Third Edition

Qualitative Research for Education

An Introduction to Theory and Methods

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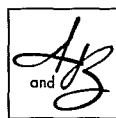**Sari Knopp Biklen**

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C h a p t e r *1*

Foundations of Qualitative Research in Education

A man and woman sat in the upper level of a packed athletic stadium watching a big game of what was to be a winning season for an up-and-coming division I men's collegiate basketball team. Although it was difficult to distinguish them from the other enthusiastic and boisterous spectators, they were researchers engaged in a study of the home team—the socialization and education of male college athletes. Attending games was a minor part of their research work. They also hung out with and interviewed players, athletic staff, boosters, athlete's women friends, media personnel, and professors. In addition, they collected press reports and other written materials related to the team and players. They gained access to the locker room, the dormitories, and other places players spent their time. They followed several groups of players through their college years and beyond. The researchers maintained detailed written notes of what they observed and heard and conducted tape-recorded interviews which they transcribed. The result was a book which explored topics such as the relationship between athletics and academics, social class, ethnicity, and players' friendship and achievement, players' views of their college experience, and the social organization of collegiate athletics (Adler & Adler, 1991).

In another part of the United States, a researcher regularly visited a multicultural public elementary school where she spent long periods of time observing and carefully listening to boys and girls go about their day-to-day activities, in the classroom, on the play ground, in the gym, and in the lunch room, as well as in less supervised places. She was studying how children experience gender in school. The book which resulted from her work is rich in detail about the "gender play" among groups of children. She discusses and describes gender-related activities such as "chase and kiss," "cooties," "goin' with," and teasing (Thorne, 1993).

A researcher was interested in the academic achievement of African American adolescents, particularly in what she came to call the "logic" of responses of the students to their school. She spent time studying at a predominantly African American school in Washington, DC. Thirty-three students were her "key informants"; these students helped her to study the meaning systems at Capitol High. She explored how some students resisted school-sanctioned learning. She learned about the costs of doing well. She interviewed the students both formally and informally, looked at transcripts and other documents, and spent time hanging out at school and at the students' homes, churches, neighborhoods, and recreational center, even riding the bus with them, in order to find out how they made sense of their education. She found out that the theme of "acting white" was an important issue to these students; she came to look at success in terms that were more than academic (Fordham, 1996).

In a medium-size city a researcher regularly visited a city elementary school, interviewing and observing female teachers. She was studying her subjects' perspectives about their work, what they valued and criticized about their occupation, and how these views were manifested in their speech and actions. After she completed her work in the schools she read diaries and letters by female teachers archived in libraries. In addition, she examined published fictional accounts of teaching and other related material. In the book she published, she explored how teachers think about their occupation and how their thinking is related to images of teachers available in popular culture (Biklen, 1995).

These are examples of people conducting qualitative research for education. They exhaust neither the variety of strategies nor the range of topics. Other qualitative researchers look at old photographs from family albums and other sources to see how people with disabilities are presented (Bogdan, 1988); scrutinize brochures advertising educational safaris to understand how travel companies lure their customers (Casella, 1997); interview successful African American educators to understand their life struggles (Gordon, 1997). The educational experiences of people of all ages (as well as material that expands our knowledge of these experiences), in schools as well as out, can be the subject matter. Qualitative research for education takes many forms and is conducted in many settings.

Although researchers in anthropology and sociology have used the approach described in this book for a century, the term *qualitative research* was not used in the social sciences until the late 1960s. We use qualitative research as an umbrella term to refer to several research strategies that share certain characteristics. The data collected have been termed *soft,* that is, rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Research questions are not framed by operationalizing variables; rather, they are formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context. While people conducting qualitative research may develop a focus as they collect data, they do not approach the research with specific questions to answer or hypotheses to test. They also are concerned with understanding behavior from the subject's own frame of reference. External causes are of secondary importance. They tend to collect their data through sustained contact with people in settings where subjects normally spend their time—classrooms, cafeterias, teacher's lounges, dormitories, street corners.

The best-known representatives of qualitative research studies and those that most embody the characteristics we just touched on are those that employ the techniques of *participant observation* and *in-depth interviewing.* The man and woman watching the basketball team and the researcher at Capitol High were engaged in participant observation. The re-

searcher enters the world of the people he or she plans to study, gets to know them and earns their trust, and systematically keeps a detailed written record of what is heard and observed. This material is supplemented by other data such as school memos and records, newspaper articles, and photographs.

In addition to participant observation and archival research, the study of female teachers used in-depth interviewing. Sometimes termed "unstructured" (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954), or "open-ended" (Jahoda, Deutsch, & Cook, 1951), "nondirective" (Meltzer & Petras, 1970), or "flexibly structured" (Whyte, 1979), the researcher is bent on understanding, in considerable detail, how people such as teachers, principals, and students think and how they came to develop the perspectives they hold. This goal often leads the researcher to spend considerable time with subjects in their own environs, asking open-ended questions such as "What is a typical day like for you?" or "What do you like best about your work?" and recording their responses. The open-ended nature of the approach allows the subjects to answer from their own frame of reference rather than from one structured by prearranged questions. In this type of interviewing, questionnaires are not used; while loosely structured interview guides may sometimes be employed, most often the researcher works at getting the subjects to freely express their thoughts around particular topics. Because of the detail sought, most studies have small samples. In some studies, the researcher draws an in-depth portrait of only one subject. When the intent is to capture one person's interpretation of his or her life, the study is called a *life history.*

We use the phrase *qualitative research,* but others use different terms and conceptualize the brand of research we present in this book slightly differently. Anthropologists have often used the term *field work* to refer to the kind of research we are describing (see Junker, 1960). Its use derives from the fact that data tend to be collected in the field as opposed to laboratories or other researcher-controlled situations. In education, qualitative research is frequently called *naturalistic* because the researcher frequents places where the events he or she is interested in naturally occur. And the data are gathered by people engaging in natural behavior: talking, visiting, looking, eating, and so on (Guba, 1978; Wolf, 1979a). The term *ethnographic* is applied to the approach as well. While some use it in a formal sense to refer to a particular type of qualitative research, one in which most anthropologists engage and which is directed at describing culture, it is also used more generally—sometimes synonymously—with qualitative research as we are defining it (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Other phrases are associated with qualitative research. They include *symbolic interactionist, inner perspective,* the *Chicago School, phenomenological, case study, interpretive, ethnomethodological, ecological,* and *descriptive.* The exact use and definition of these terms, as well as words like *fieldwork* and *qualitative research,* varies from user to user and from time to time. We do not mean to suggest that they all mean the same thing, nor to imply that some do not have very exact meanings when used by particular people who belong to particular research traditions (Jacob, 1987; Tesch, 1990; Lancy, 1993; Smith, 1992; Wolcott, 1992). We prefer to use the term *qualitative research* to include the range of strategies that we call "qualitative." We will clarify some of the phrases we have just mentioned as we proceed with our discussion.

