

## **Teaching Qualitative Research for Human Services Students: A Three-Phase Model**

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*Qualitative research is an inherent part of the human services profession, since it emphasizes the great and multifaceted complexity characterizing human experience and the sociocultural context in which humans act. In the department of human services at Emek Yezreel College, Israel, we have developed a three-phase model to ensure a relatively intense exposure to and practice in qualitative methodology. While in the first phase students are exposed to the qualitative thinking and writing, they are required in the second phase to take a Qualitative Research Methods course that includes practice. The third and final phase includes conducting a qualitative research seminar. The aim of the present article is to shed light on the dilemmas involved in implementing the three-phase model. Key Words: Qualitative Methods, Higher Education, and Human Services*

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In 1625, King Gustav II Adolf of Sweden ordered the royal shipyard to build four warships that would press his imperialistic ambitions forward. The most flamboyant of these vessels, the *Vasa*, was one of the biggest of its time with 64 cannons on its gun decks. In August 1628 the vessel, gleaming with fresh paint, was launched in the port of Stockholm at a splendid ceremony to the delight and applause of the crowds that viewed the event. Their joy was short-lived, however: a sudden gust of wind made the ship keel over while still close to land, and the *Vasa* capsized and sank.

An appointed commission of inquiry showed that the area allotted to the ballast (placed in the hold just above the keel to maintain balance) was not sufficiently wide enough to balance a vessel with two gun decks. The ship was unstable.

In general terms, the design of the *Vasa*, how its various parts were built and the ratio between them, were erroneous. Although the vessel was built by the best shipbuilders of the royal shipyards in Stockholm, and in accordance with the best knowledge and experience available at the time, some principal characteristics of its parts, and particularly the ratio of the weight it carried to the weight of its ballast and the laws of flotation, were not fully known to the artisans of the time. The shipbuilders of the time did not have a theory for designing and building a vessel, but rather built in accordance with traditional models familiar to them and by trial and error. They had no way of calculating stability and the proportions of the various parts, so they built the bigger and heavier vessels just as they built smaller and lighter ones (Maxwell, 1996).

This story illustrates the issues we seek to discuss in the present article, which are all connected to the following questions: What is the correct way of teaching qualitative research to human services students? What are the diverse parts of teaching qualitative research? When is the right and appropriate time to teach each of these parts? What are

the appropriate proportions among the parts of teaching this subject? What connection should there be (if at all) between teaching qualitative and quantitative research? What should be the ratio between teaching the theoretical-philosophical parts explaining the nature of qualitative research and practice on observations and their analyses, interviews and their interpretations and grounding the findings in existing knowledge and different theories? How important (or not) is the use of language in general and rich language in particular, and when does description slide from scientific endeavor into creative writing that does not meet research criteria?

Qualitative research is very important as a worldview not only from the research standpoint but also as an inherent part of the human services profession, since it emphasizes the great and multifaceted complexity characterizing human experience and the sociocultural context in which humans act. For this reason, it is so important for us that our students not only know how to implement the technique of qualitative research, but also as human services personnel they internalize its fundamental nature and become qualitative researchers. That is the reason we felt it was crucial to develop an extensive developing model of qualitative research methods; we were not satisfied only with a standard practice of a semester basic course of qualitative methods, or in including these methods in a "general" (i.e., quantitative) research methods course.

Some researchers have already noted (e.g., Webb & Glense, 1992; Yassour-Borochowitz, 2005) that teaching qualitative research methods is an extremely complex task since students find the questions that result from qualitative approaches challenging such as their self-evident assumption that the objective of research is to discover one absolute truth, how we structure our knowledge of the world, and perhaps even the significance of being humans. In the not too distant past there were but a few books dealing with qualitative research in general, and even fewer on ways of teaching it. Unlike teaching quantitative research, there is no clearly defined theory for teaching qualitative research methods. Does this derive from qualitative research being more disorderly, ambiguous and tentative, or from political and ideological circumstances? It seems that the presentation of qualitative research to students raises new and different questions regarding their knowledge in other courses too, in which they are required to read articles and studies that are generally quantitative.

A review of various articles dealing with students' experience of qualitative research studies (Hein, 2004) produces a number of main themes which our program attempts to address: (a) students' difficulty in understanding the qualitative paradigm; (b) the change, after studying qualitative research methods, in their perception of quantitative research; (c) their difficulty in understanding the essential philosophical concepts (i.e., phenomenology, narrative) underlying the qualitative method; and (d) describing the various difficulties encountered when conducting qualitative research in general, and for the first time in particular. After studying and experiencing qualitative research, the studies (Hein, 2004) describe new student insights regarding the research process, a deeper understanding of the qualitative concepts and paradigm and appreciation of this form of research as empirical research for all intents and purposes.

All four authors of the present article are lecturers who have taught research methods in general and qualitative research methods and research seminars in particular. We are all beset with questions regarding the proportions and balances between the various parts of structuring knowledge and of students' comprehension of research

methods and scientific writing in general and qualitative research methods in particular. The topics we shall raise here derive from the deliberations and questions we all experience in our work as lecturers. The initiative for structuring this model was a one-day workshop in 2004 involving all department faculty members; the workshop related to the department's vision and goals, curriculum issues and the desired profile of graduates of the Human Services first degree program. Following this workshop we met to discuss common dilemmas regarding qualitative research methods teaching, which resulted in a session at the third national qualitative research conference in 2008 and this manuscript.

