

CURRICULUM INSTRUCTION & EVALUATION 578
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

Spring 2008

Tuesday 5:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.

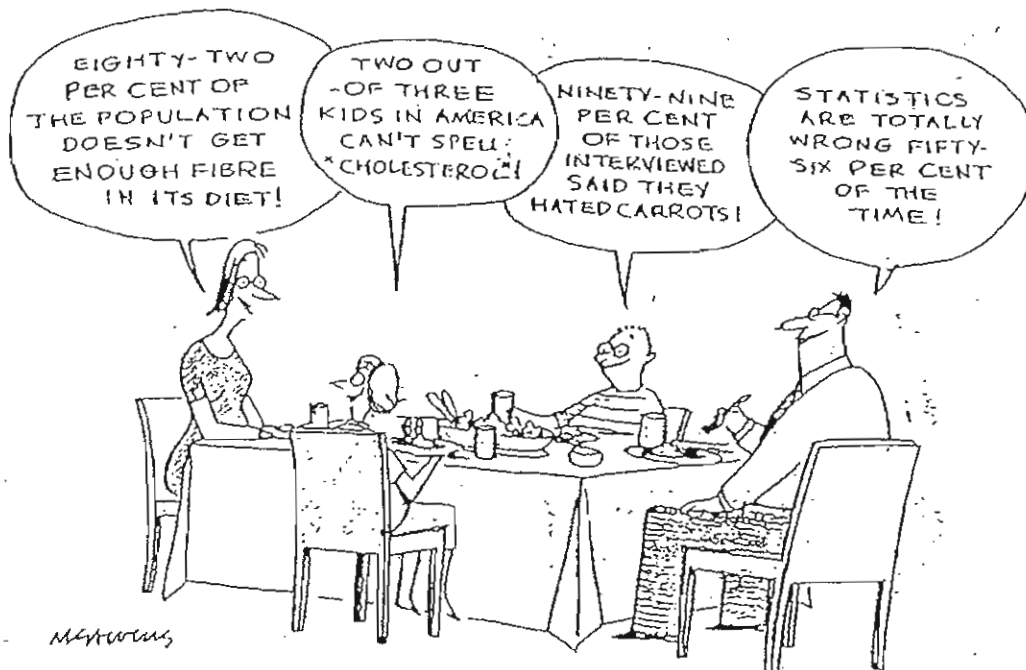
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MAY 2008

THE STAT FAMILY



"I'm David and I'm a bean-counter."

The transcendent literary critic Edward Said—author of the essential text, *Orientalism*—explores the contested space of teaching and learning and research in much of his work, but perhaps most pointedly in *Representations of the Intellectual* in which he offers in effect a brief for the ethical and lively conduct of intellectual life. The book is crisp, concise, small in size—the perfect companion to cram into your backpack between your toothbrush and your bottle of water, and as necessary to daily survival as either of those.

The intellectual, he argues, must strive to become “an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public.” For Said “this role has an edge to it,” for the intellectual must recognize the necessity of opening spaces “to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison de’etre* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug.”

Said notes that “the world is more crowded than it ever has been with professionals, experts, consultants, in a word with *intellectuals*”, and that this creates—as a central task—the requirement to search out and fight for relative independence from all manner of social and institutional pressures, to authentically choose oneself against a hard wall of facts: “At bottom,” Said argues, “the intellectual...is neither a pacifier nor a consensus-builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical...sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do.” This unwillingness to accede cannot be simply a passive shrug or a cynical sigh; for Said it must involve, as well, publicly staking out a space of refusal.

Said speaks for a particular stance, a distinct approach to intellectual life: all intellectuals, he argues, “represent something to their audiences, and in so doing represent themselves to themselves.” Whether you’re a straight-up academic or a free-lance writer, a down-and-out bohemian essayist or an itinerant speech-maker, an educational researcher or a teacher or a consultant to corporations or the state, you represent yourself based on an idea you have of yourself and your function: Do you think you’re providing a balanced, disinterested view, or are you delivering objective advice for pay? Are you an expert offering high-level program evaluation, or are you teaching your students some indispensable truth? Perhaps you imagine you’re advocating an eccentric if important idea. What do you want to represent? To whom? For what purpose? Toward what end, and in the interest of what social order?