At this point we have merely introduced our subject matter. Next we discuss in more detail the characteristics of qualitative research. Then, before we explain its theoretical underpinnings, we place our subject in historical context.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Whether or not you have ever taken any kind of research methods course, you come to qualitative methods class already knowing about research. Media and popular culture, particularly television and radio news, as well as print media, explain the dangers of smoking, drinking while pregnant, driving without seatbelts, and other social problems as discoveries of science, or of scientific research. Charts and graphs illustrate the results of the research, and commentators and journalists employ words such as "variables," "populations," and "results" as part of their daily vocabulary. So, we come to think about research in terms of this vocabulary, even if we do not always know just what all of the terms mean. Whether or not we know how to determine sampling error, we know that this is part of the process of doing research. Research, then, as it comes to be known publicly, is a synonym for *quantitative* research.

Learning to do qualitative research means unlearning this social construction of "research," and opening oneself to the possibility of employing a different vocabulary and way of structuring the research process. While qualitative research shares with quantitative research an emphasis on disciplined data collection, it differs in other ways we will discuss later.

Some researchers "hang around" schools with notepads in hand to collect their data. Others rely on video equipment in the classroom and would never conduct research without it. Still others draw charts and diagrams of student–teacher verbal communication patterns. All of them, though, have this in common: Their work fits our definition of qualitative research and they study an aspect of educational life. In this section we elaborate on the common strands and show why, in spite of differences, their research fits in our category of qualitative research.

There are five features of qualitative research as we define it. All studies that we would call qualitative do not exhibit all the traits to an equal degree. Some, in fact, are almost completely lacking in one or more. The question is not whether a particular piece of research is or is not absolutely qualitative; rather it is an issue of degree. As we mentioned earlier, participant observation and in-depth interview studies tend to be exemplary.

1. *Naturalistic.* Qualitative research has actual settings as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument. The word *naturalistic* comes from ecological approaches in biology. Researchers enter and spend considerable time in schools, families, neighborhoods, and other locales learning about educational concerns. Although some people use videotape equipment and recording devices, many go completely unarmed save for a pad and a pencil. Even when equipment is used, however, the data are collected on the premises and supplemented by the understanding that is gained by being on location. In addition, mechanically recorded materials are reviewed in their entirety by the researcher with the researcher's insight being the key instrument for analysis. In a major study of medical education, for example, researchers went to a mid-western medical school where they followed students to classes, laboratories, hospital wards, and the places where they gathered for social occasions as well: their cafeterias, fraternities, and study halls (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961). For a study of educational stratification in California (Ogbu, 1974), it took the author twenty-one months to complete the fieldwork of visiting, observ-

ing, and interviewing teachers, students, principals, families, and members of school boards.

Qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with *context*. They feel that action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs. These settings have to be understood in the historical context of the institutions of which they are a part. When the data with which they are concerned are produced by subjects, as in the case of official records, qualitative researchers want to know where, how, and under what circumstances they came into being. Of what historical circumstances and movements are they a part? To divorce the act, word, or gesture from its context is, for the qualitative researcher, to lose sight of significance. As one anthropologist described it:

> If anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens, then to divorce it from what happens—from what in this time or that place specific people say, what they do, what is done to them, from the whole vast business of the world's to divorce it from its application and render it vacant. A good interpretation of anything— a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society—takes us to the heart of that of which it is the interpretation. (Geertz, 1973, p. 18)

Whether they collect data on classroom interaction by videoing class sessions (Florio, 1978; Mehan, 1979), on the experiences of superintendents and teachers through interviewing (Chase, 1995; Weiler, 1988; Middleton, 1993; Casey, 1993), or on desegregation (Metz, 1978), literacy (Oyler, 1996), and adolescent identity formation in the high school (Eckert, 1989) by participant observation, qualitative researchers assume that human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs, and whenever possible, they go to that location.

2. *Descriptive Data.* Qualitative research is descriptive. The data collected take the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. The written results of the research contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation. The data include interview transcripts, fieldnotes, photographs, videotapes, personal documents, memos, and other official records. In their search for understanding, qualitative researchers do not reduce the pages upon pages of narration and other data to numerical symbols. They try to analyze the data with all of their richness as closely as possible to the form in which they were recorded or transcribed.

Qualitative articles and reports have been described by some as "anecdotal." This is because they often contain quotations and try to describe what a particular situation or view of the world is like in narrative form. The written word is very important in the qualitative approach, both in recording data and disseminating the findings.

In collecting descriptive data, qualitative researchers approach the world in a nit-picking way. Many of us are locked into our "taken for granted" worlds, oblivious to the details of our environment, and to the assumptions under which we operate. We fail to notice such things as gestures, jokes, who does the talking in a conversation, the decorations on the walls, and the special words we use and to which those around us respond.

The qualitative research approach demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied. The researcher continually asks such questions as: Why are these desks arranged the way they are? Why are some rooms decorated with pictures and others not? Why do certain teachers dress differently from others? Is there a reason for certain activities being carried out where they are? Why is there a television in the room if it is never used? Why do similar behaviors on the part of different students elicit such different responses from the teacher? Nothing is taken for granted, and no statement escapes scrutiny. Description succeeds as a method of data gathering when every detail is considered.

3. *Concern with Process.* Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products. How do people negotiate meaning? How do certain terms and labels come to be applied? How do certain notions come to be taken as part of what we know as "common sense"? What is the natural history of the activity or events under study? In studies of inclusion and integration in schools, for instance, the researchers examined teachers' attitudes toward certain kinds of children and then studied how these attitudes were translated into daily interactions with them and how the daily interactions then reified those taken-for-granted attitudes (Bruni, 1980; Rist, 1978). In interviews with female superintendents, a researcher showed how the administrators developed specific stories about their struggles over the course of their careers (Chase, 1995).

