GAINING ENTRY

As discussed in Chapter 3, before any study can begin, the researcher typically needs to submit a proposal to the college or university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once the study has been approved, the researcher must negotiate entry into the research setting, such as a school, and obtain the cooperation of potential participants. Because data collection in qualitative research is generally lengthy and in depth, it involves a more than casual relationship between the researcher and participants. Thus, how the researcher enters the setting and makes contact with participants is extremely important. In fact, the method she or he uses to do this can influence the relationship between researcher and participants from the very beginning. For example, a poor initial impression can hamper the research study from start to finish, making participants hesitant to fully cooperate. Grandma was right: first impressions really are important and do influence the way others perceive you.

The first obstacle you will face in gaining entry is getting permission to carry out your research in the desired field setting. You have decided, at least in general, what your study will be about. If your research is to be conducted in a classroom, a clinic, or a hospital, you will likely have to deal with a gatekeeper who will either directly decide or strongly influence the decision to allow you to conduct your study in that setting. For example, in most schools, the principal is the most important gatekeeper in determining admission into the school for research. In large school districts there may be a central body that decides on the acceptability of proposed research study requests, although the school principal will still likely have substantial input. Note that principals usually will not approve your request unless they know that the teachers or other participants agree. Note also that if you plan to gather data from students, you will probably need parental permission and informed consent. Most schools, hospitals, clinics, and other institutions have specific procedures that must be followed to gain entrance (see, for example, the discussion in Chapter 3). You should identify the gatekeepers, learn the procedures for requesting access to a desired site, and follow these procedures. You should also ask how long the decision process typically takes.

The process of obtaining entry to a field site can be tedious and lengthy. To avoid tedious and time consuming, you might be tempted to short circuit the process by studying participants you can access easily, such as people you supervise (teachers in your own school), students in your class, or acquaintances and friends whom you know will cooperate. This tempting alternative to school or site approval is not advised except, of course, when conducting action research. Acquaintances may be uncomfortable answering certain questions, and friends may assume they understand each other and thus not probe or question given responses.

Gaining permission to a site may require negotiation between yourself and the gatekeeper. For example, timing, access, use of results, and the like are common negotiation issues. You should be prepared to answer questions from both the gatekeeper and, subsequently, the research participants. Make every attempt to establish good rapport with everyone involved; it will serve you well. For example, they may wish to know the following:

- What are you trying to do in your study? This question is logical and your response is important; participants want to know what you're planning to do and find out. Notice, to answer this question, you must have some idea about the purpose of your study. Few people will give access or agree to be participants if all you can tell them about your study is, "It's about teachers (or students, or added, or parent involvement), but I don't know more than that at this time." You don't have to know the specifics of your topic and methods, but you will need to provide some focus in your response. In describing your topic, avoid educational jargon. Anticipate their questions and prepare a two- or three-sentence description of your aims. If pressed by participants for more details, it is appropriate to respond that an important part of your study is to identify what's important and should be examined. It is advisable to put the topic in writing to provide interested parties with documentation.
How much will your presence disrupt my classroom and students? Participants have rhythms and routines to their activities and want to minimize their disruption. It is important to be honest in answering this question. For example, don't water down what you expect teachers to do, because they will be resentful and uncooperative when they find out during the study that you were not truthful. However, you may also capitalize on the fact that much of qualitative research involves data gathering that is not disruptive.

What will you do with the findings? Gatekeepers and participants may have concerns about how results of the study are reported, and to whom. For example, they may worry about bad publicity or political use of the findings against the research site or its participants. Respond honestly. In most cases you will be able to indicate that no participant's name or title will be published and the site and location will be disguised for publication. Two things that you might face are the gatekeeper demanding a copy of the results as a condition of providing the site and participants' demand for access to the data during and at the end of the study. Agreeing to the former may affect the responses of participants: if I knew the principal will see the results, I may not give honest answers to questions or may change my teaching practices. Allowing teachers access to data at the end of the study can provide insights and corroborate your interpretations, but may also make teachers self-conscious, leading to revisions of interpretations and descriptions. Don't show data to participants during the study unless you have a compelling reason to do so.

