

STUDY GUIDE FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAM FOR EDPR 7/8561 QUALITATIVE METHODS IN EDUCATION

The primary focus of the comprehensive exam questions would be to test your ability to work through a research scenario (either yours or one assigned to you) and create a research design that aligns with epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, methods, and representation. You are not required to actually work through issues of data analysis or representation, however, you are expected to have an idea about how you would approach data analysis and representation similar to the proposal that you prepared in class. Be vigilant of your own position, subjectivities, and reflexive analysis, and ethics in qualitative research that would have bearing on the research design. Last, but not least, be aware of what you need to do to maintain academic rigor and trustworthiness in your research design.

The following are scenarios for you to consider along with some questions. Your comprehensive exam question will be similar. For each of the scenario, consider framing a research design that threads together

1. epistemology
2. theoretical framework
3. research purpose
4. research questions
5. methodology
6. methods of data collection (including timeline)
7. representation
8. ethical issues
9. limits and possibilities

while attending to your subjectivities and issues of academic rigor and trustworthiness. Include a timeline in your methods section identifying the various milestones of the research project.

SCENARIOS

Suppose you want to study disenfranchisement of millions of African American people during and before the civil rights movement. Suppose you want to know the **essence** of people's suffering, including what they had to endure, how they empowered themselves and organized personal and public resistance forces. Work through numbers 1-9 to develop a research design around this topic. (Hint: Think phenomenology)

Suppose you are interested in studying educational policies. You have a feeling that there are certain levels of systematic discrimination in the current educational system that affect curriculum and instructional design, the quality of education, and the ways students perceive history, social sciences, culture, from mainstream dominant perspective. You are primarily interested in raising questions about issues of **social justice and power** in education by exploring the experiences of minority students to reveal the effects of maintaining status quo in their everyday lives. Work through numbers 1-9 to develop a research design around this topic. (Hint: Think critical theory)

You have been studying the holocaust and its effects on people. You realize that in your readings you only get a general idea of how people were affected but there is a **lot of silence around how women, in particular, were affected**. You have an elderly neighbor who tells you that many women's stories are untold and erased. But they were raped, murdered, tortured, and at times even sold to slavery. You know that these stories of marginalization, trauma, and injustice need to be told and need to be given their long overdue historical significance. It is the nature of the stories and an in-depth look at women and their experiences in which you are interested. Work through numbers 1-9 to develop a research design around this topic. (Hint: Think feminism)

As an educator, you are concerned about the No Child Left Behind policy and what it is doing to your school's administrators and the teachers. You see that the administrators and stressed and the teachers are mostly teaching to the test to get the school's scores up. You also see that a lot of new teachers are quitting after one year creating more stress and pressure on other teachers and administrators. You want to look at how teachers are coping with the No Child Left Behind policy in their everyday lives and what administrators could do to support the teachers. Work through numbers 1-9 to develop a research design around this topic. (Hint: Think interpretivism)

You are a teacher. You want to employ several interactive techniques in the classroom and see how your students learn. You want to go beyond evaluating students' learning based on test scores. You want to be able to assess what students are taking away from each of the techniques, how those techniques work with different subject matters, and the ways students respond to higher level learning tasks based on the competencies you have designed for the class. Work through numbers 1-9 to develop a research design around this topic. (Hint: Think interpretivism)

You are an educator at an urban university in the midsouth. You notice that many students in your classes do not have the basic prerequisite skills needed to perform according to expectations. Yet the students' prior academic records demonstrate grades that range within A's and B's. You want to study the conditions that produced such academic incompetence amongst the students. You want to further explore the influence of various educational structures that produced students' current expectations about their academic experience and performances. Your primary interest is to look for ways such social systems of education are upheld so that you can demonstrate its fragility by breaking them apart for alternate structures with their own limits and possibilities. Work through numbers 1-9 to develop a research design around this topic. (Hint: Think deconstructivism)

ESSENTIAL READINGS

Crotty, M. (2004). *The foundation of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Chapters 1, 3, 4, 6, (8, 10: optional)

Cresswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, (8-10: optional)

UNDERSTANDING VARIOUS PARADIGMS

Positivist	Interpretivist	Critical Theory	Deconstructivist
Reality is object and "found"	Reality is subjective and constructed	Reality is subjective and constructed on the basis of issues of power	Reality is ultimately unknowable; attempts to understand reality subvert themselves
Truth is one	Truth is many	Truth is many, and constitutes a system of socio-political power	"Truths" are socially constructed systems of signs which contain the seeds of their contradiction.
Discourse is structured and transparent, reflecting reality	Discourse is dialogic and creates reality	Discourse is embedded in (and controlled by) rhetorical and political purpose	Discourse is by nature inseparable from its subject, and is radically contingent and vulnerable
What is true? What can we know? Knowing the world Communication as transmission	What is heuristic? What can we understand? Understanding the world. Communication as transaction	What is just? What can we do? Changing the world. Communication as decision-making	Is there a truth? What constitutes truth? Critiquing the world. Communication as challenging the nature of communication

Adapted from Lather, P. (2006). Paradigm proliferation as a good thing to think with: teaching research in education as a wild profusion. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19(1), 35-57.

