Data Gathering

Organizing the data gathering • Access and Permissions • Observation • Description of Concepts • Interview • Document review

There is no particular moment when data gathering begins. It begins before there is commitment to do the study: back-grounding, acquaintance with other cases, first impressions. A considerable proportion of all data is impressionistic, picked up informally as the researcher first becomes acquainted with the case. Many of these early impressions will later be refined or replaced, but the pool of data includes the earliest of observations.

Qualitative study capitalizes on ordinary ways of getting acquainted with things. The acquaintance is largely cerebral, only a few things get recorded. All researchers have great privilege and obligation: the privilege to pay attention to what they consider worthy of attention and the obligation to make conclusions drawn from those choices meaningful to colleagues and clients. One of the principal qualifications of qualitative researchers is experience. Added to the experience of ordinary looking and thinking, the experience of the qualitative researcher is one of knowing what leads
### Issue-Based Observation Form

**for Case Studies in Science Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observer:</th>
<th>School:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Time: to:</th>
<th>Teacher: M F</th>
<th>Age 25 35 50 65</th>
<th>Grade:</th>
<th>Time of write-up: same day</th>
<th># Students:</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Θ** = Archipolis  
Synopsis of lesson, activities:

Comments on science education issues:  
- Θ₁ response to budget cuts  
- Θ₂ locus of authority  
- Θ₃ teacher prep  
- Θ₄ hands-on mats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of room</th>
<th>Pedagogic orientation</th>
<th>Teacher aim</th>
<th>Reference made to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>learning place L - - H</td>
<td>textbook L - - H</td>
<td>didactic L - - H</td>
<td>sci method 0 - - M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>science place L - - H</td>
<td>stdzd testing L - - H</td>
<td>heuristic L - - H</td>
<td>technology 0 - - M</td>
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<tr>
<td>compet’n place L - - H</td>
<td>prob solving L - - H</td>
<td>philetic L - - H</td>
<td>ethics, relig 0 - - M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

to significant understanding, recognizing good sources of data, and consciously and unconsciously testing out the veracity of their eyes and the robustness of their interpretations. It requires sensitivity and skepticism. Much of this methodological knowledge and personality comes from hard work under the critical examination of colleagues and mentors. It helps to read materials like this book, to attend lectures, to discuss, and to read field reports (one of which may even serve as a model)—but expertise comes largely through reflective practice.

What one does in the field, from gaining access to triangulating data, needs to be guided by the research questions. Sometimes, it is useful to make a data-gathering form that not only has space for information to be recorded but that draws attention to the issues of immediate concern. In the table above is a version of an
on-site observer form created by the CIRCE team working on *Case Studies in Science Education* (Stake & Easley, 1979). Note that the form has space for needed qualitative and quantitative information, a narrative account, and commentary on one or more issues. Each of the information and interpretation categories is driven by the research questions.

**Organizing the Data Gathering**

There is always too little time. Perhaps we would like to prepare some good attitude scales or tentative assertions for focus groups to respond to—but each of these alone could absorb the time available. And we want to have some reserve to deal with unanticipated data sources or emerging issues. We need some deep thinking, perhaps a data-gathering plan, a plan that protects time for the less attractive work, such as writing up observations, yet that expects reallocations along the way. It needs to be a plan rooted in the research questions.

Absolutely essential parts of a data-gathering plan are the following: definition of case, list of research questions, identification of helpers, data sources, allocation of time, expenses, intended reporting. There are far more things we will do than will ever actually get preallocation of time, such as socializing with case actors and watching for relevant stories in the newspaper—yet it is good periodically to remind ourselves of some of those nuances. Especially if one faces a difficult review panel, such as a doctoral committee or funding competition, the data-gathering plan will be elaborate. The guideline given in the following table can be a draft of one's own plan, edited and augmented, a reminder of some important steps, some nuances, that the researcher will attend to.

