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The Nature of Qualitative Inquiry

The Fruit of Qualitative Methods

There once lived a man in a country with no fruit trees. A scholar, he spent a great deal of time reading. He often came across references to fruit. The descriptions enticed him to undertake a journey to experience fruit for himself.

He went to the marketplace and inquired where he could find the land of fruit. After much searching he located someone who knew the way. After a long and arduous journey, he came to the end of the directions and found himself at the entrance to a large apple orchard. It was springtime and the apple trees were in blossom.

The scholar entered the orchard and, expectantly, pulled off a blossom and put it in his mouth. He liked neither the texture of the flower nor its taste. He went quickly to another tree and sampled another blossom, and then another, and another. Each blossom, though quite beautiful, was distasteful to him. He left the orchard and returned to his home country, reporting to his fellow villagers that fruit was a much overrated food.

Being unable to recognize the difference between the spring blossom and the summer fruit, the scholar never realized that he had not experienced what he was looking for.

—From Halcolm's *Inquiry Parables*

EXHIBIT 1.1 Three Kinds of Qualitative Data

Interviews

Open-ended questions and probes yield in-depth responses about people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Data consist of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable.

Observations

Fieldwork descriptions of activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience. Data consist of field notes: rich, detailed descriptions, including the context within which the observations were made.

Documents

Written materials and other documents from organizational, clinical, or programs records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries, letters, artistic works, photographs, and memorabilia; and written responses to open-ended surveys. Data consist of excerpts from documents captured in a way that records and preserves context.

Recognizing Qualitative Data

This book discusses how to collect, analyze, and use qualitative data. To begin, let's examine the fruit of qualitative methods. It is important to know what qualitative data and findings look like so that you will know what you are seeking. It will also be important to consider criteria for judging the quality of qualitative data. Apples come to market sorted by type (Red Delicious, Golden), purpose (e.g., cooking or eating), and quality. Likewise, qualitative studies vary by type, purpose, and quality.

Qualitative findings grow out of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents. *Interviews* yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. The data from *observations* consist of detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience. *Document analysis* includes studying excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries; and open-ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys. (See Exhibit 1.1.)

The data for qualitative analysis typically come from fieldwork. During fieldwork, the researcher spends time in the setting under study—a program, an organization, a community, or wherever situations of importance to a study can be observed, people interviewed, and documents analyzed. The researcher makes firsthand observations of activities and interactions, sometimes engaging personally in those activities as a *participant observer.* For example, an evaluator might participate in all or part of the program under study, participating as a regular program member, client, or student. The qualitative researcher talks with people

about their experiences and perceptions. More formal individual or group interviews may be conducted. Relevant records and documents are examined. Extensive field notes are collected through these observations, interviews, and document reviews. The voluminous raw data in these field notes are organized into readable narrative descriptions with major themes, categories, and illustrative case examples extracted through content analysis. The themes, patterns, understandings, and insights that emerge from fieldwork and subsequent analysis are the fruit of qualitative inquiry.

Qualitative findings may be presented alone or in combination with quantitative data. Research and evaluation studies employing multiple methods, including combinations of qualitative and quantitative data, are common. At the simplest level, a questionnaire or interview that asks both fixed-choice (closed) questions and open-ended questions is an example of how quantitative measurement and qualitative inquiry are often combined.

The quality of qualitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher. Systematic and rigorous observation involves far more than just being present and looking around. Skillful interviewing involves much more than just asking questions. Content analysis requires considerably more than just reading to see what's there. Generating useful and credible qualitative findings through observation, interviewing, and content analysis requires discipline, knowledge, training, practice, creativity, and hard work.

This chapter provides an overview of qualitative inquiry. Later chapters examine how to choose among the many options available within the broad range of qualitative methods, theoretical perspectives, and applications; how to design a qualitative study; how to use observational methods and conduct in-depth, open-ended interviews; and how to analyze qualitative data to generate findings.

Qualitative Findings: Themes, Patterns, Concepts, Insights, Understandings

> Newton and the apple. Freud and anxiety. Jung and dreams. Piaget and his children. Darwin and Galapagos tortoises. Marx and England's factories. Whyte and street corners. What are you obsessed with?
>
> —Halcolm

Mary Field Belenky and her colleagues set out to study women's ways of knowing. They conducted extensive interviews with 135 women from diverse backgrounds probing how they thought about knowledge, authority, truth, themselves, life changes, and life in general. They worked as a team to group similar responses and stories together, informed partly by previous research but ultimately basing the analysis on their own collective sense of what categories best captured what they found in the narrative data. They argued with each other about which responses belonged in which categories. They created and abandoned categories. They looked for com-

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Discovery of an early qualitative evaluation report

monalities and differences. They worked hard to honor the diverse points of view they found while also seeking patterns across stories, experiences, and perspectives. One theme emerged as particularly powerful: "Again and again women spoke of 'gaining voice' " (Belenky et al. 1986:16). Voice versus silence emerged as a central metaphor for informing variations in ways of knowing. After painstaking analysis, they ended up with the five categories of knowing summarized in Exhibit 1.2, a framework that became very influential in women's studies and represents one kind of fruit from qualitative inquiry.

EXHIBIT 1.2 **Women's Ways of Knowing: An Example of Qualitative Findings**

Silence: A position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority.

Received knowledge: Women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing knowledge from external authorities, but not capable of creating knowledge on their own.

Subjective knowledge: A perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited.

Procedural knowledge: Women are invested in learning and apply objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge.

Constructed knowledge: Women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing.

SOURCE: Belenky et al. (1986:15).

One of the best-known and most influential books in organizational development and management is *In Search of Excellence: Lessons From America's Best-Run Companies.* Peters and Waterman (1982) based the book on case studies of 62 highly regarded companies. They visited companies, conducted extensive interviews, and studied corporate documents. From that massive amount of data they extracted eight attributes of excellence: (1) a bias for action; (2) close to the customer; (3) autonomy and entrepreneurship; (4) productivity through people; (5) hands-on, value-driven; (6) stick to the knitting; (7) simple form, lean staff; and (8) simultaneous loose-tight properties. Their book devotes a chapter to each theme with case examples and implications. Their research helped launch the quality movement that has now moved from the business world to not-for-profit organizations and government. This study also illustrates a common qualitative sampling strategy: studying a relatively small number of special cases that are successful at something and therefore a good source of lessons learned.

Stephen Covey (1990) used this same sampling approach in doing case studies of "highly effective people." He identified seven habits these people practice: (1) being proactive; (2) beginning with the end in mind; (3) putting first things first; (4) thinking win/win; (5) seeking first to understand, then seeking to be understood; (6) synergizing, or engaging in creative cooperation; and (7) self-renewal.

Both of these best-selling books, *In Search of Excellence* and *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,* distill a small number of important *lessons* from a huge amount of data based on outstanding exemplars. It is common in qualitative analysis for mounds of field notes and months of work to reduce to a small number of core themes. The quality of the insights generated is what matters, not the number of such insights. For example, in an evaluation of 34 programs aimed at people in poverty, we found a core theme that separated more effective from less effective programs: How people are treated affects how they treat others. If staff members are treated autocratically and insensitively by

management, with suspicion and disrespect, staff will treat clients the same way. Contrariwise, responsiveness reinforces responsiveness, and empowerment breeds empowerment. These insights became the centerpiece of subsequent cross-project, collaborative organizational and staff development processes.

A different kind of qualitative finding is illustrated by Angela Browne's book *When Battered Women Kill* (1987). Browne conducted in-depth interviews with 42 women from 15 states who were charged with a crime in the death or serious injury of their mates. She was often the first to hear these women's stories. She used one couple's history and vignettes from nine others, representative of the entire sample, to illuminate the progression of an abusive relationship from romantic courtship to the onset of abuse through its escalation until it was ongoing and eventually provoked a homicide. Her work helped lead to legal recognition of battered women's syndrome as a legitimate defense, especially in offering insight into the common outsider's question: Why doesn't the woman just leave? An insider's perspective on the debilitating, destructive, and all-encompassing brutality of battering reveals that question for what it is: the facile judgment of one who hasn't been there. The effectiveness of Browne's careful, detailed, and straightforward descriptions and quotations lies in their capacity to take us inside the abusive relationship. Offering that inside perspective powers qualitative reporting.