Table 1.7
WAYS OF KNOWING IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

	<i>Archival Knowing</i>	<i>Narrative Knowing</i>	<i>Observational Knowing</i>
	<i>People's Artifacts</i>	<i>People's Stories</i>	<i>People's Behaviors</i>
Methodological approaches	Historical research Biography	Phenomenology Narratology Autobiography In-depth interview approaches Oral history	Ethnography Participatory action research
Data sources	Journals, diaries, letters, newspapers Photographs Film Objects Other archives	Interview transcripts Stories Written narratives	Participant observation (fieldnotes)

Bennett deMarris, L. (Ed.). (1998). *Inside Stories: Reflections on Qualitative Research Methods and Ethics*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Objectivism

- Positivism
- Post-positivism
 - a. Experimental research
 - b. Survey research
 - i. Sampling
 - ii. Measurement and scaling
 - iii. Questionnaire

Constructionism

- Interpretivism
 - a. Symbolic interactionism
 - b. Phenomenology
 - c. Hermeneutics
 - i. Observation
 - ii. Interview
 - iii. Focus group
 - iv. Case study
 - v. Life history
 - vi. Narrative
 - vii. Visual ethnographic methods
 - viii. Data reduction
 - ix. Theme identification
 - x. Comparative analysis
 - xi. Interpretive methods
 - xii. Document analysis
 - xiii. Content analysis
 - xiv. Conversation analysis

Subjectivism

- Critical inquiry
- Feminism
- Postmodernism
 - i. Same as the above list

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE "ISMS"

Phenomenology

Looks at the essence of an experience. What is the nature of meaning? What is the essence of an experience?

Symbolic Interpretivism

How do people use symbols to make meaning of their world/reality/experiences?

General Interpretivism

How do people make sense of their reality/world?

Constructivism

How does an individual make meaning of X?

Social Constructivism

How do people make sense of X based on their interaction with the world around them and X?

Constructionism

Big broad umbrella under which all of the above forms of inquiry falls highlighting multiple realities and relativism in people's ways of making sense of their world.

Feminism

Another broad framework to understand the social category of gender, women's lived experiences as intersected by other social categories such as race, class, gender, politics of location, etc.

Deconstructivism

Not so much a theoretical framework as it is a form of critique. The critique explores ways a structure is held together, identifies the assumptions, disrupts the assumptions so that out of the ruins of such destruction new possibilities can emerge embedded with their own pitfalls and potentials.

Critical Theory

Looks at the influence of socio-political structure and power on people's lived experiences.

THINGS TO TAKE AWAY FROM CROTTY'S CHAPTER 3: CONSTRUCTIONISM

- Meaning is not discovered but constructed
- Relationship between subject and object
- Meaning is given to object by human beings
- Object alone without human beings do not have meanings
- Researcher is a bricoleur – a Jack of all trades, an inventive investigator
- Meaning is also constructed through social interactions
- Social constructivism is both real and relative at the same time

THINGS TO TAKE AWAY FROM CROTTY'S CHAPTER 4: INTERPRETIVISM

- Attempts to understand and explain human and social reality
- Understanding and interpretation
- Understandings within a cultural group – what interpretations do they make, what symbols do they use to make meaning of their existence, experiences?
- Phenomenology is the study of the essence of an experience
- What is the nature of meaning?

PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Phenomenological research is....

- The explication of phenomena as they present themselves in the consciousness
- The study of essences
- The description of experiential meanings as we live them
- The human scientific study of a phenomena
- The attentive practice of thoughtfulness
- A search for what it means to be human
- A poeticizing activity

What phenomenological research is not ...

- Does not seek generalizations
e.g. who did what? How many? To what extent? Under what conditions?
- Is not mere speculative inquiry in the sense of unworldly reflection
- Is neither mere particularity, nor sheer universality
- Does not problem solve (rather questions of meaning)

Methodology

- Aims at being presuppositionless (but never completely achieves this)
- The method of phenomenology is that there is no method

How does one approach the task?