Said exhorts intellectuals to work on the basis of a particular principle he takes to be universal: “that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations [including all institutions—schools, e.g., or corporations], and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified to and fought against courageously.” This might become the fulcrum for us, the central and primary plot point, although it in no way lays

out a neat road forward—choose the way of opposition and you do not inherit a set of ready-made slogans nor a nifty, easy-fit party line. There are no certainties—and for some this might prove difficult, perhaps even fatal—nor any gods whatsoever who can be called upon to ease specific, personal responsibility, to settle things once and for all. Each of us is out there on our own, with our own minds and our own hearts, our own ability to empathize, to touch and to feel, to recognize humanity in its many unexpected postures, to construct our own standards of truth about human suffering that must be upheld despite everything. “Real intellectuals,” Said writes, “are never more themselves than when, moved by metaphysical passion and disinterested principles of justice and truth, they denounce corruption, defend the weak, defy imperfect or oppressive authority.” Said is uninterested in allying with the victors and the rulers whose very stability he sees as a kind of “state of emergency” for the less fortunate; he chooses instead to account for “the experience of subordination itself, as well as the memory of forgotten voices and persons.”

Said returns again and again to the notion of the authentic intellectual as a person who chooses to create an identity in part as exile—restless, in-motion, unsettled and unsettling, a person who does not feel entirely at home in his or her home—and in part as amateur—exuberant, passionate, driven by authentic interest and concern, committed, and full of delight. The intellectual lives willfully as an engaged outsider, a gratified if discomforted disrupter of the status quo, an advocate, a critic of orthodoxy and dogma; stereotype and received wisdom of every kind, all the reductive categories that limit human thought and communication. Said’s intellectual works hard to maintain a kind of doubleness—something akin, I think, to DuBois’ double consciousness in which African-Americans were compelled, he argued, to see society and the world as both Americans *and* simultaneously as Black people, this duality being a synthesis, and therefore greater than either perspective alone. Said urges us to see our individual and collective situations in this way, as both insiders and outsiders, participants in the fullness of social life but simultaneously removed from and slightly askance to our associations. We must cultivate, then, a state of steady alertness if we are to speak the unwelcome truth—as we understand it—to power.

This does not mean that intellectuals are required to be, in Said’s term, “humorless complainers,” nor whiny Cassandras—a character who, he points out, was not only unheard but unpleasant. It means, rather, that intellectuals work at “scouring alternative sources, exhuming buried documents, reviving forgotten (or abandoned) histories and peoples”. This, for Said, can be “a lonely condition, yes, but it is always a better one than a gregarious tolerance for the way things are.”

“It is a spirit in opposition, rather than in accommodation,” Said writes, “that grips me because the romance, the interest, the challenge of intellectual life is to be found in dissent against the status quo at a time when the struggle on behalf of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups seems so unfairly weighted against them.” This points toward a research ideal we might strive toward, and it illuminates as well a series of pitfalls and problems that must somehow be met and engaged. The ideal is knowledge, enlightenment, and truth on the one hand, and on the other, human freedom,

emancipation, liberation for all, with emphasis on the dispossessed. That this core of humanism is unachievable in some ultimate or final form might be discouraging to some, but it does set a certain coherent standard within our existential boundaries, and provides, then, both focus and energy for our efforts.

In the world of teaching and learning, of schooling and education, Said's concept of the intellectual's role resonates with particular force. We live in a time when the assault on disadvantaged communities is particularly harsh and at the same time gallingly obfuscated. Access to adequate resources and decent facilities, to relevant curriculum, to opportunities to reflect on and to think critically about the world is unevenly distributed along predictable lines of class and color. Further, a movement to dismantle public schools under the rubric of "zero tolerance," "standards and accountability," and "privatization," is in place and gaining force. This is the moment within which we have to choose who to be as scholars and intellectuals, as teachers and researchers, as citizens.

Howard Zinn, the eminent historian and activist scholar who has written about these issues for decades, bemoans the honor, status, prestige and pay academics garner "for producing the largest number of inconsequential studies in the history of civilization." Zinn insists that we take note of and remember what motivated us to become teachers and scholars in the first place: we wanted to save lives, expand happiness, enable others to live more fully and freely. All of this is somehow rendered suspect in the insistent call for neutrality, objectivity, disinterested and discipline-based inquiry. His indictment: "Like politicians we have thrived on public innocence, with this difference: the politicians are paid for caring, when they really don't; we are paid for not caring, when we really do". Like Said he is urgent to resurrect the intellectual as engaged and caring, to close the "gap between the products of scholarly activity and the needs of a troubled world," to challenge the tenets of professional mythology, and to resist a situation where *we* publish while others perish.

