

president's letter and highlighted it in bold font at the beginning of the report, often on the cover page. From year to year the focus changed until, over the course of 10 years, the stated mission had changed dramatically without official board action, approval, or even awareness. Further investigation through years of board minutes revealed that, in fact, the board had never adopted a mission statement at all, a matter of considerable surprise to all involved.

As this example shows, documents prove valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing. As with all information to which an evaluator has access during observations, the confidentiality of program records, particularly client records, must be respected. The extent to which actual references to and quotations from program records and documents are included in a final report depends on whether the documents are considered part of the public record and therefore able to be publicized without breach of confidentiality. In some cases, with permission and proper safeguards to protect confidentiality, some information from private documents can be quoted directly and cited.

Program records can provide a behind-the-scenes look at program processes and how they came into being. In the wilderness program evaluation, program staff made their files available to me. I discovered a great deal of information not available to other program participants: letters detailing both conceptual and financial debates between the technical staff (who led the wilderness trips) and the project directors (who had responsibility for the overall management of the program). Without knowledge of those arguments it would have been impossible to fully understand the nature of the interactions between field staff and exec-

utive staff in the project. Disagreements about program finances constituted but one arena of communication difficulties during the program, including time in the wilderness. Interviews with those involved revealed quite different perceptions of the nature of the conflicts, their intensity, and their potential for resolution. While participants became aware of some arguments among staff, for the most part they were unaware of the origins of those conflicts and the extent to which program implementation was hampered by them.

My review of files also revealed the enormous complexity of the logistics for the wilderness education program. Participants (college deans, program directors, administrators) were picked up at the airport in vans and driven to the wilderness location where the field conference would take place. Participants were supplied with all the gear necessary for surviving in the wilderness. Prior to each field trip, staff had many telephone and written exchanges with individual participants about particular needs and fears. Letters from participants, especially those new to the wilderness, showed how little they understood about what they were getting into. One seasoned administrator and hard-core smoker inquired, with reference to the first 10-day hike in the heart of the Gila wilderness, "Will there be a place to buy cigarettes along the way?" Talk about being clueless! But by the end of the year of field trips, he had given up smoking. His letter of inquiry alerted me to the importance of this pre-post observation.

Without having looked over this correspondence, I would have missed the extent to which preparation for the one-week experiences in the wilderness consumed the time and energy of program staff. The intensity of work involved before the field conferences helped explain the behavior of staff once the field trips got under way. So much had gone

into the preparations, virtually none of which was appreciated by or known to program participants, that program staff would sometimes experience a psychological let-down effect and have difficulty energizing themselves for the actual wilderness experience.

Learning to use, study, and understand documents and files is part of the repertoire of skills needed for qualitative inquiry. For an extended discussion of the interpretation of documents and material culture, see Hodder (2000).

Observing What Does Not Happen

The preceding sections have described the things one can observe in a setting or program. Observing activities, interactions, what people say, what they do, and the nature of the physical setting is important in a comprehensive approach to fieldwork. But what about observing what does *not* happen?

The potential absurdity of speculating about what does not occur is illustrated by a Sufi story. During a plague of locusts, the wise-fool Mulla Nasrudin, always looking on the bright side, went from village to village encouraging people by observing how fortunate they were that elephants had no wings. "You people don't realize how lucky you are. Imagine what life would be like with elephants flying overhead. These locusts are nothing."

To observe that elephants have no wings is indeed data. Moreover, elephants have no fins, claws, feathers, or branches. Clearly, once one ventures into the area of observing what does not happen, there are a near-infinite number of things one could point out. The "absence of occurrence" list could become huge. It is therefore with some cau-

tion that I include among the tasks of the observer that of noting what does not occur.

If social science theory, program goals, implementation designs, and/or proposals suggest that certain things ought to happen or are expected to happen, then it is appropriate for the observer or evaluator to note that those things did not happen. If a community where water is scarce shows no evidence of conflict over water rights, an anthropologist could be expected to report and explain this absence of community conflict. If a school program is supposed to, according to its funding mandate and goals, provide children with opportunities to explore the community and no such explorations occur, it is altogether appropriate for the evaluator to note said implementation failure. If the evaluator reported only what occurred, a question might be left in the mind of the reader about whether the other activities had occurred but had simply not been observed. Likewise, if a criminal justice program is supposed to provide one-to-one counseling to juveniles and no such counseling takes place, it is entirely appropriate for the evaluator to note the absence of counseling.

In observing early childhood programs, the absence of children's art on the walls in one center stood out. Indeed, the absence of any colorful posters or art of any kind stood out because all other centers' walls were covered with colorful displays. When I pointed this out, embarrassed staff members explained that they had set in motion a planning process for decorating the walls that had become bogged down and they had just neglected to get back to the issue because, they realized, they got gotten used to the way things were.

Thus, it can be appropriate to note that something did not occur when the observer's basic knowledge of and experience with the phenomenon suggests that the ab-

sence of some particular activity or factor is noteworthy. This clearly calls for judgment, common sense, and experience. As eminent qualitative methodologist Bob Stake (1995) has asserted:

One of the principal qualifications of qualitative researchers is experience. Added to the experience of ordinary looking and thinking, the experience of the qualitative researcher is one of knowing what leads to significant understanding, recognizing good sources of data, and consciously and unconsciously testing out the veracity of their eyes and robustness of their interpretations. It requires sensitivity and skepticism. Much of this methodological knowledge and personality come from hard work under the critical examination of colleagues and mentors. (pp. 49-50)

Making informed judgments about the significance of nonoccurrences can be among the most important contributions an evaluator can make because such feedback can provide program staff members or other evaluation users with information that they may not have thought to request. Moreover, they may lack the requisite experience or awareness to have noticed the absence of that which the evaluator observes. For example, the absence of staff conflict is typically noteworthy because staff conflict is common. Similarly, absence of conflict between administrative levels (local, state, and federal) would be noteworthy because such conflict is, in my experience, virtually universal.

