**ERMA 7210/D: Theory and Methodology of Qualitative Research[[1]](#footnote-0)**

Auburn University - College of Education

Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, & Technology

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Fall 2021

**Location**: This class will be a blend of synchronous instruction on Zoom and asynchronous

activities. **We will meet synchronously on Tuesdays at 5:00pm this semester via Zoom:**

[https://auburn.zoom.us/j/5913393078.](https://auburn.zoom.us/j/5913393078) Please have a headset, webcam, desktop or laptop, quiet location

and high speed Internet connection available for these meetings. Plan to login for a few minutes

from wherever you will normally attend class to test your Internet connection and devices before the first

day of class.

**Office Hours:** I’ll log in to the chat on Canvas and our Zoom room for virtual office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:00-4:00. I’m also available to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet by Zoom or by phone. Email is the quickest way to reach me, and I try to answer emails within 48 hours during the week.

**Credit Hours:** 3 semester hours

**Date Syllabus Prepared:** August 2021

**Special Accommodations:** Students who need accommodations are asked to electronically submit their

approved accommodations through AU Access and to arrange a meeting during the first week of classes.

**Required Materials:**

* Tracy, S. J. (2020). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact.* Wiley Blackwell
* Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide.*
* Additional course readings and materials will be delivered via Canvas.
* Time management skills. (This course is time- and reading-intensive. I encourage you to consider your schedule before deciding to commit to this class.).
* Web access. You must have access to a web browser, and you must check your email accounts (Tiger Mail and Canvas) several times a week.

**Course Description**: This course is designed to give you an overview and introduction to the historical

and theoretical underpinnings of qualitative inquiry. We will also compare and contrast the assumptions,

design, and methods of different “schools” of qualitative inquiry. The primary purposes of the course are

to: 1) introduce the founding and prevailing principles and paradigms of qualitative inquiry; how these

have been used to describe social phenomena; and their underlying assumptions; 2) critique the limits and

possibilities of the various paradigms of qualitative research; 3) help you become ‘good consumers’ of

qualitative research; 4) provide an opportunity to begin honing your qualitative research design skills; and

5) push you to ‘get your feet wet’ in data generation.

**The Web Ate My Homework and Other Excuses:**By registering for this course, please realize:

* This course is hosted in Canvas and may require students to download and employ third-party software programs and troubleshoot their own technology problems. Since I can't make house calls or analyze multiple different student computer systems, troubleshooting may involve working with the campus help desk, LRC, peers, etc. That being said, if you have tech issues, I will happily try to help you during regular office hours.
* All assignments for this course are submitted to Canvas. Courses with electronically submitted assignments require students to take responsibility for saving/backing up work and for re-doing assignments if they fail to back up their work.  (It’s a good idea to create assignments in Word, Pages, or other word processing software in case Canvas times you out or you lose your connection.)

1. **Course Objectives:** Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

* Discuss the theoretical traditions of qualitative research;
* Discuss the limits/possibilities of various approaches to qualitative inquiry;
* Discuss the limits/possibilities of various techniques and procedures for generating data;
* Assess the quality of qualitative research;
* Design qualitative research studies.

**Course Format:** Education scholars have long theorized that pedagogy and practice are rooted in a ‘banking’ approach to teaching and learning (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1997) where students are viewed as empty vessels to be filled by the teacher, who ‘deposits’ knowledge and expertise. Students are often positioned as passive and powerless, and teaching is a purely teacher-directed act. Due to this positioning, students are often unfamiliar with being responsible for active participation in their own learning. Our course, by contrast, will be student-led. That is, our course format will often be structured as a seminar, and will include small group discussions and activities, whole-class discussions and activities, reflection, conferencing, fieldwork, and student-led discussions and presentations. It is important that students keep current with assigned readings, attend class, and participate in discussions as informed members, which is the basis of a student-centered approach to coursework. The student-centered nature of our work together underpins the necessity of synchronous meetings, and asynchronous tasks, each week.