Toward this end Zinn points out several commonplaces that undermine clear thought and humanistic judgment in all the intellectual precincts, from research project to academy to school to journal. These include the injunctions to: carry on only "disinterested scholarship"; "be objective"; "stick to your discipline"; remember that "scientific" means "neutral"; and believe that there is no room in the world of ideas for something as suspect as passion, love, or emotions.

Zinn's refutation of these commandments begins with a defense of knowledge as a form of power, a particular kind of power that can be employed against the naked power of brute force. Knowledge has the power to undermine and, perhaps, to overthrow force. But to do so, knowledge must be freely sought, explicitly linked to moral purposes, and tied to conduct. It must stand for something.

Within our disputed spaces objectivity is not a self-evident good. "If to be objective is to be scrupulously careful about reporting accurately what one sees," Zinn writes, "then of course, this is laudable". If, for example, "objectivity" were to mean getting all the facts, data, and grounds one can, and making judgments in light of that,

well, of course. But, Zinn points out, while a metalsmith would be a fool to tinker or deceive in regard to accurate and reliable measurements, if “the metalsmith has determined in advance that he prefers a plowshare {to a sword}”, that determination in no way asks for distorted measurements. Just so a scholar: that she prefers peace to war, national sovereignty to occupation, and women’s equality to patriarchy requires no distortion.

Calls for “balance” in teaching and scholarship, which draw force from a perceived tie to “objectivity,” are similarly peculiar and precarious. If the purpose of education is to seek the truth through evidence and argument, “balance” could only sensibly mean: Find and present all the evidence you can. Very well. But if by “balance” people mean the equal presentation of contradictory perspectives, the classroom and the scholarly journal become little more than sites of incessant bickering. The classroom task, the obligation of the scholarly journal, is not quibbling, but achievement of judgment based on the widest and deepest available evidence. This means open debate, continuous inquiry, dialogue, *and* taking a stand. In reality calls for “balance” are often in the service of a particular ideology. If an historian speaks about Palestinian rights at Columbia University today, for example, the call goes up for “balance.” If an Israeli diplomat defends Israeli policies at the same place, there is no comparable hue and cry.

As with “objectivity” and “balance,” so it goes with educational “research,” an enterprise as we know it today constructed and catapulted after World War II on a wave of federal money. In education a sentence that begins, “The research says...” is too-often meant to silence debate. It evokes Science, which is assumed to be larger than life; the expected response is awe and genuflection. It functions as a kind of bludgeon wielded on several sides of the school wars. It’s contrapositive—“There is no research that shows”—plays a similar role in quashing discussion. So, for example, a principal in Chicago, resisting the idea of bringing in a literature unit based on rap poetry, told me that there is no research that links studying rap with improved test scores. This may be true, but when I pointed out that Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* was required reading, and asked what research links the study of Shakespeare to higher scores, he said I was being ridiculous.

“Science is a great and worthy mistress,” W.E.B. DuBois wrote, “but there is one greater and that is Humanity which science serves...” It’s important to underline the point: research cannot be neutral. It occurs in contexts, in an historic flow, a cultural surround, a social and economic condition. It serves humanity—or some other mistress. Like education, it is designed either to perpetuate the status quo or to take the side of the disadvantage and underrepresented, to stand for humanization or to accede to dehumanization.

But if not on objectivity, balance, and research, upon what base does a claim for attention rest? Here things get sticky. For many academics that claim is primarily one of status, pedigree, affiliation, or the mantle of science. I’m reminded of the comment of my then-five-year-old son, Malik, at the awarding of my doctorate: “You’re a doctor,

right?” he asked brightly. “But not the kind who can help anybody, right?” Right. I thought then of the wisdom of the Wizard of Oz, handing over a diploma—a Th.D., Doctor of Thinkology—to the elated and suddenly notably less hapless Scarecrow: There are plenty of professors who haven’t any more brains than you have, says the Wizard. The one thing they have that you don’t is a diploma.

The alternative to status claims is to claim authority on the basis of content, on the power of evidence and argument, the representation of ideas to and for a public. C. Wright Mills argues that academics create for themselves a vicious circle: in order to claim status, they too-often adopt an obscure, impenetrable style; yet that grandly opaque style too-often contributes to isolation and peripheral status. For Mills, intellectuals must break the cycle and fight toward clarity of both substance and style: “To overcome the academic *prose*,” he writes, “you have first to overcome the academic *pose*”.

If there is an urgency to the researcher’s or scholar’s message—a real belief that the content matters—the prose tends toward directness. Imagine yourself in an auditorium filled with educators—teachers, administrators, some academics. You are to address the assembly on an issue of immediate importance, something you yourself think and care deeply about. You intend to be informed by, but not enslaved to, your inquiry, your research, your data. This clears away much of the performative underbrush. Cut the bullshit: Speak!