In many such cases, the observation about what did not occur is simply a restatement, in the opposite, of what did occur. That restatement, however, will attract attention in a way that the initial observation might not. For example, if one were observing a program being conducted in a multiracial community, it is possible that program

goals would include statements about the necessity of staff being sensitive to the particular needs, interests, and cultural patterns of minorities, but there may not be specific mention of the desired racial composition of program staff. If, then, the evaluator observes that the staff of the program consists entirely of Caucasians, it is appropriate to report that the staff is all White, that is, no people of color are among the program staff, the importance of which derives from the location and nature of the program.

Observations of staff interaction and decision-making processes also provide opportunities for evaluators to note things that do not happen. If, over time, the observer notes that program planning processes never include participants' input in any systematic or direct way, it may well be appropriate for the evaluator to point out the absence of such input based on experiences indicating the significance of participant input in the planning processes of other programs.

My evaluation of the wilderness education program included observations about a number of things that did not occur. No serious injuries occurred at any of the six field conferences in the wilderness—important information for someone thinking about the possible risks involved in such a program. No participant refused to shoulder his or her share of the work that had to be done in order for the group to live and work together in the wilderness. This observation emerged from discussions with technical field staff who often worked with juveniles in wilderness settings where uneven sharing of cooking, cleaning, and related responsibilities often led to major group conflicts. The fact that the groups I observed never had to deal with one or two people not helping out was worth noting.

Perhaps the most important observation about what did not happen came from observing staff meetings. Over time, I noticed a pattern in which staff held meetings to make decisions about important issues, but no such decisions were made. Staff sometimes thought that a decision had been made, but closure was not brought to the decision-making process and no responsibility for follow-up was assigned. Many subsequent implementation failures and staff conflicts could be traced to ambiguities and differences of opinion that were left unresolved at staff meetings. By hearing me describe both what was and was not occurring, staff became more explicit and effective in making decisions. Reporting what did happen in staff meetings was important, but it was also extremely important to observe what did not happen.

Nested and Layered Case Studies During Fieldwork

A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case. The single leaf, even a single toothpick, has unique complexities—but rarely will we care enough to submit it to case study. We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its context. Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. (Stake 1995:xi)

Months of fieldwork may result in a single case study that describes a village, community, neighborhood, organization, or program. However, that single case study is likely to be made up of many smaller cases—the stories of specific individuals, families, organizational units, and other groups. Critical incidents and case studies of specific bounded activities, like a celebra-

tion, may also be presented within the larger case. The qualitative analysis process typically centers on presentation of specific cases and thematic analysis across cases. Knowing this, fieldwork can be organized around nested and layered case studies, which means that some form of nested case sampling must occur.

Let me briefly review the centrality of case studies as a qualitative inquiry strategy. Chapter 1 opened by citing a number of well-known and influential books based on case studies, for example, *In Search of Excellence: Lessons From America's Best-Run Companies* by Peters and Waterman (1982), Angela Browne's important book *When Battered Women Kill* (1987), and Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's six detailed case studies in *Respect* (2000:13). Chapter 2 presented the construction of *unique case studies* as a major strategic theme of qualitative inquiry. Chapter 3 reviewed theoretical perspectives that are inductively case based. Chapter 4 reviewed at some length the importance in qualitative evaluation of *capturing and reporting individualized outcomes* based on case studies of how participants in programs change during a program and whether they maintain those changes afterward. To illustrate this point, in the wilderness education program our evaluation team constructed case studies of participants using multiple sources of data from fieldwork: (1) background data gathered through interviews about participants' situations and perspectives upon entering the year of field conferences; (2) observations of their experiences during field conferences; (3) informal and conversational interviews with them during the wilderness trips; (4) quotations from formal group interviews (focus groups) held at various times during the trips; (5) excerpts from their journals and other personal writings when they were willing to

share those with us, as they often were; and (6) follow-up telephone interviews with participants after each field trip and after the entire program was completed to track the impact of the program on individuals over time.

Let me pause at this point and note some confusion in the qualitative literature about terminology. For example, sociologists Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993) ask:

But is the case study a method? Or is it an approach? ... Case studies employ various methods. These can include interviews, participant observation, and field studies. Their goals are to reconstruct and analyze a case from a sociological perspective. It would thus be more appropriate to define the case study as an approach, although the term *case method* suggests that it is indeed a method. (p. 1)

Whatever term or phrase is used, case studies depend on clearly defining the object of study, that is, the case. But this too is complex.

When more than one object of study or unit of analysis is included in fieldwork, case studies may be layered and nested within the overall, primary case approach. William Foote Whyte's (1943) classic study *Street Corner Society* has long been recognized as an exemplar of the single-community ($N = 1$) case study (e.g., Yin 1989) even though his study of "Cornerville" includes the stories (case studies) of several individual lower-income youth, some of whom were striving to escape the neighborhood.

The wilderness program illustrates how case studies often are layered and nested. The three-year wilderness program constituted the overall, one might say *macro*, case study. The final evaluation report presented conclusions about the processes and outcomes of the overall program, a case example of a three-year wilderness education ini-

tiative. As Exhibit 6.4 (p. 300) shows, however, within that overall evaluation case study were nested individual case studies documenting individual experiences and outcomes; case studies of each yearlong group cohort; and case studies of each separate field conference, for example, the 10 days in the Gila wilderness or the 10 days in the Kofa Mountains. Slicing through the fieldwork and analysis in other ways were case studies of particular incidents, for example, the emotional catharsis experienced by one participant when she finally managed to overcome her terror and rappelled down a cliff face, the whole group watching and urging her on, a process that took some 45 tense minutes. Other mini-cases consisted of different units of analysis. A full day's hike could be a case, as could running a specific dangerous rapid on the San Juan River. Each evening discussion constituted a case such that that over the three years, we had notes on over 80 discussions of various kinds. Staff meetings made for a different unit of analysis and therefore a different series of case studies. Thus, extended fieldwork can and typically does involve many mini- or micro-case studies of various units of analysis (individuals, groups, specific activities, specific periods of time, critical incidents), all of which together make up the overall case study, in this example, the final evaluation of the wilderness education program. Chapter 5 discusses at length various units of analysis and sampling strategies for case studies (see especially Exhibit 5.5 [p. 231] on units of analysis and Exhibit 5.6 [pp. 243-244] on purposeful sampling strategies).