### **Model Framework: The Department of Human Services**

At the Yezreel Valley Academic College Department of Human Services we have constructed a graduated model in which students are exposed to and study qualitative research methods in three phases. It is important to note that the basic orientation of the College's Department of Human Services is to train academics for the labor market, or in other words, the Department places considerable emphasis on professional skills and the program comprises of a two-year practicum placement in various organizations. We mention this because at the same time, and in order to balance the professional emphasis, we view the Scientific Writing and Quantitative and Qualitative Research courses and the two research seminars (one quantitative, the other qualitative) as the basis for socialization towards and professionalization of critical thinking, scientific reading and writing and conducting research employing accepted social sciences methods. In other words, these courses perhaps constitute the stabilizing ballast of our bachelor's degree ship, and thus it is of vital importance that they be suitable, correct and exact. But qualitative thinking is just as important, as we have mentioned above, to human services professionals as it promotes a complex and sensitive understanding of human behavior. The 21st century has been called the "Service Century." The conceptualizations of "service" have expanded: the provision of service has become the focal point of the majority of organizations in the economy, be they from the public sector, the business and private sector or the third sector. Under the new circumstances, existing social services have difficulty identifying and providing solutions to a diverse array of human needs – the problem stems both from a lack of knowledge and from issues of scale. In order to deal with these emerging gaps, there is a real need to provide broad training to professionals in fields of social services. The aim of this training is to create a cadre of professionals who have up-to-date knowledge and the skills as well as general orientation that are needed to operate, initiate and plan services that provide solutions to an ever-changing array of human needs. The field of Human Services, which is a new and developing area in Israel, is defined broadly as having the aim of providing solutions to human needs on the basis of inter-disciplinary resources and knowledge. The Human Services profession addresses human needs and problems, while upholding a continuing commitment to improve the quality of life of the population of service recipients. In the academic sphere, we aim to develop interviewing and diagnostic skills, understanding of complex human processes and the ability to create an empathetic human interaction. The qualitative approach, which emphasizes a dialog and a holistic view of the human needs, seemed to be most suitable for these goals.

### Three-Phase Model for Teaching Qualitative Research

The model evolved through trial and experience while the authors were teaching in different departments. Each, separately, felt an accumulating dissatisfaction because of the partiality of his/her course. When the issue was discussed, the idea of three gradual phases evolved. The presented model has been practiced for four years.

We would like to describe the three-phase model for teaching qualitative research in the Department of Human Services and discuss at length a number of questions we have raised as a result of employing the model. The teaching program for qualitative research is comprised of three phases. In the first phase, the first year, we seek *to open the qualitative eye* of the students in a Scientific Writing course. Although this is a generic course that does not focus solely on qualitative research, the encounter with texts describing qualitative research (through study of scientific reading) is important at this early stage. In order to write well, it is important that students experience and benefit from good writing in different genres that employs a variety of research methods. This course will be described in greater detail later.

In the second phase, the second semester of the second year, the students are required to take a structured course called Qualitative Research Methods that includes practice. The introduction of a Qualitative Research Methods course as compulsory for a Bachelor's degree was not self-evident, for as we know in numerous institutions these research methods are studied in a number of lessons included in a broader course called Research Methods, the greater part of which is in fact devoted to an essentially positivist worldview and research. It is worthy of note that teaching this course calls for creativity and openness so that the students indeed comprehend the nature of the epistemological difference between the different research methods, and on this, too, we shall expand later.

In the third and final phase all third year students are required to conduct two studies for a research seminar: one in one of the quantitative research seminars offered by the Department (on subjects such as quality of life, stress and burnout), and the second in one of the qualitative research seminars offered by the Department (on subjects such as ethics in human services, working with volunteers or providing services to deprived populations). This is a heavy requirement for the students (the common practice here being to demand only one research seminar for a Bachelor's degree), two different research seminars, qualitative and quantitative which comprise posing research questions relevant to the method, gathering and analyzing data and integrating theoretical material with empirical material of their own. Despite the basic workload involved in taking two seminars, and the difficulty of combining different research methods, we thought it appropriate to complete the circle in this way on the assumption that until you jump into the water you cannot learn to swim, and you do not know *if you know how* to swim.

The aim of the present article is to shed light on the dilemmas involved in implementing the three-phase model described above. The first section will examine the place of qualitative thinking in teaching the introductory course on scientific thinking; in the second section, we shall present the main issues we contend with in teaching qualitative research methods; and in the third section, we will deal with the advantages and disadvantages of combining the different research methods in teaching and conducting research as part of the seminars.

### **“Opening the Qualitative Eye”: The First Phase**

The Scientific Writing course is a semester course taken by first year Department of Human Services students and the main objective is to expose them to the style and rules of scientific writing and thinking and provide them with basic tools for reading and understanding scientific studies, reports and publications (for a more detailed description of the courses, as well as the other phases, see the Appendix).