Clark Moustakas (1995), a humanistic psychologist and phenomenologist, also gives us an insider's perspective: his own. An astute and dedicated observer of relationships, especially therapeutic relationships, he drew deeply on his own experiences and clinical cases to identify, distinguish, and elaborate three primary processes that contribute to the development of a relationship: "Being-In," "Being-For," and "Being-With."

- Being-In involves immersing oneself in another's world: listening deeply and attentively so as to enter into the other person's experience and perception. "I do not select, interpret, advise, or direct. . . . Being-In the world of the other is a way of going wide open, entering in as if for the first time, hearing just what is, leaving out my own thoughts, feelings, theories, biases. . . . I enter with the intention of understanding and accepting perceptions and not presenting my own view or reactions. . . . I only want to encourage and support the other person's expression, what and how it is, how it came to be, and where it is going." (Moustakas 1995: 82-83)

- Being-For involves taking a stand in support of the other person, being there *for* the other. "I am listening. I am also offering a position, and that position has an element of my being on that person's side, against all others who would minimize, deprecate, or deny this person's right to be and to grow. . . . I become an advocate of the person with reference to his or her frustrations and problems in dealing with others." (Moustakas 1995:83)

- Being-With involves being present as one's own person in relation to another person, bringing one's own knowledge and experience into the relationship. "This may involve disagreeing with the other's ways of interpreting or judging or presenting some aspect of the world. Being-With means listening and hearing the other's feelings, thoughts, objectives, but it also means offering my own perceptions and views. There is, in Being-With, a sense of joint enterprise —two people fully involved, struggling, exploring, sharing." (Moustakas 1995:84)

EXHIBIT 1.3 Coming-of-Age Paradigms

Dimensions of Comparison	*Tribal Initiation*	*Modern Coming of Age*
View of life passages	One-time transition from child to adult	Multiple passages over a lifetime journey
Territory	Tribal territory	Earth: Global community
Ancestry	Creation myth	Evolutionary story of humankind
Identity	Becoming a man or woman	Becoming a complete person
Approach	Standardized	Individualized
Outcome	Tribe-based identity	Personality identity: Sense of self
Message	You are first and foremost a member of the tribe	You are first and foremost a person in your own right

SOURCE: Patton (1999a:333, 335).

Qualitative findings often have this simple yet elegant and insightful character. This straightforward yet nuanced framework represents a creative synthesis of years of participant observation and personal inquiry. Through cases, dialogues, quotations, cases, and introspective reflections, Moustakas illuminates the process of moving from Being-In to Being-For and ultimately Being-With. His work exemplifies the contribution of phenomenological inquiry to humanistic psychology.

Still a different format for capturing and reporting qualitative findings is illustrated by my own inquiry into alternative coming-of-age approaches. I used the device of constructing ideal-typical alternative paradigms to compare and contrast what I learned (Patton 1997a). Exhibit 1.3 provides a sampling of contrasts between traditional tribe-centered initiations and modern youth-centered coming-of-age celebrations. These kinds of polar contrasts can sometimes set up a Hegelian dialectic of thesis and antithesis that leads to a new synthesis. In philosophy such contrasts derive from the ruminations of philosophers; in qualitative research such thematic contrasts emanate from and are grounded in fieldwork.

This quick sampling of the fruit of qualitative inquiry is meant, like a wine tasting, to demonstrate choices toward developing a more sophisticated palate, or like appetizers, as an opening to the fuller feast yet to come. The next section discusses some of the different research and evaluation purposes that affect what kind of fruit results from qualitative inquiry and how the quality of that fruit is judged.

Different Purposes of and Audiences for Qualitative Studies: Research, Evaluation, Dissertations, and Personal Inquiry

As the title of this book indicates, qualitative methods are used in both research and

evaluation. But because the purposes of research and evaluation are different, the criteria for judging qualitative studies can vary depending on purpose. This point is important. It means one can't judge the appropriateness of the methods in any study or the quality of the resulting findings without knowing the study's purpose, agreed-on uses, and intended audiences. Evaluation and research typically have different purposes, expected uses, and intended users. Dissertations add yet another layer of complexity to this mix. Let's begin with evaluation.

Program evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming. Policies, organizations, and personnel can also be evaluated. Evaluative research, quite broadly, can include any effort to judge or enhance human effectiveness through systematic data-based inquiry. Human beings are engaged in all kinds of efforts to make the world a better place. These efforts include assessing needs, formulating policies, passing laws, delivering programs, managing people and resources, providing therapy, developing communities, changing organizational culture, educating students, intervening in conflicts, and solving problems. In these and other efforts to make the world a better place, the question of whether the people involved are accomplishing what they want to accomplish arises. When one examines and judges accomplishments and effectiveness, one is engaged in evaluation. When this examination of effectiveness is conducted systematically and empirically through careful data collection and thoughtful analysis, one is engaged in evaluation *research.*

Qualitative methods are often used in evaluations because they tell the *program's story* by capturing and communicating the *participants' stories.* Evaluation case studies have all the elements of a good story. They tell what happened, when, to whom, and with what consequences. Many examples in this book are drawn from program evaluation, policy analysis, and organizational development. The purpose of such studies is to gather information and generate findings that are useful. Understanding the program's and participants' stories is useful to the extent that they illuminate the processes and outcomes of the program for those who must make decisions about the program. In *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* (Patton 1997a), I presented a comprehensive approach to doing evaluations that are useful, practical, ethical, and accurate. The primary criterion for judging such evaluations is the extent to which intended users actually use the findings for decision making and program improvement. The methodological implication of this criterion is that the intended users must value the findings and find them credible. They must be interested in the stories, experiences, and perceptions of program participants beyond simply knowing how many came into the program, how many completed it, and how many did what afterward. Qualitative findings in evaluation illuminate the people behind the numbers and put faces on the statistics, not to make hearts bleed, though that may occur, but to deepen understanding.

Research, especially fundamental or basic research, differs from evaluation in that its primary purpose is to generate or test theory and contribute to knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Such knowledge, and the theories that undergird knowledge, may subsequently inform action and evaluation, but action is not the primary purpose of funda-

QUALIA

Neurologist V. S. Ramachandran studies unique cases of brain damage trying to find out how a young man can think his parents are imposters; why a woman with a stroke laughs uncontrollably; how a man with a stroke can be oblivious to being paralyzed on one side; why amputees have intense feeling, even pain, in missing limbs; and why an epilepsy patient has intense religious experiences. Beyond what can be measured in brain waves and electrical impulses, he strives to understand "qualia"—what humans subjectively add to the scientifically measurable aspects of experience. This involves inquiry into the greatest shared challenge for neuroscience, social sciences, and philosophy: understanding consciousness. Ramachandran postulates that consciousness may involve the capacity to process qualia and that that capacity resides in a specific brain location (Ramachandran and Blakeslee, 1998).

If Ramachandran is right, qualitative inquirers may need that part of the brain to be especially active, accessible, and responsive.

mental research. Qualitative inquiry is especially powerful as a source of *grounded theory,* theory that is inductively generated from fieldwork, that is, theory that emerges from the researcher's observations and interviews out in the real world rather than in the laboratory or the academy. The primary audiences for research are other researchers and scholars, as well as policymakers and others interested in understanding some phenomenon or problem of interest. The research training, methodological preferences, and scientific values of those who use research will affect how valuable and credible they find the empirical and theoretical fruit of qualitative studies.

Dissertations and graduate theses offer special insight into the importance of attention to audience. Savvy graduate students learn that to complete a degree program, the student's committee must approve the work. The particular understandings, values, preferences, and biases of committee members come into play in that approval process. The committee will, in essence, evaluate the student's contribution, including the quality of the methodological procedures followed and the analysis done. Qualitative dissertations, once quite rare, have become increasingly common as the criteria for judging qualitative contributions to knowledge have become better understood and accepted. But those criteria are not absolute or universally agreed on. As we shall see, there are many varieties of qualitative inquiry and multiple criteria for judging quality, many of which remain disputed.

