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## **Researching Writing and Writers: Qualitative Methods in Writing Studies**

Why undertake a qualitative study of writing? What questions about writing can qualitative studies answer? And how? This course, an introduction to qualitative studies of writing, addresses these questions.

In answering these questions, this course has four primary goals:

- To understand how methodological choices shape the creation of knowledge about writing, and forward the field of writing studies
- To articulate the affordances and limitations of different approaches to qualitative work for creating knowledge about literacy.
- To develop principles for rigorous and socially responsible qualitative research
- To practice key aspects of qualitative work, including study design, ethical conduct, data collection, data analysis, and of course, writing.

To meet these goals, this course is split into two parts: a reading-intensive first half and a hands-on second-half. In the reading-intensive first half of the course, we will examine some key methodological approaches—and debates about these approaches—in writing studies. In the practice-intensive second half the course, the reading is lighter, and students will be primarily engaged in developing a small-scale qualitative project, on which they will present at the end of the semester.

This course is meant to be an introduction to qualitative work in literacy studies. As you develop a dissertation project, I encourage you to follow up with courses in sociology, curriculum and instruction, education and policy studies, history, and anthropology, for more specific training.

### **Required Texts:**

Readings will be available online.

Students will choose to read one of the book-length ethnographies listed for 2/12

## **Assignments:**

*Article or Book Methodology Review: 10%* Each participant in the class (alone or in groups) will offer a 5-minute review of a qualitative study of literacy of his or her choice, accompanied by a brief handout. The presentation should address: a) what the study contributes to our knowledge of literacy; b) which methods of data collection and analysis were used; c) how these methods helped construct that knowledge; d) limitations of the methodological approach.

*Journal: 25%* Because writing can help us process information, we will keep a journal of all readings. These journal entries (.5 pages to 1 page) will be turned in twice during the semester, once with the mid term paper, and then again on the last day of class. They will be evaluated for completion and participation.

*Mid-term paper: 20%* The midterm paper (2 pages) will synthesize these free writes and answer the following question: Based on readings thus far, what are the methodological challenges of qualitative research in literacy studies? Of the approaches we've addressed, which (or which combination) best addresses these challenges?

*Final Project: 35%* The final project will be a short (8 pages) small-scale qualitative project (based on at one interview, one observation, and one text) accompanied by a reflection on the methodological choices informing the project (2 pages). To build up to this project, students will complete the IRB training module, turn in a brief proposal (1 page), collect data, bring it to class to analyze, and engage in a writing workshop.

*Presentations: 10%* Class participants will give presentations on their projects in the last two weeks of class.

## Course Calendar:

### Literacy and Qualitative Studies

- 1/22: *What is literacy and why do qualitative and ethnographic studies help us understand it?*  
Street, "The New Literacy Studies"  
Szwed, "Ethnography of Literacy"  
Hymes, "Toward Ethnographies of Communication"  
Optional: Cresswell, "Five Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry"

### Homegrown and Borrowed Methods for Studying Literacy: A Selective Overview

- 1/29: *Linguistics, Ethnography, Genre Analysis, and Other Beginnings*  
Haas and Takayoshi, "Young People's Everyday Literacies: The Language Features of Instant Messaging"  
Haas, Takayoshi, and Carr, "Analytic Strategies, Competent Inquiries, and Methodological Tensions in the Studies of Writing"  
Haswell, "NCTE/CCCC's Recent War on Scholarship"  
Heath, "Prologue" from *Ways with Words*  
Swales, "Introduction" from *Genre Analysis*
- 2/5 *Cognition, Phenomenology, and Social History: Some Methodological Debates*  
Prior, "Combining Phenomenological and Socio-Historic Frameworks for Studying Literate Practice: Some Implications of Deborah Brandt's Methodological Trajectory"  
Brandt, "The Cognitive as the Social: An Ethnomethodological Approach to Writing Process Research"  
Brandt, "Introduction," *Literacy in American Lives*  
Duffy, "Recalling the Letter: The Uses of Oral Testimony in Historical Studies of Literacy"  
Flower and Hayes, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing."
- 2/12 *Ethnography: Community, Classroom, Rhetorical, Workplace, Digital*  
Lillis, "Ethnography as Method, Methodology, and "Deep Theorizing": Closing the Gap Between Text and Context in Academic Writing Research."  
*Students will choose to read and present on one of these texts:*  
Community ethnography: Moss, Beverly. *A Community Text Arises*.  
Classroom ethnography: Dyson, Anne. *Writing Superheroes*.  
Rhetorical ethnography: Cintron, Ralph. *Angelstown*.  
Workplace ethnography: Spinuzzi, Clay. *Network*.  
Digital ethnography: Sun, Huatong. *Cross-cultural Technology Design*  
Community/Classroom/International Ethnography: Bartlett, Lesley. *The Word and the World*

2/19 *Actors, Artifacts, Activities*

Roozen, "The 'Poetry Slam,' Maethemagicians, and Middle School Math: Tracing Trajectories of Actors and Artifacts."