We have instituted changes in this course throughout the years, not so much in the curriculum itself as in its applications. In the first formation of the course, teachers had mostly emphasized some technical aspects of scientific writing, thus students were provided with tools for how to search scientific material in the library or how to place citations within the text. In the second stage, the teachers were instructed to focus on tools for reading and understanding scientific studies, which resulted in too much emphasis on the process of conducting of a scientific research (see below for more details). In the past three years however, and in an attempt to balance between what we perceive to be too little and too much for students in first year, what is being emphasized is the exposure of students to various kinds of scientific materials, including qualitative research, and to the basic rules of writing including both structure rules and style rules (e.g., how to conduct an integration, how to write a paragraph).

Scientific thinking cannot be shaped in a basic course, or even in several courses. Rather, it is a product of prolonged individual work, the main thrust of which is maximal exposure to reading scientific material combined with writing and receiving feedback and revision. Hence, the Scientific Writing course should be considered merely the first step in the long and protracted socialization process of scientific thinking.

But what is the role of the first step? What content should it contain? More specifically, the questions we seek to raise for discussion in this article deal with (a) the appropriate time for teaching a scientific writing course and (b) the content it should contain.

- (a) When should the course be taken? Is the first year indeed the most suitable? Can the objectives be attained in the first year?

In the Scientific Writing course we want to expose students to the structure of the empirical paper and different types of studies and scientific publications, to inculcate in and practice the rules of scientific writing (e.g., structure, style, integration), and guide them towards the effective reading of scientific research.

But can guiding towards an effective reading of a research report be accomplished without an understanding of research methods? The difficulty encountered in this context can be demonstrated by a description of the changes undergone by the course: there is an inbuilt problem in the fact that the Scientific Writing course is taken in the first year, whereas the research method courses (qualitative and quantitative) are taken in the second year. This problem resulted in very little application of and instruction on principles of scientific writing and reading in the early days of the course, and escaping to the more technical spheres of library searches or rules of writing bibliographies. Later, the deficit became a surplus; on the assumption that teaching scientific reading and writing requires, first and foremost, familiarity with the basic concepts of research

methods, the course lecturers tended to load their first year students – in addition to the content of the abovementioned course – with subjects whose place was in the second year, particularly in the sphere of quantitative research method studies (including the distinction between the different types of variables, research hypotheses and questions and the distinction between correlation versus experimental research). The outcome was that the vast knowledge failed to harmonize on the grounds that the students were totally unprepared for comprehension and cohesion. Our impression was that the course contained far too much study material for teaching in one semester, and that the overload impaired comprehension and internalization of the basis of scientific writing and reading. In other words, everyone across the board bit off more than they could chew. Today, after years of trial and error, it seems to us that the attempt to teach a shortened course on research methods as a basis for a scientific writing course was doomed to failure.

The program implemented over the last two years in the wake of the lessons learned is characterized by an attempt to reduce the objectives of the course, the lecturers' expectations and the content studied, so that they focus on scientific reading (e.g., including the distinction between popular and scientific writing, familiarization with the different types of scientific publications, familiarization with the structure of a scientific paper) and scientific writing (e.g., the rules of structure, style, writing a paragraph as a contextual unit, teaching integration). The question still remains, however, of whether it is correct, effective and even possible to teach a scientific writing course before the research methods courses. Thus, for example, any attempt to inculcate the basic elements required for reading in a quantitative empirical article will require terminology like variables, hypotheses, correlations and research methods, which are studied in depth only in the second year.

(b) What is the place of qualitative thinking in initial socialization, and which content is relevant to the basic course?

While the rules of scientific writing studied in the course (e.g., the rules of structure, organization, style, and integration) are relevant and applicable to the various types of research, we are aware of the fact that the main thrust of the training offered in the course is grounded in the foundations of quantitative research and adheres to the rules of working (and thinking) in this kind of research. Although the course exposes the students to different types of research, including qualitative research, it is only natural that the students are more exposed to quantitative research by means of which they can practice the studied rules. This socialization towards quantitative thinking means:

1. The term, scientific, might be construed as being reserved for positivist research as a consequence of the requirement for objectivity (that mandates the researcher's absence from the data gathering process and analysis of the findings).
2. The logic learned is basically deductive, since the research process is studied as (a) having rigid linear research stages and (b) directed towards examining a theory and testing hypotheses regarding the relations between dependent and independent variables, when the studied phenomenon and the research method are predefined. This is

opposed to inductive logic, which guides towards developing categories of meaning emerging from data rather than testing a theory, and towards employing emerging design methods that vary throughout the data gathering process.

The more structured quantitative approach equips the learner with the rules of do and do not do, along with unequivocal insights on the scientific research process and its demands. On the other hand, the assumptions underlying the qualitative paradigm – on the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge – pull the rug out from under the demand for objectivity and deductive logic. It is therefore evident that qualitative thinking demands a rewiring of understanding regarding the meaning of the research process, its aims, the role of the researcher, and what is considered scientific. As it is more open and less subject to organized work rules during the initial phase of exposure to scientific thinking, this process might make learning difficult. On the other hand, qualitative research demands a different form of thinking and different writing structures and this, too, requires socialization in the form of exposure, reading and practice. Furthermore, since the basic course exposes students to scientific research for the first time, it can inculcate a thinking style in terms of knowledge acquired in childhood or a beginner's mind into the students.

