FIELD RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Course 3042

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Course Description

This course will introduce students to field research in educational administration. In particular it will provide students with the opportunity to become familiar with the philosophy, assumptions, characteristics and methods of field research in educational administration. It includes both a theoretical component and a practical component. The practical component will be carried out in a field setting.

Course Objectives

The purpose of this course is to prepare students to conduct field research in ways that will assist them with their doctoral theses. Towards this end, it will provide students with the opportunity to (1) understand the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of field research, (2) understand, evaluate and critique written accounts of research, and (3) develop a degree of proficiency in the research skills including:

(i) Formulating a research focus or question
(ii) Negotiating access to potential research sites
(iii) Analyzing documents
(iv) Interacting and Observing in a field setting
(v) Interviewing and talking to people in the field
(vi) Analyzing field data
(vii) Writing up an account of the research
(viii) Writing a proposal for research

Course Format

Class will take the form of a seminar. Students will be expected to do the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss the topics of the day. I, as instructor, will
not lecture. Instead I see my role as coordinator or initiator of discussion and conversation. As such, student input is valued highly. Students will also have the opportunity to make a brief presentation in class.

Course Assignments and Evaluation

1. **Critique of Research.** Each student will critique a written report of a field or qualitative research study, and share their critique with fellow students in class time. Students will be expected either to distribute copies of the study, or to notify their fellow students where they might locate their chosen research report, at least one week before presentation in class. In their presentations students will identify key elements of the study and point out any shortcomings that may be evident. Students will talk for not more than ten minutes, after which time fellow students may comment on the students' remarks or on selected elements of the studies. Students will not be evaluated on their oral presentation. Instead they will receive marks based on their written appraisals of these studies. These papers are to be handed in not more than two weeks after the oral presentation, and should be from 5 to 10 typed pages.

TOTAL 30 MARKS

2. **Research Report.** Students will also be graded on a research report. Students will be expected to formulate a research topic, narrow the focus or problem to an appropriate dimension, gain entry to a setting or at least acquire consent from those who will be involved in the study, carry out appropriate research methods, analyze incoming data, and write up a report. Students will report their methods and findings in class time. Evaluation of this project will be based strictly on a submitted paper. Normally the length of such a paper would range from 10 to 20 pages.

TOTAL 70 MARKS

Required Text


(Available at University of Toronto Book Store)

Supplementary Texts


**Projected Course Schedule**

**Class 1**

Introduction to Field Research

1. Introductions
2. Review of Course Outline and Requirements
3. Discussion of the Nature of Research and Field Research

**Class 2**

1. Qualitative or Field Research
   
   Readings: (1) Schram, Chapter 1 *(Handout)*
   (2) Merriam, Chapter 1
   (3) Kirby et. al., Introduction, Chapter 1,

   2. Critiquing Research: An example
      
      Reading: (1) Listiak*
Class 3

1. Formulating a question and focusing
   Readings:   (1) Schram, Ch. 5*
               (2) Kirby et. al., Ch. 4 & 6

2. Critiquing Research: An example
   Reading:    (1) MacKinnon *

Class 4

1. Review of potential topics or research questions

2. Proposals and Designs
   Readings:   (1) Merriam, Chapter 3
               (2) Bogdan & Biklen (1982), Ch.2*
               (3) Ryan & Wignall (and others)*

3. Student Critique

Class 5

1. Update on research projects

2. Negotiating Access
   Readings:   (1) Kirby & McKenna, pp. 95-106*
               (2) Bogdan & Biklin pp. 74-79*
               (3) Marshall & Rossman, Chapter pp 59-77*

3. Student Critique

Class 6

1. Update on research projects

2. Ethics
   Readings:   (1) Glesne & Peshkin, Ch. 6*
               (2) Ethical Review Process Materials*
               (3) Gardner*

3. Student Critique
**Class 7**

1. Update on research projects

2. Document Analysis
   Readings: (1) Merriam, Ch. 6
   (2) Woods, Ch. 5

3. Student Critique

**Class 8**

1. Update on research projects

2. Observation
   Readings: (1) Glesne & Peshkin, Ch. 3*
   (2) Merriam, Ch. 5

3. Student Critique

**Class 9**

1. Update on research projects

2. Interview Techniques/ Field Relations
   Readings: (1) Glesne & Peshkin, Chs. 4 & 5*
   (2) Merriam, Ch. 4

3. Student Critique

**Class 10**

1. Update on Research Projects

2. Data Analysis
   Readings: (1) Kirby et. al., Ch. 10, 219-242
   (2) Merriam, Ch. 8 & 9
   (3) Glesne & Peshkin, Ch. 7*

3. Student Critique
Class 11

1. Update on research projects

2. Writing the Results
   Readings:
   (1) Kirby et. al., 242-254
   (2) Merriam, Ch. 11
   (3) Glesne & Peshkin, Ch. 8*

3. Student Critique

Class 12

1. Update on research projects.

2. Open

3. Student Critique

Selected References


**Selected Books**


GUIDE FOR CRITIQUING RESEARCH

Introduction

Is there a significant social problem here that needs addressing? Are there values, for example, that are not being met? Is there a need to address this problem?