While the preceding discussion of evaluation, research, and dissertations has emphasized taking into account external audiences and consumers of qualitative studies, it is also important to acknowledge that *you* may be the primary intended audience for your work. You may study something because *you* want to understand it. As my children grew to adulthood, I found myself asking questions about coming of age in modern society so I undertook a *personal inquiry* that became a book (Patton 1997a), but I didn't start out to write a book. I started out trying to understand my own experience and the experiences of my children. That is a form of

qualitative inquiry. While doing interviews with recipients of MacArthur Foundation Fellowships (popularly called "Genius Awards"), I was told by a social scientist that her fieldwork was driven by her own search for understanding and that she disciplined herself to not even think about publication while engaged in interviewing and observing because she didn't want to have her inquiry affected by attention to external audiences. *She wanted to know because she wanted to know,* and she had made a series of career and professional decisions that allowed her to focus on her personal inquiry without being driven by the traditional academic admonition to "publish or perish." She didn't want to subject herself to or have her work influenced by external criteria and judgment.

In summary, all inquiry designs are affected by intended purpose and targeted audience, but purpose and audience deserve special emphasis in the case of qualitative studies, where the criteria for judging quality may be poorly understood or in dispute, even among qualitative methodologists. This book cannot resolve these debates, but it will illuminate the methodological options and their implications. (Chapter 9 discusses alternative criteria for judging the quality of qualitative studies.)

Making Methods Decisions

The implication of thinking about purpose and audience in designing studies is that methods, no less than knowledge, are dependent on context. No rigid rules can prescribe what data to gather to investigate a particular interest or problem. There is no recipe or formula in making methods decisions. Widely respected psychometrician Lee J. Cronbach has observed that designing a study is as much art as science. It is "an exercise of the dramatic imagination" (Cronbach 1982:239). In research as in art, there can be no single, ideal standard. Beauty no less than "truth" is in the eye of the beholder, and the beholders of research and evaluation can include a plethora of stakeholders: scholars, policymakers, funders, program managers, staff, program participants, journalists, critics, and the general public. Any given design inevitably reflects some imperfect interplay of resources, capabilities, purposes, possibilities, creativity, and personal judgments by the people involved.

Research, like diplomacy, is the art of the possible. Exhibit 1.4 provides a set of questions to consider in the design process, regardless of type of inquiry. With that background, we can turn to consideration of the relative strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Methods Choices: Contrasting Qualitative and Quantitative Emphases

> Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.
>
> —Albert Einstein

EXHIBIT 1.4 **Some Guiding Questions and Options for Methods Decisions**

1. What are the purposes of the inquiry?
   Research: Contribution to knowledge
   Evaluation: Program improvement and decision making
   Dissertation: Demonstrate doctoral-level scholarship
   Personal inquiry: Find out for oneself
2. Who are the primary audiences for the findings?
   Scholars, researchers, academicians
   Program funders, administrators, staff, participants
   Doctoral committee
   Oneself, friends, family, lovers
3. What questions will guide the inquiry?
   Theory-derived, theory-testing, and/or theory-oriented questions
   Practical, applied, action-oriented questions and issues
   Academic degree or discipline/specialization priorities
   Matters of personal interest and concern, even passion
4. What data will answer or illuminate the inquiry questions?
   Qualitative: Interviews, field observations, documents
   Quantitative: Surveys, tests, experiments, secondary data
   Mixed methods: What kind of mix? Which methods are primary?
5. What resources are available to support the inquiry?
   Financial resources
   Time
   People resources
   Access, connections
6. What criteria will be used to judge the quality of the findings?
   Traditional research criteria: Rigor, validity, reliability, generalizability
   Evaluation standards: Utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy
   Nontraditional criteria: Trustworthiness, diversity of perspectives, clarity of voice, credibility of the inquirer to primary users of the findings

Thinking about design alternatives and methods choices leads directly to consideration of the relative strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative data. The approach here is pragmatic. Some questions lend themselves to numerical answers; some don't. If you want to know how much people weigh, use a scale. If you want to know if they're obese, measure body fat in relation to height and weight and compare the results to population norms. If you want to know what their weight *means* to them, how it affects them, how they think about it, and what they do about it, you need to ask them questions, find out about their experiences, and hear their stories. A comprehen-

sive and multifaceted understanding of weight in people's lives requires both their numbers and their stories. Doctors who look only at test results and don't also listen to their patients are making judgments with inadequate knowledge, and vice versa.

Qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, require the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned.

The advantage of a quantitative approach is that it's possible to measure the reactions of a great many people to a limited set of questions, thus facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. This gives a broad, generalizable set of findings presented succinctly and parsimoniously. By contrast, qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increases the depth of understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability.

Validity in quantitative research depends on careful instrument construction to ensure that the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. The instrument must then be administered in an appropriate, standardized manner according to prescribed procedures. The focus is on the measuring instrument—the test items, survey questions, or other measurement tools. In qualitative inquiry, **the researcher is the instrument.** The credibility of qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork—as well as things going on in a person's life that might prove a distraction. Guba and Lincoln (1981) have commented on this aspect of qualitative research:

> Fatigue, shifts in knowledge, and cooptation, as well as variations resulting from differences in training, skill, and experience among different "instruments," easily occur. But this loss in rigor is more than offset by the flexibility, insight, and ability to build on tacit knowledge that is the peculiar province of the human instrument. (p. 113)

Because qualitative and quantitative methods involve differing strengths and weaknesses, they constitute alternative, but not mutually exclusive, strategies for research. Both qualitative and quantitative data can be collected in the same study. To further illustrate these contrasting approaches and provide concrete examples of the fruit of qualitative inquiry, the rest of this chapter presents select excerpts from actual studies.

Comparing Two Kinds of Data: An Example

The Technology for Literacy Center was a computer-based adult literacy program in Saint Paul, Minnesota. It operated out of a storefront facility in a lower-socioeconomic area of the city. In 1988, after three years of pilot operation, a major funding decision had to be made about whether to continue the program. Anticipating the funding decision, a year earlier local foundations and the public schools had supported a *summative evaluation* to determine the overall outcomes and cost-effectiveness of the center. The evaluation design included both quantitative and qualitative data.

The quantitative testing data showed great variation. The statistics on average

achievement gains masked great differences among participants. The report concluded that although testing showed substantial achievement test gains for the treatment group versus the control group, the more important finding concerned the highly individualized nature of student progress. The report concluded, "The data on variation in achievement and instructional hours lead to a very dramatic, important and significant finding: *there is no average student at TLC*" (Patton and Stockdill 1987:33).

This finding highlights the kind of program or treatment situation where qualitative data are particularly helpful and appropriate. The Technology for Literacy Center has a highly individualized program in which learners proceed at their own pace based on specific needs and interest. The students come in at very different levels, with a range of goals, participate in widely varying ways, and make very different gains. Average gain scores and average hours of instruction provide a parsimonious overview of aggregate progress, but such statistical data do little to help funders understand what the individual variation means. To get at the meaning of the program for individual participants, the evaluation included case studies and qualitative data from interviews.

INDIVIDUAL CASE EXAMPLES

One case is the story of Barbara Jenkins, a 65-year-old Black grandmother who came to Minnesota after a childhood in the deep South. She works as a custodian and house cleaner and is proud of never having been on welfare. She is the primary breadwinner for a home with five children spanning three generations, including her oldest daughter's teenage children for whom she has cared since her daughter's unexpected death from hepatitis. During the week she seldom gets more than three hours of sleep each night. At the time of the case study, she had spent 15 months in the program and progressed from not reading at all (second-grade level) to being a regular library user (and testing a grade level higher than where she began). She developed an interest in Black history and reported being particularly pleased at being able to read the Bible on her own. She described what it was like not being able to read:

> Where do you go for a job? You can't make out an application. You go to a doctor and you can't fill out the forms, and it's very embarrassing. You have to depend on other people to do things like this for you. Sometimes you don't even want to ask your own kids because it's just like you're depending too much on people, and sometimes they do it willingly, and sometimes you have to beg people to help. . . .
>
> All the progress has made me feel lots better about myself because I can do some of the things I've been wanting to do and I couldn't do. It's made me feel more independent to do things myself instead of depending on other people to do them for me.