The qualitative emphasis on process has been particularly beneficial in educational research in clarifying the self-fulfilling prophecy, the idea that students' cognitive performance in school is affected by teachers' expectations of them (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Quantitative techniques have been able to show by means of pre- and post-testing that changes occur. Qualitative strategies have suggested just how the expectations are translated into daily activities, procedures, and interactions. A particularly brilliant rendition of the self-fulfilling prophecy in a kindergarten classroom is represented in a participant observation study of an African American kindergarten class in St. Louis. The children were divided into groups based on social and economic criteria within the first few days of school. The teacher interacted more with her top group, allowed them more privileges, and even permitted them to discipline members of the lower group. The day-to-day process of interaction is richly portrayed (Rist, 1970). This kind of study focuses on how definitions (teacher's definitions of students, students' definitions of each other and themselves) are formed.

4. *Inductive.* Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. They do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together.

Theory developed this way emerges from the bottom up (rather than from the top down), from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected. The theory is grounded in the data. As a qualitative researcher planning to develop some kind of theory about what you have been studying, the direction you will travel comes after you have been collecting the data, after you have spent time with your subjects. You are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture that

takes shape as you collect and examine the parts. The process of data analysis is like a funnel: Things are open at the beginning (or top) and more directed and specific at the bottom. The qualitative researcher plans to use part of the study to learn what the important questions are. He or she does not assume that enough is known to recognize important concerns before undertaking the research.

5. *Meaning.* "Meaning" is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. Researchers who use this approach are interested in how different people make sense of their lives. In other words, qualitative researchers are concerned with what are called *participant perspectives* (Erickson, 1986; see Dobbert, 1982, for a slightly different view). They focus on such questions as: What assumptions do people make about their lives? What do they take for granted? In one educational study, for example, the researcher focused part of his work on parent perspectives of their children's education. He wanted to know what parents thought about why their children were not doing well in school. He found that the parents he studied felt that the teachers did not value their insights about their own children because of their poverty and their lack of education. The parents also blamed teachers who assumed that this very poverty and lack of education meant the children would not be good students (Ogbu, 1974). He also studied the teachers' and the children's perspectives on the same issues to find some intersections and to explore the implications for schooling.

Qualitative researchers are concerned with making sure they capture perspectives accurately. Some researchers who use videotape show the completed tapes to the participants in order to check their own interpretations with those of the informants (Mehan, 1978). Other researchers may show drafts of articles or interview transcripts to key informants. Still others may verbally check out perspectives with subjects (Grant, 1988). Although there is some controversy over such procedures, they reflect a concern with capturing the people's own way of interpreting significance as accurately as possible.

Qualitative researchers in education can continually be found asking questions of the people they are learning from to discover "what they are experiencing, how they interpret their experiences, and how they themselves structure the social world in which they live" (Psathas, 1973). Qualitative researchers set up strategies and procedures to enable them to consider experiences from the informants' perspectives. For some, the process of doing qualitative research can be characterized as a dialogue or interplay between researchers and their subjects.

Ten Common Questions about Qualitative Research

Hearing about qualitative research for the first time usually causes a number of questions to come to mind. We address ten questions others have raised that you may also have.

1. *Are qualitative findings generalizable?* When researchers use the term *generalizability* they usually are referring to whether the findings of a particular study hold up beyond the specific research subjects and the setting involved. If you study a specific classroom, for example, people want to know whether other classrooms are like the one you studied. Not all qualitative researchers are concerned with the question of generalizability as we have just defined it. Those who are concerned are very careful to state that explicitly. If they do a case study of a classroom, for example, they do not mean to imply in reporting results of the study that all classrooms are like that one.

Others who are concerned with generalizability, as we have discussed it thus far, may draw upon other studies to establish the representativeness of what they have found, or they may conduct a larger number of less intense studies to show the non-idiosyncratic nature of their own work. In a study of cheerleaders, for example, the researcher conducted intense participant observation and interviews at one school for six months, and then studied two other schools which served different populations so that she could be more sensitive to the significance of race and class in the lives of these young women (Swaminathan, 1997).

Some qualitative researchers do not think of generalizability in the conventional way. They are more interested in deriving universal statements of general social processes than statements of commonality between similar settings such as classrooms. Here, the assumption is that human behavior is not random or idiosyncratic. This, they state, is the basic

premise of all of social science. Therefore, they concern themselves not with the question of whether their findings are generalizable, but rather with the question of to which other settings and subjects they are generalizable.

In the study of an intensive care unit at a teaching hospital, we studied the ways professional staff and parents communicate about the condition of the children. As we concentrated on the interchanges, we noticed that the professional staff not only diagnosed the infants but sized up the parents as well. These parental evaluations formed the basis for judgments the professionals made about what to say to parents and how to say it. Reflecting about parent–teacher conferences in public schools and other situations where professionals have information about children to which parents might want access, we began to see parallels. In short, we began concentrating on a general social process that appeared clearly in one particular setting. One tack we are presently exploring is the extent to which the findings of the intensive care unit are generalizable not to other settings of the same substantive type, but to other settings, such as schools, in which professionals talk to parents. The approach to generalizability as we have just described it is embraced by researchers who are interested in generating what is called a *grounded theory.*

Another way some qualitative researchers approach generalizability is to think that if they carefully document a given setting or group of subjects, it is then someone else's job to see how it fits into the general scheme of things. Even a description of a deviant type is of value because theories have to account for all types. They see their work as having the potential to create anomalies that other researchers might have to explain. Some of the explanation might entail enlarging the conception of the phenomena under study.

Before gorillas were studied by detailed observation in their own environments, doing what they naturally do, they were considered to be extremely aggressive and dangerous to humans and other animals. George Schaller went out and studied gorillas in their own environments and found out that they did not resemble the profiles drawn of gorillas in captivity. He observed them to be timid and shy, preferring to flee or avoid people rather than to attack. They would, however, rear up and beat their chests in a ritualistic warning when challenged. Questions about whether all gorillas are like that and under what conditions they are the way they have been described cannot be answered by such limited case-study research, but Schaller's gorillas have to be reckoned with in future discussions about gorilla behavior (Schaller, 1965; Waldorf & Reinarman, 1975).

2. *What about the researcher's opinions, prejudices, and other biases and their effect on the data?* Qualitative researchers, whether in the tradition of sociology or anthropology, have wrestled over the years with charges that it is too easy for the prejudices and attitudes of the researcher to bias the data. Particularly when the data must "go through" the researcher's mind before they are put on paper, the worry about subjectivity arises. Does, perhaps, the observer record only what he or she wants to see rather than what is actually there? Qualitative researchers are concerned with the effect that their own subjectivity may have on the data and papers they produce (LeCompte, 1987).