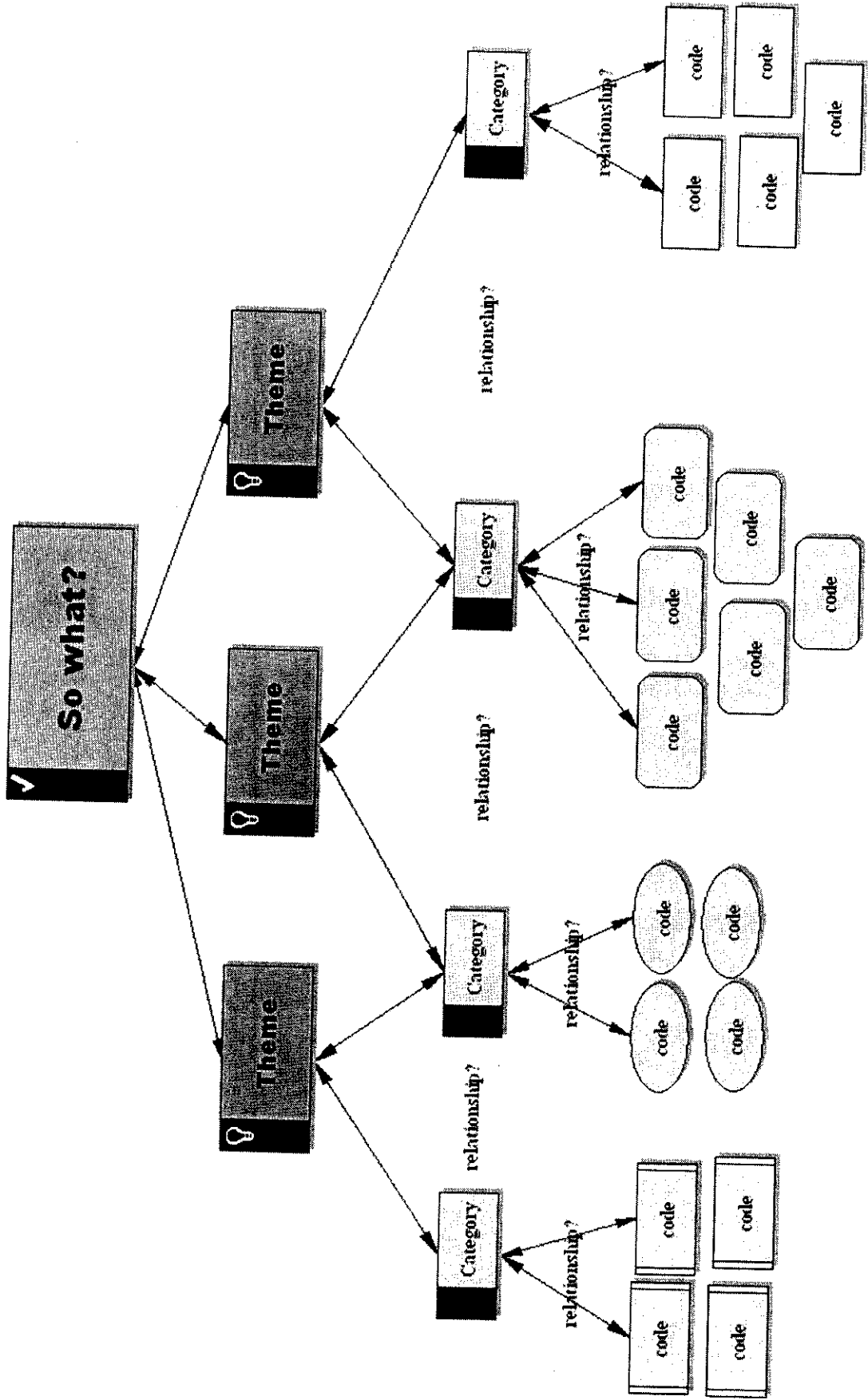
- Turn to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world

- Investigate experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it
- Reflect on essential themes which characterize the phenomenon
- Describe the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting
- Maintain a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon
- Balance the research context by considering the parts and whole

FEMINIST THEORIES

Voice
 Rapport
 Diversity
 Connections
 Collaborative
 Social change
 Transdisciplinary
 Power/oppression
 Interconnectedness
 Personal experience
 Making the invisible visible
 Starting from one's own experience
 Women's lives are the focus of the study
 Epistemology of insiderness
 Margins to the center
 Multiple methods
 Process oriented
 Understanding
 Transformative
 Self-reflexive
 Inclusiveness
 Cumulative
 Relational
 Critical

Inductive Analysis of Qualitative Data



EXAMINING A PROBLEM FROM DIFFERENT THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Topic: Hip Hop Culture

Theoretical approach	Research question	Methodology	Methods	Participants
<u>Interpretivist</u> Symbolic interactionism	What do participants in the hip hop culture identify as the key symbols and identifiers? What are educator's perceptions of hip hop culture in x setting	Ethnography	Interview Observations	
Phenomenology	What is the essence of participation in hip hop culture? What is the experience of hip hop culture for participants?	Phenomenological interviews	In dept interviews	
Ethnomethodology	How do participants make sense of each other's utterance and actions?	Naturally occurring interaction	Audio recordings Video recording of hip hop performance/talk	