Fieldwork, then, can be thought of as engaging in a series of multilayered and nested case studies, often with intersecting and overlapping units of analysis. One final case study deserves consideration—the observer's experiences and reactions. We turn to that now.

Observing Oneself

Physician, heal thyself.
Observer, observe thyself.

—Halcolm

In the second chapter, I identified voice and perspective, or reflexivity, as one of the central strategic themes of contemporary, postmodern qualitative inquiry. The term *reflexivity* has entered the qualitative lexicon as a way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective. Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to observe herself or himself so as to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of her or his own perspective and voice as well as—and often in contrast to—the perspectives and voices of those she or he observes and talks to during fieldwork. Reflexivity calls for self-reflection, indeed, critical self-reflection and self-knowledge, and a willingness to consider how who one is affects what one is able to observe, hear, and understand in the field and as an observer and analyst. The observer, therefore, during fieldwork, must observe self as well as others, and interactions of self with others.

Once again, for continuity, I cite Parameswaran (2001), who has written a wonderfully self-reflective account of her experience returning to her native India to do fieldwork as a feminist scholar after being educated in United States.

Because my parents were fairly liberal compared to many of my friends' parents, I grew up with a little more awareness than many middle- and upper-class Indians of the differences between my life and that of the vast majority of Indians. Although I questioned some restrictions that were specific to women of my

class, I did not have the language to engage in a systematic feminist critique of patriarchy or nationalism. Feminism for me had been unfortunately constructed as an illness that struck highly Westernized intellectual Indian women who were out of touch with reality. . . . [I]t was my dislocation from India to the relatively radicalized context of the United States that prompted my political development as a feminist and a woman of color. (p. 76)

Given this background and the controversial focus of her fieldwork (reading of Western romance novels by young Indian women), she identified reflective questions to guide her reflexive inquiry during and after fieldwork:

How do kinship roles assigned to native scholars shape social interactions in the field? How can commitments to sisterhood make it difficult for feminist ethnographers to achieve critical distance and discuss female informants' prejudiced views? (p. 76)

Her personal inquiry into these questions, reflecting on her own fieldwork experiences (Parameswaran 2001), is a model of reflexivity.

Many years ago, Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti (1964) commented on the challenges of self-knowledge. Although his reflections were directed to the importance of lifelong learning rather than to being reflexive in fieldwork, his ruminations offer a larger context for thinking about how to observe oneself, a context beyond concern

about methodological authenticity, though his advice applies to that as well.

Self-knowledge comes when you observe yourself in your relationship with your fellow-students and your teachers, with all the people around you; it comes when you observe the manner of another, his gestures, the way he wears his clothes, the way he talks, his contempt or flattery and *your response*; it comes when you watch everything in you and about you and see yourself as you see your face in the mirror. . . . Now, if you can look into the mirror of relationship exactly as you look into the ordinary mirror, then there is no end to self-knowledge. It is like entering a fathomless ocean which has no shore. . . ; if you can just observe what you are and move with it, then you will find that it is possible to go infinitely far. Then there is no end to the journey; and that is the mystery, the beauty of it. (Krishnamurti 1964:50-51, emphasis added)

I realize that Krishnamurti's phrase "There is no end to the journey" may strike terror in the hearts of graduate students reading this in preparation for dissertation fieldwork or evaluators facing a report deadline. But, remember, he's taking about lifelong learning, of which the dissertation or a specific evaluation report is but one phase. Just as most dissertations and evaluations are reasonably expected to contribute incremental knowledge rather than make major breakthroughs, so too the self-knowledge of reflexive fieldwork is but one phase in a lifelong journey toward self-knowledge—but it's an important phase and a commitment of growing significance as reflexivity has emerged as a central theme in qualitative inquiry.

The point here, which we shall take up in greater depth in the chapters on analysis and credibility, is that the observer must ultimately deal with issues of authenticity, reactivity, and how the observational process may have affected what was observed as well as how the background and predispositions of the observer may have constrained what was observed and understood. Each of these areas of methodological inquiry depends on some degree of critical reflexivity.

