



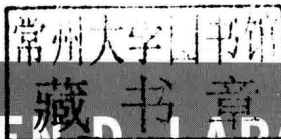
# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

AN INTRODUCTION TO METHODS AND DESIGNS

STEPHEN D. LAPAN  
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FRANCES J. RIEMER EDITORS

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# **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**Stephen D. Lapan**

**October 23, 1940–April 19, 2011**

*Our colleague Steve Lapan passed away unexpectedly just as this book went to press. This edited text was Steve's idea, and although we each brought our own experiences and expertise to its organization, the book would not exist without his initiative. Steve was our friend, our colleague, our mentor, our co-conspirator. Steve loomed large. He was funny and irreverent, curious and cynical. As a mentor, Steve was clear, strong, and indefatigable. When Steve was on your side, you knew you had an advocate who would fight with heart and soul for your cause. When he wasn't, you knew you needed to lay low and hope for the best.*

*I (Frances) first met Steve as a colleague not long after I came to Northern Arizona University (NAU). We were office neighbors and immediately recognized a shared interest in research in schools. We talked methodology and methods, students and administrators. Later we played poker once a month; we played for pennies and nickels—not much money, but plenty of entertainment. Steve brought his chips, I brought my cheat sheet, and with five colleagues (eventually including Steve's wife, Pat), we spent the occasional Friday night wagering and bluffing, and enjoying every minute.*

*I (MaryLynn) first interacted with Steve as I was entering my second year in NAU's Curriculum and Instruction Doctoral Program. Despite his somewhat gruff demeanor and intimidating physical presence, I found him to have both high expectations and a generous heart. It is because of his expertise and enthusiasm for research in its many forms that my career took the path it did. Without Steve's encouragement and support, I would never have pursued editing a methodology book, much less two!*

*There aren't too many people like Steve in one's life; we're grateful that he blessed ours.  
We dedicate this text to him.*

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## PREFACE

**T**HIS BEGINNING TEXTBOOK, *Qualitative Research: An Introduction to Methods and Designs*, is designed specifically for students taking their first, and possibly only, qualitative research course. Writing a text for students in education and the social sciences, we set out to serve three main purposes:

1. Provide a broad spectrum of research approaches, ranging from such recognizable investigative areas as historical and ethnographic research to emerging methodologies including autoethnography and arts-based research
2. Detail the basic purposes and processes of research approaches, explaining in each case how they are planned, conducted, and reported
3. Offer explanations and examples of how educational and social scientific research study results can be interpreted, evaluated, and applied across many professions

This book can also serve as an introductory source for students who plan to pursue advanced study and conduct their own qualitative research, but its primary aim is to offer readable, accessible content for the practitioner-consumer. As students graduate from college and begin their career, they become both professional practitioners of their discipline and potential consumers of research findings.

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### To the Instructor

This introductory research text is intended as a guide for your students who are most likely to be consumers, but not necessarily producers, of qualitative research. Although the book might serve as a primer for fledgling researchers, the overarching goal is to support your efforts in teaching students to become more intelligent readers and interpreters of this kind of research conducted by others.



The specific audiences are students in upper-level undergraduate and beginning graduate research courses who are not likely to pursue additional research course work on their own. Thus no prior experience or prerequisite course work would be required before using this text, although an introductory quantitative and qualitative survey course would be a useful foundation.

The book is structured to support your instructional endeavors in encouraging students to recognize important distinctions between research-based work and alternative sources of knowledge, to be able to understand the language and procedures normally encountered in different types of qualitative research studies, and to make practical sense of such studies in translating findings for use in everyday practice. Our purposes emphasized in this text include the following:

- Using, where possible, nontechnical language to explain research ideas
- Providing practical explanations of research approaches and the kinds of questions each answers
- Presenting clear-cut descriptions of most qualitative approaches used in education and the social sciences
- Making distinctions among a wide array of research approaches
- Offering explanations for necessary technical terms needed to understand how research is reported
- Examining forms and criteria for planning and conducting research
- Showing how each approach can be critically evaluated and interpreted from a practitioner's perspective
- Identifying actual research studies to allow students to practice critical analysis

The book is organized for a college course format in which one to two chapters may be assigned each week. And, because the chapters are of a stand-alone quality, you may use the sequence offered or may select a sequence that suits your unique instructional plans. Additional instructional features of the text are

- Chapters specifically relevant to qualitative research on ethics, the role of grounded theory, and data collection methods and tools
- A writing style that makes ideas accessible to students new to the field

- A diverse and balanced perspective of a broad spectrum of qualitative research methodologies ranging from discipline-based and interdisciplinary to emancipatory approaches
- An ending chapter on democratizing qualitative research designs
- Challenging questions distributed throughout each chapter to aid in instructional planning
- Key research ideas, concepts, and terms identified in each chapter
- An annotated set of relevant readings and an array of journals, organizations, and Web sites as sources for assignments and class discussions at the end of each chapter
- Expert authors for each chapter

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## To the Student

This text is based on the assumption that you have little or no background in how qualitative research is conducted in your field. Most who take a course of this kind will neither major in research nor become researchers one day. As students you will need to know how to read, understand, and interpret this kind of research so that you can judge its worth and practical value.

The material here is therefore presented using nontechnical language whenever that is possible. When technical terms are needed, they are offered along with practical explanations to increase your understanding. Further, you are provided with a broad coverage of qualitative research approaches (sometimes called methodologies) ranging from the recognized field of ethnography (the study of cultures and practices) to the emerging framework of indigenous research.