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1. This form was not systematically used because several of the 10 case workers did not find the form compatible with their style of work. More particularly, they felt that such a form drew their attention too much away from what they should be seeing. In other words, it would have been too powerful, too restricting, a conceptual organizer.
One Set of Guidelines for Doing a Field-Observation Case Study

I: ANTICIPATION

Review or discover what is expected at the outset in the way of a case study. Consider the questions; hypotheses, or issues already raised. Read some case study literature, both methodological and exemplary. Look for one or more studies possibly to use as a model: Identify the "case:" Was it prescribed, selected to represent; or merely convenient? Define the boundaries of the case (or cases) as they appear in advance. Anticipate key problems, events, attributes, spaces, persons, vital signs. Consider possible audiences for preliminary and final reportings. Form initial plan of action, including definition of role of observer on site.

II: FIRST VISIT

Arrange preliminary access, negotiate plan of action, arrange regular access: Write a formal agreement indicating obligations for observer and for host: Refine access rules with people involved, including union, PTA, officials, etc. Discuss real or potential costs to hosts, including opportunity costs. Discuss arrangements for maintaining confidentiality of data, sources, reports. Discuss need for persons to review drafts to validate observations, descriptions. Discuss publicity to be given during and following the study. Identify information and services, if any, to be offered hosts. Revise plan of action, observer's role, case boundaries, issues, as needed.

III. FURTHER PREPARATION FOR OBSERVATION

Make preliminary observations of activities. Use other sites for tryouts? Allocate resources to alternative spaces, persons, methods, issues, phases, etc. Identify informants and sources of particular data. Select or develop instruments or standardized procedures, if any. Work out record-keeping system, files, tapes; coding system; protected storage. Rework priorities for attributes, problems, events, audiences, etc.
IV. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT
OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

Reconsider issues or other theoretical structure to guide the data gathering. Learn what audience members know, what they want to come to understand. Sketch plans for final report and dissemination of findings. Identify the possible "multiple realities," how people see things differently. Allocate attention to different viewpoints, conceptualizations.

V. GATHER DATA, VALIDATE DATA

Make observations, interview, debrief informants, gather logs, use surveys, etc.
Keep records of inquiry arrangements and activities. Select vignettes, special testimonies, illustrations: Classify raw data; begin interpretations:
Redefine issues, case boundaries, renegotiate arrangements with hosts, as needed.
Gather additional data, replicating or triangulating, to validate key observations.

VI. ANALYSIS OF DATA

Review raw data under various possible interpretations.
Search for patterns of data (whether or not indicated by the issues).
Seek linkages between program arrangements, activities, and outcomes.
Draw tentative conclusions, organize according to issues, organize final report.
Review data, gather new data, deliberately seek disconfirmation of findings.

VII. PROVIDING AUDIENCE OPPORTUNITY
FOR UNDERSTANDING

Describe extensively the setting within which the activity occurred. Consider the report as a story; look for ways in which the story is incomplete.
Draft reports and reproduce materials for audience use. Try them out on representative members of audience groups.
Help reader discern typicality and relevance of situation as base for generalization.
Revise and disseminate reports and materials. Talk to people.
The data-gathering plan may be part of a formal proposal. It may be useful to think of what the reviewers of this proposal will pay attention to. The following is one checklist for reviewing a proposal to do a case study.

**EXAMPLE OF A CHECKLIST FOR RATING A CASE STUDY PROPOSAL**

Communication

Clarity: Does the proposal read well?
Integrity: Do its pieces fit together?
Attractiveness: Does it pique the reader's interest?

Content

The Case: Is the case adequately defined?
The Issues: Are major research questions identified?
Data Resource: Are sufficient data sources identified?

Method

Case Selection: Is the selection plan reasonable?
Data Gathering: Are data-gathering activities outlined?
Validation: Is the need and opportunity for triangulation indicated?

Practicality

Access: Are arrangements for start-up anticipated?
Confidentiality: Is there sensitivity to protection of people?
Cost: Are time and resource estimates reasonable?

It is easy to become overwhelmed with the details. The most important planning has to do with the substance of the study: What needs to be known? What are some possible relationships that may be discovered? Some researchers like to go to the scene open-
mind, ready to soak up anything that happens. Most researchers find they do their best work by being thoroughly prepared to concentrate on a few things, yet ready for unanticipated happenings that reveal the nature of the case.