Sources of Data Reviewed

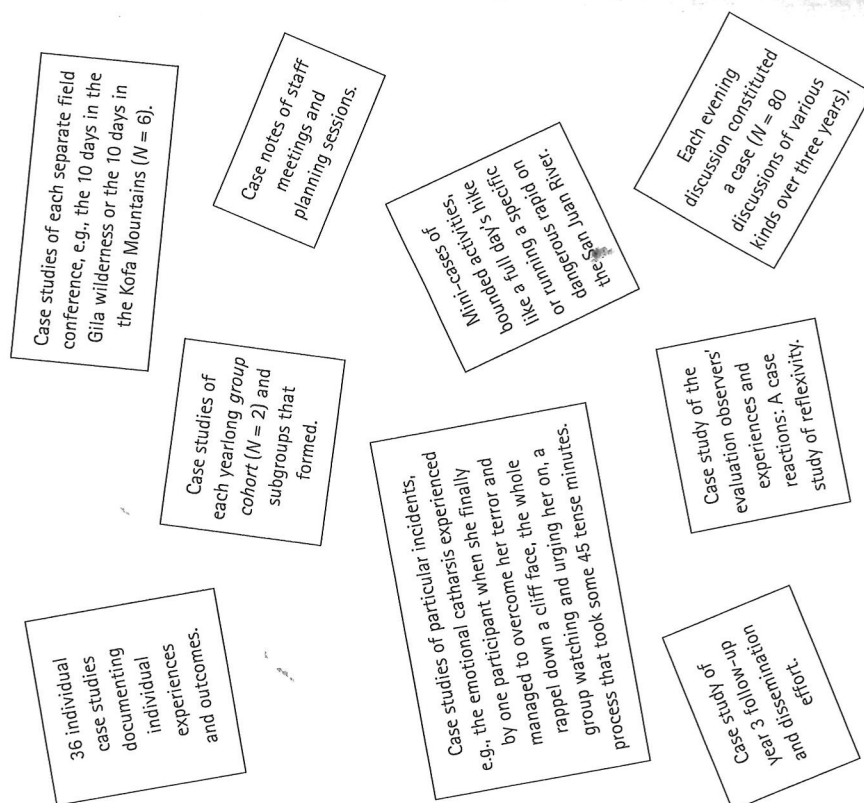
This lengthy review of options in what to observe and sources of data for evaluation fieldwork began with the suggestion that a *sensitizing framework* can be useful as a tool to guide fieldwork. The list of data sources we've reviewed can be used to stimulate thinking about evaluation fieldwork possibilities. Other phenomena and other observational arenas would have different sensitizing frameworks or concepts. The following summarizes the observation and inquiry topics we've reviewed for evaluation:

- Description of the program setting/physical environment
- Description of the social environment
- Capturing historical perspectives
- Describing planned program implementation activities and structured interactions
- Observing informal interactions and unplanned activities
- Recording participants' special program language
- Observing nonverbal communication
- Watching for unobtrusive indicators
- Analyzing documents, files, records, and artifacts

Nested, Layered, and Overlapping Mini-Case Studies During Fieldwork: Example From the Wilderness Education Program Evaluation

The wilderness education program evaluation illustrates how case studies often are layered and nested. Evaluation of the three-year wilderness program constituted the overall macro case study. Nested and layered within that overall evaluation were various mini-cases of overlapping and intersecting units of analysis that helped organize and frame fieldwork.

Macro Case Study: Final Evaluation Study of the Three-Year Program Possible nested, layered, and overlapping mini-case studies



- Commenting on notable nonoccurrences (what does not happen)
- Constructing nested and layered case studies during fieldwork for intersecting and overlapping units of analysis
- Observing oneself: Reflexivity
- Documenting individualized and common outcomes (Chapter 4)

Creativity in Fieldwork

No checklist can be relied on to guide all aspects of fieldwork. A participant observer must constantly make judgments about what is worth noting. Because it is impossible to observe everything, some process of selection is necessary. Plans made during design should be revised as appropriate when important new opportunities and sources of data become available. That's where flexibility and creativity help. Creativity can be learned and practiced (Patton 1987a). Creative fieldwork means using every part of oneself to experience and understand what is happening. Creative insights come from being directly involved in the setting being studied.

I shall return to the issue of creativity in considering the interpretation of field notes later in this chapter and again in the analysis chapter. For the moment, it is sufficient to acknowledge the centrality of creativity in naturalistic inquiry and to concur with Virginia Woolf:

Odd how the creative power at once brings the whole universe to order . . . I mark Henry James' sentence: observe perpetually. Observe the outcome of age. Observe greed. Observe my own despondency. By that means it becomes serviceable. (quoted in Partnow 1978: 185)

■ Doing Fieldwork: The Data-Gathering Process

The purpose of the research has been clarified. The primary research questions have been focused. Qualitative methods using observations have been selected as one of the appropriate methods of data gathering. It is time to enter the field. Now begins the arduous task of taking field notes.

Field Notes

Many options exist for taking field notes. Variations include the writing materials used, the time and place for recording field notes, the symbols developed by observers as their own method of shorthand, and how field notes are stored. No universal prescriptions about the mechanics of and procedures for taking field notes are possible because different settings lend themselves to different ways of proceeding and the precise organization of fieldwork is very much a matter of personal style and individual work habits. **What is not optional is the taking of field notes.**

Aside from getting along in the setting, the fundamental work of the observer is the taking of field notes. Field notes are "the most important determinant of later bringing off a qualitative analysis. Field notes provide the observer's *raison d'être*. If . . . not doing them, [the observer] might as well not be in the setting" (Lofland 1971:102).

Field notes contain the description of what has been observed. They should contain everything that the observer believes to be worth noting. Don't trust anything to future recall. At the moment one is writing it is very tempting, because the situation is still fresh, to believe that the details or particular elements of the situation can be recalled later. If it's important as part of your con-

BOXED IN

Those who aspire to be creative are admonished to "think outside the box." This presumes that one has exhausted the possibilities of learning within the box. Before moving outside the box, make sure you know the box. Observe it. Look deep within. Find out the history of the box, how it came to be the box. What has it held? What has been taken from it? Examine the corners. Look underneath, on top, on all sides. Know the box. Understand the box. Learn what the box has to teach. Think inside the box. Only then will you truly be ready to "think outside the box."

—From Halcolm's *Boxing Guide*

sciousness as an observer, if it's information that has helped you understand the context, the setting, and what went on, then as soon as possible that information should be captured in the field notes.

First and foremost, field notes are descriptive. They should be dated and should record such basic information as where the observation took place, who was present, what the physical setting was like, what social interactions occurred, and what activities took place. Field notes contain the descriptive information that will permit you to return to an observation later during analysis and, eventually, permit the reader of the study's findings to experience the activity observed through your report.

The passages in Exhibit 6.5 on the next page illustrate different kinds of descriptive field notes. On the left side are vague and overgeneralized field notes. On the right side are more detailed and concrete field notes from the same observation.