It is important to note that qualitative methods are learned in the Department out of a genuine recognition of the importance of qualitative research for those engaged in human services. Providing these services includes identification of the client's needs, and in many cases research dealing with identifying needs in groups requiring services in the community calls for qualitative methods. But is it possible in this basic course to equip the learner with two approaches for understanding empirical research when an in-depth understanding of even one is an almost impossible task in the first year?

### **“How Much, When, What and How?” – The Second Phase: Dilemmas in Teaching Qualitative Research**

A few years ago, the teaching of qualitative research started to become a more natural part of numerous bachelor's programs, albeit in most of these programs it remained inconsistent and was based to a great extent on the researcher's own epistemology and methodological training; that is, that of the lecturer himself (Blank, 2004; Corner, 2002; Holley, Risley-Curtiss, Stott, Jackson, & Nelson, 2007; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006; Snyder, 1995; Yassour-Borochowitz, 2005). It may be assumed that a non-structured and unsystematic model is a consequence of the primacy of these courses in the various departments, of the deficiencies of earlier models in drawing information from them, and also of the fact that qualitative research is itself a rich, multifaceted, and complex phenomenon. While various researchers continue to deliberate on how to shape their training, in recent years a discourse has developed in research literature regarding the effective model for this kind of course, the objectives, and relevant content (see also Janesick, 1998; Keen, 1996; Ponterotto, 2005; Rogers, 2003).

When observing the structure of courses developed in recent years, a number of questions and dilemmas emerge. For example, teaching the epistemology of qualitative

research is very common among lecturers. Why is this? Is it a basic requisite for the maturation of the qualitative researcher? If so, how much time should we devote to this subject, and at the expense of what? Should we aspire to broad methods training or will teaching two or three methods suffice? At the practice stage, should we drill the students in methods we have taught separately or should we ask them to combine them and conduct a single holistic study? As mentioned above, in this section we wish to raise various dilemmas regarding the teaching of qualitative research and propose further deliberation on the teaching methods extant in the literature.

How much should be invested in theory and how much in practice? Many lecturers open their teaching of qualitative research with an inquiry into the basic premises of the qualitative approach and a presentation of its unique epistemology. This is also how qualitative textbooks begin. Various questions are presented in the introduction of these books, such as: What is the nature of reality and what is the nature of a phenomenon that does not always have clear products? What is the nature of unobservable facts? What is a whole reality whose parts are not separated? What is the relationship between knowledge and its subject, and all kinds of philosophical questions that guide constructive thinking? The main reason presented for this approach is that qualitative inquiry requires a unique maturity in the researcher (McMullen, 2002). This inquiry calls for the ability to observe a situation from a variety of angles and approaches, the ability to decipher a connection between two events that are not necessarily visible and the ability to empathetically observe others and give meaning to their actions; therefore, what is required is a unique view that is essentially different from the quantitative view. Poulin (2007) terms this an emotional and mental “turning point” (p. 438).

Indeed, dilemmas and weaknesses emerge in this approach as well. It seems that this background is not easy on the ear of the first year Bachelor’s student. Each of the questions discussed in this section requires complex theoretical understanding in itself. Are our students sufficiently mature to hear this at the beginning of the course? Our experience has taught us that there is no simple or obvious answer to this question. Are there any preconditions to the ability for developing the qualitative approach and view? For example, can we make the theory easier for the students by starting with practice and experience? As researchers, many of us feel that actual familiarization with qualitative studies, practical experience in conducting an interview, attempting to interpret it, deliberating over an analysis from different angles, can yield the unique view we expect. If that is so, then we should rethink the order of course subjects and how to structure graduated learning. On a deeper level, it is also important to consider the aim of the Qualitative Research course. What do we actually seek to achieve from the students through this course, and what purpose are we seeking to attain? It seems that this approach will also determine the structure of the course. The literature presents different aims from different researchers. Through the course, Poulin (2007) seeks to develop the qualitative approach in the student, to sharpen the student’s ability to observe situations from different angles and discover varied thinking frameworks for texts. She herself devotes half a semester to the introductory chapters employing a five-phase model that includes various emotional experiences and experiential exercises (self-presentation, listening to other students’ presentations and analysis of their texts in class) as well as reflective writing on an extraordinary event they experienced in which the purpose is to



bring about the unique approach that for her constitutes the effective background for becoming a future consumer of qualitative research. Blank (2004) aspires to teach qualitative analysis as practical, systemic, valid and given to verification like any other figure-based analysis. Accordingly, he presents his students with a wide range of practical exercises and various analytical methods that in his opinion constitute the basis for training the student as a future researcher. After observing the difficulties encountered by the students in gaining a deep understanding of the theory, and the considerable progress they made when exposed to the method, our approach at the Yezreel Valley Academic College aligned with the latter and we decided to shorten the introductory sections and expand on the method in the initial phase. We returned to these sections later in the course and at its conclusion, while studying the various research and examples that were processed during the course, and for which we went into the more sensitive and finer points of the philosophy underlying qualitative inquiry.