What rationale does the study provide for examining this topic? Is it logical? Does it make sense?

Does the research provide evidence that supports the stated rationale? What is the nature of this evidence? Are the sources credible?

What theory or body of literature does the researcher use to provide a perspective on the phenomenon that is being explored? Is it appropriate? Is the review critical?

Does the researcher provide a question, hypothesis or central focus for the study? Is it manageable? Does it fall in line with the rationale, review of literature and theory? Does it follow from the social problem implied or stated in the study?

Methods

What methods does the researcher employ? In other words, how does the researcher go about answering the question or questions that were posed?

Does the researcher adequately describe the setting? Is the setting appropriate?

Does the researcher adequately describe the methods employed? What data are collected? How does the research collect the data? Are these methods appropriate? Does the researcher describe in sufficient detail the sampling techniques? Are they appropriate for the study? Does the researcher describe how the data were analyzed? Is the analysis appropriate?

Do the methods allow the researcher to answer the questions that were posed? Will the methods generate the type of data that will answer the question?

Do the methods generate credible data?

Are the data collected in an ethical way?

Does the researcher bring to the study any idiosyncrasies that might obviously shape the data? Does the researcher account for these?

Results
What kinds of findings does the researcher report?

Do the findings answer the question(s) posed? Are they organized in a way that answers the question(s)?

Are the findings consistent with the methods employed?

Are the findings adequately described?

**Conclusions**

What conclusions does the researcher reach?

Do the findings justify the conclusions?

**General**

Is the study credible? Do you believe what the researchers tell you?

What is the underlying purpose of the study? Who will benefit from it? What effect is it likely to have?

Are there any other problems with the study?
Proposal Template

Your topic.

What is it you want to know?

Setting the context.

What is the problem?

What is known about the problem?

What evidence do you have to support your claim that this is a problem?

What is the relationship of your study to the problem you outline?

What research to date has been carried out on your study topic?

How does this research inform us?

What is wrong with this research?

What is missing in this research?

What effect will this study have on the problem? Why is this study important? (Significance)

Focus

What do you intend to study? (Describe in one sentence)

Reformulate this as a question.

List your specific objectives or sub-questions. (These should be derived from you perspective).
Perspective (Lens)

What is the phenomenon you are studying?

From what angle/lens do you intend to explore this phenomenon?

Consider:

What are the various elements/dimensions/processes associated with it?

What has been written about these things?

What is right with these sources?

What is wrong with them?

What is missing from them?

What is the best way to arrange/describe these elements/dimensions/processes so that you can answer your research question?

What (sub) questions emerge from this perspective?

Method

How are you going to answer your research question(s)?

Why are you choosing these methods/this approach?

How and why are you choosing participants/sites?

How are you going to analyze your data?
Assignment Criteria

1. Substance

a) RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY
   Do you demonstrate that:
   • there a need for exploring this area?
   • it addresses a significant social problem?
   • this problem is worth studying?
   • why a researcher would want to study this area?
   • the literature in the area supports doing a study of this nature?
   • that there is a gap in the literature? /5

b) RESEARCH QUESTION or PURPOSE
   Do you:
   • present a suitably focused question or purpose?
   • propose to explore an area that is manageable in scope?
   • present a question that is based on your stated rationale?
   • present a question or focus that provides a good foundation for exploring your area of interest? /6

c) PERSPECTIVE or THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
   Does your perspective or framework:
   • allow you to “see” your objective of study in a helpful way?
   • provide you with guidance in deciding what specific areas you wish to explore?
   • present a view that is based in the literature?
   • display a consistency with your rationale and research focus? /6

d) CONTEXT
   Do you:
   • provide a detailed description of the setting?
   • allow the reader to either identify or not identify with the situation? /4

d) DESIGN/METHODS
   Do you:
   • demonstrate that your methods are appropriate for the kind of study you are doing?
   • employ methods that allow you to answer your research question or address your research focus?
   • provide sufficient detail in your description of your methods?
   • describe in sufficient detail a description of your data analysis?
   • employ methods that are manageable? /6

e) PRESENTATION OF RESULTS
   • Do your results provide evidence that allow you to answer your research question?
• Are they consistent with the methods you employed?
• Is there enough detail to allow the reader to get a good sense of the setting?
• Do you provide direct citations from respondents (where appropriate)?
• Are the results organized in a clear manner? /12

f) DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION
• Discussion (Optional)
  - Do you provide the reader with a clear understanding of what the results of your study mean?
  - Do you integrate relevant literature sources into your discussion?
  - Do you use literature to support your contentions?
• Conclusions
  - Are your conclusions succinct and to the point?
  - Do they flow naturally from the rationale, focus, perspective, methods and results? /4

2. Form

a) Expression (language use/ sentence structure/ flow) /4
b) Coherence (progression of ideas/ sequencing /continuity) /4
c) Clarity /4

3. Overall Impression

• Is the study convincing?
• Does it conform to ethical standards?
• Is it worthwhile/significant? Who benefits and how might they benefit?
• Does the study “hang together?” /5

4. Reflection

• How have you felt about the process?
• Is there anything you would have done in a different way?
• What aspects of your study are you most satisfied with?
• What did you learn from the processs? /10

Total /70