# INTRODUCTION

**M**y experience has convinced me that, in a relatively short time, a multidisciplinary research team, including whenever possible **insiders** as well as outsiders, can make significant progress toward understanding a problematic situation from an insider's perspective. My objective here is to convince you that such an approach is possible, to provide you with enough examples and information about specific techniques that you will be willing to experiment with the approach, and to ensure that you recognize its limits.

I believe Rapid Qualitative Inquiry (RQI) can produce useful results even when the most important elements of the local situations from the perspectives of the local participants are not obvious. Often in these situations, the words the local participants use to define the situation, their categories for dealing with reality, are also not known. If there is no urgent need for an intervention to address the situation, traditional long-term fieldwork is a solution. However, my experience has been that there is almost never enough time; that when there *is* time, trained qualitative researchers are not available; and that when both are available, it is exceedingly difficult to convince the decision makers that long-term qualitative research is the best use of resources.

I want to encourage new users to experiment with RQI while helping current users of RQI and related approaches do a better job. I also want to increase confidence in the results of RQI among the decision makers who are its potential clients. Students studying qualitative research methods who need to do short research projects, especially students

in professional programs, are an important audience for this book. A Mini-RAP can provide students with the opportunity to develop skills and attitudes relevant to qualitative research while doing an educational activity based on RQI. Students doing short-term qualitative research activities can be found in graduate and undergraduate courses as diverse as community nursing, advanced agricultural research, rural sociology, forestry, marine management, community development, leadership studies, organizational theory, information systems planning, and urban planning. A second audience are the professionals facing complex situations where local categories are not known, but who do not have the time or resources for traditional long-term **fieldwork**. Rapid research approaches have been used for project design, project evaluation, and for design of additional research in fields as diverse as wetland evaluation, citywide needs assessment, early childhood care, home ownership patterns among minorities, reproductive health, marketing, and landscape planning (see table 9.1).

RQI uses many of the techniques of qualitative research. These techniques should be familiar to anyone with formal training in anthropology or closely related fields. Ideally, every RQI team will have at least one member with expertise in the assumptions and techniques of qualitative research. However, there will be times when no one on the team has had formal training in qualitative research methodology, or when most team members will be unfamiliar with these techniques. Therefore, I have included brief introductions to some concepts most useful to RQI and suggestions on where additional information can be found. A note of caution—these brief introductions cannot do justice to the richness of qualitative research and the reader is encouraged to seek further information from primary sources. However, even these brief introductions, when combined with the attitude of a seeker, a willingness to listen intently, and genuine respect for others can help users of RQI get started. The specific techniques that are introduced have proven to be especially relevant to RQI. If no one on the team has experience with qualitative research methodology, this should be noted in the report.

My decision to produce a book that can be used in both academic and nonacademic settings will probably ensure that neither camp is completely satisfied with the results.

## A Note on Terms

In this second edition I use the phrase **Rapid Qualitative Inquiry (RQI)** to describe a particular type of **rapid research** methodology. At least some of the characteristics of the approach I call RQI began appearing in descriptions of research in the late 1970s, under names such as "Rapid Appraisal," "Rapid Assessment," or "Rapid Rural Appraisal." More recently, the label "**Rapid Assessment Process" (RAP)** has been applied to a variety of related rapid research approaches. Similar approaches have also been referred to by a variety of names and have been used in numerous settings, in the Unites States and throughout the world. (These are discussed in chapter 9, "Rapid Research and the RQI Family Tree.")

Although I am reluctant to introduce a new moniker to the mix, there are certain features of rapid research methodology that, taken together, represent a particular and significant type of RAP. RQI can be considered a further refinement of RAP, and in most cases the terms are interchangeable. When I discuss examples of rapid research that were identified as RAP at the time the research was done, but that are also examples of RQI as I define it in this book, usually I will refer to them as RAP/RQI.

### Rapid, Qualitative, Inquiry

Rapid Qualitative Inquiry (RQI) is defined as:

> intensive, team-based qualitative inquiry with (a) a focus on the insider's or **emic** perspective, (b) using multiple sources and **triangulation**, and (c) using **iterative** data analysis and additional data collection to quickly develop a preliminary understanding of a situation.

Each word in the phrase "Rapid Qualitative Inquiry" is useful for further explaining and defining the approach, which is team-based and cannot be implemented by one individual researcher.

For our purposes, "rapid" means a minimum of four or five days and, in most situations, a maximum of about six weeks. RAP/RQI recognizes that there are times when results are needed almost immediately and that the "rapid" production of results involves compromises and requires special attention to methodology if the results are to be meaningful. The

time actually required has to be adjusted to the local situation and both the minimum and maximum are offered as guidelines rather than hard rules. Rapid does not mean rushed, and spending too little time or being rushed during the process can reduce RQI to "**research tourism**."

"Qualitative" refers to a study of things in their natural setting, where the research attempts "to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 3). Creswell (2013, 44) added to Denzin and Lincoln's definition an emphasis on the process of the research with attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and the need for situating a study within a political, social, and cultural context along with attention to the background of the researcher and how this informs the study. Qualitative research often implies the study of many variables in a few cases. Anthropologists have traditionally used a qualitative research approach to study cultures, and anthropology is the academic discipline most closely associated with qualitative research.