The case researcher should have ways of displaying the progress of the study. Some use a status board, a matrix of tasks to accomplish, modifiable so that tasks can be added and deleted. Some keep track of time spent on different tasks, issues, and data sources so that the distribution is not badly skewed. Some project a table of contents of their final report, with page assignments, then mark the progress in terms of pages for each section planned, data-banked, interpreted, and written up. Too much time can be spent on these records of progress, and, in holding to the early plan, they often fall out of touch with what is really happening. But at least some casual system can be very valuable.

And the researcher should have a data storage system. For many researchers, the most important thing is to have a personal diary or log in which everything is kept: calendar, telephone numbers, observation notes, expenses. Increasingly this information is kept in electronic files—which facilitates categorizing and editing information—but hard copy is still the preference of most. Many researchers continue to use 3 x 5 cards, sorted and alphabetized, but the principal coding and storage of text data by most researchers is inside the standard office file cabinet. File folders identify issues, sites, persons. Some data sheets are photocopied and placed in more than one file. Researchers try to keep as much of the organization of data as they can in their heads, but code keys and lists are needed for all but the smallest projects. Data management is a skill that comes with experience. Help along the way is available in such writings as Michael Huberman and Matthew Miles's (1994) chapter in the Denzin and Lincoln Handbook.

The question regularly comes up as to how much to use audiotapes and even videotapes. Videotapes make wonderful records that can be analyzed (at great labor) by the researcher for aggregative interpretation, but the tapes are of little use in prepar-
ing most reports. Subsequently, a segment of a videotape may be useful to supplement oral presentation, consultation, or instruction. Audiotaping is valuable for catching the exact words used, but the cost in making transcripts and the annoyance for both respondent and researcher argue strongly against it. Some researchers find they can think better, reflecting, probing, if they have a recorder going. But the amount of taped data a researcher can work with is very small. The researcher should develop skill in keeping shorthand notes and count on member checks to get the meanings straight.²

Selection of data sources can be left too much to chance. The people who happen to be there when we happen to be there are not likely to be the best sources of data. The researcher should have a connoisseur's appetite for the best persons, places, and occasions. "Best" usually means those that best help us understand the case, whether typical or not. To illustrate a choice, let us consider the case study by Cynthia Cole of a school in the "Buddy" program. On an experimental basis, the Indiana State Department of Education placed high-quality personal computers in the homes of fourth graders for scholastic purposes.³ The cases (Θ = a school ) were already selected. Although there was some coordination of activity, each participating researcher had one case study to develop. A principal issue had to do with impact on the family, since certain expectations of computer use accompanied placement in the home. The computer was to be available for word processing, record keeping, and games by family members, but certain time was to be set aside for fourth-grade homework. In Cole's community, 50 homes had "Buddy" computers; from each she obtained certain information, but observations in the home could be made in but a small number of homes. Which homes to select? Cole noted attri-

². For more on the use of tapes, see Fetterman (1989).
³. Indiana's "Buddy" project was a component of the state school reform effort in 1990-1993. Evaluation case studies were designed by William Quinn of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. The report including Cole's study was not published, but her study is available (Cole, 1993).
butes of interest: gender of the fourth grader, siblings, family structure, home discipline, previous use of computers, other technology in the home, and so forth. She discussed these characteristics with informants, got recommendations, visited several homes, and obtained data. She made her choices gradually, assuring variety but not necessarily representativeness, not concerned about typicality. She considered accessibility and hospitality, for the time was short and perhaps too little can be learned from less hospitable parents. Here too the primary criterion was opportunity to learn.

Each researcher is different; each has to work out methods that make him or her effective in understanding and portraying the case.

Access and Permissions

Almost always, data gathering is done on somebody's "home grounds." Most educational case data gathering involves at least a small invasion of personal privacy. The procedures for gaining access are based on the enduring expectation that permissions are needed. Whose space it is? In requests to district, school, and teachers, the nature of the case study, the sponsor, the activity intended, the primary issues, the time span, and burden to the parties should be made known. Although individuals often immediately acquiesce if a superior has granted permission, a brief written description of the intended casework should be offered. Usually, a couple of paragraphs will suffice, but extensive plans should be available if requested. Plans for distribution of the report should be indicated, with any intention or opportunity for review of the drafts by actors. Expectations of any plan to anonymize should be expressed. Some change in these matters should be anticipated along the way, and the ways change will be negotiated, with all relevant parties agreeing to the changes, should be mentioned in the request for access.