Russell, "Uses of Activity Theory in Written Communication Research."

Bazerman, C. "Speech Acts, Genres, and Activity Systems: How Texts Organize Activity and People."

Latour, "Circulating Reference," "Humans and Non-Humans," and "Conclusion" in *Pandora's Hope*

**Due: journal entries and midterm paper**

## **Practicing research**

2/26 *Ethics and positionality*

Royster, J. "When the first voice you hear is not your own."

Behar, excerpts from *The Vulnerable Observer*

Brandt, "Protecting the Personal" and Cushman, "The Butterfly Fixation"

Vieira, "Preface" and "An Ethnographic Approach to Studying Literacy," *American by Paper*

**Due: IRB training module**

3/5 *Beginning where we are*

Broad, "Strategies and Passions in Empirical Qualitative Research"

Moss, "Ethnography and Composition"

Herrington and Curtis, "Shaping the Study"

**Due: two-sentence statement of interest to Vieira by email**

3/12 *Collecting Data*

Emerson, R., Fretz, R., and Shaw, L. "Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research" and "In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes."

Charmaz, K. "Gathering Rich Data"

Prior, P. "Tracing Process: How Texts Come into Being"

Leander and McKim, "Tracing the Everyday 'Sittings' of Adolescents on the Internet."

**Due: proposal**

**3/19 No class, Vieira at C's: Collect Data**

**3/26 Data Analysis**

Charmaz, K. "Coding in Grounded Theory Practice."

Emerson, R., Fretz, R., and Shaw, L. "Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing"

Gee, "Discourse Analysis"

Narrative analysis, TBA

**4/2 No class, Spring break**

**4/9 Data Analysis Workshop**

Bring copies of transcribed interview, field notes, and text to class

**4/16 Writing**

Young, "Reclaiming Engagement Through Style"

Behar, R. "Believing in Anthropology as Literature,"

Smagorinsky, "The Methods Section as Conceptual Epicenter in Constructing Social Science Research Reports."

Mendoza-Denton, N. (2008). "Introduction" from Homegirls.

**Due: Journal entries from 2/26 to 4/16**

**4/23 Presentations**

**Due: Draft of paper for peers**

**4/30 Writing workshop**

**5/7 Presentations**

**Final papers, due 5/11 by 5pm, hard copy to mailbox 754 in HC White**

3/3 Online/Offline work

Haas

Leander

How do you do it?

3/10 Choosing a project

Analyzing data

discourse analysis, Gee

charmaz, grounded theory

3/17 Analyzing data

discourse analysis, Gee

charmaz, grounded theory

3/24 Ethics

3/31 no class spring break

4/7 Positionality

4/14 writing

smagorinsky

prophets book

4/21 No class

4/28 No class

5/5 Final class, presentations?

8/31: Ethnography, ethnomethodology, and networks. Why ethnography? How might we best study literacy in context?

Shuman, A. with Beniss Blue. (1999). "Ethnography of writing." In D. Wagner, R. Venezky, and B. Street (Eds.) *Literacy: An International Handbook* (pp 107-113) Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Lillis, T. (2008). "Ethnography as method, methodology, and "deep theorizing": Closing the gap between text and context in academic writing research." *Written Communication* 25.3, 353-388.

Fleckenstein, K., Spinuzzi, C, Rickly, R. and Papper C. (2008) "The importance of harmony: An ecological metaphor for writing research." *College Composition and Communication*, 60.2, 388-419.

Optional: Brandt, D. (1992). "The cognitive as the social: An ethnomethodological approach to writing process research" *Written Communication* 9.3, 315-355.

Assignment One: Please write two paragraphs suggesting how the ecological metaphor and ethnography may or may not be compatible. What kinds of questions about writing do they answer?

9/7: How do we develop an ethnographic project in writing?

Moss, B. J. (1992). "Ethnography and Composition: Studying Language at Home" In G. Kirsch and P. Sullivan (Eds.). *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 153-171.