Human beings, and particularly intellectuals and researchers, are driven by a long and continuous: “I don’t know.” It is, after all, not the known that pushes and pulls us along, although we must be serious about preparation, work, discipline, and labor.

There is a long tradition of scholarship whose avowed purpose is to combat silence, to defeat erasure and invisibility—this is research for social justice, research to resist harm and redress grievances, research with the explicit goal of promoting a more balanced, fair, and equitable social order. Several questions can serve as guideposts for this kind of inquiry:

- What are the issues that marginalized or disadvantaged people speak of with excitement, anger, fear, or hope?
- How can I enter a dialogue in which I will learn from a specific community itself about problems and obstacles they face?
- What endogenous experiences do people already have that can point the way toward solutions?
- What narrative is missing from the “official story” that will make the problems of the oppressed more understandable?
- What current or proposed policies serve the privileged and the powerful, and how are they made to appear inevitable?
- How can the public space for discussion, problem-posing and problem-solving, fuller and wider participation be expanded?

There is no single procedure, no computer program that will allow this work to take care of itself; there is no set of techniques that is orderly, efficient, and pretested that can provide complete distance from a phenomenon under study or from the process of inquiry itself. Researchers draw on judgment, experience, instinct, common sense, courage, reflection, further study. There is always more to know, always something in reserve. We're never exactly comfortable, but neither are we numb or sleep-walking. We don't get harmony, but we do get a kind of arching forward—reaching, pursuing, longing, opening, rethinking.

Researchers peer into the unknown and cultivate habits of vigilance and awareness, a radical openness, as we continually remind ourselves that in an infinite and expanding universe our ignorance is vast, our finiteness itself all the challenge we should need to propel ourselves forward. Knowing this, we nourish an imagination that's defiant and limitless, and like the color blue or love or friendship, impossible to define without a maiming reductiveness. The goal is discovery and surprise, and in the end it is our gusto, our immersion, our urgency, enthusiasm, and raw nerve that will take us hurling toward the next horizon. We remind ourselves that the greatest work awaits us, and that we are never higher than when we're not exactly certain where we're going.

What interests, tendencies, or classes will your research serve? What will invite people to become more aware, more critical, creative, active and productive, more free? While researchers might never know definitively how to answer these questions *a priori*, a certain angle of regard might help each of us to make sounder judgments, to construct a more hopeful and workable standard by which we can examine our efforts. We begin by recognizing that every human being, no matter who, is a gooey biological wonder, pulsing with the breath and beat of life itself, eating, sleeping, pissing and shitting, prodded by sexual urges, evolved and evolving, shaped by genetics, twisted and gnarled and hammered by the unique experiences of living. Every human being also has a unique and complex set of circumstances that makes his or her life understandable and sensible, bearable or unbearable. This recognition asks us to reject any action that treats anyone as an object, any gesture that *thingifies* human beings. It demands that we embrace the humanity of every student and every research collaborator, that we take their side.

What are the challenges to human beings today? What does the hope for democracy demand now? Edward Said points out that "Our country is first of all an extremely diverse immigrant society, with fantastic resources and accomplishments, but it also contains a redoubtable set of internal inequities and external interventions that cannot be ignored." We are faced with the enduring stain of racism and the ever more elusive and intractable barriers to racial justice, the rapidly widening gulf between rich and poor, and the enthronement of greed. We are faced as well with aggressive economic and military adventures abroad, the macho posturing of men bonding in groups and enacting a kind of theatrical but no less real militarism, the violence of conquest and occupation from the Middle East and Central Asia to South America.

Encountering these facts thrusts us into the realm of human agency and choice, the battlefield of social action and change, where we come face to face with some

stubborn questions: Can we, perhaps, stop the suffering? Can we alleviate at least some of the pain? Can we repair any of the loss? There are deeper considerations: can society be changed at all? Is it remotely possible—not inevitable, certainly, perhaps not even likely—for people to come together freely, to imagine a more just and peaceful social order, to join hands and organize for something better, and to win? Can we do anything?