What qualitative researchers attempt to do, however, is to objectively study the subjective states of their subjects. While the idea that researchers can transcend some of their own biases may be difficult to accept at the beginning, the methods researchers use aid this process. For one thing, qualitative studies are not impressionistic essays made after a quick visit to a setting

or after some conversations with a few subjects. The researcher spends a considerable time in the empirical world laboriously collecting and reviewing piles of data. The data must bear the weight of any interpretation, so the researcher must constantly confront his or her own opinions and prejudices with the data. Besides, most opinions and prejudices are rather superficial. The data that are collected provide a much more detailed rendering of events than even the most creatively prejudiced mind might have imagined prior to the study.

Additionally, the researcher's primary goal is to add to knowledge, not to pass judgment on a setting. The worth of a study is the degree to which it generates theory, description, or understanding. For a study to blame someone for a particular state of affairs, or to label a particular school as "good" or "bad," or to present a pat prejudicial analysis can brand a study as superficial. Qualitative researchers tend to believe that situations are complex, so they attempt to portray many dimensions rather than to narrow the field.

Further, as we discuss in detail in Chapter 3, qualitative researchers guard against their own biases by recording detailed fieldnotes that include reflections on their own subjectivity. Some qualitative researchers work in teams and have their fieldnotes critiqued by a colleague as an additional check on bias. It should be noted that we are talking about limiting observers' biases, not eliminating them. Qualitative researchers attempt to seek out their own subjective states and their effects on data, but they never believe they are completely successful. All researchers are affected by observers' bias. Questions or questionnaires, for example, reflect the interests of those who construct them, as do experimental studies. Qualitative researchers try to acknowledge and take into account their own biases as a method of dealing with them.

Some researchers and writers are so concerned about controlling their personal biases that it immobilizes them. Our advice is to lighten up. Acknowledge that no matter how much you try you can not divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable. The goal is to become more reflective and conscious of how who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it. On the other hand, do not be so head strong about who you are and what you believe that it leads to being unreflective and to losing your self-consciousness. It is fine to shape your study, but you need to be open to being shaped by the research experience and to having your thinking be informed by the data. The data argues with your general notions, so your thinking is necessarily shaped by the empirical world you are exploring. You need to be open to this and not defensive of what you bring to the research.

Subjectivity as a concern to qualitative researchers looks very different depending on who raises these concerns. Qualitative researchers may often feel defensive when talking with peers or colleagues accustomed to the quantitative mode because subjectivity is considered a problem. When talking with feminists or critical theorists, however, subjectivity is considered a part of all research and moreover, is an important aspect of the work. A researcher's standpoint can be considered an entry into the data. In *White Lies,* for example, a qualitative study of white supremacist literature (Daniels 1997), the author describes how her own identities, or standpoint, gave her "a particular angle of vision for analyzing white supremacist discourse and has also deeply affected me" (p. xiii). The importance of subjectivity for research is defined differently in these groups.

3. *Doesn't the presence of the researcher change the behavior of the people he or she is try-ing to study?* Yes, and these changes are referred to as *observer effect.* They are also called the "Heisenberg effect." This refers to Heisenberg's discovery that the heat of the electron mi-croscope causes the electrons to move faster than they would if they were not under the mi-croscope. So even using this expensive scientific equipment it is impossible to study something without having some effect on it. Almost all research is confounded by this prob-lem. Consider surveys that try to gauge opinions. Asking people to sit down and fill out a questionnaire changes their behavior. Might not asking a person for his or her opinion create an opinion? Some experimental studies create a completely artificial world (in the laboratory) in which to observe people's behavior. Because other research approaches suffer from the problem does not mean that qualitative researchers take the issue of "observer effect" lightly. Throughout the history of qualitative methods practitioners have addressed themselves to this problem and have incorporated procedures to minimize it or take it into account.

Qualitative researchers try to interact with their subjects in a natural, unobtrusive, and nonthreatening manner. The more controlled and obtrusive the research, the greater the like-lihood that the researcher will end up studying the effects of his or her methods (Douglas, 1976, p. 19). If you treat people as "research subjects," they will act like research subjects, which is different from how they usually act. Since qualitative researchers are interested in how people act and think in their own settings, they attempt to "blend into the woodwork," or to act so the activities that occur in their presence do not differ significantly from those that occur in their absence. Similarly, since interviewers in this type of research are interested in how people think about their lives, their experiences, and particular situations, they model their interviews after a conversation between two trusting parties rather than on a formal question-and-answer session between a researcher and a respondent. It is only in this manner that they can capture what is important in the minds of the subjects themselves.

Researchers can never eliminate all of their own effects on subjects or obtain a perfect correspondence between what they wish to study—the "natural setting"—and what they ac-tually study—"a setting with a researcher present." They can, however, understand their ef-fect on the subjects through an intimate knowledge of the setting, and use this understanding to generate additional insights into the nature of social life. Researchers learn to "discount" some of their data, that is, to interpret them in context (Deutscher, 1973). Subjects often at-tempt to manage impressions of researchers and their activities, especially during the early stages of the project (Douglas, 1976). Teachers, for example, might not yell at their students in front of you, or in other ways act more reserved. Knowing that you are seeing teachers' behavior before strangers is important to take into account. Principals may engage in behav-ior they consider principal-like, and in order to do this upset their normal routines. You can turn this to your advantage to learn what principals consider to be principal-like behavior (see Morris & Hurwitz, 1980). In their reaction to outsiders, people reveal as much as in their reactions to insiders, provided, of course, that you know the difference.

4. *Will two researchers independently studying the same setting or subjects come up with the same findings?* This question is related to the quantitative researchers' word *reliability.* Among certain research approaches, the expectation exists that there will be consistency in results of observations made by different researchers or by the same researcher over time.

Qualitative researchers do not exactly share this expectation (Agar, 1986, pp. 13–16; Heider, 1988).

Educational researchers come from a variety of backgrounds and have divergent interests. Some have studied psychology, others sociology, others child development, and still others anthropology or social work. Academic training affects the questions a researcher brings to an area of inquiry. In the study of a school, for example, social workers might be interested in the social background of the students, sociologists might direct their attention to the school's social structure, and developmental psychologists might wish to study the self-concept of pupils in the early grades. As such, social workers, sociologists, and developmental psychologists who pursue their interests in different ways may spend more time in some parts of the school than others, or may speak more to certain people than to others. They will collect different types of data and reach different conclusions. Similarly, theoretical perspectives specific to their fields will structure a study.