It is essential to obtain special written permission from parents for personal attention to individual children. School districts
usually have permission procedures that should be followed. Universities and other research organizations have regulations for the protection of human subjects. These procedures are not perfect, sometimes more concerned about limiting liability than about the well-being of the individuals. Protection of respondents is not fully covered by these procedures, so the researcher has an obligation to think through the ethics of the situation and to take the necessary steps prior to requesting access and permissions. Some choices are difficult because to identify troubling issues that may come up may unduly frighten parents or administrators. Previous experience and talk with knowledgeable people already at the site are important in shaping the requests.

Unless they have had a bad experience recently, people are generally cooperative, often pleased to have their story known, happy to help someone do their job, although not optimistic that the research will be of benefit to them. The researcher should not expect people to admire the work of researchers and should seldom lay out the request for access and permissions on the grounds that the study will solve a problem or advance social well-being. Many respondents consider it a compliment to be asked, and some will use the request to indicate that this verifies the high position their organization has attained. The researcher should indicate how and why the organization was selected but should not work hard at correcting misrepresentations of the selection procedure. Most understandings will be oral, but some written indication, most often a letter, of the request should be a part of the record.

In discussing prospects of the study, burden on the host should be acknowledged. The researcher may be delightful company, but hosting delightful company is a burden. It is a good idea for the researcher to provide reports of previous studies that reveal, however indirectly, the mutual involvement and the kinds of issues likely. Either party may be surprised by the customs or points of view of the other.

Neither researcher nor host can anticipate the possible misperceptions. For our class fieldwork in Umeå, one student report noted,
After receiving grade reports at the "Examination," the graduates bounded out of the hall to be hugged by family members carrying balloons and a placard with large childhood photos of the honoree, to be taken home to a party in special contrivance, not uncommonly the family car decked with flowers and ribbons.

Upon returning from observing these activities, Benny said, “I was standing near a family listening to what they were saying when I realized that I shouldn't be hearing this; this was a ‘family matter’.” Benny surprised me. I had come to suppose that it is not ethically problematic to overhear intimate facts about people. I had thought our ethical obligation was a matter of avoiding improper use of what we learn. But Benny had a point. Privacy is a matter of avoiding personal exposure to everyone outside intimate circles, circles decided by the individual. I told Benny and his classmates that, for much case study work, researchers had to put themselves somewhat aggressively into a position to make observations, meaning there was no chance of avoiding at least a little intrusion, but also that they had to aggressively review their behavior for indication that they were interfering with the lives of others—a difficult balance.

Opportunity should be taken early to get acquainted with the people, the spaces, the schedules, and the problems of the case. With most studies, there is a hurry to get started, yet a quiet entry is highly desirable. Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin (1992) described exemplary entry behavior in *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*. They urged researchers to be as unobtrusive, as interesting, as wallpaper. Some fieldworkers like to offer something in exchange for the favors; for the intrusion, such as a few books for the library or the arrangement of a seminar, perhaps a staff development session, preferably unrelated to the content of the ongoing study. If there is funding, a line-item for meals and refreshments for informants and hosts is a legitimate field expense. A researcher’s willingness to present findings after the study is over is
appreciated, but by the time the study is over, the actors are often little interested. Although difficult for the delightful researcher, it is not a bad idea to cultivate lack of interest. Ordinariness of phenomena is more likely when actors have little interest in learning more about what is being studied.

The back side of access is protocol for leaving the site. It is often unclear when the final visit is, each could be the last. Ordinary common sense and good manners again are needed. Careful recollection should identify promises made, possibly not yet fulfilled. The researcher should leave the site having made no one less able to carry out their responsibilities.

Observation

Recall again that it is \( \Theta \) that is the target. Observations work the researcher toward greater understanding of the case. Refining the plan of observation is directed by \( \Theta \). We need observations pertinent to our issues. If our case is a curriculum and a main issue is about opposition to the content of that curriculum, we should not expect to make most of our observations in classrooms, that is not where opposition is likely to be expressed. We want to increase our understanding of the case. We can only look at a few aspects. We choose opportunities identified partly by issues, helping us to make a better acquaintance with the case.