In addition, assignments in this course are designed with skill-building for qualitative research in mind. Our weekly reading and writing is practice for the synthesis skills needed to construct a literature review. Our group work together is an exercise in collaboration and peer review, both of which are foundational to the work of scholarship. Reflective journals prepare us to engage deeply in reflexivity throughout the conduct of research; they also prompt us to remain flexible and open to the possibilities of emergent questions and design that are hallmarks of qualitative inquiry. And, all facets of our class are designed to alert us to the power and authority inherent in the role of the researcher, a power with which we must grapple and attend to every step of the way as we prepare to engage in ethical, humanizing research practices.

**Course Requirements and Evaluation (see weekly schedule for due dates):**

**A. Weekly Preparation and Discussion (5 pts x 14 weeks = 70 points total):** The reading for this class is not casual. To demonstrate that you have read, engaged with the course readings, and are prepared to discuss in class, a preparatory writing assignment is due before class each week.This assignment is intended for you to process and articulate your thoughts about the readings so that you can engage in meaningful discussion in class; thus, you should be prepared to share what you've written in class. It is also a way for me to gauge your engagement with the concepts presented so that I might design how our synchronous time together is best focused. Note that this weekly writing may take two different forms. Some weeks, you may be asked to construct your writing in Canvas, and some weeks you will be asked to annotate readings in Perusall, an annotation tool. We will demo Perusall in class together before those assignments. ***You must both complete your written preparation and be in class to participate in the discussion*** to earn credit for the assignment.

Critical and scholarly discussion of readings do not include your feelings about the author's writing style ("I like this.", "This is boring", etc.)  Instead, push yourself to synthesize the main ideas of the readings, identifying how they are 'in conversation' with one another.  What are the themes across the readings?  Where do these ideas diverge/do the authors appear to disagree?  What questions do you have, after unpacking the readings?

**Reflection Rubric**

1. Unpacks at least 2 specific concepts or points from the readings (with in-text citations). (1 pt)

2. Relates new information to old information learned in the course to date. (1 pt)

3. Relates information in article or reading to personal experience. (1 pt)

4. Synthesis, rather than recitation and summary, **of *all* of the readings**. (1 pt)

5. Length of reflection: approx 1 page. (1 pt)

**B. CITI Training (completion):** Online ethics in research training required by the university before you begin conducting research with human subjects. Every *individual* enrolled in this class must complete their CITI training. In addition to the required modules, I encourage you to also complete any modules that are relevant to your field of study.

**C. Facilitating Discussion (20 points):** For one of our class weeks 5-14, you (perhaps with a partner, depending on class size) will betasked with facilitating the class discussion for approximately 45-60 minutes. Assume that your classmates have done the reading; no need to “present” information to us. Instead, you should develop discussion questions and activities that will get the class talking and working through the main ideas presented in the readings. You might, for example, generate questions and activities that direct us in: 1) how the readings shed light on qualitative research, 2) comparing and contrasting how the methods in a particular study map onto (or don’t) expectations for the tradition in which the study is situated; 3) the ethical issues treated in a study focusing on the three pillars of research ethics - beneficence, justice, and autonomy; and 4) the trustworthiness and credibility of the researcher(s), and tracing the scholarly body of work by a particular researcher whose work we’ve read. This assignment will be assessed based on the degree to which: you engage your classmates; the discussion is grounded in your growing understanding of qualitative research methodology, in lieu of, for example, the content of a particular study; and inclusive of your classmates (see rubric in Canvas). This assignment is intended to be formal in the sense that you will need to be prepared, but informal in the sense that you are not presenting anything to your classmates. Again, your task is to *lead* *our* *discussion* about the readings, meaning that your job is to get your classmates talking about qualitative research methods by asking questions.

**D. Article Critique (20 points)** As a researcher it will be critical for you to collect, read, and assess published reports, including ones employing qualitative research methods. Reading such papers can help you 1.) identify relevant evidence that can guide your practice (e.g., determine what to include in a comprehensive review of the extant literature), 2.) appreciate the utility of qualitative research when it comes to studying various topics, and 3.) select appropriate methods to address your own research questions.