How many approaches should we teach? Regarding the structure of a qualitative course it seems that the course has several dimensions: theoretical framework, research question, sample, data gathering, data analysis, ethics, and so forth. These different dimensions must be addressed and taught differently and require different timeframes. How should the time be divided and how much should be devoted to each component? Data gathering, of course, requires more extensive engagement. This subject encompasses in-depth interviews, observations, focus groups, and document analysis. Giving one lesson on each tool will cover close to one-third of the course. Our experience shows that teaching interview methodology certainly requires more than one lesson. We have to teach interview structure, conducting an interview, preparing an interview guide and recording an interview. The literature shows that researchers devote at least four lessons to this (Holley et al., 2007) including extensive discussions on ethics and attitudes towards interviewees, questioning techniques (Kramer & Wrenn, 1994) and examination of non-verbal language in an interview (Cramer, 1995). That being so, should we expand on the interview tool at the expense of other methods? Is the interview more important than the others? On the one hand one might argue that fair teaching of qualitative methods should contain a sufficient number of methods, while on the other hand this might lead to overload or lack of depth.

In view of the abovementioned dilemmas we decided to expand on conducting an interview and observations at the expense of other methods. We briefly addressed focus groups as a means of pilot research and life stories as part of the interview method. We did not delve deeply into document analysis, autobiography and other subjects; here too, out of a rationale of gradual progression in practice and application with the aim of increasing the students' ability to actually conduct research.

How should the studied material be practiced? There are two common approaches to student practice: critical reading and analysis of qualitative articles and putting the method into actual practice. Critical reading of a qualitative article constitutes a thoughtful and analytical method and is linked to numerous objectives: developing a critical approach, developing and understanding a qualitative worldview, familiarization with various types of research and data gathering (which are not learned in class) and so on. In this exercise the students are presented with a number of main questions: (a) What is the conceptual framework of the researcher in the article? (b) How did this framework shape the research question and his/her choice of method? (c) What sample was planned

to test the research question? (d) Why was it chosen by the researcher? and (e) other analytical questions. The advantage of this method increases as the students are exposed to a larger number of articles, and to the broad canvas and dilemmas characterizing the qualitative field. The second approach for students' practice is practicing specific methods. This method provides the students with a meaningful opportunity to be part of a real study and building up their skills and confidence as researchers (Davis, 2003; Secret, Ford, & Rompf, 2003; Whipple, Grettenberger, & Flynn, 1997). A third approach entails conducting an entire study embracing a combination of methods. The advantage of an entire study lies in the student's holistic view and his or her ability to understand the study's developing stages. At the Jezreel Valley Academic College we gave the students two different data gathering exercises, each employing a different method from which he or she produced data (interview and observations). In the third stage the student had to unite the methods into a single study and present a joint discussion. In effect we sought to expose students to the different findings obtained from different methods for the same question, to the possibility of analyzing and comparing meanings and summarizing the commonalities. One of the training faculty lecturers suggested that the students conduct a study combining the quantitative method (questionnaires) with the qualitative method (interviews/observations) on the same research question. The results of this exercise showed that many students were significantly averse to combining the methods. On combining different methods, see the discussion below.

How should students be assessed - experience or results? The main question here is what our expectations are regarding the standard of research, data gathering and the standard of analysis and writing presented by Bachelor level students. In the most simplistic sense, should we assess them on real results as qualitative researchers or on the experience itself? Thus, for instance, what level of analysis should we require? Can we achieve identification of categories, and if so, at what level? How should the students present the data they obtained? Would a sporadic presentation of quotes under a category be sufficient, or would constructing a story and drawing connections of meaning between the quotes better? Should we expect the quotes to be indented or italicized in accordance with the rules of correct writing? In this regard we insisted on the rules of correct writing and an in-depth analysis. Our rationale was that this is an initial course on qualitative teaching and as such it has a major influence in forming standards. We therefore insisted on finding main categories (not just finding categories), correct presentation of quotes and also on the interpretative connection between the various quotes. Greater flexibility was exercised regarding the internal content; we asked the students to find categories but did not insist either on the quality of category discovery or on the nomenclature. While we did ask for connections to be made between the quotes, we did not insist on dense, wordy, reflective prose. Although we examined the students on planning the interview guide and correct writing of the interview transcript, we did not examine them on mistakes in conducting the interview (e.g., asking wrong questions at the wrong time, not listening enough to the interviewee). At that point in their training we did not expect them to have those skills. It seems to us that they need more training time to practice in order to achieve it. Additional points that can be taken into account in the assessment and to which we have not given consideration are the students' degree of subjectivity in their work, their transparency as researchers, their reflective ability, the scope of their

accumulated knowledge, the uniqueness of the knowledge they have produced and their level of understanding of data (Shek, Tang, & Han, 2005).