These examples illustrate the problem of using general terms to describe specific ac-

tions and conditions. Words such as *poor*, *anger*, and *uneasy* are insufficiently descriptive. Such interpretive words conceal what actually went on rather than reveal the details of the situation. Such terms have little meaning for a person present for the observation. Moreover, the use of such terms in field notes, without the accompanying detailed description, means that the fieldworker has fallen into the bad habit of primarily recording interpretations rather than description. Particularly revealing are terms that can make sense only in comparison to something else. The phrase "poorly dressed" requires some frame of reference about what constitutes "good dress." No skill is more critical in fieldwork than learning to be descriptive, concrete, and detailed.

Field notes also contain what people say. Direct quotations, or as near as possible recall of direct quotations, should be captured during fieldwork, recording what was said during observed activities as well as responses garnered during interviews, both formal and conversational. Quotations provide the "emic perspective" discussed earlier—the insider's perspective—which "is at the heart of most ethnographic research" (Fetterman 1989:30).

Field notes also contain the observer's own feelings, reactions to the experience, and reflections about the personal meaning and significance of what has been observed. Don't deceive yourself into thinking that such feelings can be conjured up again simply by reading the descriptions of what took place. Feelings and reactions should be recorded at the time they are experienced, while you are in the field. Both the nature and intensity of feelings should be recorded. In qualitative inquiry, the observer's own experiences are part of the data. Part of the purpose of being in a setting and getting close to the people in the setting is to permit you to experience what it is like to be in that

had to be completed after the weeklong field

ing program as a participant observer, the conference: in evaluating a readership training

ing program as a participant observer, the

- The extent to which notes are openly recorded during the activities being observed is a function of the observer's role and purpose, as well as the stage of participant observation. If the observer or evaluator is openly identified as a short-term, external, nonparticipant observer, participants may expect him or her to write down what is going on. If, on the other hand, one is engaged in longer-term participant observation, the early part of the process may be devoted to establishing the participant observer role with emphasis on participation so that open taking of notes is deferred until the fieldworker's role has been firmly established within the group. At that point, it is often possible to openly take field notes since, it is hoped, the observer is better known to the group and has established some degree of trust and rapport.

ence, I never took notes openly. The only time I wrote was when others were also writing. During the second field conference, I began to openly record observations when dis-

cussions were going on if taking notes did not interfere with my participation. By the third week, I felt I could take notes whenever I wanted to and I had no indication from anyone that they even paid attention to the fact that I was taking notes. By that time I had established myself as a participant, and my participant role was more primary than my evaluator role.

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their journals, but some of the expansion had to be completed after the weeklong field conference. In evaluating a leadership training program as a participant observer, the staff facilitator privately asked me not to take notes during group discussions because it made him nervous, even though most other participants were taking notes.

The extent to which notes are openly recorded during the activities being observed

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The wilderness program evaluation involved three 10-day trips ("field conferences") with participants at different times during the year. During the first field conference, I never took notes openly. The only time I wrote was when others were also writing. During the second field conference, I began to openly record observations when discussions were going on if taking notes did not interfere with my participation. By the third week, I felt I could take notes whenever I wanted to and I had no indication from anyone that they even paid attention to the fact that I was taking notes. By that time I had established myself as a participant, and my participant role was more primary than my evaluator role.

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The point here is that evaluator observers must be strategic about taking field notes, timing their writing and recording in such a way that they are able to get their work done without unduly affecting either their participation or their observations. Given those constraints, **the basic rule of thumb is to write promptly**, to complete field notes as soon and as often as physically and pragmatically possible.

Writing field notes is rigorous and demanding work. Lofland (1971) has described this rigor quite forcefully:

Let me not deceive the reader. The writing of field notes takes personal discipline and time. It is all too easy to put off actually writing notes for a given day and to skip one or more days. For the actual writing of the notes may take as long or longer than did the observation! Indeed, a reasonable rule of thumb here is to expect and plan to spend as much time writing notes as one spent in observing. This is, of course, not invariant . . . but one point is inescapable. All the fun of actually being out and about monkeying around in some setting must also be met by cloistered rigor in committing to paper—and therefore to future usefulness—what has taken place. (p. 104)

Observations, Interviews, and Documentation: Bringing Together Multiple Perspectives

Fieldwork is more than a single method or technique. For example, evaluation fieldwork means that the evaluator is on-site (where the program is happening) observing, talking with people, and going through program records. Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective on

the program. By using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings. Each type and source of data has strengths and weaknesses. Using a combination of data types—triangulation, a recurring theme in this book—increases validity as the strengths of one approach can compensate for the weaknesses of another approach (Marshall and Rossman 1999: 79-111).

Limitations of observations include the possibility that the observer may affect the situation being observed in unknown ways, program staff and participants may behave in some atypical fashion when they know they are being observed, and the selective perception of the observer may distort the data. Observations are also limited in focusing only on external behaviors—the observer cannot see what is happening inside people. Moreover, observational data are often constrained by the limited sample of activities actually observed. Researchers and evaluators need other data sources to find out the extent to which observed activities are typical or atypical.

Interview data limitations include possibly distorted responses due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, politics, and simple lack of awareness since interviews can be greatly affected by the emotional state of the interviewee at the time of the interview. Interview data are also subject to recall error, reactivity of the interviewee to the interviewer, and self-serving responses.

Observations provide a check on what is reported in interviews; interviews, on the other hand, permit the observer to go beyond external behavior to explore feelings and thoughts.

Documents and records also have limitations. They may be incomplete or inaccurate. Client files maintained by programs are no-

toriously variable in quality and completeness, with great detail in some cases and virtually nothing in others. Document analysis, however, provides a behind-the-scenes look at the program that may not be directly observable and about which the interviewer might not ask appropriate questions without the leads provided through documents.

By using a variety of sources and resources, the evaluator observer can build on the strengths of each type of data collection while minimizing the weaknesses of any single approach. This mixed methods, triangulated approach to fieldwork is based on pragmatism (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998) and is illustrated in my attempt to understand some of the problems involved in staff communication during the wilderness education evaluation. I mentioned this example earlier, but I'd like to expand it here.