A second contrasting case tells the story of Sara Johnson, a 42-year-old Caucasian woman who dropped out of school in the 10th grade. She is a clerical office manager. She tested at 12th-grade level on entry to the program. After 56 hours of study over 17 days, she received her general equivalency diploma (GED), making her a high school graduate. She immediately entered college. She said that the decision to return for her GED was

> an affirmation, as not having a diploma had really hurt me for a long time. . . . It was always scary wondering if somebody actually found

> out that I was not a graduate that they would fire me or they wouldn't accept me because I hadn't graduated. The hardest thing for me to do was tell my employer. He is very much into education and our company is education-oriented. So the hardest thing I ever had to do was tell him I was a high school dropout. I needed to tell because I needed time to go and take the test. He was just so understanding. I couldn't believe it. It was just wonderful. I thought he was going to be disappointed in me, and he thought it was wonderful that I was going back. He came to graduation.

These short excerpts from two contrasting cases illustrate the value of detailed, descriptive data in deepening our understanding of individual variation. Knowing that each woman progressed about one grade level on a standardized reading test is only a small part of a larger, much more complex picture. Yet, with over 500 people in the program, it would be overwhelming for funders and decision makers to attempt to make sense of 500 detailed case studies (about 5,000 double-spaced pages). Statistical data provide a succinct and parsimonious summary of major patterns, while select case studies provide depth, detail, and individual meaning.

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEWS

Another instructive contrast is to compare closed-ended questionnaire results with responses to open-ended group interviews. Questionnaire responses to quantitative, standardized items indicated that 77% of the adult literacy students were "very happy" with the Technology for Literacy Center program; 74% reported learning "a great deal." These and similar results revealed a general pattern of satisfaction and progress. But what did the program mean to students in their own words?

To get the perspective of students, I conducted group interviews. "Groups are not just a convenient way to accumulate the individual knowledge of their members. They give rise synergistically to insights and solutions that would not come about without them" (Brown, Collins, and Duguid 1989: 40). In group interviews I asked students to describe the program's outcomes in personal terms. I asked, "What difference has what you are learning made in your lives?" Here are some responses.

> I love the newspaper now, and actually read it. Yeah, I love to pick up the newspaper now. I used to hate it. Now I *love* the newspaper.

> I can follow sewing directions. I make a grocery list now, so I'm a better shopper. I don't forget things.

> Yeah, you don't know how embarrassing it is to go shopping and not be able to read the wife's grocery list. It's helped me out so much in the grocery store.

> Helps me with my medicine. Now I can read the bottles and the directions! I was afraid to give the kids medicine before because I wasn't sure.

> I don't get lost anymore. I can find my way around. I can make out directions, read the map. I work construction and we change locations a lot. Now I can find my way around. I don't get lost anymore!

> Just getting a driver's license will be wonderful. I'm 50. If I don't get the GED, but if I can get a license . . . ! I can drive well, but I'm scared to death of the written test. Just getting a driver's license . . . , a driver's license.

> Now I read outdoor magazines. I used to just read the titles of books—now I read the books!

> I was always afraid to read at school and at church. I'm not afraid to read the Bible now at

> Bible class. It's really important to me to be able to read the Bible.
>
> I can fill out applications now. You have to know how to fill out an application in this world. I can look in the Yellow Pages. It used to be so embarrassing not to be able to fill out applications, not to be able to find things in the Yellow Pages. I feel so much better now. At least my application is filled out right, even if I don't get the job, at least my application is filled out right.
>
> I'm learning just enough to keep ahead of my kids. My family is my motivation. Me and my family. Once you can read to your kids, it makes all the difference in the world. It helps you to want to read and to read more. When I can read myself, I can help them read so they can have a better life. The kids love it when I read to them.

These group interview excerpts provide some qualitative insights into the individual, personal experiences of adults learning to read. The questionnaire results (77% satisfied) provided data on statistically generalizable patterns, but the standardized questions only tap the surface of what it means for the program to have had "great perceived impact." The much smaller sample of open-ended interviews adds depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience. Another example will show that qualitative data can yield not only deeper understanding but also political action as the depth of participants' feelings is revealed.

The Power of Qualitative Data

In the early 1970s, the school system of Kalamazoo, Michigan, implemented a new accountability system. It was a complex system that included using standardized achievement tests administered in both fall and spring, criterion-referenced tests developed by teachers, performance objectives, teacher peer ratings, student ratings of teachers, parent ratings of teachers, principal ratings of teachers, and teacher self-ratings.

The Kalamazoo accountability system began to attract national attention. For example, the *American School Board Journal* reported in April 1974 that "Kalamazoo schools probably will have one of the most comprehensive computerized systems of personnel evaluation and accountability yet devised" (p. 40). In the first of a three-part series on Kalamazoo, the *American School Board Journal* asserted: "Take it from Kalamazoo: *a comprehensive, performance-based system of evaluation and accountability can work*" ("Kalamazoo Schools" 1974:32).

Not everyone agreed with that positive assessment, however. The Kalamazoo Education Association charged that teachers were being demoralized by the accountability system. Some school officials, on the other hand, argued that teachers did not want to be accountable. In the spring of 1976, the Kalamazoo Education Association, with assistance from the Michigan Education Association and the National Education Association, sponsored a survey of teachers to find out the teachers' perspective on the accountability program (Perrone and Patton 1976).

The education association officials were interested primarily in a questionnaire consisting of standardized items. One part of the closed-ended questionnaire provided teachers with a set of statements with which they could agree or disagree. The questionnaire results showed that teachers felt the accountability system was largely ineffective and inadequate. For example, 90% of the teachers disagreed with the school administration's published statement "The Kala-

mazoo accountability system is designed to personalize and individualize education"; 88% reported that the system does not assist teachers to become more effective; 90% responded that the accountability system has not improved educational planning in Kalamazoo; and 93% believed, "Accountability as practiced in Kalamazoo creates an undesirable atmosphere of anxiety among teachers." And 90% asserted, "The accountability system is mostly a public relations effort." Nor did teachers feel that the accountability system fairly reflected what they did as teachers, since 97% of them agreed, "Accountability as practiced in Kalamazoo places too much emphasis on things that can be quantified so that it misses the results of teaching that are not easily measured."

It is relatively clear from these statements that most teachers who responded to the questionnaire were negative about the accountability system. When school officials and school board members reviewed the questionnaire results, however, many of them immediately dismissed those results by arguing that they had never expected teachers to like the system, teachers didn't really want to be accountable, and the teachers' unions had told their teachers to respond negatively anyway. In short, many school officials and school board members dismissed the questionnaire results as biased, inaccurate, and the results of teacher union leaders telling teachers how to respond in order to discredit the school authorities.

The same questionnaire included two open-ended questions. The first was placed midway through the questionnaire, and the second came at the end of the questionnaire.

1. Please use this space to make any further comments or recommendations concerning any component of the accountability system.
2. Finally, we'd like you to use this space to add any additional comments you'd like to make about any part of the Kalamazoo accountability system.

A total of 373 teachers (70% of those who responded to the questionnaire) took the time to respond to one of these open-ended questions. All of the comments made by teachers were typed verbatim and included in the report. These open-ended data filled 101 pages. When the school officials and school board members rejected the questionnaire data, rather than argue with them about the meaningfulness of teacher responses to the standardized items, we asked them to turn to the pages of open-ended teacher comments and simply read at random what teachers said. Examples of the comments they read, and could read on virtually any page in the report, are reproduced below in six representative responses from the middle pages of the report.

Teacher Response No. 284: "I don't feel that fear is necessary in an accountability situation. The person at the head of a school system has to be human, not a machine. You just don't treat people like they are machines!

"The superintendent used fear in this system to get what he wanted. That's very hard to explain in a short space. It's something you have to live through to appreciate. He lied on many occasions and was very deceitful. Teachers need a situation where they feel comfortable. I'm not saying that accountability is not good. I am saying the one we have is lousy. It's hurting the students—the very ones we're supposed to be working for."

Teacher Response No. 257: "This system is creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. I can only speak for the school I am in, but people are tense, hostile and losing their humanity. Gone is the good will and team spirit of administration and staff and I believe this

all begins at the top. One can work in these conditions but why, if it is to 'shape up' a few poor teachers. Instead, it's having disastrous results on the whole faculty community."