Royster, J. J. (2000). "A View From a Bridge: Afrafeminist Ideologies and Rhetorical Studies," *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 251-285

Cintron, R. (1997). "Starting Places," *Angelstown: Chero ways, gang life, and the rhetorics of the everyday*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1-14.

Heath, S.B. (1983). "Prologue," *Ways with words: language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-14.

Optional: Marcus, G. (1995). *Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography*. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24. 95-117.

Assignment Two: Please write a page describing your choice of a fieldsite: What and who are there? What kinds of questions about writing/literacy might this community answer?

9/14: Ethics and Data Collection

Newkirk, T. (1996) "Seduction and Betrayal in Qualitative Research," in (eds. P. Mortensen and G. Kirsch) *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy* (pp 3-15). Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Sullivan, P. (1996). "Ethnography and the Problem of the Other," in (eds. P. Mortensen and G. Kirsch) *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy* (pp 97-114). Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Assignment Three: Please write a preliminary proposal of your research project for the semester, to be turned in to me and to IRB (details TBA).

9/21: Where do we stand in relation to participants and their writing?

Behar, R. (1996). "The Vulnerable Observer" (1-32), "My Mexican Friend Marta Who Lives across the Border from Me in Detroit" (90-103), "Anthropology that Breaks your Heart" (161-177). *The Vulnerable Observer*, Boston, Beacon Press.

Cushman, E. (1998). "Prologue" (ix-xiv) and "Activist Methodology" (21-37). *The Struggle and the Tools: Oral and Literate Strategies in an Inner City Community*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Cushman, E. (2001). "The Butterfly Fix(at)ion." (The Politics of the Personal: "Storying our Lives Against the Grain") *College English* 64.1. 44-46.

Assignment Four: Please write a page describing your position in relation to your site and participants. Please address what your position might allow you to see in regards to literacy and what your position might make it difficult for you to see.

9/28: Data Collection

Interviews

Duffy, J. (2007). "Recalling the letter: The uses of oral testimony in historical studies of literacy." *Written Communication* 24.1, 84-107.

Brandt, D. (2001). "Interview Script." *Literacy in American Lives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Appendices to literacy in American Lives, 208-210.

Texts: (Choose to read either Prior or Bazerman)

Observations

Assignment Five: Begin collecting data, including one of the three following data collection methods: one interview, one observation for which you take fieldnotes, and one text or observation/interview of how a text comes into being. Nothing written is due, but we'll report on this in class.

10/5: Online Literacy Ethnographies

Leander, K. and Mckim, K. (2003). "Tracing the everyday sitings of adolescents on the internet: A strategic adaptation of ethnography across online and offline spaces." *Education, Communication, and Information*, 3: 2, 211-140.

Hines, C. (2000). "Internet as culture and cultural artefact" (14-40) and "The virtual objects of ethnography." *Virtual Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications, 60-63.

Boellstorff, T. (2008). "Introduction" (3-7) and "Method" (60-86) *Coming of age in second life: An anthropologist explores the virtually human*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Assignment Six: What are the virtual components of your fieldsite? Please collect data online or interview a participant about digital literacy. Again, no need to write anything, but we will report on this in class.

10/12: Data Analysis and Problems of Generalizability

Charmaz, K. (2006) "Coding in Grounded Theory Practice." *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications, 42-70.

Emerson, R., Fretz, R., and Shaw, L. (1995). "Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing" (142-168). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of



Chicago Press.

Packer, M (2011). "Qualitative Analysis Reconsidered." *The Science of Qualitative Research*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 99-122.

Optional: Purcell-Gates, V., Perry, K., Briseño, A. (2011). "Analyzing literacy practice: From grounded theory to model." *Research in the Teaching of English* 45.4, 439-458.

Optional: Review Ch 5 from Street and Heath.

Assignment Seven: Please write a page listing the types and quantity of data you have collected, any challenges you have encountered, and any preliminary questions or thoughts this data has raised for you. Ideally by this point, you will have collected at least three each of observations, texts, interviews.

10/19: Workshop on memos and codes

Brandt, D. (2001). "Protecting the Personal" (*The Politics of the Personal: "Storying our Lives Against the Grain"*) *College English* 64.1. 42-44.

Assignment Eight: Bring some data (a few pages of fieldnotes, interview transcript, extant texts, memos) to class. We will try out coding as a class and in groups to see what it can teach us about writing at our fieldsite.

10/26: Why, how, and to whom does one write an ethnography?

Charmaz, K. (2006) "Writing the Draft." *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications , 151-176.