When you locate pertinent research papers, it is critical that you can *assess* the quality of these published accounts and *synthesize* your understandings of these sources. This objective can be even more challenging in qualitative research given the variety of methods, styles, and philosophical approaches, as well as the uneven nature of the quality of some publications. To help you develop a critical eye for evaluating qualitative research you will be asked to critique two qualitative research articles from a field of your choosing. To help you discern the quality of your chosen article, you will use the Eight “Big Tent” Criteria to guide you (Tracy, 2010), as well as the expectations for different approaches outlined in the Creswell & Poth and Schwandt texts (see rubric in Canvas). You will need to submit a copy of the first page of the article, or more if required to capture an abstract, along with your critique. You should explicitly address each criterion, providing a clear statement of your assessment and critique of the article, *and* provide support for your evaluation (ie. Creswell & Poth, Schwandt, journal articles, etc.). Remember that the purpose of this assignment is to critique, not simply to summarize.

**E. Interview Assignment (10 points):** Individually, you will conduct and record a ten(ish) minute interview with a participant of your choosing about any topic you wish. Upload your recording to Canvas, along with the interview protocol you followed and the consent document you developed. You will conclude this task with an entry in your reflective journal about ‘how you did’ as a qualitative interviewer. Your reflection should be grounded in course readings, including citations.

**F. Field notes Assignment (10 points):** Individually, you will collect ten(ish) minutes of observational data “in the field” at a site of your choosing. Upload your observation protocol and field notes to Canvas. You will conclude this task with an entry in your reflective journal about ‘how you did’ as a qualitative observer/fieldworker, grounding your reflection in course readings.

**G. Qualitative Research Project Proposal:** You will design and propose a qualitative study that will include at least two sources of data. The design of your pilot study should fulfill Shulamit Reinharz’s[[2]](#footnote-1) three criteria for worthwhile research: 1.) Contribute to a substantive area of inquiry, 2.) flesh out your understanding of what it means to do qualitative research (Don’t worry if you don’t know what this means. You will.), and 3.) learn about yourself as a researcher—that is, be reflective about methodological learning and ongoing questions. You will submit this design in the template provided in Canvas.

* 1. Literature Search (10 points): This assignment is designed to get you into the research literature about your topic. Further details will be given in class and in Canvas.

* 1. Draft design template submissions (2 x 5 point = 10 points total): At two points during the semester, you will submit your design template. Your first submission should include draft entries for the following elements at least: paradigmatic commitment, purpose and rationale, research questions, and positionality/subjectivity. Your second submission should include updated drafts of the elements from the first submission, having been responsive to the feedback you received, with the addition of drafts of: methodology, study boundaries, and recruitment. You may include additional elements at each submission for feedback.
  2. Design template -final draft and presentation (25 points): Your final design template will be submitted Details about the content and the format of the template are in the Canvas assignment. Prepare to share and discuss your template with a group of classmates during the final class meeting.
  3. Peer reviews (5 points): In the final class meeting, you will craft peer reviews for two classmates’ design templates.
  4. Revision memo (to be submitted as final reflective journal entry): In the final class meeting, you will receive reviews on your template for classmates. You will carefully consider that feedback and craft a memo in response. Your memo should clearly identify what feedback you consider worthwhile in terms of improving your design and what feedback you are going to disregard because it would not improve your design. For the former, clearly describe the changes you would make to your design. For the latter, provide a rationale for disregarding the feedback; explain why it is either unhelpful or misaligned with your paradigmatic commitments or purpose.
  5. Reflective Journal (20 points). This semester, you will be asked to keep areflective journal. Your reflective journal is a place to keep track of how your research question and proposed design have evolved. That is, it may contain several drafts of these. It should also contain a description of the materials and data you would collect, including details about site selection, inclusion criteria for participants, how you would gain access and recruit, etc. Much of this will come directly from/lead directly to your (draft) design template. You should think of this as a precursor to writing a methods chapter of a proposal for a dissertation study. As it is a *reflective* journal, it is also a place for you to document your methodological learning—What have you come to understand about research practice and yourself as a researcher? How is your understanding of self as instrument evolving? How are you both a help and hindrance to your work? See Appendix A for some further guiding questions. You will also receive writing prompts in time from time to time. As you write, **you should incorporate specific concepts from course readings and discussions (including citations).**