Why did you select this setting? In answering this question try to say something positive about the setting as your basis for its selection. For example, I heard the teachers in this school are exceptional; there are many new teachers in this school and I wanted to work in such a setting, you have a unique science program that I wish to understand. It is important that you indicate that your topic is on teachers or programs as a group, not as individuals.

What does the research study look like? This is a valid and reasonable question. This is a qualitative research study; so you will be spending a lot of time and asking a lot of your participants. It is reasonable that they expect something in return. Think carefully about what you are willing to provide in return for participation. Would you be willing to provide information about your results, to meet with teachers and parents to summarize and answer questions about the results, provide a written summary of the results? Would you teach a course in teacher research? You should give thoughts to these questions.

There are many aspects to gaining entrance, negotiation and compromise usually are important aspects of the process. It might be useful for you to write brief answers to these five questions, just to make you think about how you will answer them when asked.

MIXED METHOD: INTEGRATING QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE METHODS

Now that you have gotten a flavor for qualitative research, and before we proceed much further, you need to be aware of something: You can mix quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study! Now, before you close your book in frustration, or decide right now that would be a good time for a nap, stay with us for the next few pages for an introduction to mixed-method research. Your study may benefit if you know how to integrate both qualitative and quantitative aspects.

In Chapter 1 we introduced qualitative and quantitative research methods, and we have mentioned occasionally since then the possibilities of mixing them. Recall some of the characteristics of each approach:

1. Quantitative research methods are characterized by a deductive approach; qualitative methods are characterized by an inductive approach.
2. Quantitative researchers are concerned with objective reality that is "out there" to be discovered, qualitative researchers focus on interpreting their participants' perspectives.
PART 2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

3. Quantitative researchers focus on cause-effect relationships; qualitative researchers focus on describing the process of their research.

4. Quantitative researchers identify hypotheses to test; qualitative research topics emerge slowly as a study progresses.

5. Quantitative researchers select participants as randomly as possible; qualitative researchers select research participants purposely based on their uniqueness and experience in the research setting.

These distinctions do not completely define quantitative and qualitative approaches, but they do highlight important differences. As Krathwohl notes, "Research, however, is a creative act; don't confuse your thinking to specific approaches. Researchers creatively combine the elements of methods in any way that makes the best sense for the study they want to do. Their own limits are then own imagination and the necessity of presenting their findings convincingly. The research question to be answered really determines the method." 12

BRIEF BACKGROUND

In recent years, educational researchers have become increasingly interested in combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. However, although both quantitative and qualitative researchers support mixed-method or multimethod research studies, historically most educational researchers are primarily educated in quantitative research methods. Thus, many researchers are not experienced in carrying out multimethod research studies.

Support for the multimethod approach has come from some of the foremost proponents of experimental and quasi-experimental designs. 13 Mixed-method studies require dual competencies, in both qualitative and quantitative methods, and considerable time and resources.

THREE MODELS OF MIXED-METHOD RESEARCH

There are three common mixed-method approaches: (1) qualitative data are collected first and are more heavily weighted than quantitative; (2) quantitative data are collected first and are more heavily weighted than qualitative; and (3) qualitative and quantitative data are equally weighted and are collected concurrently. The third is the most difficult to implement. 14

The QUAL-Quan Model

In the QUAL-Quan model, a qualitative study (or phase in a study) comes first, typically an "exploratory" study in which observation and open-ended interviews with individuals or groups are conducted and concepts and potential hypotheses are identified. In the second phase of the study, variables are identified from concepts derived from the qualitative analysis and hypotheses are tested with quantitative techniques. For example, the QUAL-Quan approach is useful for researchers who obtain results from multi-item scales to measure phenomena. The validity of the qualitative results can be enhanced by results from the second, quantitative study results.


The QUAN-Qual Model

In the QUAN-Qual model, the findings of the quantitative study are followed by—and determine the type of data collected—in a qualitative study. This is, the first study or phase is comprised of a hypothesis, quantitative data collection, and analysis. The second study or phase is comprised of qualitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This type of study is more heavily weighted toward the qualitative side, and the qualitative analysis and interpretation can help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results.