As noted, two kinds of staff worked in the program: (1) those who had overall management and administrative responsibility and (2) the technical staff, who had responsibility for wilderness skills training, field logistics, and safety. The technical staff had extensive experience leading wilderness trips, but they also were skilled at facilitating group processes. During the trips, the lines of responsibility between technical staff and administrative staff were often blurred and, on occasion, these ambiguities gave rise to conflicts. I observed the emergence of conflict early on the first trip but lacked context for knowing what was behind these differences. Through interviews and casual conversations during fieldwork, I learned that all of the staff, both administrative and technical, had known each other prior to the program. Indeed, the program administrative directors had been the college professors of the technical staff while the latter were still undergraduate students. However, the technical staff had introduced the directors to the

wilderness as an environment for experiential education. Each of the staff members described in interviews his or her perceptions of how these former relationships affected the field operations of the program, including difficulties in communication that had emerged during planning sessions prior to the actual field conferences. Some of those conflicts were documented in letters and memos. Reading their files and correspondence gave me a deeper understanding of the different assumptions and values of various staff members. **But the documentation would not have made sense without the interviews, and the focus of the interviews came from the field observations. Taken together, these diverse sources of information and data gave me a complete picture of staff relationships.** Working back and forth among individual staff members and group staff meetings, I was able to use this information to assist staff members in their efforts to improve their communication during the final field conference. All three sources of information proved critical to my understanding of the situation, and that understanding enhanced my effectiveness in providing feedback as a formative evaluator.

The Technology of Fieldwork and Observation

The classic image of the anthropological fieldworker is of someone huddled in an African hut writing voluminously by lantern. Contemporary researchers, however, have available to them a number of technological innovations that, when used judiciously, can make fieldwork more efficient and comprehensive. First and foremost is the battery-operated tape recorder or dictaphone. For some people, myself included, dictating field notes saves a great deal of time while

increasing the comprehensiveness of the report. Learning to dictate takes practice, effort, and critical review of early attempts. Tape recorders must be used judiciously so as not to become obtrusive and inhibit program processes or participant responses. A tape recorder is much more useful for recording field notes in private than it is as an instrument to be carried about at all times, available to put a quick end to any conversation into which the observer enters.

Portable computers have emerged as a fieldwork tool that can facilitate writing field notes. Cameras have become standard accessories in fieldwork. Photographs can help in recalling things that have happened as well as vividly capturing the setting for others. Digital photography and advances in printing and photocopying now make it possible to economically reproduce photographs in research and evaluation reports.

In the wilderness education evaluation, I officially became the group photographer, making photographs available to all of the participants. This helped legitimize taking photographs and reduced the extent to which other people felt it necessary to carry their own cameras at all times, particularly at times when it was possible that the equipment might be damaged. Looking at photographs during analysis helped me recall the details of certain activities that I had not fully recorded in my written notes. I relied heavily on photographs to add details to descriptions of places where critical events occurred in the Grand Canyon initiation story I wrote about coming of age in modern society (Patton 1999a).

Video photography is another technological innovation that has become readily accessible and common enough that it can sometimes be used unobtrusively. For example, in a formative evaluation of a staff training program I used videotapes to provide vi-

sual feedback to staff. Videotaping classrooms, training sessions, therapeutic interactions, and a host of other observational targets can sometimes be less intrusive than a note-taking evaluator. We had great success taking videos of mothers and children playing together in early childhood education centers. Of course, use of such equipment must be negotiated with program staff and participants, but the creative and judicious use of technology can greatly increase the quality of field observations and the utility of the observational record to others. Moreover, comfort with tape recorders and video cameras has made it increasingly possible to use such technology without undue intrusion when observing programs where professionals are the participants. In addition, sometimes videotapes originally done for research or evaluation can subsequently be used for future training, program development, and public relations, making the costs more manageable because of added uses and benefits. Evaluators learn to balance costs against benefits and look for multiple uses of more expensive techniques where there is a need to make judicious decisions about reducing expenses.

Visual technology can add an important dimension to fieldwork if the observer knows how to use such technology and uses it well—for there is much to learn beyond how to click the camera or turn on the video recorder, especially about integrating and analyzing visual data within a larger fieldwork context (Ball and Smith 1992). Moreover, a downside to visual technology has emerged, since it is now possible to not only capture images on film and video but also change and edit those images in ways that distort. In his extensive review of "visual methods" in qualitative inquiry, Douglas Harper (2000) concludes that "now that images can be created and/or changed digi-

tally, the connection between image and 'truth' has been forever severed" (p. 721). This means that issues of credibility apply to using and reporting visual data as they do to other kinds of data.

Perhaps the ultimate in observer technology for fieldwork is the Stenomask, a sound-shielded microphone attached to a portable tape recorder that is worn on a shoulder strap. The handle of the Stenomask contains the microphone switch. The Stenomask allows the observer to talk into the recorder while an activity is occurring without people in the area being able to hear the dictation. Its use is limited to external, onlooker observations, as the following passage makes clear.

Two procedures precede any data taking. The first is orientation of the subject and as many other persons in the environment as are likely to be present during observations. . . . During this phase, the observer goes into the habitat and behaves exactly as he or she will during the actual recording. They wear the Stenomask, follow the subject about and run the machine, taking mock records. The purpose of these activities is exactly what is implied in the title, to adapt the subject and others in the environment to the presence of the observer and to reduce the effects of that presence to as near zero as possible. The cardinal rule of the observer during this time is to be completely nonresponding. It has been demonstrated over and over again that if the observer continues to resist all social stimuli from the subject and others (and some will occur despite the most careful orientation) by simply keeping the mask in place, looking busily at work and remaining nonresponding, both subjects and others soon cease emitting stimuli to the observer and come to truly accept him or her as a present and sometimes mobile but completely nonresponding part of the environment, per-

haps somewhat like a rolling chair. (Scott and Eklund 1979:9-11).