In qualitative studies, researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data. Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations. As the preceding discussion indicates, two researchers studying a single setting may come up with different data and produce different findings. Both studies can be reliable. One would only question the reliability of one or both studies if they yielded contradictory or incompatible results.

5. *How does qualitative research differ from what other people such as teachers, reporters, or artists do?* Let us take teachers first. Many intelligent laypeople are astute observers of their world, do systematic inquiries, and come to conclusions. Good teachers do this consistently. What they do is like qualitative research, but it is different in a number of ways. First, the observer's primary duty is to the research; he or she does not have to devote time to developing curricula, teaching lessons, and disciplining students. The researcher can thus devote full time and energy to taking it all in. Also, researchers are rigorous about keeping detailed records of what they find. They collect data. Teachers keep records too, but these are much less extensive and of a different sort. Further, researchers do not have as much of a personal stake in having the observations come out one way or the other. The teacher's life, career, and self-concept are always intimately tied to seeing what he or she is doing in a particular way. This is not to say that teachers cannot transcend this to do research or that researchers do not also have a stake in their studies. But for the researchers, success is defined by doing what certain others define as good research, not seeing what the teacher does in any particular way. Another way the researcher and the teacher differ is that the researcher has been trained in the use of a set of procedures and techniques developed over the years to collect and analyze data. Many of these are described in this book. Finally, the researcher is well-grounded in theory and research findings. These provide a framework and clues to direct the study and place what is generated in a context.

What about reporters? Some people link qualitative research with journalism disparagingly. We do not. As the short history we presented suggests, some traditions of qualitative research are linked to journalism. Journalists share some of the goals and standards social scientists have, and some produce research of greater social science value than those who flaunt their academic credentials and titles (Levine, 1980a). While this is so, we do believe

that academic researchers in general do work in a different way than journalists (Grant, 1979). Journalists tend to be more interested in particular events and issues and tend to have a bias toward the newsmakers. Journalists work under deadlines. Rather than spending years collecting data and carefully analyzing it, they usually write with less evidence; they shoot from the hip. They also tend to write for a different audience and their work is more directed at telling a story than at analyzing it. Journalists also are not necessarily grounded in social theory. Therefore, they do not address their findings to theoretical questions. Of course, journalists also are interested in selling papers and this puts some constraints on what they can say and how they write. Sometimes, however, the line separating social science research and good investigative journalism is nonexistent (see Douglas, 1976; Levine, 1980a).

What about artists? Some novelists and poets are very keen observers of the human scene. Again, they may not be as formal or as rigorous as qualitative researchers in their data-collecting techniques, and they may take greater license with the data they do collect. Much of what they have to say, however, is of interest to social scientists. Some people fall between the cracks of social science and art. They write in a very involving style while drawing from social science traditions in what they say (Coles, 1964; Cottle, 1976a). Social scientists probably have a lot to learn from novelists and essayists. They had best not set themselves apart, but rather try to understand what it is that they can learn from them to improve their own trade (see Eisner, 1980).

6. *Can qualitative and quantitative approaches be used together?* Yes, some people do use them together (Cronbach et al., 1980; Miles & Huberman, 1984, 1994; Reichardt & Cook, 1994). It is common, for example, in designing questionnaires to do open-ended interviews first. Qualitative data can be used used to supplement, validate, explain, illuminate, or reinterpret quantitative data gathered from the same subjects or site (Miles & Huberman, 1994). There are studies with both qualitative and quantitative components. Most often, descriptive statistics and qualitative findings have been presented together (Mercurio, 1979). While it is possible, and in some cases desirable, to use the two approaches together (Fielding & Fielding, 1986), attempting to carry out a sophisticated quantitative study while doing an in depth qualitative study simultaneously is very difficult. Researchers, especially novices, trying to combine good quantitative design and good qualitative design have a difficult time pulling it off, and rather than producing a superior hybrid, usually produce a piece of research that does not meet the criteria for good work in either approach (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 1987, p. 96). The two approaches are based on different assumptions (Smith & Heshusus, 1986). While it is useful to have an interplay of competing data, often such studies turn out to be studies in method rather than in the topic the research originally started out to study.

7. *Is qualitative research really scientific?* In the past, educational researchers modeled their research after what they saw the so-called "hard scientists" doing. Some saw measurement as synonymous with science, and anything straying from this mode was suspect. The irony is that scientists in the hard sciences (physics and chemistry, for example) do not define science as narrowly as some of those who emulate them. Nobel prize–winning physicist P. W. Bridgeman has this to say of the scientific method: "There is no scientific method

as such.... The most vital feature of the scientist's procedure has been merely to do his utmost with his mind, no holds barred" (Dalton, 1967, p. 60). Dalton (1967) says that "many eminent physicists, chemists, and mathematicians question whether there is a reproducible method that all investigators could or should follow, and they have shown in their research that they take diverse, and often unascertainable steps in discovering and solving problems" (p. 60). More recently, feminist researchers studying the history of science have brought to light how major scientific breakthroughs occur serendipitously or even by people refusing to be constrained by methodological orthodoxy.

Some people may use an extremely narrow definition of science, calling only research that is deductive and hypothesis-testing scientific. But part of the scientific attitude, as we see it, is to be open-minded about method and evidence. Scientific research involves rigorous and systematic empirical inquiry that is data-based. Qualitative research meets these requirements, and in this book we describe some of the conventions in this scientific tradition that define what rigorous and systematic investigation entails.

8. *What is the goal of qualitative research?* As we have suggested, there is variety in the work done under the rubric of qualitative research. All qualitative researchers do not share the same goal. Some approach their work in an attempt to develop grounded theory. Others emphasize the creation of sensitizing concepts. Description is another objective. If we included applied qualitative research in our discussion of goals the variety in objectives would be greater still. While differences between various approaches to qualitative research exist, researchers operating in the qualitative mode do have some shared understanding about the purpose of their work. Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers do not see themselves as collecting "the facts" of human behavior, which when accumulated will provide verification and elaboration on a theory that will allow scientists to state causes and predict human behavior. Qualitative researchers understand human behavior as too complex to do that and see the search for cause and prediction as undermining their ability to grasp the basic interpretive nature of human behavior and the human experience.