Learn to use your journal as a **habitual** way of jotting down your thoughts, questions, and notes for later application to your dissertation research process. You are encouraged to use your writing as a means of inquiry. Later you may find that your journal entries will become important data for research you are conducting, as well as a valuable means of sense-making and a source that documents personal transformation. Be sure to document dates and times of your entries. This assignment will be assessed based on the degree to which it is complete, comprehensive, and detailed and the extent to which it reveals your own thinking and growth as a researcher (see rubric in Appendix A and in Canvas.)

1. **Final Grade:**

| Assignment | | Points Possible |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Attendance, Class Participation & Weekly  Preparation | | 70 |
| CITI Training | | completion |
| Literature Search | | 10 |
| Draft Template Submissions | | 10 |
| Final Draft of Template and Presentation | | 25 |
| Peer Feedback on final templates | | 5 |
| Facilitating Class Discussion | | 20 |
| Article Critique | | 20 |
| Interview Assignment | | 10 |
| Field Notes Assignment | | 10 |
| Reflective Journal | | 20 |
| **TOTAL** | | **200** |
|  | Points | Letter Grade |
|  | 198 to 220 points | A |
|  | 176 to 197.99 points | B |
|  | 154 to 175.99 points | C |
|  | 132 to 153.99 points | D |
|  | Below 132 points | F |

**5. Course Policies**:

1. Professionals show up on time and prepared every day for work. Your attendance is expected during each class session. Failure to attend class sessions usually results in a lower grade due to the challenging nature of the course content, and to the ‘workshop’ approach to class structure. Being prepared for class means that you have read and are ready to discuss that reading. Treat synchronous meetings in Zoom as you would treat an in-class meeting. Please come to class prepared to have your camera and your audio connected for the duration of our meeting.
2. Professionals complete assignments on time. Assignments are due in Canvas as indicated in the syllabus and the course calendar. Assignments handed in after this time will be considered late. **Late assignments will be penalized by 10% per day late**.
3. Professionals use appropriate means for discussing disagreements. Please respect our class time together and my own time as a teacher and researcher by planning to discuss grades or other points of contention during office hours or by appointment, **not during class or via email**.
4. Professionals take responsibility for their own learning. My overarching goal is to support class members in becoming the very best they can possibly become at this point in their professional development. Please allow me to assist in any way possible including, but certainly not limited to: listening, providing feedback, answering questions, sharing and addressing concerns, brainstorming, clarifying course content or expectations, and mediating or facilitating work with collaborating peers. While I do check my email regularly, **I do not check email after 8 pm.**
5. Professionals give credit where credit is due. Even though I will encourage you to work in groups and learn from each other, each individual is held responsible for their own behavior and learning. I expect students to submit their own work for all assignments. The University Academic Honesty Code and the Tiger Cub Rules and Regulations pertaining to Cheating will apply to this class. See also <http://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/academicHonestyStudents.php> for rules on academic honesty. If and when resources are found (including those on websites), proper citation must be used. It is a graduate student’s responsibility to learn and adhere to APA style guidelines. Failure to provide appropriate citations constitutes a violation of the Auburn University Academic Honesty Code. In addition, written assignments that are similar or identical to those of other students in the class (past or present) is also a violation of the Code. Violations of the Auburn University Academic Honesty Code will be treated according to university policy. Rewriting and resubmission is not an option. **Finally, you may not submit the work of someone else or work that you have submitted for another class to satisfy a requirement of ERMA 7210.**
6. Professionals make others aware of what they need to be successful. Please inform me within the first week of class if you require adaptations/modifications to any assignment because of special needs (disabilities, religious observances, and so on). Additionally, grades associated with incomplete course work (IN) or withdrawal from class will be assigned in strict conformity to University policy (see Auburn University Bulletin). If you wish to drop this course you may do so by the 10th class day with no grade assignment. From the 10th class day to mid-semester a W (withdrawn-passing) grade will be recorded in your transcripts. After this period withdrawal from the course will only be granted under unusual circumstances and must be approved by the Dean of the College of Education.
7. Professionals respect other professionals. Except in the case of an approved disability accommodation, **students are not permitted to audio or video record any portion of class, nor will our Zoom sessions be recorded by the instructor.** Prohibiting the recording of class sessions helps to preserve an inclusive, friendly, and safe learning environment where learners can take risks without fear of retribution or scrutiny. This risk-taking is essential to high quality graduate learning.