**A holistic view of the learning process.** Now we question whether a course teaching qualitative methods should be analogous with the research process. We know that the ethnographic research process is cyclical, and the research question can be formulated after a pilot or a review of the literature or alternatively, the choice of sample can be the opening stage of the research, and so on. Should we simulate this in learning? What then should be the order of subjects? Should we accept the traditional (quantitative) method of teaching research methods (introduction, the research question, review, choice of sample, data gathering, analysis and writing the final report), or should we present a new model that resembles qualitative thinking? Dare we start with methods and only afterwards come to the research question? In other words, to what extent should we structure the non-structured processes? Here our approach opted for tradition. We did not want to impose another burden on the students by changing the traditional way of teaching. We found it more understandable at that point in their training and also more suitable to the guide books that they were reading. For that reason we teach the course, its order and its requirements in a structured, predetermined fashion that resembles the introductory textbooks on qualitative teaching, similar to traditional quantitative thinking (see the Appendix). However, the question still remains: Why? Would we benefit from changing the approach? How?

### **The Third Phase- Experiencing Qualitative Field Research**

**Qualitative research seminar.** The aim of the research seminar is to give students the tools to conceptualize their research project in terms of research questions and design, field data collection and analyzing qualitative data. The research seminar is to build on the research skills and methods introduced in the second phase by helping students apply these tools to their own research projects. The topics covered in the second phase are aimed at deepening students' familiarity with the practical uses of qualitative research techniques in order to execute their research design.

Each student is required to undertake a significant qualitative field research study as part of the research seminar requirements under the supervision of the lecturers of the Human Services Department. The students have to choose among one of seven research seminars which are being held at the same time by different lecturers. Each seminar is focused on a different research issue (e.g., poverty issues in Israel, ethical issues in human services organization, volunteering in human services organizations, knowledge management in service organization). All research projects in this seminar involve the empirical exploration of a theoretical argument.

Students are assisted during the different phases of their research and offered personal consultations for specific research problems. Teaching methods include group frontal lecture (in which the specific research areas are introduced to the students) and personal counseling meetings in which the seminar lecturers help students promote their personal research projects. Group meetings are held several times during the academic year. The group meetings are devoted to discussions of the different research stages according to students' progress (e.g., formulating research questions, literature review,

research design, data analyzing, discussion conclusions). The lecturers also address ethical questions related to field work in the group and personal meetings. Students are also expected to give a 15-20 minute presentation of their work in the group meetings held at the end of the academic year and have to submit a research paper according to academics rules of scientific writing.

Similarly, all the students submit a quantitative research field project at the end of that same academic year. Doing two research projects using different research methods correspondingly raises several questions. It seems very reasonable for the students to compare these two methods and to ask questions about the validity of both methods. In the next part we will discuss this issue and suggest ways to deal with this problem.

“Will the two walk together?” The need for a mixed methods approach in teaching qualitative research. The central question on which this section will focus is: In the education and training of the novice researcher can we link the qualitative and quantitative methodologies and view them as two complementary methods, or should they be addressed separately as two discrete and conflicting disciplines? The basic premise underlying the teaching concept described in this section is that a synergetic melding of the different research paradigms leads to a deeper understanding of human behavior and to more fruitful research (Corner 2002; Johnson & Turner, 2003)

**Defining the problem.** Over the years social science researchers have emphasized the paradigmatic differences between qualitative and quantitative research (Alexander, 2006). The two research paradigms have engendered two different research cultures based upon totally different basic premises. The qualitative-constructivist approach emphasizes the importance of observing in a natural environment, producing data from a reconstruction of the study’s participants’ experiences, and attempting to interpret the phenomena from their point of view. This approach embarks from a relativist point of view holding that there are no universal truths. Advocates of this approach claim that social behaviors are unique to place (the community) and time (the period), and that every society and culture should be understood in accordance with the concepts and consciousness shaped by the members in a given period and in accordance with the circumstances. According to constructivist researchers, an understanding of reality does not derive from knowledge by means of discovering phenomena but by means of their structuring in the eyes of the beholder (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The quantitative-positivist approach emphasizes the importance of objective measurement by employing formal, mathematical methods of analysis and representative samples while striving to achieve universal generalization. According to advocates of this approach, the phenomena we study are real and exist in and of themselves, are independent of the observer and that the rules governing social phenomena can be revealed through controlled experiments (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The quantitative-positivist approach undergirds studies in which the researchers manipulate the studied variables and predefine the outcome indices. On the other hand, researchers working in accordance with qualitative-constructivist principles prefer minimal manipulation of the variables and enter the field without predefining outcome/category indices. These categories are supposed to develop and be characterized inductively in the course of the research. Each side in the positivist-constructivist debate espouses its preferred approach as the ideal one for research and has

adopted, either covertly or overtly, the incompatibility thesis holding that there is no possibility of mixing these two research paradigms.

In recent years a third stream of researchers has emerged that opposes the extreme concepts of positivism on the one hand and constructivism on the other. This stream attempts to extract the uniqueness embodied in each of the above methods and integrate them. Numerous researchers are now calling for greater methodological variety in social science research (Gelso, 1979; Goldman, 1999). As a result of the integrative approaches the mixed-methods research paradigm has gained legitimacy as a research method in its own right (Creswell, 1999, 2002, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Advocates of mixed-methods research claim that using two types of methods of data collection and analysis enables researchers to simultaneously generalize it from sample to population and gain a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon. This paradigm enables researchers to test theoretical models and change them as a result of participants' responses. Furthermore, using results collected by means of accurate measuring tools facilitates a more in-depth analysis in studies based on information gathered in the field. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) see a great advantage in mixed methods and claim that each method has a relative advantage in certain situations. Glaser and Strauss (1967) also view data obtained from the two approaches as acceptable for forming a theory, and support the informed use of both.