The qualitative researchers' goal is to better understand human behavior and experience. They seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are. They use empirical observation because it is with concrete incidents of human behavior that investigators can think more clearly and deeply about the human condition.

Some qualitative researchers (including some feminist and action researchers) who study people who have been marginalized also hope to empower their research informants (Roman & Apple, 1990; Lather, 1988). They engage in dialogue with their informants about their analysis of observed and reported events and activities. They encourage informants to gain control over their experiences in their analyses of them. Here the goal is promoting social change.

9. *How does qualitative differ from quantitative research?* Many authors have elaborated the different assumptions, techniques, and strategies of qualitative as opposed to quantitative research. Most of those writing about the qualitative approach define it in contrast to quantitative (Bruyn, 1966; Rist, 1977a). Although a certain amount of comparison is unavoidable, we have attempted in this book to concentrate on describing what qualitative research is and how to do it rather than presenting what it is not. We refer you to others for

examination of the differences (see Campbell, 1978; Eisner, 1980; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Smith & Heshusius, 1986).

While we have not been comprehensive in discussing the qualitative/quantitative distinction, Figure 1-1 summarizes the characteristics of both approaches. This chart also serves as a useful summary of the points we have raised in this chapter, many of which we elaborate in the pages that follow.

10. *Which research approach is better, qualitative or quantitative?* While this may strike you as a silly question many people new to research seem deeply concerned with it. Perhaps this is because they see people associated with one approach discrediting the other. There are a number of positions on this question. By far the most widely held is that there is no best method. It all depends what you are studying and what you want to find out. If you want to find out what the majority of the American people think about a particular issue, survey research which relies heavily on quantitative design in picking your sample, designing and pretesting your instrument, and analyzing the data is best. If you want to know about the process of change in a school and how the various school members experience change, qualitative methods will do a better job. Without a doubt there are certain questions and topics that the qualitative approach will not help you with, and the same is true of quantitative research.

People who think this way see choices of research approaches as pragmatic—pick the right one for the job. While this is the popular position, some strongly aligned with one research tradition or the other take less of a cooperative stance. They say their method is best and the other is basically flawed. While this may remind you of an argument between kids about who is the toughest, the argument can involve more than pure self-aggrandizement. People can have strongly held beliefs about the basic nature of human behavior which they lay claim to when explaining why they hold the position they do. They say that the best method of studying human behavior, or anything else for that matter, is the one which is consistent with the basic nature of the subject matter. If you tried to study microorganisms with a telescope or the stars with a microscope you would not get very far. The approach you would be applying just does not fit the subject matter. Similarly, some qualitative researchers believe that meaning and interaction are so basic to human behavior that to use methods that do not make these qualities central distorts the very thing you are trying to understand. Some quantitative researchers say that without precise measurement and systematic hypothesis testing no advances can be made in studying human behavior and the way they go about operationalizing variables and the like is very consistent with the way the universe is organized and humans behave.

Unfortunately the way the university is set up, with its propensity for specialization, some people who take strong stances do so without a deep knowledge about what they are against. But this does not diminish the fact that some who are well read in a variety of approaches take a position on which research approach is best.

This issue raises another question: How do you respond to people who are critical of qualitative research? Beware of argumentative types, especially those who have not read anything about qualitative research and who are basically hostile to it. Let them talk because they are not their strategy when they control the conversation by insisting that you use their vocabulary rather than the one you suggest. Encounters with people like this can

FIGURE 1-1   Characteristics of Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Qualitative	Quantitative
Terms/Phrases Associated with the Approach	
ethnographic	experimental
documentary	hard data
fieldwork	outer perspective
soft data	empirical
symbolic interaction	positivist
inner perspective	social facts
naturalistic	statistical
ethnomethodological	scientific method
descriptive	
participant observation	
phenomenological	
Chicago School	
life history	
case study	
ecological	
narrative	
interpretive	
Key Concepts Associated with the Approach	
meaning	variable
common-sense understanding	operationalize
bracketing	reliability
definition of situation	hypothesis
everyday life	validity
negotiated order	statistically significant
understanding	replication
process	predication
for all practical purposes	
social construction	
grounded theory	
Theoretical Affiliation	
symbolic interaction	structural functionalism
ethnomethodology	realism, positivism
phenomenology	behaviorism
culture	logical empiricism
idealism	systems theory
Academic Affiliation	
sociology	psychology
history	economics
anthropology	sociology
	political science
Goals	
develop sensitizing concepts	theory testing
describe multiple realities	establishing facts
grounded theory	statistical description

FIGURE 1-1 *Continued*

Qualitative	Quantitative

Goals (Continued)

develop understanding	show relationship between variables
	predication

Design

evolving, flexible, general	structured, predetermined, formal, specific
hunch as to how you might proceed	detailed plan of operation

Written Research Proposals

brief	extensive
speculative	detailed and specific in focus
suggests areas research may be relevant to	detailed and specific in procedures
often written after some data have been collected	thorough review of substantive literature
not extensive in substantive literature review	written prior to data collection
general statement of approach	hypotheses stated

Data

descriptive	quantitative
personal documents	quantifiable coding
fieldnotes	counts, measures
photographs	operationalized variables
people's own words	statistics
official documents and other artifacts	

Sample

small	large
nonrepresentive	stratified
theoretical sampling	control groups
snow ball sampling	precise
purposeful	random selection
	control of extraneous variables

Techniques or Methods

observation	experiments
participant observation	survey research
reviewing various documents, etc.	structured interviewing
open-ended interviewing	quasi experiments
first person accounts	structured observation

Relationship with Subjects

empathy	detachment
emphasis on trust	short-term
equalitarian	distant
subject as friend	subject–researcher
intense contact	circumscribed

Instruments and Tools

tape recorder	inventories
transcriber	questionnaires

Continued

FIGURE 1-1 *Continued*

Qualitative	Quantitative
Instruments and Tools (Continued)	
computer	indexes
	computer
	scales
	test scores
Data Analysis	
ongoing	deductive
models, themes, concepts	occurs at conclusion of data collection
inductive	statistical
analytic induction	
constant comparative method	
Problems in Using the Approach	
time consuming	controlling other variables
data reduction difficulties	reification
reliability	obtrusiveness
procedures not standardized	validity
difficult to study large populations	

be frustrating, even upsetting—especially if the person is your superior in the organization (a senior professor in you department, for example). Suggest readings for them. Send them articles you feel are particularly good and relevant. One way to win someone over or to succeed in spite of their apparent disapproval is to do good work. Exhaust yourself doing research and writing that gets recognized by outside sources—publish, get funding, be asked to speak on panels—not on engaging in combat with someone with whom you can not win. If you do well, he or she will come around; that has been our experience. It is also useful to find other people in your area or on your campus who do or who are interested in qualitative methods. There is strength in numbers.