Quantitative data require aggregation and sorting in order for meanings to become clear. Qualitative or interpretive data have meanings directly recognized by the observer. The pattern of teacher talk to student talk, described as coded data in Chapter 2, can also be captured in narrative accounts. Consider the following interpretive observation from Anacortes Middle School:

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The middle school students in this class travel several blocks by school bus to meet at the high school. Today about 44 students have gathered here in the band room: Seats are arranged in orchestra formation. After individual warm-up (with an insinuated tribute to Clementine), Love puts them through five minutes of scales. Then come make-up exams. At least once every two weeks each student is expected to play a dozen bars solo. The student chooses the piece, it is played by all, then while the group remains reasonably quiet, the examinee plays his/her part. Love makes a few diagnostic, suggestive comments. The students are aware that the best and worst performance gets criticized about equally gently:

Together the band works on special passages: Today they play "A Technic Tune." They repeat it several times. Love stops them to review concepts and notations. Articulations: slur, staccato, accent, tenuto. A few youngsters are able to identify them. On to "That's Where the Money Goes." More technical terms, particularly about syncopation: Bill Love demonstrates the different syncopations. Then he redirects the snare drum to change the presentation, explaining his reasoning to whomever cares to listen. Conceptualization is important, but—if the two are separable—it seems aimed more at bolstering performance than at enhancing understanding;

On to "American Patriot:" "Yaaay!" The rendition is spirited: The second trumpet section has a fit of giggles. Then "Blue Rock" Love muses later: "There's never enough time. Important to get in these exercises:"

No numerical indicator is available here to indicate the ratio, but researcher and reader are likely to interpret this session as heavily dominated by the teacher, a considerate and competent teacher, Bill Love, but not on this occasion developing in students
a sense of responsibility for their own learning. The researcher might quote the paragraphs above to illustrate dominance of teacher talk over self-initiated student talk.

During observation, the qualitative case study researcher keeps a good record of events to provide a relatively *incontestable description* for further analysis and ultimate reporting. He or she lets the occasion tell its story, the situation, the problem, resolution or irresolution of the problem. Often, it seems there is no story, that is, nothing relating much to the issues, nothing that opens up the depths of the case. Some researchers find stories when others do not, enough to be worrisome. How much are they making it up? Most readers want the straight story, but they also expect researchers to put themselves into the interpretation, finding meanings that others cannot grasp. The story often starts to take shape during the observation, sometimes does not emerge until write-ups of many observations are poured over. The experienced researcher fixes a schedule and a quiet nook to write up the observation while it is still fresh.

During observation, the quantitative case study researcher keeps focused on categories or key events, attentive to background conditions that may influence subsequent analysis but concentrated on what constitutes a tally. He or she tries not to interpret relationships along the way, wary that moving to that level of thinking might alter the objectivity of the tally. In one way, the researcher is closed-minded, not looking for opportunities to expand or refine the design. But in another way, the researcher is testing every tally, every happening, raising the possibility that seeing things in a different way might change the tally. Usually, a worksheet anchors the meaning of a variable category. Each good observation period is expected to aggregate with others. The break between observations is for relaxing, then prepping for the next data gathering.

Several similarities and several differences between quantitative and qualitative observation should be apparent. Both plan carefully, reinforcing the categories or kind of case activities that
represent the issues. Quantitative works to develop aggregates of coded data leading to substantiated covariation; qualitative works with episodes of unique relationship to fashion a story or unique description of the case. The more quantitative approach usually means including many repeated observation situations to get a representative coverage of the relationships for this particular case. The more qualitative approach usually means finding good moments to reveal the unique complexity of the case.

Description of Contexts

To develop vicarious experiences for the reader, to give them a sense of "being there," the physical situation should be well described. The entryways, the rooms, the landscape, the hallways, its place on the map, its decor. There should be some balance between the uniqueness and the ordinariness of the place. The physical space is fundamental to meanings for most researchers and most readers.

To the extent that summaries across classrooms or other spaces are needed, some checkoff procedure should be followed. For studying science classrooms, we devised a checklist, parts of which are shown in Table 4.1. Most of the space on the observation form was used to record natural language description of the lesson and activities, with special attention to anything that happened relevant to key issues. The checklist at the bottom of the page provided a coded-data description of the classroom, with four category scales from zero to many or from low to high. (Several of the physical descriptors of the classroom were omitted from this version of the form.)

