Reading discussion questions for chapter 6 of Gay and Airasian
Characteristics of Qualitative Research

After reading chapter 6 from Gay and Airasian on qualitative research, work through the following questions in small group discussion. Be prepared to report on some of the details of your discussion in a whole group conversation at the end – in other words, remember some of the interesting things you talked about!

1. What is participant observation? (see page 198) In what kind of a research setting might you expect to find a participant observer? What kinds of things do you think a participant observer might do – and not do in the name of research? What might be some of the insights participants learn that other observers might not? Similarly, what threats to trustworthiness of data might be a concern in participant observation? Years ago, participant observers were sometimes accused of “going native” – what do you think this means? What might be the consequences of that in research? How can researchers avoid this?

2. Why is the descriptor naturalistic often used to describe qualitative research? Imagine some qualitative research studies and discuss how they are situated naturalistically. Be prepared to offer 2-3 examples here. What advantages are there to naturalistic research? What might be some disadvantages? Now for the tough part of this question: What’s the relationship between naturalistic research and constructivism as a philosophy? Why do these make sense together?

3. Some qualitative researchers use the term emic to describe their work. Emic refers to “an insiders” perspective as opposed to etic, which is “an outsiders” perspective. Give examples of research or situations where we have an emic perspective and others where we might have an etic perspective. Why do you think qualitative researchers care about an emic perspective and what does this have to do with the trustworthiness of data?

4. These authors describe ethnography as the act of investigating “how people go about seeing, explaining, and describing order in the world in which they live.” In other words, our culture is dominated by routines that everybody seems to understand. What are some of these routines or methods that well all have a shared understanding of? Are there any of these in schools? How would you go about investigating/learning about one of these routines? What would you do? What might be the advantage of doing so?

5. Review grounded theory on pg. 167. Give an example of a potential grounded theory study in a school or educational setting. Be sure you can defend why it is best explored using a grounded theory approach. How would you judge the value of a grounded theory research study? Is the issue of generalizability applicable here?

6. Review action research on pg. 168. Give an example of a potential action research study in a school or educational setting. Be sure you can defend why you would characterize it in this way. What might be the value of this kind of inquiry for the researcher, other involved parties, policy, or institutions? Is action research just evaluation research (pg. 7) or might it be something a little different?

7. Review historical research on pg. 166. Give an example of a potential historical research study related to educational issues. Be sure you can defend why it is best explored using a historical approach. What problems or issues might a historical research encounter with regards to trustworthiness of data and the changing social norms of our own culture? How does the notion of interpretive apply here? How can historical researchers strengthen the trustworthiness of their research?

8. Are qualitative researchers concerned with generalizability? Why or why not? Don’t just give a flippant answer here – consider many different instances or examples before you decide.

9. How do qualitative researchers deal with their own subjectivity, opinions, and prejudices? Do you think this compromises their work? If so, in what ways? Discuss some things qualitative researchers could do to strengthen the trustworthiness of their claims or to mitigate their own subjectivity.

10. Why are ethical concerns of particular interest to qualitative researchers? Not to imply, of course, they are dismissed by quantitative researchers but why might qualitative researchers find themselves in ethically tricky territory more often? Imagine a qualitative research study and consider the ethical issues that may arise during the course of the research. How would you deal with them as a researcher? Is your response different from how you would respond as a teacher?