Ethics

Like the words *sex* and *snake, ethics* is emotionally charged and surrounded with evocative and hidden meanings. Nothing is more indicting to a professional than to be charged with unethical practices. While the word conjures up images of a supreme authority and absolutes, ethics in research are the principles of right and wrong that a particular group accepts at a particular time. Most academic specialties and professions have codes of ethics that set forth these rules (see, for example, American Sociological Association, 1989). Some codes are thoughtful and help sensitize members to dilemmas and moral issues they must face; others are narrowly conceived and do more to protect the professional group from attack than to set forth a moral position.

Two issues dominate traditional official guidelines of ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm. These guidelines attempt to insure that:

1. Subjects enter research projects voluntarily, understanding the nature of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved.
2. Subjects are not exposed to risks that are greater than the gains they might derive.

These guidelines are usually implemented through the use of forms that the researcher fills out in which he or she gives a description of the study, what will be done with the findings, possible dangers to the subjects and other pertinent information. The subject's signature on this form is taken as evidence of informed consent. Committees on human subjects, often referred to as "institutional review boards," now exist in most colleges, universities, and other places researchers are employed; they review proposals, checking that the proposed research insures proper informed consent and safety for the participants. They also ask for information that allows them to weigh the risks that subjects might face against the gains they and the larger society might accrue.

These bureaucratic responses to the concern for exploitation and harm of subjects were precipitated by public exposés of research projects that endangered their human subjects in extraordinarily blatant ways. It was discovered, for example, that upon admission at Willowbrook State School the mentally retarded residents were injected with hepatitis virus as part of a study on vaccines (Rothman & Rothman, 1984). In another part of the country, headlines revealed that, without their knowledge, a group of men known to have syphilis were not treated for their condition. Still other experimental subjects were lied to while they participated in and watched what they thought was the electric shocking of other human beings who were actually actors working for the project. It is clear that such abuse must be stopped.

The relationship between the present regulations and what qualitative researchers do is less clear (Duster, Matza, & Wellman, 1979; Thorne, 1980; Wax, 1980; Taylor, 1987). Over the years there have been proposals for a specific code of ethics for qualitative researchers (Cassell, 1978b; Cassell & Wax, 1980; Lincoln, 1995; Punch, 1986; Curry & Davis, 1995). Many qualitative researchers have come to the conclusion that the relationship between researcher and subject is so different in the qualitative and quantitative approaches that following established procedures on informed consent and the protection of subjects seems little more than ritual. In the research for which these guidelines were established, subjects have a very circumscribed relationship to the researcher; they fill out questionnaires or participate in specific experiments. Institutional review board policies were developed on the medical model. The subjects can be told explicitly the content and possible dangers of the study. With qualitative research, on the other hand, the relationship is ongoing; it evolves over time. Doing qualitative research with subjects can be more like having a friendship than a contract. The subjects have a say in regulating the relationship and they continuously make decisions about their participation. While the regulations seem to reflect the studies in which the exact design is completed prior to entering the field, in qualitative research no such designs exist. In submitting a research proposal to human subjects committees, for example, only a "bare bones" description of what will occur can generally be included. This raises the issue of whether institutions force students doing qualitative studies to be

unethical by filling out forms that were designed to protect human subjects in quantitative research. If students have to make up interview questions because they do not know before entering the field what questions they will ask, for example, they can be pressured to lie on the form.

Furthermore, qualitative researchers who are critical of the current guidelines question the extent to which subjects can truly be informed. Most people with college educations are not sophisticated enough in such esoteric subjects as qualitative research to ever really know what it means to be a subject in such a study. Furthermore, much of what qualitative researchers do is not all that different from what regular citizens do as they go about their work. Reporters observe and do interviews. So do novelists and others. Should qualitative researchers have less freedom to interact with people than others? After all they are not giving injections or other life altering treatments.

Much research has a tradition of insensitivity to the lives of the people in the studies. In addition to the studies we mentioned earlier, many black and white people were angry at Moynihan's findings in his study of poor African American families. It is not clear, however, that institutional review boards can have any effect on the politics of research. But qualitative researchers can work to change how the members of institutional review boards understand qualitative methods.

While regulations about informed consent and protection of human subjects, as they are traditionally formulated, may not fit the qualitative mode of doing research, ethical issues are of concern (Burgess, 1984). Although qualitative researchers have not developed a specific written code of ethics, conventions have been established regarding ethics in fieldwork (Punch, 1986). As we suggest in Chapter 4, different styles and traditions of fieldwork operate on different ethical principles. We make specific suggestions related to ethics in other chapters, but here we want to lay out some general principles by which the majority of mainstream fieldworkers abide in their research. They apply more specifically to people who are conducting basic research. As we will suggest in Chapter 7, the following ethical principles may be irrelevant to some forms of applied research, particularly to what we call *action research.*

1. Unless otherwise agreed to, the subjects' identities should be protected so that the information you collect does not embarrass or in other ways harm them. Anonymity should extend not only to writing, but also to the verbal reporting of information that you have learned through observation. The researcher should not relate specific information about individuals to others and should be particularly watchful of sharing information with people at the research site who could choose to use the information in political or personal ways.

2. Treat subjects with respect and seek their cooperation in the research. While some advocate covert research, there is general consensus that under usual circumstances the subject should be told of your research interests and should give you permission to proceed. Get written consent. Be particularly sensitive and diligent in explaining yourself and getting consent when studying people who are vulnerable to manipulation such as people labeled mentally disabled or who are very young or very old or who lack formal education. Researchers should neither lie to subjects nor record conversations on hidden mechanical devices.

Rosalie Wax on the Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota, 1963, with members of the Sioux family she discusses in *Doing Fieldwork*.

3. In negotiating permission to do a study, you should make it clear to those with whom you negotiate what the terms of the agreement are, and you should abide by that contract. If you agree to do something in return for permission, you should follow through and do it. If you agree not to publish what you find, you should not. Because researchers take the promises they make seriously, you must be careful as a researcher to be realistic in such negotiations.