If a fairer, more sane and just social order is both desirable and possible, if some of us can join one another to imagine and build a participatory movement for justice, a public space for the enactment of democratic dreams, our field opens slightly. There would still be much to be done, for nothing would be entirely settled. We would still need to find ways to stir ourselves and our students from passivity, cynicism, and despair, to reach beyond the superficial barriers that wall us off from one another, to resist the flattening social evils like institutionalized racism, to shake off the anesthetizing impact of the authoritative, official voices that dominate so much of our space, to release our imaginations and act on behalf of what the known demands, linking our conduct firmly to our consciousness. We might reconceptualize ourselves as “stunt-intellectuals,” the ones who are called upon when the other intellectuals refuse to jump off the bridge. We would be moving, then, without guarantees, but with purpose and with some small spark of hope.

The desire for certainty in an uncertain world is understandable. The desire to categorize, sort, label, and fix is powerful. But, for me qualitative inquiry is still fundamentally genre-blurring. Scratch a qualitative researcher and you might find a linguist, an historian, an anthropologist, a psychiatrist, a folk-lorist, a physician, a musicologist, an economist, or a philosopher. So what? Put another way I think Freud, Zinn, Piaget, Geertz, Lomax, Mead, Hubbard, Weismann, and Chomsky have more in common than they do with many of their discipline-based comrades in the academy. And let’s say we could assert with confidence that “Fine is a critical ethnographer”, “Peshkin is an educational anthropologist”, “Willis is a Marxist”, and “Paley is a personal narrative researcher”, what have we added to our understanding? To me it becomes a kind of elitist academic exercise. I’m interested in your being able to read all of this material critically, and, if you like, write it well. I’m interested in your own intellectual curiosity, restlessness and growth. I don’t see these categories as helping much.

I think beginning researchers are more wrought up than they need to be about the “big split” in the academy between quantitative and qualitative researchers. The key issue is substantive focus, not good guys and bad guys, so the question is: what are you interested in? If your answer is some meaning made by actors in situations, some bounded life-world you can enter and find out what people make of it all, then you’re tending toward a naturalistic and interpretive approach. If you’re interested in generalizing or in correlating things—as this occurs, that also tends to occur—then you tend toward a statistical study. In this sense, “the question determines the work” is correct. But remember: *method is not technique*, and multiple tactics might be useful. In any case, find out all you can, without arbitrary or phony limits.

Stephen Jay Gould asserts that “we live in a world of detail, and diversity just is.” Gould defends natural history as the painstaking work of observing and developing case studies, one by one. “You may view this as discouraging,” he goes on, “if your temperament be dark. You may also find in [it] the essence of freedom.”

Qualitative research is interested in a world of detail and diversity. It tends to a thick and nuanced narrative that describes a whole—an entire cultural universe—as it is experienced by participants. It further attempts to capture the *relationship* of this particular cultural universe, this whole unit, to the larger and smaller units in which it is embedded. It emphasizes *qualities* instead of *quantities*. It asks, “What the hell is going on?” “How do people make sense of life here?” As Clifford Geertz says, “The trick is to figure out what the devil they think they are up to.”

When natives in the Western Pacific cut down a tree to make a boat they apologize to the tree through prayer. That’s no more (nor less) culturally bounded and socially constructed than the sense that there are large numbers of poor families who don’t care about their children.

It’s true that you begin a study without guarantees—you may not get anything of terrific value. You may come up empty. And yet there are things you can do to make your work more deliberate and worthwhile from the start. Your goal is to understand something that is complex and elusive. You have to plan to spend a lot of time in the field, watching, writing, observing, recording. You have to make yourself available to a phenomenon, and you have to wait. You can work away from the start: identifying the full range of relationship and meaning-perspectives; collecting lots of samples, instances, and details; tacking back and forth, up and down, from the tiniest detail to the most overarching context. Observe for a time and then write up your notes. This takes a lot of time, but it is essential. You must also vary the focus, search for a wider range of perspectives, and identify disconfirming evidence.

What else can you do to from the start? What else taken together will add up to a believable (although not an objective nor a generalizable) study?

Our focus is life as it is *lived*, meaning as it is *constructed* by people in their circumstances—something not easily fitted into disciplines or departments. This leads us to story, to narrative, to life history—approaches that are person-centered, unapologetically subjective. Far from a weakness, the voice of the *person*, the subject’s own account, is the singular *achievement* of this work. These are actually ancient approaches to understanding human affairs, relatively new only to educational researchers.

Doing qualitative research is in the first place an act of intelligence and creativity. There simply is no substitute for these. That makes doing qualitative research risky, intimidating, and awesome as well.