There are other contexts besides physical that may be important for establishing the similarity of the case to other cases. The physical context is no more important than certain other contexts, depending on $\Theta$ and $\vartheta$. When the case is a person, home and family are usually important contexts. When the issue is one of evalu-
ation or efficiency, the economic context is important. Clients pro-
viding support for or requiring case studies and the readers of re-
ports may indicate contexts to be examined, perhaps historical,
cultural, or aesthetic. During these two weeks in Sweden, the issues
of education are often discussed in the political contexts of decen-
tralization and equity for immigrant children. Like researchers
everywhere, my Umea students brought personal curiosities and
talents to their studies. Kristina was interested in dance education,
Britt-Marie in the use of teachers of crafts as advocates of equity.
They had special sophistication in certain scholarly study, and it is
not unlikely they will use those contexts to help others understand
the cases they will study.

The more the case study is an intrinsic case study, the more
attention needs to be paid to the contexts. The more the case study
is an instrumental case study, certain contexts may be important,
but other contexts important to the case are of little interest to the
study. The allocation of attention to contexts will be based partly
on the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental purposes.

**Interview**

Much of what we cannot observe for ourselves has been or is
being observed by others. Two principal uses of case study are to
obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others. The case will
not be seen the same by everyone. Qualitative researchers take
pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case.
The interview is the main road to multiple realities.

Just as with gathering observation data, the interviewer needs
to have a strong advance plan. It is terribly easy to fail to get the
right questions asked, awfully difficult to steer some of the most
informative interviewees on to your choice of issues. They have
their own. Most people are pleased to be listened to. Getting acqui-
escence to interviews is perhaps the easiest task in case study re-
search. Getting a good interview is not so easy.
There are guides to good interviewing, Louis Dexler's (1970) *Elite and Specialized Interviewing* and Michael Patton's (1980) *Qualitative Evaluation Methods*, for example, but most writers orient to survey data aggregation. Stanley Payne's (1951) *The Art of Asking Questions* is especially good for novices because it starts at the fundamental step of forming questions on the basis of what needs to be known. A full appreciation of the use of interviewing in qualitative field studies, written by Andrea Fontana and James Frey (1994), is included in the Denzin and Lincoln *Handbook*.

Qualitative case study seldom proceeds as a survey with the same questions asked of each respondent; rather, each interviewee is expected to have had unique experiences, special stories to tell. The qualitative interviewer should arrive with a short list of issue-oriented questions, possibly handing the respondent a copy, indicating there is concern about completing an agenda. The purpose for the most part is not to get simple yes and no answers but description of an episode, a linkage, an explanation. Formulating the questions and anticipating probes that evoke good responses is a special art. Quantitative interviews parallel quantitative observations: They seek to aggregate perceptions or knowledge over multiple respondents. A research-question-based set of questions should be worked out in advance, with departures from the protocol limited by design.

Trying out the questions in pilot form, at least in mental rehearsal, should be routine. During the actual exchange, the interviewer needs most to listen, maybe take few or many notes, as fits the occasion, but to stay in control of the data gathering, thinking about what form the account will take in writing. Main questions should be kept in mind, probes carefully created, occasionally ask-

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5. It is not uncommon in research for all respondents to be surveyed, with a few then selected for case study. It is often important to ask some questions in case study interviews to confirm what is asked in the survey, to establish a certain comparability between the two groups. In studying urban bureaucracies, Yin (1979) found the two suitably similar, whereas Stake and Easley (1979) found their own survey too simplistic to confirm their case study findings.
ing the dumb question, assuring that what was said was said, or asking if they meant what clearly was not meant. If possible, the interviewer should enjoy the interview but mostly be its repository. Keeping the record of an interview is part of the artistry. Within a few hours of the interview, the researcher should prepare a written facsimile, with key ideas and episodes captured. For many researchers, the tape recorder is of little value unless ultimately an audio presentation is intended. Getting the exact words of the respondent is usually not very important, it is what they mean that is important. A good interviewer can reconstruct the account and submit it to the respondent for accuracy and stylistic improvement. Interviewees often are dismayed with transcripts not only because of the inelegance of their own sentences but because they did not convey what they intended. And the transcript arrives long after context and innuendo have slipped away. Rather than tape-record or write furiously, it is better to listen, to take a few notes, to ask for clarification. Perhaps the most important thing is to insist on ample time and space immediately following the interview to prepare the facsimile and interpretive commentary.