As a student your objectives for a course using this text should include learning about how qualitative studies are planned, carried out, and reported so that you, as a practitioner, might be able to read and interpret the results. Whether or not each research study's results should be used depends on your ability to determine if the studies are done well. To be an effective reader and evaluator of research in education and the social sciences, you should gain from this text the ability to

- Recognize and judge ethical issues in research
- Understand the inductive role of most qualitative approaches

- Comprehend the ideas and terms used to explain how each kind of research study is conducted
- Determine how each approach is organized and planned
- Recognize that practitioner questions may be answered differently depending on which research methodology is used
- Explain the similarities and differences found among qualitative research methodologies
- Understand how data are ordinarily collected and interpreted
- Develop ways of evaluating actual research studies to determine whether or not findings can be trusted
- Gain insight into how or when research might be translated into policy and practice

### Some Study Suggestions

Many students find the language and procedures associated with research to be frightening or at least foreign to their everyday world. The following suggestions may assist you in tackling this relatively new and unusual area of study:

- Read the textbook before the course begins, making margin notes
- Commit new terminology and definitions to memory along with at least two examples for each
- Use chapter questions to monitor understanding
- Rewrite class notes and compare them to assigned readings
- Form a study group to test understanding “out loud”
- Talk with advanced students who have successfully completed the course for suggestions on content and study habits

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### Acknowledgments

Many have contributed to the publication of this textbook. The most prominent are the expert authors who patiently adjusted their individual writing style to match the rhythm and tone of the manuscript. We are grateful for their commitment to this complicated effort.

In addition, we very much appreciate the insightful critiques offered by these thoughtful reviewers: Valicia Boudry, Michel Coconis, Janet W. Colvin, Nancy Curtin, Jennifer K. Holtz, Dave Shen-Miller, Tara J. Schuwerk, and Julia Storberg-Walker. Most of their ideas and suggestions were incorporated into subsequent drafts of the text.

Certain people have a lasting impact on our lives and our work. Ernie House was Steve's instructor, mentor, colleague, friend, and critic to the world—"the best I know at reconstructing meaning through story."

For MaryLynn it was Steve Lapan, whose confidence in her has provided much-needed support through many challenges and (ad)ventures.

And Frances will always be grateful to Fred Erickson, who helped her find her voice, and taught her to look, ask, watch, and listen.

We are once again indebted to our editor, Andy Pasternack, who assisted in formulating the structure and content of the text. Also, we offer a special thanks to Seth Schwartz, who guided the development of this work from beginning to end. Finally, we are thankful for the thorough feedback by our fabulous copyeditor, Francie Jones, and to Kelsey McGee for shepherding the book through to its publication.

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## A Tour of This Text

This text, *Qualitative Research*, includes four chapters that prepare the reader in how this overall approach to research is planned, outlining philosophical assumptions that shape research studies (Chapter One), ethical dilemmas and guidelines for qualitative researchers (Chapter Two), the vital role of inductive grounded theorizing (Chapter Three), and the basic methods and tools used in these investigations (Chapter Four).

Chapters Five through Eight contain explanations of study approaches that are founded in recognized areas of study (discipline-based approaches). These include biography and life story research that examines individuals using biography and psychology as lenses for analyses (Chapter Five); historical research that employs the historian's craft to fill in gaps or reconsider histories already written (Chapter Six); ethnographic research that applies field studies in understanding a range of practices and beliefs from a cultural perspective (Chapter Seven); and autoethnography, an emerging research methodology used to offer dense descriptions of an individual's experience with a culture (Chapter Eight).

Chapters Nine through Thirteen address approaches that have blended disciplinary frameworks (interdisciplinary methodologies). These include narrative inquiry that seeks ways to understand and represent experiences through

the stories that research participants live and report (Chapter Nine); case study research that isolates and reconstructs elements of a program or other phenomena (Chapter Ten); arts-based research that designs new research or critiques completed studies, in each case using principles and procedures from the arts (Chapter Eleven); practitioner action research, whereby groups or individuals study their own professional practice or examine important social issues (Chapter Twelve); and program evaluation that emphasizes the study of educational or social programs to determine their quality and effectiveness (Chapter Thirteen).

A decidedly more emancipatory perspective is emphasized in Chapters Fourteen through Eighteen. In Chapter Fourteen, the authors demonstrate that the undue influence of Eurocentric views reflected in research can be addressed in one way by using a culturally responsive system in evaluation studies involving African Americans; in Chapter Fifteen on critical ethnography, the primary goal is to highlight cultural aspects that represent oppression and identify avenues for equity; in Chapter Sixteen, feminist and other perspectives are used to demonstrate alternative explanations to the ordinary white male views found in traditional studies; and in Chapter Seventeen, the authors present ideas rooted in both indigenous knowledge systems and an anticolonial perspective and focus explicitly on the needs of the community. Finally, in Chapter Eighteen, qualitative researchers are challenged to incorporate strong conflicting values and interests of stakeholders by including stakeholder perspectives and interests, thereby democratizing their research.

Stephen D. Lapan  
MaryLynn T. Quartaroli  
Frances Julia Riemer

## THE EDITORS

**Stephen D. Lapan** was professor emeritus at Northern Arizona University, where he directed the Curriculum and Instruction Doctoral Program. He taught courses in statistics, tests and measurements, program evaluation, action research, introduction to research, advanced research design, and paradigms for research. He received a PhD in educational psychology from the University of Connecticut. He conducted various types of research including several program evaluations. Among his publications are three books, *Survival in the Classroom* (with E. House), *Foundations for Research* (with K. deMarrais), and *Research Essentials: An Introduction to Designs and Practices* (with M. T. Quartaroli). Awards include the Arizona Association for Gifted and Talented Honor Board Life Achievement Award and Northern Arizona University College of Education Distinguished Service Award for Research. He served as editor for the *Excellence in Teaching Journal*, as consulting editor for the *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, and as a review editor for the *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*.

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