Researchers who prefer the mixed-methods approach base their stance on two philosophical concepts: the pragmatist approach and the dialectical approach (Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher, & Perez-Prado, 2003). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) suggest that the subject be examined from the viewpoint of the pragmatic philosophers (Dewey, 1960; James, 1981). In their view, the uniqueness of each of the methods should be extracted and combined. The pragmatist approach advocates employing methods that can provide an answer to a specific research question. The decisions on the research method and the application of data gathering methods should be determined in accordance with the best way of meeting the needs of a given study (Patton, 2002). According to this concept, the researcher has had no prior obligation to employ mixed methods and any approach is potentially suitable for application according to the aims of the specific study he/she is conducting.

In contrast with the pragmatist approach, the dialectical approach (Green & Caracelli, 1997; Maxwell & Loomis, 2003) calls for consciously seeking synergetic benefit from integration of the positivist and constructivist paradigms. The basic premise of the dialectical approach is that a synergetic mixing of the various research paradigms leads to a more in-depth understanding of human behavior. Dialectical researchers believe that it would also be more ethical to mix methods in order to present a pluralism of interests, voices and points of view (Green & Caracelli, 1997). The complementary value of both approaches is also stressed by Miles and Huberman (1994), who contend that both the validity and applicability of research benefit from collaboration.

Mixed-methods research means an attempt to employ a number of research approaches in answer to specific research questions. The research method is pluralistic, comprehensive, complementary and eclectic in terms of choosing research methods that enable obtaining practical answers to research questions. Mixed-methods research is based on the researcher's understanding of the weaknesses and strengths of the qualitative and quantitative research methods and encourages him or her to employ them

in a complementary fashion with reference to their unique attributes (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

### **Implications**

In this section we assert that qualitative and quantitative research methods complement each other and that in order to implement it action must be taken on two principal levels:

1. Teaching the two methods in separate courses, with quantitative research methods preceding qualitative ones. Qualitative research is characterized by an ongoing dialectical discourse between researcher and data throughout the research process. The process of teaching research methods should begin with teaching based on a deductive research method that dictates to the student a structured logical base that will enable him or her to conduct research according to structured and concrete stages. Only after contending with the structured mode, which is a product of the positivist approach, comes dialectical thinking, which maintains that there are different ways of observing social phenomena, and that there is no single absolute truth. We have seen evidence of this concept in a comparison between different continua of learning qualitative and quantitative research. Teaching the qualitative research methods course after the student has completed the traditional research methods course and has experienced statistical methods appears to us to be more effective developmentally (Basseches, 1984).
2. Experiencing the integration of the two methods by means of research seminars dealing with the same research subject. In this approach an attempt is made to enable the student to conduct a qualitative study together with a quantitative one on the same research subject. This kind of experience leads to a more comprehensive view of the possibility of integrating the two research approaches and enriching the understanding of human behavior by means of mixed-methods research.

### **Summary**

The present article deals with the question of the quality of our curriculum in the context of teaching qualitative research. Not many teaching curricula have been studied and tested in general, particularly teaching programs dealing with a specific subject. What, then, does it mean when we ask whether the teaching model for qualitative research we have developed is coherent, balanced and comprehensive? The concept of quality in a curriculum has various definitions, but in most of them there is some reference to the balance, coherence, consistency and integrity (i.e., to the ethical-moral aspect) of the curriculum described (Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996). True, teaching

qualitative research methods can be reduced to the technical aspects of this type of research and in the process we would lose the possibility that the students will be enthused and be won over by it. In order to obviate this we must invest a great deal in creative teaching of the field. We want students to be able to see the wood and the trees.

We believe this should be examined in light of a number of important components of the program that we hope comprise it harmoniously and in a balanced fashion for methodical, gradual, professional and ethical training (Cocks, 2001). We aspire that at the end of our program every student will not only know how to conduct an interview or an observation and analyze them, but will also understand the essential difference between the findings of a qualitative study and a quantitative one, and will know how to identify which method is most suited to which research questions. Or in other words, the student will understand the essential difference between the two.

Various writers and many varied teaching theories stress that learning should balance across theory and practice, as well as sensory-emotional experience and cognitive understanding (Bonello, 2001). Our understanding is that teaching qualitative research is not merely the teaching of a new, additional skill, but also constitutes, when correctly accomplished, a reminder that the mundane lives of human beings are not only built of routine and repetition, but are living, dynamic, changing entities that should never be taken for granted. This reminder can, perhaps, turn the students (and us, their teachers) into better and more sensitive researchers, as well as more attentive human beings and human services personnel.