Teacher Response No. 244: "In order to fully understand the oppressive, stifling atmosphere in Kalamazoo you have to 'be in the trenches'—the classrooms. In 10 years of teaching, I have never ended a school year as depressed about 'education' as I have this year. If things do not improve in the next two years, I will leave education. The Kalamazoo accountability system must be viewed in its totality and not just the individual component parts of it. In toto, it is oppressive and stifling.

"In teaching government and history, students often asked what it was like to live in a dictatorship. I now know firsthand.

"The superintendent with his accountability model and his abrasive condescending manner has managed in three short years to destroy teacher morale and effective creative classroom teaching.

"Last evening my wife and I went to an end of the school year party. The atmosphere there was strange—little exuberance, laughter or release. People who in previous years laughed, sang and danced were unnaturally quiet and somber. Most people went home early. The key topic was the superintendent, the school board election, and a millage campaign. People are still tense and uncertain.

"While the school board does not 'pay us to be happy' it certainly must recognize that emotional stability is necessary for effective teaching to take place. The involuntary transfers, intimidation, coercion and top to bottom 'channelized' communication in Kalamazoo must qualify this school system for the list of 'least desirable' school systems in the nation."

Teacher Response No. 233: "I have taught in Kalamazoo for 15 years and under five superintendents. Until the present superintendent, I found working conditions to be enjoyable and teachers and administration and the Board of Education all had a good working relationship. In the past 4 years—under the present superintendent—I find the atmosphere deteriorating to the point where teachers distrust each other and teachers do not trust administrators at all! We understand the position the administrators have been forced into and feel compassion for them—however—we still have no trust! Going to school each morning is no longer an enjoyable experience."

Teacher Response No. 261: "A teacher needs some checks and balances to function effectively; it would be ridiculous to think otherwise—if you are a concerned teacher. But in teaching you are not turning out neatly packaged little mechanical products all alike and endowed with the same qualities. This nonsensical accountability program we have here makes the superintendent look good to the community. But someone who is in the classroom dealing with all types of kids, some who cannot read, some who hardly ever come to school, some who are in and out of jail, this teacher can see that and the rigid accountability model that neglects the above mentioned problems is pure 'BULLSHIT!' "

Teacher Response No. 251: " 'Fear' is the word for 'accountability' as applied in our system. My teaching before 'Accountability' is the same as now. 'Accountability' is a political ploy to maintain power. Whatever good there may have been in it in the beginning has been destroyed by the awareness that each new educational 'system' has at its base a political motive. Students get screwed. . . . The bitterness and hatred in our system is incredible. What began as 'noble' has been destroyed. You wouldn't believe the new layers of administration that have been created just to keep this monster going.

"Our finest compliment around our state is that the other school systems know what is go-

ing on and are having none of it. Lucky people. Come down and *visit in hell* sometime."

Face Validity and Credibility

What was the impact of the qualitative data collected from teachers in Kalamazoo? You will recall that many of the school board members initially dismissed the standardized questionnaire responses as biased, rigged, and the predictable result of the union's campaign to discredit school officials. However, after reading through a few pages of the teachers' own personal comments, after hearing about teachers' experiences with the accountability system in their own words, the tenor of the discussion about the evaluation report changed. School board members could easily reject what they perceived as a "loaded" questionnaire. They could not so easily dismiss the anguish, fear, and depth of concern revealed in the teachers' own reflections. The teachers' words had face validity and credibility. Discussion of the evaluation results shifted from an attack on the measures used to the question: "What do you think we should do?"

During the summer of 1976, following discussion of the evaluation report, the superintendent "resigned." The new superintendent and school board in 1976-1977 used the evaluation report as a basis for starting fresh with teachers. A year later teacher association officials reported a new environment of teacher-administration cooperation in developing a mutually acceptable accountability system. The evaluation report did not directly cause these changes. Many other factors were involved in Kalamazoo at that time. However, the qualitative information in the evaluation report revealed the full scope and nature of teachers' feelings about what it was like to work in the atmosphere created by the accountability system. The depth of those feelings as expressed in the teachers' own words became part of the impetus for change in Kalamazoo.

THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD

"I know of a small boy eight years old who sat alone on a park bench five or six hours every day for almost a week. He alternately played with the pigeons, watched the passing people, made patterns in the air with his feet and legs, or looked blankly into space. On the fourth day of his visit to this bench, a friend of mine asked this boy why he sat there every day. He replied that his mother brought him there in the mornings telling him to wait there while she looked for a job and a place for them to stay. There is no place else for him to go. When asked what he did all day he simply said that he watched and he waited. He watched the pigeons and the people. He made a game of guessing where each had to go. He said that mostly he just waited for his mother to come at the end of the day so they could wait together until the night shelter opened" (Boxill 1990:1).

The Purpose of Open-Ended Responses

The preceding example illustrates the difference between qualitative inquiry based on responses to open-ended questions and quantitative measurement based on scales composed of standardized questionnaire items. Quantitative measures are succinct, parsimonious, and easily aggregated for analysis; quantitative data are systematic, standardized, and easily presented in a short space. By contrast, the qualitative findings are longer, more detailed, and variable in content; analysis is difficult because re-

sponses are neither systematic nor standardized. Yet, the open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents. The purpose of gathering responses to open-ended questions is to enable the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories. As Lofland (1971) put it: "To capture participants 'in their own terms' one must learn *their* categories for rendering explicable and coherent the flux of raw reality. That, indeed, is the first principle of qualitative analysis" (p. 7, emphasis added).

Direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing respondents' depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions. The task for the qualitative researcher is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world, or that part of the world about which they are talking—for example, their experience with a particular program being evaluated. Too often social scientists "enter the field with preconceptions that prevent them from allowing those studied to 'tell it as they see it' " (Denzin 1978b:10).

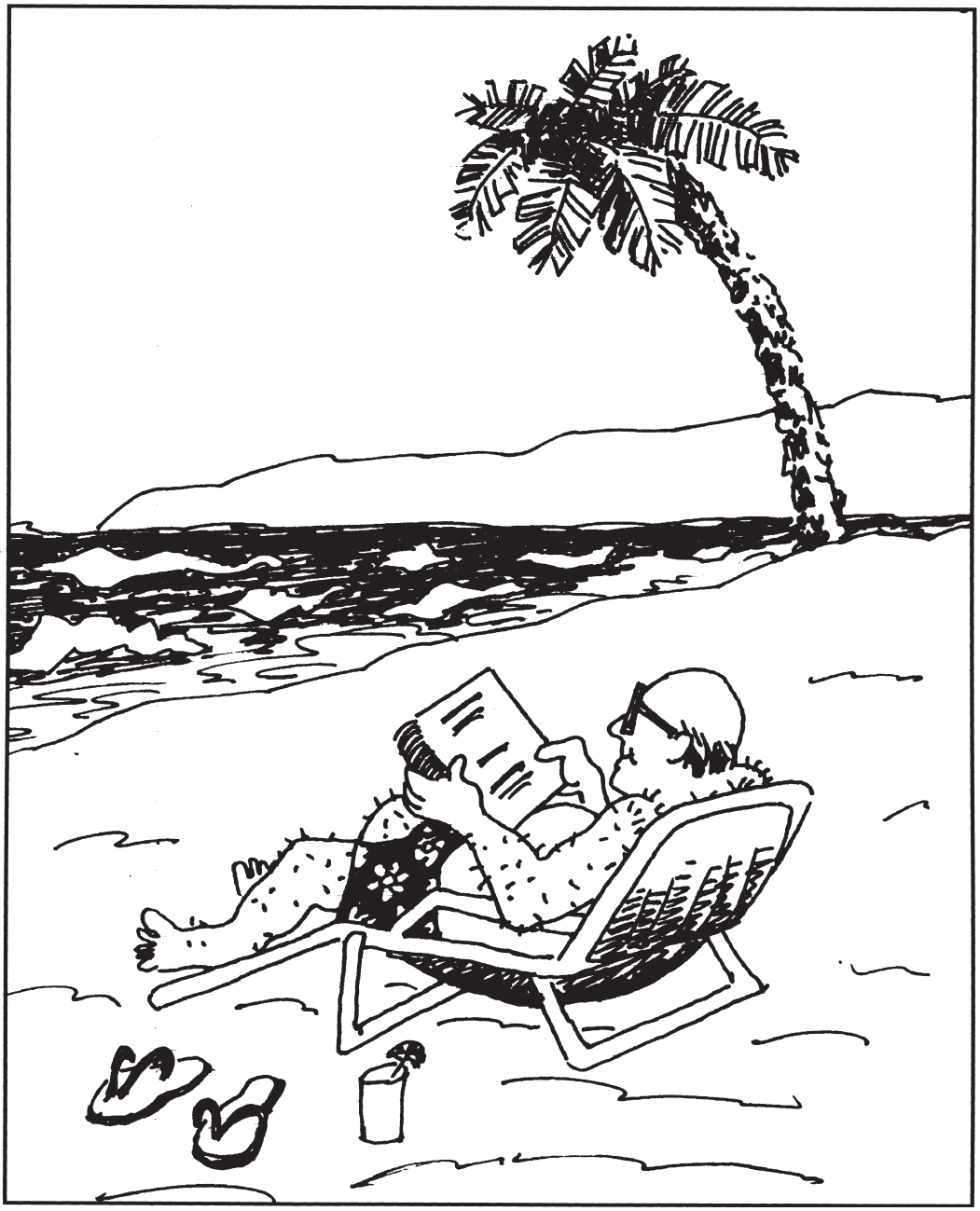
I have included the Kalamazoo evaluation findings as an illustration of qualitative inquiry because open-ended responses on questionnaires represent the most elementary form of qualitative data. There are severe limitations to open-ended data collected in writing on questionnaires, limitations related to the writing skills of respondents, the impossibility of probing or extending responses, and the effort required of the person completing the questionnaire. Yet, even at this elementary level of inquiry, the depth and detail of feelings revealed in the open-ended comments of the Kalamazoo teachers illustrate the fruit of qualitative methods.