This class will ask you to use your intelligence and creativity, your critical mind and ethical heart, because doing qualitative research requires it. There is no procedure nor any computer program to follow that will allow this work to take care of itself; there is no recipe; there is no technique nor set of techniques that are orderly, efficient, and pre-tested that will allow you to distance yourself from the phenomenon under study or from the process of inquiry itself. You will be out there with no substitute for your own mind, your own heart, your own ability to empathize, to touch and to feel, to recognize human life in its many unexpected guises. You will draw on judgment, experience, instinct, common sense, reflection, further study. And, of course, we will be out there together – planning, gathering information, interpreting, representing what we each find, and reporting back.

Before we become too enchanted, though, let's remember that qualitative research does not enjoy a particularly proud nor an entirely ethical record. Do you know the story of Ishi, "the last wild Indian," "a living relic of the Stone Age," who lived out his days inside the San Francisco Museum? Do you remember the "Venus Hottentot?" Or the character from *Beloved* called Schoolteacher? Check out the web or some other reference source to see who they were. Ethnographers have always accompanied the colonial armies, and "scientific curiosity" about other people served the conquerors and the masters. The eugenics movement grew alongside museums, exhibitions, world fairs, and anthropology. This reminds us that any attraction or identification we feel to this work should resist all romanticism. We must stay alert and aware, critical and engaged, or we are as likely as any other to lose our ways, and then our souls.

Qualitative research is interpretive in several senses--its substantive focus is on meaning for actors in their own lifeworlds (the interpretations of informants); it is conducted by someone who must struggle to render the meanings of others for an audience (the interpretation of the researcher); it is received by an audience trying to understand the researcher's interpretations of the participants' interpretations of a given social or cultural world (the interpretation of the reader). Keeping this straight is itself a challenge, but the point is that qualitative research is *shamelessly* interpretive. And its substantive core is this: *meaning for human beings in situations*. Keep this in the front of your mind as we proceed.

We struggle to understand both the importance and the elusiveness of meaning for human beings – we understand, for example, that you can't get a joke by following objective laws or logical progressions, nor can you grasp the reason for a rebellion or the workings of a school from a mathematical model. We know that knowledge is not – cannot be – a disembodied view from nowhere, something mechanically attained, free of perspective, point-of-view, or situation. We see knowledge as entangled, rooted, complex, and various. And we seek, therefore, consciousness, the root of meaning, rather than an unreasoning or automatic apparatus.

Because we see knowing as transactional and focused on lived experience, and we accept knowing as always and necessarily partial, incomplete, and contingent, there is always the danger of total relativity (maybe even indifference); on the other side lurks the

danger of certainty, dogmatism, and authoritarianism. Our problem then is not so bad – there is always more to know, always something in reserve. We don't get harmony or a neat and total mushing together, but neither do we get barbed wire and electric currents. We're never exactly comfortable, but we're neither numb nor sleep-walking. What we get is a kind of arching forward – always reaching, pursuing, longing, opening, rethinking. Always contradiction, always contingency, always new vistas and open spaces. And critical reflection. And self-criticism.

That is why we try to tack back-and-forth between the most local of local detail and the larger concentric circles of context in which everyday life is lived. The purpose is to understand the lifeworlds of others – not to caricature nor so much to criticize. It is to expand our understanding of the sensible.