The QUAN-QUAL Model

The third type of mixed-method model, QUAN-QUAL, integrates simultaneous qualitative and quantitative methods, and with equal weight, throughout the same study. One method may be dominant over the other (QUAN-qual or QUAL-quant), or the two methods may be given equal weight throughout. When following the QUAN-qual model, for example, researchers might weight their qualitative findings by collecting and writing case vignettes. When using the QUAL-quant approach, qualitative researchers might decide to include survey, census, and Likert-scale data along with narrative data.

The most challenging type of multimethod research is the fully integrated QUAL-QUAN approach because it requires expertise in both quantitative and qualitative methods. In this model, quantitative and qualitative methods are given equal weight at all stages of the study.

The same issues in the general debate over qualitative versus quantitative paradigms arise in discussions of mixed-method evaluation. Qualitative researchers who are philosophically opposed to quantitative methods argue that these methods have taught us very little about how and why programs work. Quantitative studies are good at establishing what, but qualitative studies help us to understand how a program succeeds or fails. Both sides can benefit from collaboration. Note how triangulation occurs in mixed method studies—one set of data corroborates another.

Types of Mixed-METHOD DESIGNS

To identify a study as a mixed-method design, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is there evidence in the title? Does the title include terms such as quantitative and qualitative, mixed methods, integrated, triangulated, or other terms that suggest a mixture of methods?
2. What about in the data collection section? Does the procedure or methods section, where data analyses are shown, use more numbers or words?
3. Does the purpose statement or the research questions indicate the type(s) of method(s) used?
4. What priority does the research give to qualitative or quantitative elements?
5. What is the sequence of collecting qualitative and quantitative data? Which comes first?
6. How does the researcher actually analyze the data? Describe any distinction in analysis.

The following are some criteria for evaluating whether a study is mixed method:

1. Are both qualitative and quantitative methods in the study?
2. Does the researcher describe the kind of mixed methods applied?

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### TABLE 6.2 The Interaction of Qualitative Research Methods with Quantitative Research Designs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Design Type</th>
<th>Role of Ethnography in Quantitative Research Designs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Cross-sectional research, Population and sample surveys | Preparation for survey  
- Identification of the problem and context  
- Identification of the range of response  
- Identification of target population, characteristics, locations, and possible barriers to survey research  
Complementary data  
- Identification and exploration of social subgroups, explaining patterns or variation in survey results |
| Experiments | Preparation  
- Identification of elements of the experiment  
- Identification of constraints in the field  
- Pilot testing for acceptability and feasibility  
- Developing and validating measures of change  
Process  
- Finding differences in implementation  
- Documenting context of intervention for comparison with outcome measures |
| Construct field studies/ quasi-experiments | Preparation  
- Identification of elements of the intervention  
- Identification of potential differences among treatment and control groups  
- Identification of constraints to experimentation in the field  
- Pilot testing for acceptability and feasibility  
- Developing and validating measures of change  
Process  
- Finding differences in implementation  
- Documenting context of intervention for comparison with outcome measures |


3. Are questions for both qualitative and quantitative approaches stated or described?

4. Is the writing balanced in terms of qualitative and quantitative approaches?

Tables 6.2 and 6.3 illustrate (1) the interaction of quantitative methods with qualitative designs and, conversely, (2) the interaction of qualitative methods with quantitative data. These tables illustrate the varied strategies available for linking qualitative and quantitative methods in the same research study.

Figure 6.3 is an example of an abstract for a combined qualitative and quantitative research study. The abstract provides an overview of how combined qualitative and quantitative research can work together to broaden educational research from a single to a multiple perspective.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Research Designs</th>
<th>Role of Qualitative Research in Relation to Ethnography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Case studies/ethnographies | - Survey to confirm and validate ethnographically defined patterns  
                            |   - "Case-control" matched sample to identify factors associated with presence/absence of element (e.g., disease, school performance, etc.)  
                            |   - "Case-control" matched sample to validate ethnographically defined patterns  
                            |   - Time series design (repeated observations of the same unit over time) to define change more accurately |
| Geomorphologies             | - Survey to confirm and validate ethnographically defined patterns |
| Narratives                  | - Survey to demonstrate presence of patterns revealed by narratives, using language and concepts of respondents |
| Compressed or rapid ethnographic assessments or focused ethnography | - Brief cross-sectional surveys with small samples  
                            |   - Brief before and after surveys or panel designs for assessing intervention |
| Action research             | - Action research makes use of both qualitative and quantitative design features to accomplish the purposes not satisfactorily addressed by either method |