The imagery of a fieldworker following a subject around through a day wearing a Stenomask offers a stark contrast to that of the traditional anthropologist doing participant observation and trying covertly to write notes during informal field interviews. Taking field notes can be nearly as intrusive as wearing a Stenomask, as illustrated in the fieldwork of anthropologist Carlos Castaneda. In the passage below, Castaneda (1973) reports on his negotiations with Don Juan to become his Native Indian key informant on sorcery and indigenous drugs. The young anthropologist records that Don Juan "looked at me piercingly."

"What are you doing in your pocket?" he asked, frowning. "Are you playing with your whanger?"

He was referring to my taking notes on a minute pad inside the enormous pockets of my windbreaker.

When I told him what I was doing he laughed heartily.

I said that I did not want to disturb him by writing in front of him.

"If you want to write, write," he said. "You don't disturb me." (pp. 21-22)

Whether one uses modern technology to support fieldwork or simply writes down what is occurring, some method of keeping track of what is observed must be established. In addition, the nature of the recording system must be worked out in accordance with the participant observer's role, the purpose of the study, and consideration of how the data-gathering process will affect the activities and persons being observed. Many of these issues and procedures must be worked out during the initial phase (entry period) of fieldwork.

□ Stages of Fieldwork

Thus far, fieldwork has been described as if it were a single, integrated experience. Certainly, when fieldwork goes well it flows with a certain continuity, but it is useful to look at the evolution of fieldwork through identifiable stages. Three stages are most often discussed in the participant observation literature: the entry stage, the routinization of data-gathering period, and the closing stage. The following sections explore each of these stages, again using evaluative research as the primary example.

Entry Into the Field

The writings of anthropologists sometimes present a picture of the early period of fieldwork that reminds me of the character in Franz Kafka's haunting novel *The Castle*. Kafka's character is a wandering stranger, K., with no more identity than that initial. He doesn't belong anywhere, but when he arrives at the castle he wants to become part of that world. His efforts to make contact with the faceless authorities who run the castle lead to frustration and anxiety. He can't quite figure out what is going on, can't break through their vagueness and impersonal nature. He doubts himself; then he gets angry at the way he is treated; then he feels guilty, blaming himself for his inability to break through the ambiguous procedures for entry. Yet, he remains determined to make sense out of the incomprehensible regulations of the castle. He is convinced that, after all, where there are rules—and he does find that there are rules—they must fit together somehow, have some meaning, and manifest some underlying logic. There must be some way to make contact, to satisfy the needs of the authorities, to find some pattern of behavior that will permit him to be ac-

cepted. If only he could figure out what to do, if only he could understand the rules, then he would happily do what he was supposed to do. Such are the trials of entry into the field.

Entry into the field for evaluation research involves two separate parts: (1) negotiation with gatekeepers, whoever they may be, about the nature of the fieldwork to be done and (2) actual physical entry into the field setting to begin collecting data. These two parts are closely related, for the negotiations with gatekeepers will establish the rules and conditions for how one goes about playing the role of observer and how that role is defined for the people being observed. In traditional scholarly fieldwork for the purpose of basic or applied research, the investigator unilaterally decides how best to conduct the fieldwork. In evaluation studies, the evaluator will need to take into account the perspectives and interests of the primary intended users of the evaluation. In either case, interactions with those who control entry into the field are primarily strategic, figuring out how to gain entry while preserving the integrity of the study and the investigator's interests. The degree of difficulty involved varies depending on the purpose of the fieldwork and the expected or real degree of resistance to the study. Where the field researcher expects cooperation, gaining entry may be largely a matter of establishing trust and rapport. At the other end of the continuum are those research settings where considerable resistance, even hostility, is expected, in which case gaining entry becomes a matter of "infiltrating the setting" (Douglas 1976:167). And sometimes entry is simply denied. A doctoral student had negotiations for entry end abruptly in a school district where she had developed good relationships with school personnel and negotiations appeared to be going well. She later learned that she was denied entry

far into the negotiation process because of community opposition. The local community had had a very bad experience with a university researcher more than 20 years earlier and still viewed all research with great suspicion.

A major difference between the entry process in anthropological or sociological research and the entry process for evaluation research is the extent to which fieldworkers are free to make up whatever story they want to about the purpose of the study. In scholarly research, the investigators represent only themselves and so they are relatively free to say whatever they want to say about why they are doing the research guided by the ethics of their discipline with regard to informed consent. The usual cross-cultural explanation is some variation of "I'm here because I would like to understand you better and learn about your way of life because the people from my culture would like to know more about you." While anthropologists admit that such an explanation almost never makes sense to indigenous peoples in other cultures, it remains a mainstay initial explanation until mutual reciprocities can be established with enough local people for the observation process to become established and accepted in its own right.

Evaluators and action researchers, however, are not just doing fieldwork out of personal or professional interest. They are doing the fieldwork for some decision makers and information users who may be either known or unknown to the people being studied. It becomes critical, then, that evaluators, their funders, and evaluation users give careful thought to how the fieldwork is going to be presented.

Because the word *evaluation* has such negative connotations for many people, having had negative experiences being evaluated, for example, at school or work, it may be ap-

propriate to consider some other term to describe the fieldwork. In our onlooker, nonparticipation observations for an implementation study of early childhood programs in Minnesota, we described our role to local program participants and staff as follows:

We're here to be the eyes and ears for state legislators. They can't get around and visit all the programs throughout the state, so they've asked us to come out and describe for them what you're doing. That way they can better understand the programs they have funded. We're not here to make any judgments about whether your particular programs is good or bad. We are just here to be the eyes and ears for the legislature so that they can see how the legislation they've passed has turned into real programs. This is your chance to inform them and give them your point of view.