Emerson, R., Fretz, R., and Shaw, L. (1995). "Writing an Ethnography" (169-186). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Farmer, P. (2009). "Fighting Words." In A. Waterston and M. Vesperi (Eds.) *Anthropology Off the Shelf: Anthropologists on Writing*. (pp 182-190). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Behar, R. (2009). "Believing in Anthropology as Literature," *Anthropology Off the Shelf: Anthropologists on Writing*. (pp 106-116). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Reader reviews from Vieira's ethnographic submission to *Written Communication*.

Optional: Mendoza-Denton, N. (2008). "Introduction." *Homegirls: Language and cultural practice among Latina Youth Gangs*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1-8.

Assignment Nine: Write two pages of your ethnography. (This does not have to be the intro. It can be also be a scene or an analysis of data).

11/2: What does a classic literacy ethnography teach us?

Besnier, N. (1995). *Literacy, Emotion, and Authority: Reading and Writing on a Polynesian Atoll*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (chapters TBA).

Assignment Ten: Continue to collect and analyze data. We'll report on this in class.

11/9: What does a post-modern or critical writing ethnography tell us?

Cintron, R. (1993). "Wearing a pith helmet at a sly angle: Or, can writing researchers do ethnography in a postmodern era?" *Written Communication* 10.3, 371-412.

Cintron, R. (1998). "conclusion." *Angelstown: Chero ways, gang life, and the rhetorics of the everyday*. Boston: Beacon Press, 227-232.

Packer, M (2011). "The Crisis in Ethnography." *The Science of Qualitative Research*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 208-244.

Assignment Eleven: Continue to collect and analyze data. We'll report on this in class.

11/16: No Class. Individual Conferences.

11/23: Thanksgiving

11/30: No Class. Meet in peer review groups to review at least ten pages of a draft (email to me before hand).

12/7: presentations

Some options for book methodology reviews:

Ball, Arnetha and Ted Lardner. *African American Literacies Unleashed: Vernacular English and the Composition Classroom*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005.

Barton, David and Mary Hamilton. *Local Literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy in American Lives*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Canagarajah, Suresh. *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Cobb, Amanda J. *Listening to our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852-1949*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

Cushman, Ellen. *The Struggle and the Tools: Oral and Literate Strategies in an Inner City Community*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

Daniell, Beth. *A Communion of Friendship: Literacy, Spiritual Practice, and Women in Recovery*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, c2003.

Duffy, John. *Writing from these Roots: Literacy in a Hmong-American Community*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2007.

Dyson, Anne Haas. *Writing Superheroes: Contemporary Childhood, Popular Culture, and Classroom Literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1997.

Flowers, Linda. *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008.

Heath, Shirley B. *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983

Heller, Carline E. *Until We are Strong Together: Women Writers in the Tenderloin*. Teachers College Press, 1997.

Hernandez-Zamora, Gregorio. *Decolonizing Literacy: Mexican Lives in the Era of Global Capitalism*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2010.

Kalman, Judy. *Writing on the Plaza: Mediated Literacy Practices Among Scribes and Clients in Mexico City*. Kresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1999.

Kalmar, Tomás Mario. *Illegal alphabets and Adult Biliteracy: Latino Migrants Crossing the Linguistic Border*. Malwah, NJ: LEA, 2001.

Lindquist, Julie. *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working Class Bar*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

Lofty, John. *Time to Write: The Influence of Time and Culture on Learning to Write*. Albany: State University of New York, 1992.

Moss, Beverly. *A Community Text Arises: A Literate Text and a Literacy Tradition in African-American Churches*. Hampton Press, 2002.

Prendergast, Catherine. *Literacy and Racial Justice: The Politics of Learning after Brown vs. Board of Education*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003.

Prior, Paul. *Writing/Disciplinarity: A Sociohistoric Account of Literate Activity in the Academy*. Malwah, NJ: LEA, 1998.

Purcell-Gates, Victoria. *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Scribner, Sylvia and Michael Cole. *The Psychology of Literacy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Sohn, Katherine Kelleher. *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006.

Street, Brian. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Street, Brian (ed.). *Literacy and Development: Ethnographic Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 2001

Sweeney, Megan. "Reading Is My Window": *Books and the Art of Reading in Women's Prisons*; University of North Carolina Press, 2010

Trainor, Jennifer Seibel. *Rethinking Racism: Emotion, Persuasion, and Literacy Education in an All-White Highschool*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008.

Valdés, Guadalupe. *Learning and Not Learning English: Latino Students in American Schools*. New York, Teachers College Press, 2001.