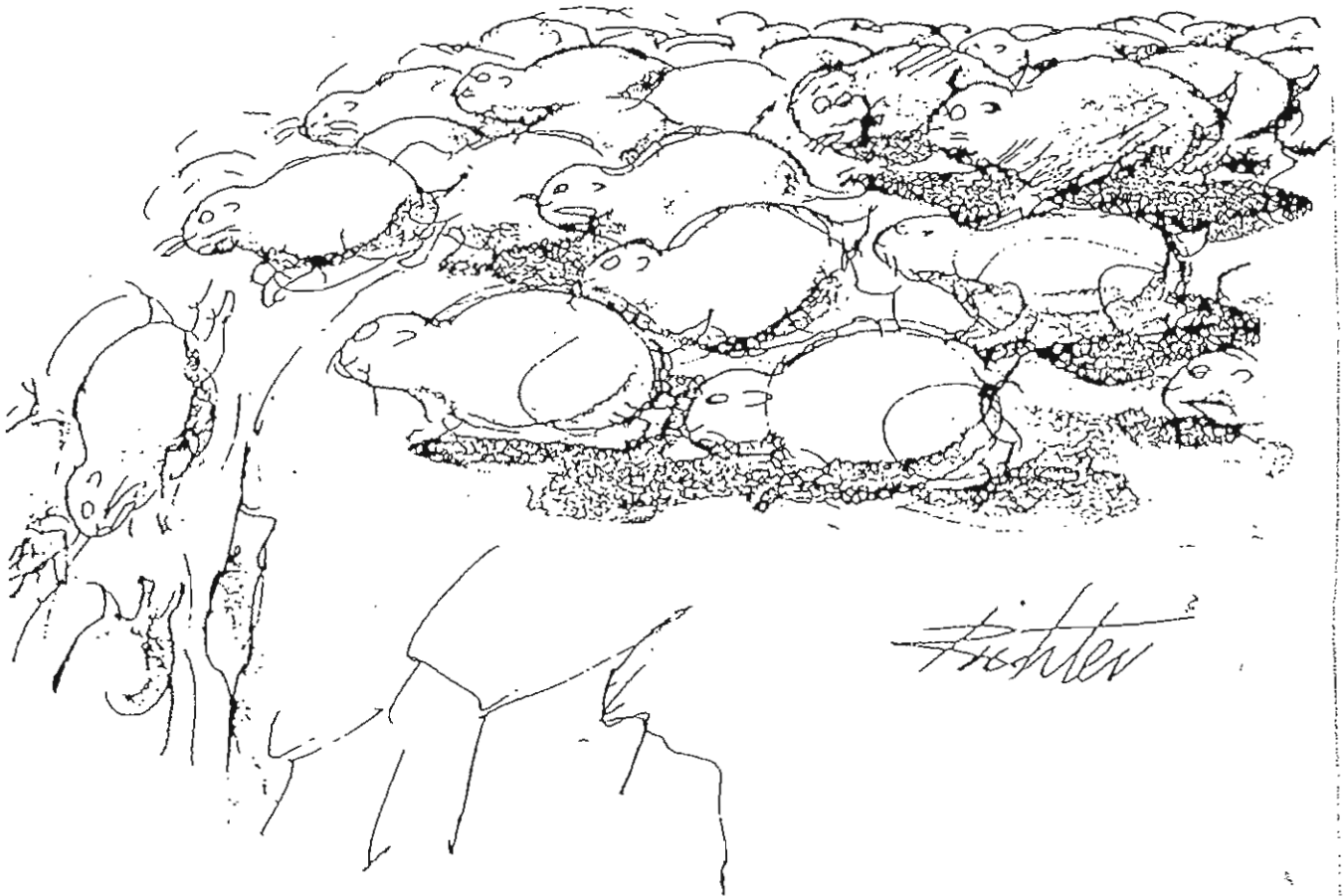
In order to tell the story you will try to tell in this type of work, you will realize that something is enabling and helping you to focus, to understand, to interpret. That something is often fetishized in the academy as a “theoretical framework,” and a “literature review” becomes a requirement. I prefer to think of this as a recognition that there is already an intellectual conversation underway, that that conversation is necessarily dynamic, multi-dimensional, and unfinished, and that in order to enter it you need to bring to the surface your understanding of where it is and how it's going. This, rather than an ERIC search, is the start of a literature review. Further, in order to make your utterance in that conversation significant, you will see that there is not a single story to tell, but a story embedded in many other stories. This opens you to a theoretical framework, but remember Paulo Freire's warning: “theory or introspection in the absence of social action is escapist idealism or wishful thinking.” It's complicated, of course, but also natural and necessary.

This class is a seminar, a place of dialogue. It will only work if you listen to others with the possibility of being changed, and speak up forcefully with the possibility of being heard. You must listen and speak, learn and teach. Without freedom of expression we are doomed to accept current dogma, received ideas, prejudice and popular stereotypes. In this class we will try to challenge intellectual complacency, easy belief, and received wisdom. We will be agnostics and skeptics, questioning the presuppositions and biases of others as well as of ourselves. We invite the clash of ideas. Some debates may be straight-forward, others may be full of emotion and fear and pain. We will create here the possibility of understanding the value of tolerating sharply different points of view—an impossibility unless we allow and even encourage real differences of opinion.

Please attend every scheduled class, read and write every week, and ask your own authentic questions. You don't have to write brilliantly but you have to write. Your presence in class every week is *REQUIRED*—missing class destroys the collective dialogue and weakens the learning community. Show up or be doomed!

Doing interpretive research is hard work. Many of you already know this, and for the rest, you are forewarned. Still you will feel (if you are like others who go down this

path) overwhelmed, uncertain, and deeply confused and dislocated in turn. You will also, if you stay with it, if you dive into the wreckage, likely find moments of relief, of exhilaration, of self-discovery, and even of joy.



"Actually, I'm a participant-observer collecting data for a definitive study of rodent behavior."