### SUMMARY

**The Nature of Qualitative Research**

1. Qualitative researchers strive to capture the human meanings of social life as lived and experienced by the research participants.
2. Qualitative research approaches are rooted in the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and history.
3. Because qualitative researchers rely heavily on verbal description, researchers are their own main instrument of data collection, interpretation, and written narratives. It is commonly noted that in qualitative research "the researcher is the research method."
4. Six General Steps in Qualitative Research
   - The six steps in qualitative research are (1) identifying a topic or issue to study, (2) reviewing the literature related to the topic, (3) selecting research participants, (4) collecting data related to the topic, (5) analyzing and interpreting the data, and (6) developing a narrative to describe the results of the study.
5. Qualitative Research Methods
   - Qualitative research methods include ethnography: historical research, grounded theory, and action research. The primary difference among the methods are the social context examined and participants studied.
6. Ethnography
   - Ethnography seeks to describe and analyze all or part of the culture of a community by identifying and describing the participants, practices, and beliefs.
7. Context or background is an important aspect of interpreting qualitative research results.
**FIGURE 6.3**  
Abstract of a Mixed-Method Study.

Note that the title indicates that the research involves both qualitative and quantitative methods.

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| AUTHOR | Holbrook, Allyson; Bours, Gid; Owen, John M.; McKenzie, Phil; Amey, John |
| PUB DATE | 1999 |
| PUB TYPE | Reports—Research (143)—Speeches/Meeting Papers (150) |
| DESCRIPTORS | Administrator Attitudes; Databases; Educational Administration; Educational Policy; "Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; "Girls/Students; Higher Education; "Principals; "Research Utilization; "Teacher Attitudes; Theory/Practice Relationship |
| IDENTIFIERS | *Australia |
| ABSTRACT | This paper discusses the main analytical techniques used in "Mapping Educational Research and the Impact on Schools." The study considered the impact of the outcomes of educational research on the practice of teaching and learning in Australian schools fed on educational policy and administration. Mixed methods were used, beginning with a review of the literature and the exploration of the Australian Education Index (AEI) educational research database. Documents were collected from faculties of education in Australia, and questionnaires about the use of educational literature were developed for postgraduate students (n = 267), school principals (n = 73), and representatives of 72 professional associations. Interviews were then conducted with seven policymakers and selected respondents to the postgraduate student questionnaires. The study indicates that it is possible to use an existing database to monitor educational research in Australia. A clear majority of all three groups surveyed provided evidence of the awareness, acceptance, and valuing of educational research in Australia. Interviews with policymakers also showed the use of educational research in policy formation. The multiple perspectives of this study give a picture of the links between research and its use in schools and departments of education in Australia. An appendix summarizes the database descriptors from the database investigations. (Contains 3 tables, 3 figures, and 34 references.) (SLD) |

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**Historical Research**

8. Historical research is the systematic collection and evaluation of data related to past events for the purpose of describing causal, effects, and trends of those events.

9. In conducting a historical study, the researcher can neither manipulate nor control any of the variables.

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**Grounded Theory**

10. Grounded theory is a systematic qualitative method that aims at generating a theory that explains, at a conceptual level, a process, an action, or a concept.

11. The most common strategies used to carry out grounded theory are observation and interviews.

12. The key to success of grounded theory is the constant comparison method, an inductive strategy that "constantly compares" and integrates the data the researcher collects in numerous data collection forays. As data are continually examined and narrowed, theoretical propositions emerge that develop and link to other propositions.

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**Action Research**

13. Action research is a systematic inquiry done by teachers and other educational personnel to collect and...
CHAPTER 6 CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

study data that can help them to both understand and improve their practice. It is based on the view that teachers can serve as practical researchers who can help improve practice in school.

14. Any teacher or school-based question, topic, or problem is pertinent to action research and may be the start of the process.