Appendix A

Reflective Journal:This semester, you will be asked to keep a reflective journal. The reflective journal will be a place for you to document your emerging subjectivity (i.e., those particular things about you that help and/or hinder your research), methodological learning (i.e., what you have come to understand about research practice and yourself as a researcher), and your experiences conducting fieldwork. Your final journal entry should synthesize and summarize your growth as a researcher over the course of the semester. Feel free to use a personal tone; after all, this is about you. That being said, your writing **should be grounded in course readings (including citations in APA style)**.

Entries in your reflective journal should document your substantive thinking about some of the following:

* What have I learned about qualitative methodology?
* Who am I becoming as a researcher? Who do I want to be as a researcher?
* What is the nature of “my particular pair of spectacles”? How do I see the world in unique ways? How do my views, my lenses, my biases, and my assumptions shape what I can, and cannot, see in research? How do they shape the data I collect, the analyses I conduct, the conclusions I reach, and the ways I disseminate my work?
* What sense am I making of the class readings? … the field experiences? … the class experiences?
* How are my readings, fieldwork, and class experiences related?
* In what ways am I building skills as a qualitative researcher? What has gone well? What mistakes have I made in my fieldwork? What will I do differently next time? Why?
* How is my sense of my class project evolving? How are my ideas for my dissertation evolving? How are my ideas for my professional program of research evolving?
* How am I working to align my research topic, research questions, research design (data collection and analysis plans), and writing for my class project? … for my dissertation? … for my professional program of research?

There are also five criteria that can be used to assess the degree to which reflective practice is productive.[[3]](#footnote-2)∙I will assess your journals based on the degree to which your writing meets these criteria. They are:

1. **Systematic Documentation:** Is there evidence of consistent entries?
2. **Specificity and Clarity:** Does the reflective writing draw on specific language and terminology rather than broad, vague terms? Does it clearly communicate a message, epiphany, discovery, concern, or question? Does the reflective writing include specific details regarding the research questions, the specifics of the designed study, and how these decisions evolved over time.
3. **Accuracy:** Does the reflective writing refer to concepts in qualitative research in ways that demonstrate accurate, or evolving, understanding? Does the reflective writing include appropriate, formal citations where the thoughts, ideas, and words of others have been used? That is, this document will be most useful for you if you use it as a place to record ideas that you may cite in future work (conference presentations, journal articles, chapter 3 of a dissertation, etc.).
4. **Synthesis:** Does the reflective writing provide evidence that you have drawn on more than one source of information (reading, field experience, class experience, etc.) to reveal deep thinking about qualitative methodology? Is there evidence of substantive sense-making regarding qualitative inquiry? It will be particularly important to incorporate ideas from the readings. Including citational support for your ideas is a good scholarly habit.
5. **Self-Focus:** Does the reflective writing include substantive statements about your learning and experiences? Does the reflective writing include specific statements about your future practice as a (qualitative) researcher? After all, reflection is ultimately about *you*.

1. This syllabus draws from syllabi written by Carey Andrzejewski, Ron Chenail, Aaron Kuntz, and Bonnie Fusarelli. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Reinharz, S. (2002). *On becoming a social scientist*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. · Davis, E. A. (2006). Characterizing productive reflection among preservice elementary teachers: Seeing what matters. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 22*(3), 281-301.

   Based on guidelines developed with Heather A. Davis [↑](#footnote-ref-2)