4. Tell the truth when you write up and report your findings. Although for ideological reasons you may not like the conclusions you reach, and although others may put pressure on you to show certain results that your data do not reveal, the most important trademark of a researcher should be his or her devotion to reporting what the data reveal. Fabricating data or distorting data is the ultimate sin of a scientist.

While we have provided ethical guidelines, as with all rules, there are exceptions and complications so that in many cases the rules seem extraneous or difficult, if not impossible,

or even undesirable to employ. There are times, for example, when people do research in which the subjects' identity is difficult or impossible to hide. Further, the people involved may state their indifference to publication of their names or may even insist on being identified. The rule of anonymity may be reconsidered.

Some situations pose difficult dilemmas because they place the researcher in a position where his or her obligations as a researcher conflict with those of being a good citizen. You may, for example, see government corruption and misuse of funds when studying a school. In studies we have done in state institutions for mentally retarded people, we witnessed the physical abuse of the residents. What is the ethical responsibility of researchers in these cases (Taylor, 1987)? Should they turn their backs in the name of research? In the case of the physical abuse, the solution may seem obvious at first: Researcher or not, you should intervene to stop the beatings. In some states it is illegal not to report abuse. That was our immediate disposition. But, through our research, we came to understand that abuse was a pervasive activity in most such institutions nationally, not only part of this particular setting. Was blowing the whistle on one act a responsible way to address this problem or was it a way of getting the matter off our chests? Intervention may get you kicked out. Might not continuing the research, publishing the results, writing reports exposing national abuse, and providing research for witnesses in court (or being an expert witness) do more to change the conditions than the single act of intervention? Was such thinking a cop out, an excuse not to get involved? Such dilemmas are not easily resolved by a list of rules.

While people may make up guidelines for ethical decision making, the tough ethical decisions ultimately reside with you, with your values, and with your judgments of right and wrong. As a researcher you have to know yourself, your values and your beliefs, and be familiar with the principles other researchers have used in making such decisions (Punch, 1994). You have to know how to define your responsibility to other human beings and what that responsibility is when you are put in contact with their suffering (Taylor, 1987). Qualitative research allows for that contact. For many qualitative researchers, ethical questions do not reside narrowly in the realm of how to behave in the field. Rather, ethics are understood in terms of their lifelong obligations to the people who have touched their lives in the course of their research (Curry & Davis, 1995).

People doing research have always been concerned with taking more from the subjects than they give (Whyte, 1992). Researchers write dissertations that lead to career advancement or books that result in promotion and royalty checks. What the subjects get from the arrangement is not as clear. In recent years this issue has reared its head regularly in discussions about ethics. Exploitation of subjects has been a burning topic in a number of fields. Feminist scholars have been most prominent in keeping this topic before the research community. Some researchers are plagued with guilt about it. A number of responses have surfaced in defense of the apparent lack of reciprocity. One is an appeal to the larger contribution research makes to society—although subjects may not get anything directly, the understanding that comes from research improves the larger world. Some claim that the subjects do receive benefits, albeit minor. As any person benefits from being in a relationship, subjects benefit from the time and attention they receive. Feeling this is not enough, some researchers do things for their subjects that bring more tangible help such as sharing royalties, advocating for them or assisting them with legal and other problems (Liebow, 1967; Lincoln, 1995; Curry & Davis, 1995).

In addition to lack of direct reciprocity there is concern that the researcher may use the subjects in other ways. Most prominent here is the concern that researchers get to write and talk about what they have learned but the subjects do not have a chance to speak back or to provide their own interpretations of what their lives are like. The subjects thus may get misrepresented and in some cases demeaned (Fine, 1994a). While we will discuss practices designed to mitigate this more fully later, some researchers have developed new practices in which the researcher and subject are more partners in the study; where the social scientist gives up some of his or her authority and lets the subjects have a say. In addition, conventions have developed in writing qualitative research where it is incumbent on the researcher to tell more about themselves, their backgrounds, and their politics so it is apparent to the reader that what they are reading is written from a particular position (McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993).

Another ethical concern related to the one just discussed but even more complicated is that researcher findings, in the hands of people with power, might lead to actions that could hurt subjects (or people in similar circumstances), and/or lead to social policy or public attitudes that counter the wishes or intentions of the researcher. When Laud Humphries published his famous study of the sexual activities of gays in public rest rooms, for example, some accused him of providing information to the police who could use it to increase surveillance and arrests of male homosexuals. Studies of truants might lead to truancy laws that would restrict young peoples' freedom. What the researcher might think of as a sympathetic portrayal of people living in a housing project might be read by others as proving prejudices about poor people being irresponsible and prone to violence. While you can never be sure of how your findings will be received and used, the political ramifications and implications of your work must be carefully thought through. To do otherwise is to be irresponsible—some might say unethical. If you lack experience in such matters seek out people who might be more sensitive to what might be done with your work and ask their advice about tone, emphasis, and potential consequences. Often researchers are reluctant to directly address what they see as the policy and action implications of their research. Avoiding the task is not the solution. Not interpreting the implications your own work allows others freer reign in doing it for you.

As our discussion begins to suggest, being an ethical and responsible researcher is more difficult than it first appears. Filling out required forms may help you think through some ethical issues and dangers but it is no substitute for evaluating and being in touch with your own values, for continually taking your subjects' welfare and interests to heart, and incorporating them into your practice.

What Is to Come

Having provided you with a general introduction to the foundations of qualitative research, our goal in the rest of the book is to provide guidance on "how to do it." Although people seasoned in the approach will find it useful, reminding them of certain issues and clarifying particular aspects that have been obscure elsewhere, we write for the novice, the person taking an introductory course in qualitative research in education.

The rest of the book is shaped by the five characteristics we have discussed in this chapter. We first consider the issue of research design, emphasizing the inductive nature of the

approach. Chapter 3 is concerned with fieldwork. The field-based nature of the research enterprise and the dominance of the researcher as the instrument is clear throughout this discussion. In Chapter 4 the descriptive nature of what qualitative researchers collect is central to our discussion. Here we describe various forms data can take and present some suggestions for their collection. Returning to the inductive character of the approach, we deal extensively with data analysis in Chapter 5. The narrative, descriptive nature of qualitative analysis guides the discussion on writing and disseminating findings in Chapter 6. Because of the applied concerns of educational research, we have devoted a separate chapter, Chapter 7, to the description of applied and evaluation research.