In conclusion, as noted above, it is virtually impossible to externally infuse qualitative thinking, for it is almost solely the product of prolonged, independent hard work and there are no shortcuts. It therefore seems that any attempt to shape the foundations of qualitative thinking is tainted by paradox. Perhaps the entire Bachelor's degree should be viewed as merely the first step in the long socialization towards scientific thinking in general and qualitative thinking in particular. However, our experience in the Department of Human Services has taught us that the majority of our graduates do not go on to more advanced degrees. This means that for the majority of graduates who will work in the field, what was taught and internalized in their Bachelor's studies is what will serve them in their everyday work. Therefore, questions on the essence of teaching students towards scientific thinking and the place of qualitative thinking in this process are of paramount importance.

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## Appendix

### The Scientific Writing Course

#### *Learning Objectives:*

- a) Introduction to the characteristics of scientific writing: Distinguishing between popular writing and scientific writing; identifying the structure of an empirical paper (theoretical review, method, results, discussion- objectives and main contents of each chapter); recognizing types of scientific papers (e.g., quantitative vs. qualitative papers);
- b) The writing process--developing an awareness for the key scientific writing rules concerning both structure and style: The components of which the theoretical review is composed (the sentence, the paragraph and the chapter); integration processes; citation rules; technical and ethical aspects of correct citation; APA style; scientific writing ethic;
- c) Guidelines for effective reading: Developing reading strategies in order to comprehend research articles effectively and to search for scientific articles and publications.

#### *Activities:*

Through the course, students are asked to analyze journal articles, to exercise scientific writing and to prepare literature reviews in accordance with the scientific writing rules. These reviews are corrected and returned so that the students can incorporate the revisions into subsequent assignments.

#### *Teaching the "Qualitative Research Methods" Course:*

This is the central stage of teaching qualitative research methods. The course includes two study hours per week with a lecturer and two practice hours per week with a teaching assistant, extending over an entire semester.

#### 1. Introduction to the Qualitative Paradigm

The research paradigm, the underlying assumptions of constructive research, what is the nature of reality, the ways of accessing information, the manner of narrative thinking, how human beings learn to recognize reality.

#### 2. Planning the Research

- a) Designing and formulating the research question – sources of research problems, the nature of qualitative questions, the difference between presenting an open question and formulating an hypothesis, formulating qualitative research questions;
- b) Selecting the sample and population – what is sampling and what are its aims; the difference between a qualitative and quantitative research sampling; what is purposeful sampling, representation, and

generalization in qualitative research; presenting the sample in the final report of the term paper;

- c) Designing the research process –exploratory study and its aims, planning the research objectives, stages in conducting qualitative research, flexibility in the research design.
3. Gathering Data
    - a) In-depth interviews – the aim of the interview, theoretical assumptions concerning the interview (the narrative structure, focusing on people's stories in order to gather findings), planning the interview – stages in developing an interview guide, question types, the technical framework of the interview, ethics in conducting the interview;
    - b) Observations – the principles of observation, types of observation, advantages and disadvantages of the various types, selecting the focus of observation, selecting the units and duration of the observation, documenting the observation and managing a field book;
    - c) Focus groups – methodological aims in selecting a focus group, types of focus groups (group interviews, brainstorming), integrating the focus group into the body of the research.
  4. Analyzing Data
    - a) Introduction – data analysis and its purpose, the analysis process and its products, the interactive nature of the analysis;
    - b) Building first and second order categories – the process of building categories, searching for shared topics, division of the products, finding points of overlap, naming the categories, creating the main categories;
    - c) Organizing the data for the purpose of analysis – jotting down notes during the analysis process, writing memos, creating a category tree.
  5. The Summative Report of the Qualitative Research

The components of the final report; what is an excessive description; writing up the findings; rules of citation; the narrative nature of the final report.

### *Qualitative Research Seminar*

The aim of the research seminar is to give students the tools to conceptualize their research project in terms of research questions and design, field data collection and analyzing qualitative data.

Each student is required to undertake a significant qualitative field research study as part of the research seminar requirements under the supervision of the lecturers of the Human Services Department. The students have to choose between one of seven research seminars which are being held at the same time by different lecturers. All research projects in this seminar involve the empirical exploration of a theoretical argument.

*Seminar Goals and Structure:*

Support students to implement qualitative research based on the research skills and methods introduced in the Qualitative Research Methods course. Help students to apply these tools to their own research project.

The seminar includes group frontal lecture (in which the specific research areas are being introduced to the students), personal counseling meetings in which students will be assisted during the different phases of their research, and consultations for specific research problems.

*By the End the Seminar Students Should Be Able To:*

- a) Formulate research questions for qualitative research
- b) Situate their research question in the relevant literature
- c) Select an appropriate method or methods and tools best suited for addressing their research project
- d) Prepare an executable research design
- e) Apply the selected method and tools to their own research project
- f) Write a research report according to academic requirements
- g) Present their research project to an academic audience and to discuss it with them
- h) Develop critical reading skills of qualitative research reports

*Course Requirements:*

Participating in class meetings, reading required bibliography, attending personal counseling meetings twice a month, doing field research, writing a research report, presenting a research project in class. Submit a research report at the end of the academic year.

Prerequisite: Successful completion of the course, Qualitative Research Methods.

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### Authors' Note

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