Note how different are the field observation and the interview, although both are used to find out what happened. What is observed usually is not controlled by the researchers, they go to where the things are happening, with the hope that as they would have happened had the researchers not been there. What is covered in the interview is targeted and influenced by the interviewers. Interviews that follow the whim of the interviewee may tell us quite a bit about the interviewee but so often not what we need to know about what the interviewee has observed. It would be good if we could get what we need by observation alone. But often we have too

6. If interviews or meetings are to be taped, ample time for listening is needed. Two listenings are not enough to catch meanings at first not apparent. If tapes are to be transcribed, to justify the investment the transcripts should be meticulously analyzed. Unless taping is highly productive, the resources should be spent in other ways. Just to obtain a record is seldom reason enough.
little time and have to rely on what others have seen. And sometimes we do care about the comments the interviewees make. So we interview. But it is usually so much better if we can see it ourselves.

For the fieldwork at Harper School, I spent 10 days at the school, including a half-day field trip with two busloads of older students to a high-tech industrial site, a half day at a staff development center, a couple of hours at the Boys and Girls Club, an hour at the police station, and a couple of hours driving around the neighborhood. These trips were essential, giving me a sense of the place, the people, the passage of time. The time spent at the Boys and Girls Club and police station were mainly interview times. But the most important happenings were at the school, where I spent two thirds of my time, perhaps a third of that in formal interviews. I felt the most useful day for understanding the priorities of teachers and students, the readiness for school reform, was the day I spent in Mr. Garson's classroom, an observation day. I had little idea when I first went to the school how the time would divide up. I just kept looking for opportunities to come to understand that school.

Understanding a Θ is greatly facilitated by finding an informant. In the movies, an informant is a bit of a traitor, but in sociology, an informant is just someone who knows a lot about Θ and is willing to chat. A secretary or the associate director, maybe. It is not unusual, with the host's knowledge, for the researcher to pay in some way for the information a special informant can provide. Coffee, beer, lunch—at Harper I left a bushel of apples one day. As interviewees, the informants can provide observations, often already secondhand observations, that the researchers cannot see for themselves. ⁷

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⁷ At Harper School, I did not really find an informant. The principal, ever needing to be several other places, was extremely generous with her time. The family services coordinator tried hardest to get me to see the reality of those children's lives. In a bleak, urban, all-African-American neighborhood, I felt very much the outsider. One day, a visitor, an older woman much younger than me, called me by name, said she had something to tell me. I took her to the teacher lounge, soon
Document Review

Almost every study finds some need for examining newspapers, annual reports, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and the like. Gathering data by studying documents follows the same line of thinking as observing or interviewing. One needs to have one's mind organized, yet be open for unexpected clues. Research questions should be carefully developed in advance and a system set up to keep things on track. The potential usefulness of different documents should be estimated in advance and time allocated so that it is judiciously spent. Just how much time a document will need cannot be determined in advance. It took far more time than we allowed for analysis in Chicago just to find some school's most celebrated document, the School Improvement Plan. The plan seldom works, but having a plan can make the researcher more alert to setbacks and revelations.

Most field researchers keep clippings of newspaper stories, coding or filing them for easy retrieval. By showing interest in various documents, the researcher enlists a number of actors and colleagues in the watch for useful documents.

Documents such as the School Improvement Plan or an achievement test report can be key repositories or measures for the case. The document may be analyzed for frequencies or contingencies, such as how often school success is interpreted in terms of student achievement. Quite often, documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly. Sometimes, of course, the recorder is a more expert observer than the researcher.

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found myself joined hand in hand in prayer, and persuaded to buy "formula" for her baby and trainfare home for her family. When the principal asked, "What was that all about?," embarrassed, I told her. She laughed and said, "That just makes you one of us." It didn't, but that investiture made me feel my $40 was not entirely misspent.