the words*. Chicago Univ. Press (*chapter 5*)

7. Beyond words: Silences, images, sounds, smells

During the first hour we will jointly work through a sample of your 'peer review reports' of Wikan 2012 and recap our discussion of ethnography.

The second hour will take the lead from Unni Wikan's work to push into other non-verbal methodologies that have developed quite some momentum over the last years: qualitative research that uses the embodied experience of silences, images, sounds and smells. When is this kind of research good and helpful, and how can it be well represented in writing?

- Desai, Vandana and Potter, Robert B, 2006: *Doing development research*. Sage (*chapter 21*).
- Margolis, Eric and Pauwels, Luc (eds), 2011: *The SAGE Handbook of visual research methods* (*chapter 31*)
- Wikan, Unni, 2012: *Resonance. Beyond the words*. Chicago Univ. Press (*chapter 1*)

Homework for next week is to evaluate in writing the methodology of Cook 2015

- Trainor, Audrey A and Graue, Elizabeth (eds), 2013: *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences*. Routledge. (*chapters 13 and 14*)
- Cook, Ian, 2015: *Expectant urbanism. Time, space and rhythm in a smaller South Indian city*. Central European University (PhD dissertation)

8. Analytical strategies in grounded theory

During the first hour we will jointly work through a sample of your 'peer review reports' of Cook 2015 and recap our discussion of qualitative research 'beyond words'.

After having discussed different kinds of material over the last four sessions, the second hour shifts to a different perspective on qualitative research, less concerned with the quality of data gathering or generation, but with the quality of analysis. One prominent guideline for many qualitative researchers in that regard has been the application of a set of principles known as 'grounded theory'. What are these principles, and when are they implemented well?

- Becker, Howard, 1998: *Tricks of the trade*. Chicago University Press. (*chapter 4*)

- Glaser, Barney and Strauss, Anselm L, 1967: The discovery of grounded theory.
- Charmaz, Kathy, 2013: Constructing grounded theory. Sage.

Homework for next week is to evaluate in writing the methodology of Spiegel 2010

- Trainor, Audrey A and Graue, Elizabeth (eds), 2013: Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences. Routledge. (*chapter 8*)
- Spiegel, Anna, 2010: Contested public spheres. Female activism and identity politics in Malaysia. VS Research.

9. Analysis through coding and typologies

During the first hour we will jointly work through a sample of your 'peer review reports' of Spiegel 2010 and recap our discussion of the principles of grounded theory.

The second hour introduces a second major analytical strategy for qualitative researchers – and one rather more inspired by quantitative research: the coding of data, and the creation of typologies. What makes a good coding strategy? How do we get from a pile of material to convincing typologies? And how best to represent that inherently messy process in writing?

- Becker, Howard, 1998: Tricks of the trade. Chicago University Press. (*chapter 5*)
- Rihoux, Benoit and Ragin, Charles, 2009: Configurational comparative methods. Sage.

Homework for next week is to evaluate in writing the methodology of Varshney 2002.

- Trainor, Audrey A and Graue, Elizabeth (eds), 2013: Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences. Routledge. (*chapter 10*)
- Varshney, Ashutosh, 2002: Ethnic conflict and civic life. Yale Univ. Press.

10. Conclusion: Quality in qualitative research reconsidered

During the first hour we will jointly work through a sample of your 'peer review reports' of Varshney 2002 and recap our discussion of coding and typology creation.

The second hour wraps up the module with a reflection on our learning so far. How do methods of qualitative inquiry translate into practice? How can one judge the quality of qualitative research? And how does that compare to both the practice and quality of quantitative work?

- Trainor, Audrey A and Graue, Elizabeth (eds), 2013: Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences. Routledge (*chapter 15*).
- Jensenius, Francesca Refsum, 2014: The fieldwork of quantitative data collection. PS: Political Science & Politics 47(2), 402-404.