Other settings lend themselves to other terms that are less threatening than *evaluator*. Sometimes a fieldwork project can be described as *documentation*. Another term I've heard used by community-based evaluators is *process historian*. In the wilderness education program I was a full participant observer, and staff described my role to participants as "keeper of the community record," making it clear that I was not there to evaluate individual participants. The staff of the project explained that they had asked me to join the project because they wanted someone who did not have direct ego involvement in the success or outcomes of the program to observe and describe what went on, both because they were too busy running the program to keep detailed notes about what occurred and because they were too involved with what happened to be able to look at things dispassionately. We had agreed from the beginning that the commu-

nity record I produced would be accessible to participants as well as staff.

In none of these cases did changing the language automatically make the entry process smooth and easy. Earlier in this chapter, I described our attempt to be viewed as "educational researchers" in evaluating a community leadership program. Everyone figured out almost immediately that we were really evaluators—and that's what participants called us. Regardless of the story told or the terms used, the entry period of fieldwork is likely to remain "the first and most uncomfortable stage of field work" (Wax 1971:15). It is a time when the observer is getting used to the new setting, and the people in that setting are getting used to the observer. Johnson (1975) suggests that there are two reasons why the entry stage is both so important and so difficult:

First, the achievement of successful entrée is a precondition for doing the research. Put simply, no entrée, no research. . . . [P]ublished reports of researchers' entrée experiences describe seemingly unlimited contingencies which may be encountered, ranging from being gleefully accepted to being thrown out on one's ear. But there is a more subtle reason why the matter of one's entrance to a research setting is seen as so important. This concerns the relationship between the initial entrée to the setting and the validity of the data that is subsequently collected. The conditions under which an initial entrée is negotiated may have important consequences for how the research is socially defined by the members of the setting. These social definitions will have a bearing on the extent to which the members trust a social researcher, and the existence of relations of trust between an observer and the members of a setting is essential to the production of an objective report, one which retains the integrity of the actor's perspective and its social context. (pp 50-51)

While the observer must learn how to behave in the new setting, the people in that setting are deciding how to behave toward the observer. Mutual trust, respect, and cooperation are dependent on the emergence of an exchange relationship, or reciprocity (Jorgensen 1989:71; Gallucci and Perugini 2000), in which the observer obtains data and the people being observed find something that makes their cooperation worthwhile, whether that something is a feeling of importance from being observed, useful feedback, pleasure from interactions with the observer, or assistance in some task. This *reciprocity model* of gaining entry assumes that some reason can be found for participants to cooperate in the research and that some kind of mutual exchange can occur.

Infiltration lies at the opposite end of the continuum from a negotiated, reciprocity model of entry. Many field settings are not open to observation based on cooperation. Douglas (1976:167-71) has described a number of infiltration strategies, including "worming one's way in," "using the crowbar to pry them open for our observations," showing enough "saintly submissiveness" to make members guilty enough to provide help, or playing the role of a "spineless boob" who could never possibly hurt the people being observed. He has also suggested using various ploys of misdirection where the researcher diverts people's attention away from the real purpose of the study. There is also the "phased-entrée tactic" by which the researcher who is refused entrée to one group begins by studying another group until it becomes possible to get into the group that is the real focus of the researcher's attention, for example, begin by observing children in a school when what you really want to observe are teachers or administrators.

Often the best approach for gaining entrée is the "known sponsor approach."

When employing this tactic, observers use the legitimacy and credibility of another person to establish their own legitimacy and credibility; for example, the director of an organization for an organizational study, a local leader, elected official, or village chieftain for a community study. Of course, it's important to make sure that the known sponsor is indeed a source of legitimacy and credibility. Some prior assessment must be made of the extent to which that person can provide halo feelings that will be positive and helpful. For example, in an evaluation, using a program administrator or funders as a known sponsor may increase suspicion and distrust among program participants and staff.

The initial period of fieldwork can be frustrating and give rise to self-doubt. The fieldworker may lie awake at night worrying about some mistake, some faux pas, made during the day. There may be times of embarrassment, feeling foolish, of questioning the whole purpose of the project, and even feelings of paranoia. The fact that one is trained in social science does not mean that one is immune to all the normal pains of learning in new situations. On the other hand, the initial period of fieldwork can also be an exhilarating time, a period of rapid new learning, when the senses are heightened by exposure to new stimuli, and a time of testing one's social, intellectual, emotional, and physical capabilities. The entry stage of fieldwork magnifies both the joys and the pains of doing fieldwork.

Evaluators can reduce the "stick-out-like-a-sore-thumb syndrome" by beginning their observations and participation in a program at the same time that participants are beginning the program. In traditional fieldwork, anthropologists cannot become children again and experience the same socialization into the culture that children experience. Evaluators, however, can often ex-

perience the same socialization process that regular participants experience by becoming part of the initiation process and timing their observations to coincide with the beginning of a program. Such timing makes the evaluator one among a number of novices and substantially reduces the disparity between the evaluator's knowledge and the knowledge of other participants.

Beginning the program with other participants, however, does not assure the evaluator of equal status. Some participants may be suspicious that real difficulties experienced by the evaluator as a novice participant are phony—that the evaluator is play-acting, only pretending to have difficulty. On the first day of my participation in the wilderness education program, we had our first backpacking experience. The staff leader began by explaining that "your backpack is your friend." I managed to both pack and adjust my "friend" incorrectly. As a result, as soon as we hit the trail, I found that the belt around my waist holding the backpack on my hips was so tight that my friend was making my legs fall asleep. I had to stop several times to adjust the pack. Because of these delays and other difficulties I was having with the weight and carriage of the pack, I ended up as the last participant along the trail. The next morning when the group was deciding who should carry the map and walk at the front of the group to learn map reading, one of the participants immediately volunteered my name. "Let Patton do it. That way he can't hang back at the end of the group to observe the rest of us." No amount of protest from me seemed to convince the participants that I had ended up behind them all because I was having trouble hiking (working out my "friendship" with my backpack). They were convinced I had taken that position as a strategic place from which to evaluate what was happening. It is well to remember, then, that regardless of the na-