While the Kalamazoo example illustrates the most elementary form of qualitative inquiry, namely, responses from open-ended questionnaire items, the major way in which qualitative researchers seek to understand the perceptions, feelings, and knowledge of people is through in-depth, intensive interviewing. The chapter on interviewing will discuss ways of gathering high-quality information from people—data that reveal experiences with program activities and perspectives on treatment impacts from the points of view of participants, staff, and others involved in and knowledgeable about the program or treatment being evaluated.

Inquiry by Observation

What people say is a major source of qualitative data, whether what they say is obtained verbally through an interview or in written form through document analysis or survey responses. There are limitations, however, to how much can be learned from what people say. To understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method. Howard S. Becker, one of the leading practitioners of qualitative methods in the conduct of social science research, argues that participant observation is the most comprehensive of all types of research strategies.

> The most complete form of the sociological datum, after all, is the form in which the participant observer gathers it: an observation of some social event, the events which precede and follow it, and explanations of its meaning by participants and spectators, before, during, and after its occurrence. Such a datum gives us



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Certain really discriminating people like nothing better than to relax on the beach with a good, in-depth, and detailed qualitative study in hand.

more information about the event under study than data gathered by any other sociological method. (Becker and Geer 1970:133)

Observational data, especially participant observation, permit the evaluation researcher to understand a program or treat-

ment to an extent not entirely possible using only the insights of others obtained through interviews. Of course, not everything can be directly observed or experienced, and participant observation is a highly labor-intensive—and, therefore, relatively expensive—research strategy. In a later chapter, strategies for using observational methods, including both participant and nonparticipant approaches, will be discussed at length. My purpose at this point is simply to give the reader another taste of the fruit of qualitative methods. Before discussing how to collect observational evaluation data, it is helpful to know what such data should look like.

The purpose of observational analysis is to take the reader into the setting that was observed. This means that observational data must have depth and detail. The data must be descriptive—sufficiently descriptive that the reader can understand what occurred and how it occurred. The observer's notes become the eyes, ears, and perceptual senses for the reader. The descriptions must be factual, accurate, and thorough without being cluttered by irrelevant minutiae and trivia. The basic criterion to apply to a recorded observation is the extent to which the observation permits the reader to enter the situation under study.

The observation that follows is meant to illustrate what such a descriptive account is like. This evaluation excerpt describes a two-hour observation of mothers discussing their child rearing in a parent education program. The purpose of the program, one of 22 such state-supported programs, was to increase the skills, knowledge, and confidence of parents. The program was also aimed at providing a support group for parents. In funding the program, legislators emphasized that they did not want parents to be told how to rear their children. Rather, the purpose of the parent education sessions was to increase the options available to parents so that they could make conscious choices about their own parenting styles and increase their confidence about the choices they make. Parents were also to be treated with respect and to be recognized as the primary educators of their children—in other words, the early childhood educators were not to impose their expertise upon parents but, instead, to make clear that parents are the real experts about their own children.

Site visits were made to all programs, and parenting discussions were observed on each site visit. Descriptions of these sessions then became the primary data of the evaluation. In short, the evaluators were to be the eyes and ears of the legislature and the state program staff, permitting them to understand what was happening in various parent sessions throughout the state. Descriptive data about the sessions also provided a mirror for the staff who conducted those sessions, a way of looking at what they were doing to see if that was what they wanted to be doing.

What follows is a description from one such session. The criterion that should be applied in reading this description is the extent to which sufficient data are provided to take you, the reader, into the setting and permit you to make your own judgment about the nature and quality of parent education being provided.

OBSERVATION DATA ILLUSTRATED: A DISCUSSION FOR MOTHERS OF TWO-YEAR-OLDS

The group discussion component of this parent education program operates out of a small classroom in the basement of a church. The toddler center is directly overhead on the first floor so that noises made by the children these mothers have left upstairs can be heard during the discussion. The room is

just large enough for the 12 mothers, one staff person, and me to sit along three sides of the room. The fourth side is used for a movie screen. Some mothers are smoking. (The staff person told me afterward that smoking had been negotiated and agreed on among the mothers.) The seats are padded folding chairs plus two couches. A few colorful posters with pictures of children playing decorate the walls. Small tables are available for holding coffee cups and ashtrays during the discussion. The back wall is lined with brochures on child care and child development, and a metal cabinet in the room holds additional program materials.

The session begins with mothers watching a 20-minute film about preschool children. The film forms the basis for getting discussion started about "what two-year-olds do." Louise, a part-time staff person in her early 30s who has two young children of her own, one a two-year-old, leads the discussion. Louise asks the mothers to begin by picking out from the film things that their own children do, and talking about the way some of the problems with children were handled in the film. For the most part, the mothers share happy, play activities their children like. "My Johnny loves the playground just like the kids in the film." "Yeah, mine could live on the playground."

The focus of the discussion turns quickly to what happens as children grow older, how they change and develop. Louise comments, "Don't worry about what kids do at a particular age. Like don't worry that your kid has to do a certain thing at age two or else he's behind in development or ahead of development. There's just a lot of variation in the ages at which kids do things."

The discussion is free flowing and, once begun, is not directed much by Louise. Mothers talk back and forth to each other, sharing experiences about their children. A mother will bring up a particular point and other mothers will talk about their own experiences as they want to. For example, one of the topics is the problem a mother is having with her child urinating in the bathtub. Other mothers share their experiences with this problem, ways of handling it, and whether or not to be concerned about it. The crux of that discussion seems to be that it is not a big deal and not something that the mother ought to be terribly concerned about. It is important not to make it a big deal for the child; the child will outgrow it.

The discussion turns to things that two-year-olds can do around the house to help their mothers. This is followed by some discussion of the things that two-year-olds can't do and some of their frustrations in trying to do things. There is a good deal of laughing, sharing of funny stories about children, and sharing of frustrations about children. The atmosphere is informal and there is a good deal of intensity in listening. Mothers seem especially to pick up on things that they share in common about the problems they have with their children.

Another issue from another mother is the problem of her child pouring out her milk. She asks, "What does it mean?" This question elicits some suggestions about using water aprons and cups that don't spill and other mothers' similar problems, but the discussion is not focused and does not really come to much closure. The water apron suggestion brings up a question about whether or not a plastic bag is okay. The discussion turns to the safety problems with different kinds of plastic bags. About 20 minutes of discussion have now taken place. (At this point, one mother leaves because she hears her child crying upstairs.)