Qualitative Research Process

15. Five characteristics of qualitative research are:
   (1) real-world setting for the study, (2) data are descriptive, not numerical, (3) the research emphasizes a holistic approach to the setting and participants, (4) inductive data analysis, and (5) the researcher strives to describe meaning as seen from the perspectives of the research participants.

Characteristics of Good Qualitative Research

16. Good qualitative research displays 10 features:
   • Researchers take a holistic stance.
   • Researchers avoid making premature decisions or assumptions about the study.
   • Methods focus on person-to-person interactions.
   • Researchers spend a good deal of time in the research setting.
   • Researchers gather data directly from participants.
   • Researchers remain open to alternative explanations of phenomena.
   • Researchers adjust to and describe their biases and preferences.
   • Phenomena are described and explained from the viewpoint of, and in the voice of, the participants.
   • Researchers are responsible for obtaining participants' informed consent and ensuring their ethical treatment throughout the study.
   • The research focus is on discovery and understanding, rather than on confirmation of existing theory.

Qualitative Research Questions

17. Qualitative research questions encompass a range of topics, but most focus on participants' understanding of meanings and social life in a particular context.

18. These general topics must necessarily be more focused to become useful and researchable questions.

19. Qualitative research topics are usually more general and tentative than quantitative research topics, mainly because it is expected that a qualitative study will evolve in focus once the researcher is in the research setting and beginning to interact with the participants.

20. Although qualitative researchers seldom begin a study with a specific topic or plan, they must begin with at least a general idea of the topic and methods of their study. Qualitative proposals are not fixed contracts that cannot be altered, but neither are they so brief and general that they convey little about the proposed study.

Step 1: Selecting a Research Topic or Issue

21. The first step in qualitative research is to select a topic or issue to study. Qualitative researchers begin with an open-ended, broad research topic that will narrow and emerge as they learn more about the research participants, their thoughts, and their setting.

22. Qualitative researchers depend heavily on information provided by participants during the research.

23. The research topic may have a variety of functions. It can provide a voice for groups or individuals to be heard. It can identify new directions for research. It can help identify and examine gaps in educational practice and theory. It can help students develop their research knowledge and practice.

24. The most common sources of research topics are from testing existing theories, examining questions that pique researchers' interest or curiosity, and carrying out replications of existing studies.

25. The ethnographic researcher should select a topic that is of strong personal interest, and (2) can be carried out with a limited number of participants and a narrow research context.

26. The historical researcher should select a topic (1) that is not of strong personal interest, to reduce the effect of bias, and (2) for which sufficient sources of data are available.

27. The grounded theorist should select a topic that will lead to new insights and new understanding of what aspects of the topic are most important. The initial topic is a working model that will be altered and narrowed as the researcher analyses an iterative process that seeks to help make sense of the data participants provide.

28. The action researcher should select a topic that derives from a perceived need to understand or correct an existing problem.

Step 2: Reviewing the Literature

29. Unlike quantitative researchers, who spend a great deal of time examining the research on their topic in
the early stages of the research process, some qualitative researchers tend not to delve deeply into their literature until data collection. Some qualitative researchers believe too much emphasis on the examination of literature can bias or influence the research and prematurely narrow the focus of the intended topic prior to interaction with the participants. Others believe researchers should review literature on all aspects of the topic at the outset of the study. Nevertheless, examining literature is flexible and typically lasts throughout data collection and data analysis.

Gaining Entry

31. Qualitative researchers should be prepared to answer in a general way the following questions that gatekeepers and potential participants may ask: (1) What is the purpose of your study? (2) How much will your presence disrupt my setting and activities? (3) What will you do with the findings? (4) Why did you select this setting? (5) What do we get out of this?

Mixed Method: Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

22. Mixed-method studies integrate both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research question determines the methods undertaken.

33. Mixed-method studies require competencies in conducting both quantitative and qualitative methods.

34. The three models of mixed-method research are: (1) quantitative data are more heavily weighted and are collected before qualitative data, (2) qualitative data are more heavily weighted and collected before quantitative data, and (3) qualitative and quantitative data are equally weighted throughout the study.