"I'm David and I'm a bean-counter."

Researchers, beware!

DUH

RESEARCHERS

Researchers Find That Eating Twenty Pounds of Fish a Week Isn't So Good For You After All
- p. 7

Financial Analysts Say Don't Put All Your Money Into One Stock
- p. 15

Ten-Year Study Proves Behavior Don't Like Loud Noises

Live and learn!

Gee!

Who knew!

POSSIBLE READINGS
 READ! READ! READ!

1. Ayers, *The Good Preschool Teacher**
2. Ayers, *A Kind and Just Parent**
3. Ladson-Billings and Tate, *Education Research in the Public Interest: Social Justice, Action, And Policy*
4. Michie, *Holler If You Hear Me**
5. Michie, *See You When We Get There**
6. Heller, *Until We Are Strong Together**
7. Flores-Gonzalez, *School Kids/Street Kids**
5. Rathbone, *On the Outside Looking In*
6. Gourevitch, *We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed*
7. Yonemura, *A Teacher at Work*
8. Peshkin, *God's Choice*
9. Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here*
10. Oyler, *Making Room for Students**
11. Ladson-Billings, *The Dreamkeepers*
12. Carger, *Of Borders and Dreams**
13. Willis, *Learning to Labor*
14. Foster, *Black Teachers on Teaching*
15. Blake, *She Say, He Say**
16. Duneier, *Stim's Table*
17. Duneier, *Sidewalk*
18. Fine, *Framing Dropouts*
19. Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*
20. Agar, *Ripping and Running*
21. Lightfoot, *The Good High School*
22. Finnegan, *Cold New World*
23. Lewis, *Race in the Schoolyard**
24. Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling*
25. Hagedorn, *People and Folks**
26. Richie, *Compelled to Crime**
27. Cintron, *Angel's Town**
28. Schaffner, *Teenage Runaways**
29. Perry, *Walking the Color Line**
30. Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay*
31. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*

We can learn some from reading *about* qualitative research---this is no substitute for immersing yourself in the real thing, the work itself, but it can be useful. We will certainly read a couple of the following books in common: Glesne and Peshkin, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*, Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye*, Eisner and Peshkin, *Qualitative Inquiry in Education*, Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*, Fine, *Speed Bumps*, Geertz, *Words and Lives*, Agar, *The Professional Stranger*, Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think*, Coles, *Doing Documentary*, Lopate, *The Art of*

the Personal Essay. As you read these I urge you to take extensive notes on cards or in some loose-leaf form that you can access later.

You might want to read a couple of novels—Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, Lee, *A Gesture Life*, Barker, *Regeneration* or *The Ghost Road* or *The Eye in the Door*, Ishiguro, *Artist of the Floating World*, Tan, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Kincaid, *Lucy Mahfouz*, *Palace Walk*, Saramago, *Blindness*—or memoir—Peery, *Black Fire*, or Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted*, or Prejean, *Dead Man Walking*, or Rodriguez, *Always Running*, or Nabakov, *Speak, Memory*, or Balakian, *Black Dog of Fate*.

Think about how a world is evoked, how a story is told, and the role of writing in this work. While everyone's writing, I'm sure, could be improved, ask yourself what strengths and weaknesses characterize your writing now. Writing is always an act of sacrifice and loss, but you must write. You can read and write—for catalyzing and empowering moments, inductively for emergent themes, reflectively through autobiographical inquiry, critically for insights into power, cooperatively with project partners, queerly against the grain, counter-intuitively. Write to discover and to learn.

You may want to consult one of the following on writing: *Bird by Bird*, *Wild Minds*, *Writing Well* or *Writing Down the Bones*. Furthermore, we probably ought to read: *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Review of Books* together every week.

Let's also see two of the following films together: "Paradise Lost", "Crumb", "Unzipped", "Fundi", "Seven Songs for Malcolm X," "Eye to Eye", "Brother's Keeper," "American Movie," "Black Is, Black Ain't," "The Big One," "The Farm: Angola, U.S.A.," "Gia," "To Have and To Be." We might try to listen to "Sound Prints" and "This American Life." The point is, we will immerse ourselves in the world of documentary and interpretation.

Reading is one thing, looking at films another, and doing research quite another. Like teaching, there is only so much you can talk about before plunging into the abyss, struggling to figure it out as you do it. Here each of us will do some work toward our inquiry project—we are each in a different place, so one may do a short proposal or think piece, another a literature review, a third a substantive piece of research—and this will become the heart of what we discuss together, what we analyze, what we learn from.