The discussion returns to giving children baths. Louise interjects, "Two-year-olds should not be left alone in the bathtub." With reference to the earlier discussion about urinating in the bathtub, a mother in-

terjects that water with urine in it is probably better than the lake water her kids swim in. The mother with the child who urinates in the bathtub says again, "It really bugs me when he urinates in the tub." Louise responds, "It really is your problem, not his. If you can calm yourself down, he'll be okay."

At a lull in the discussion, Louise asks, "Did you agree with everything in the movie?" The mothers talk a bit about this and focus on an incident in the movie where one child bites another. Mothers share stories about problems they've had with their children biting. Louise interjects, "Biting can be dangerous. It is important to do something about biting." The discussion turns to what to do. One mother suggests biting the child back. Another mother suggests that kids will work it out themselves by biting each other back. Mothers get very agitated, more than one mother talks at a time. Louise asks them to "cool it," so that only one person talks at a time. (The mother who had left returns.)

The discussion about biting leads to a discussion about child conflict and fighting in general, for example, the problem of children hitting each other or hitting their mothers. Again, the question arises about what to do. One mother suggests that when her child hits her, she hits him back, or when her child bites her, she bites him back. Louise interjects, "Don't model behavior you don't like." She goes on to explain that her philosophy is that you should not do things as a model for children that you don't want them to do. She says that works best for her; however, other mothers may find other things that work better for them. Louise comments that hitting back or biting back is a technique suggested by Dreikurs. She says she disagrees with that technique, "but you all have to decide what works for you." (About 40 minutes have now passed since the film, and 7 of the 11 mothers have participated, most of them actively. Four mothers have not participated.)

Another mother brings up a new problem. Her child is destroying her plants, dumping plants out, and tearing them up. "I really get mad." She says that the technique she has used for punishment is to isolate the child. Then she asks, "How long do you have to punish a two-year-old before it starts working?" This question is followed by intense discussion with several mothers making comments. (This discussion is reproduced in full to illustrate the type of discussion that occurred.)

Mother No. 2: "Maybe he needs his own plant. Sometimes it helps to let a child have his own plant to take care of and then he comes to appreciate plants."

Mother No. 3: "Maybe he likes to play in the dirt. Does he have his own sand or dirt to play in around the house?"

Mother No. 4: "Oatmeal is another good thing to play in."

Louise: "Rice is another thing that children like to play in and it's clean, good to use indoors."

Mother No. 5: "Some things to play in would be bad or dangerous. For example, powdered soap isn't a good thing to let kids play in."

Mother No. 2: "Can you put the plants where he can't get at them?"

Mother with problem: "I have too many plants, I can't put them all out of the way."

Louise: "Can you put the plants somewhere else or provide a place to play with dirt or rice?" (Mother with problem kind of shakes her head no. Louise goes on.) "Another thing is to tell the kid the plants are alive, to help him learn respect for living

things. Tell him that those plants are alive and that it hurts them. Give him his own plant that he can get an investment in."

Mother with problem: "I'll try it."

Mother No. 2: "You've got to be fair about a two-year-old. You can't expect them not to touch things. It's not fair. I try hanging all my plants."

Louise: "Sometimes just moving a child bodily away from the thing you don't want him to do is the best technique."

Mother No. 4: "They'll outgrow it anyway."

Mother with problem: "Now he deliberately dumps them and I really get angry."

Louise: "Maybe he feels a rivalry with the plants if you have so many. Maybe he's trying to compete."

Mother No. 3: "Let him help with the plants. Do you ever let him help you take care of the plants?"

Mother No. 6: "Some plants are dangerous to help with."

Louise: "Some dangerous house plants are poison."

Louise reaches up and pulls down a brochure on plants that are dangerous and says she has brochures for everyone. Several people say that they want brochures and she goes to the cabinet to make them available. One mother who has not participated verbally up to this point specifically requests a brochure. This is followed by a discussion of child-proofing a house as a method of child rearing versus training the child not to touch things, but with less emphasis on child-proofing, that is, removing temptation versus teaching children to resist temptation. One parent suggests, in this context, that children be taught one valuable thing at a time. Several mothers give their points of view.

Louise: "The person who owns the house sets the rules. Two-year-olds can learn to be careful. But don't go around all day long saying, 'No, no.' "

The time had come for the discussion to end. The mothers stayed around for about 15 minutes, interacting informally and then going upstairs to get their children into their winter coats and hats for the trip home. They seemed to have enjoyed themselves and continued talking informally. One mother with whom Louise had disagreed about the issue of whether it was all right to bite or hit children back stopped to continue the discussion. Louise said:

> I hope you know that I respect your right to have your own views on things. I wasn't trying to tell you what to do. I just disagreed, but I definitely feel that everybody has a right to their own opinion. Part of the purpose of the group is for everyone to be able to come together and appreciate other points of view and understand what works for different people.

The mother said that she certainly didn't feel bad about the disagreement and she knew that some things that worked for other people didn't work for her and that she had her own ways but that she really enjoyed the group.

Louise cleaned up the room, and the session ended.

The Raw Data of Qualitative Inquiry

The description of this parenting session is aimed at permitting the reader to understand what occurred in the session. These data are descriptive. Pure description and

MAPPING EXPERIENCES: OUR OWN AS WELL AS THOSE OF OTHERS

Qualitative inquiry offers opportunities not only to learn about the experiences of others but also to examine the experiences that the inquirer brings to the inquiry, experiences that will, to some extent, affect what is studied and help shape, for better or worse, what is discovered. Approaches to qualitative inquiry such as autoethnography, heuristic inquiry, and critical reflexivity emphasize examining and understanding how who we are can shape what we see, hear, know, and learn during fieldwork and subsequent analysis. In that sense, qualitative inquiry can be thought of as mapping experiences, our own as well as those of others.

> *Imagine a map . . . drawn from your memory instead of from the atlas. It is made of strong places stitched together by the vivid threads of transforming journeys. It contains all the things you learned from the land and shows where you learned them. . . .*
>
> *Think of this map as a living thing, not a chart but a tissue of stories that grows half-consciously with each experience. It tells where and who you are with respect to the earth, and in times of stress or disorientation it gives you the bearings you need in order to move on. We all carry such maps within us as sentient and reflective beings, and we depend upon them unthinkingly, as we do upon language or thought. . . . And it is part of wisdom, to consider this ecological aspect of our identity. (Tallmadge 1997:ix)*

quotations are the raw data of qualitative inquiry.

The description is meant to take the reader into the setting. The data do not include judgments about whether what occurred was good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, or any other interpretive judgments. The data simply describe what occurred. State legislators, program staff, parents, and others used this description, and descriptions like this from other program sites, to discuss what they wanted the programs to be and do. The descriptions helped them make explicit *their own* judgmental criteria.

In later chapters, guidance on interpreting qualitative data will be offered in depth.

People-Oriented Inquiry

Thus far, the examples of observation and interviewing in this chapter have been presented as separate and distinct from each other. In practice, they are often fully integrated approaches. Becoming a skilled observer is essential even if you concentrate primarily on interviewing because every face-to-face interview also involves and requires observation. The skilled interviewer is thus also a skilled observer, able to read nonverbal messages, sensitive to how the interview setting can affect what is said, and carefully attuned to the nuances of the interviewer-interviewee interaction and relationship.

Likewise, interviewing skills are essential for the observer because during fieldwork, you will need and want to talk with people, whether formally or informally. Participant observers gather a great deal of information through informal, naturally occurring conversations. Understanding that interviewing and observation are mutually reinforcing qualitative techniques is a bridge to

understanding the fundamentally people-oriented nature of qualitative inquiry.

Sociologist John Lofland has suggested that there are four people-oriented mandates in collecting qualitative data. First, the qualitative methodologist must get close enough to the people and situation being studied to personally understand in depth the details of what goes on. Second, the qualitative methodologist must aim at capturing what actually takes place and what people actually say: the perceived facts. Third, qualitative data must include a great deal of pure description of people, activities, interactions, and settings. Fourth, qualitative data must include direct quotations from people, both what they speak and what they write down.

> The commitment to get close, to be factual, descriptive and quotive, constitutes a significant commitment to represent the participants in their own terms. This does not mean that one becomes an apologist for them, but rather that one faithfully depicts what goes on in their lives and what life is like for them, in such a way that one's audience is at least partially able to project themselves into the point of view of the people depicted. They can "take the role of the other" because the reporter has given them a living sense of day-to-day talk, day-to-day activities, day-to-day concerns and problems. . . .
>
> A major methodological consequence of these commitments is that the qualitative study of people in situ is a *process of discovery.* It is of necessity a process of learning what is happening. Since a major part of what is happening is provided by people in their own terms, one must find out about those terms rather than impose upon them a preconceived or outsider's scheme of what they are about. It is the observer's task to find out what is fundamental or central to the people or world under observation. (Lofland 1971:4)

The Fruit of Qualitative Methods Revisited

This chapter began with the parable of the man who traveled far in search of a widely proclaimed food called "fruit." When finally directed to a fruit tree, he confused the spring blossom of the tree with the fruit of the tree. Finding the blossom to be tasteless, he dismissed all he had heard about fruit as a hoax and went on his way. This chapter has described qualitative data so that the person in search of the fruits of qualitative methods will know what to look for—and know when the real thing has been attained. Exhibit 1.5 lists Internet resources for those who want to carry on this search for qualitative fruit in virtual space. To close this chapter, it may be instructive to consider two other short parables about the search for fruit.

While the first seeker after fruit arrived too early to experience the ripened delicacy and tasted only the blossom, a second seeker after fruit arrived at a tree that had been improperly cultivated, so that its fruit was shriveled and bitter. This bad fruit had been left to rot. Not knowing what good fruit looked like, he sampled the bad. "Well, I've seen and tasted fruit," he said, "and I can tell you for sure that it's terrible. I've had it with fruit. Forget it. This stuff is awful." He went on his way and his journey was wasted.

One can hope that such a foolish mistake is less likely today, because early in school students are taught the danger of generalizing from limited cases. Yet, rumors persist that some people continue to reject all qualitative data as worthless (and "rotten"), having experienced only bad samples produced with poor methods.

A third seeker after fruit arrived at the same tree that produced the shriveled and bitter fruit. He picked some of the rotting fruit and examined it. He took the fruit to a farmer who cultivated fruit trees with great

EXHIBIT 1.5 **Internet E-mail Discussion Groups (listservs) on Qualitative Methods**

1. QUALRS-L@listserv.uga.edu: Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences; to subscribe, send this message to listserv@listserv.uga.edu: subscribe QUALRS-L yourname
2. QUALNET@listserv.bc.edu: Qualitative Research in Management and Organization Studies; to subscribe, send this message to majordomo@listserv.bc.edu: subscribe qualnet
3. QUAL-L@scu.edu.au: Qualitative Research List, initiated by Penn State, but immediately attracted a broader audience; to subscribe, send this message to listproc@scu.edu.au: subscribe QUAL-L firstname lastname

Other resources for qualitative evaluation and research:

4. EVALTALK@bama.ua.edu: American Evaluation Association (AEA) Discussion List; to subscribe, send this message to listserv@bama.ua.edu: subscribe evaltalk ourname

   AEA home page with links to evaluation organizations, training programs, and Internet resources: www.eval.org

5. METHODS@cios.org: A list for social science research methods instructors; to subscribe, send this message to comserve@cios.org: join methods yourname

NOTE: Thanks to Judith Preissle, Aderhold Distinguished Professor, Social Foundations of Education, University of Georgia, for list subscription details. These sites and subscription details may change, and this list is not exhaustive. This list is meant to be suggestive of the qualitative resources available through the Internet. See Chapter 3, Exhibit 3.7; Chapter 4, Exhibit 4.9; and Chapter 8, Exhibit 8.3, for additional, more specialized qualitative resources through the Internet.

success. The farmer peeled away the rotten exterior and exposed what looked like a stone inside. The farmer told him how to plant this hard core, cultivate the resulting trees, and harvest the desired delicacy. The farmer also gave him a plump, ripe sample to taste. Once the seeker after fruit knew what fruit really was, and once he knew that the stonelike thing he held in his hand was a seed, all he had to do was plant it, tend properly the tree's growth, and work for the eventual harvest—the fruit. Though there was much work to be done and there were many things to be learned, the resulting high-quality fruit was worth the effort.

Between-Chapters Interlude

Top Ten Pieces of Advice to a Graduate Student Considering a Qualitative Dissertation

The following query was posted on an Internet listserv devoted to discussing qualitative inquiry:

> I am a new graduate student thinking about doing a qualitative dissertation. I know you are all busy, but I would appreciate an answer to only one question.
>
> If you could give just one bit of advice to a student considering qualitative research for a dissertation, what would it be?

The responses below came from different people. I've combined some responses, edited them (while trying to maintain the flavor of the postings), and arranged them for coherence.

Top Ten Responses

1. Be sure that a qualitative approach fits your research questions: questions about people's experiences; inquiry into the meanings people make of their experiences; studying a person in the context of her or his social/interpersonal environment; and research where not enough is known about a phenomenon for standardized instruments to have been developed (or even to be ready to be developed).

   (Chapter 2 will help with this by presenting the primary themes of qualitative inquiry.)

2. Study qualitative research. There are lots of different approaches and a lot to know. Study carefully a couple of the books that provide an overview of different approaches, then **go to the original sources** for the design and analysis details of the approach you decide to use.

   (Chapter 3 covers different qualitative approaches.)

3. Find a dissertation adviser who will support your doing qualitative research. Otherwise, it can be a long, tough haul. A dissertation is a big commitment. There are other practical approaches to using qualitative methods that don't involve all the constraints of doing a dissertation, things like program evaluation, action research, and organizational development. You can still do lots of great qualitative work without doing a dissertation. But if you can find a supportive adviser and committee, then, by all means, go for it.

   (Chapter 4 covers particularly appropriate practical applications of qualitative methods.)

4. Really work on design. Qualitative designs follow a completely different logic from quantitative research. Completely different. Are you listening? Completely different. Especially sampling. This is not the same as questionnaires and tests and experiments. You can combine designs, like quant and qual approaches, but that gets really complicated. Either way, you have to figure out what's unique about qualitative designs.

   (Chapter 5 covers qualitative designs.)

5. Practice interviewing and observation skills. Practice! Practice! Practice! Do lots of interviews. Spend a lot of time doing practice fieldwork observations. Get feedback from someone who's really good at interviewing and observations. There's an amazing amount to learn. And it's not just head stuff. **Qualitative research takes skill.** Don't make the mistake of thinking it's easy. The better I get at it, the more I realize how bad I was when I started.

   (Chapters 6 and 7 cover the skills of qualitative inquiry.)

6. Figure out analysis before you gather data. I've talked with lots of advanced grad students who rushed to collect data before they knew anything about analyzing it—and lived to regret it, big time. This is true for statistical data and quantitative data, but somehow people seem to think that qualitative data are easy to analyze. No way. That's a big-time NO WAY. And don't think that the new software will solve the problem. Another big-time NO WAY. You, that's YOU, still have to analyze the data.

   (Chapter 8 covers analysis.)

7. Be sure that you're prepared to deal with the controversies of doing qualitative research. People on this listserv are constantly sharing stories about people who don't "get" qualitative research and put it down. Don't go into it naively. Understand the paradigms and politics.

   (Chapter 9 deals with paradigms, politics, and ways of enhancing the credibility of qualitative inquiry.)

8. Do it because you want to and are convinced it's right for you. Don't do it be-

cause someone told you it would be easier. It's not. Try as hard as possible to pick/negotiate dissertation research questions that have to do with some passion/interest in your professional life. Qualitative research is time-consuming, intimate, and intense—you will need to find your questions interesting if you want to be at all sane during the process—and still sane at the end.

9. Find a good mentor or support group. Or both. In fact, find several of each. If you can, start a small group of peers in the same boat, so to speak, to talk about your research together on a regular basis—you can share knowledge, brainstorm, and problem solve, as well as share in each other's successes, all in a more relaxed environment that helps take some of the edge off the stress (for example, you might have potluck meals at different homes?). This can be tremendously liberating (even on a less than regular basis). Take care of yourself.

10. Prepare to be changed. Looking deeply at other people's lives will force you to look deeply at yourself.

    (See the discussions "Voice, Perspective, and Reflexivity" in Chapter 2 and "The Observer and What Is Observed: Unity and Separation" in Chapter 6.)