"Inquiry" as used in the phrase "Rapid Qualitative Inquiry," and consistent with the way the term is used by most people who write about the topic, is a synonym for "research." However, some observers differentiate by noting that research is expected to contribute to the scientific body of knowledge while inquiry is concerned with practical problem solving. John Dewey is credited with defining inquiry as an investigation into some part of reality with the purpose of creating knowledge for a controlled change. In the field of education, the issue of inquiry versus research has been discussed in terms of teachers doing inquiry for their own benefit as opposed to research being done for the benefit of the community. A more nuanced relationship of inquiry and research in the field of education is suggested by the title of Clarke and Erickson's (2003) book, *Teacher Inquiry: Living the Research in Everyday Practice*. For Reid (2004, 8) inquiry is not carried out with the intention, necessarily, of being made public, but this does not imply that there is any less intellectual rigor in carrying out inquiry than in conducting research. The assumption in *this* book is that the primary purpose of inquiry is not contributing to a broad body of knowledge, but producing understanding that has sufficient rigor to be evaluated publicly and used by others. Results can, but do not necessarily, contribute to a broad body of knowledge. Inquiry is also used here as a synonym for assessment and appraisal. I have chosen the phrase "qualitative inquiry" instead of "rapid ethnography" out of respect for those who have helped define

ethnography and have argued it always requires prolonged fieldwork—but at its heart, RQI is based on ethnography.

### Assessment, Appraisal, Mini-RAP

Both "Rapid Assessment" and "Rapid Appraisal" are terms that have been widely used in the kind of research discussed here, often as synonyms. Utarini, Winkvist, and Pelto (2001, 390) suggested assessment "draws attention to a limited or focused scope of information for the purpose of obtaining data to assist in problems solving or evaluation." I did not use the term "appraisal" in the first edition because that term had become so closely associated with development projects, especially projects funded by multilateral donors like the World Bank, that use of the term could lead to confusion and might have limited the potential application of RAP. Many users of RAP did not differentiate between appraisal and assessment and many potential users assumed RAP was an approach used exclusively by international donors in developing countries—an incorrect and unfortunate assumption.

A **Mini-RAP** is an educational activity and not an approach to research. A Mini-RAP is based on RQI but with limited data collection, usually only two short interviews and a team of two persons. A Mini-RAP can help practitioners master the skills and attitudes needed for doing RQI. Students doing short-term qualitative research as a course requirement will probably do a Mini-RAP but could also do a RQI. The requirements and use of a Mini-RAP are discussed in appendix C.

### Field Guides

This second edition is, like the first edition, an introduction, but it is also designed as a field guide.

Field guides have been described as books designed to be brought into the "field" or locale to help the reader identify concepts that are natural occurrences. Contemporary definitions of field guides often make reference to their ability to provide an introduction, make knowledge accessible to individuals without specialized skills, and help readers identify context. They are portable and need not be read from cover to cover in a linear way. A field guide for conducting educational research (California Postsecondary Education Commission 2008) was described as providing guidance and tips based on real-world experience that would allow researchers to apply

"deep theory in a hectic and messy world." I especially like their description of their field guide as "a set of variably scaled maps" and their caution that the researcher, like the novice traveler should "not confuse the map with the territory," since the world of research "is far richer, and messier, than any two-dimensional map." Whether one is an applied researcher working with others to make changes or a student involved in projects to develop qualitative research skills, if the activity is team based, this field guide has been designed as a map rooted in real-world experience.

## Organization of the Book

I have organized the book around the three basic concepts of RQI: (1) a focus on the categories used by the insiders to describe local situations; (2) **data collection** using multiple techniques and triangulation; and (3) analysis using an **iterative process**, where initial analysis is followed by several cycles of additional data collection and more analysis. Chapter 1 discusses two examples of RQI, explores situations where RQI was especially appropriate, and provides an overview of the relationship of specific research techniques to the basic concepts of RQI. Figure 1.1 in chapter 1 is a navigational aide and includes page numbers for quickly locating information about both basic concepts and techniques. Chapter 1 also introduces the important concept of **Appreciative Inquiry**.

Chapter 2 explores the meaning of an insider's perspective and the implication of a focus on insiders' perspectives for research. Chapter 3 deals with data collection and explores the use of multiple data collection techniques and triangulation. Chapter 4 deals with iterative analysis and additional data collection and is divided between (1) an introduction to the iterative process along with a discussion of illustrative techniques associated with the iterative process and (2) a discussion of data analysis and illustrative techniques for data analysis. Chapter 4 also examines issues relating to the team preparation of RQI reports. The materials in chapters 2, 3, and 4 are critical for the teamwork that is the foundation of RQI. The materials in the latter parts of chapters 3 and 4 provide an introduction to research techniques that will be familiar to anyone with training in qualitative research.

Chapter 5 explores the special role of teamwork in RQI and is based on RQIs of the Student Services Division at a community college and state farms in Poland. Chapter 6 examines issues relating to the trustwor-

thiness of RQI's results, notes concerns about the process, and proposes the use of a checklist, the "RAP sheet," to be attached to RQI reports. The checklist is designed to provide enough information about the research so that a reader can evaluate the results, and to remind the RQI team of issues they should not overlook. Chapter 7 explores technology such as smart phones for improving the team collection and analysis of data and the preparation of reports.

Chapter 8 examines ethical issues including issues concerning the relationship of the RQI team to the sponsoring organization and the issue of **bogus empowerment**. Chapter 9 provides the context for relating RQI to other rapid methods by briefly reviewing the history of RQI. Chapter 9 also includes a list of selected other rapid research studies that is organized around the sectors where these methods have been used. I have only referenced in this book a limited number of the more than one hundred sixty studies that I have identified and that used an RQI-based approach. It should be noted that most rapid research studies are used to design interventions or to satisfy course assignments and are not documented in journal articles or even reports that are accessible on the web. A final chapter expands on key concepts related to rigor and considers the future of RQI.

Where appropriate, chapters include the identification of main points and suggestions for additional readings. A significantly expanded appendix C explores ways of teaching RQI to both practitioners and student and explains the special role of the "Mini-RAP." The appendices also include summaries of the two RQI/RAPs that are discussed in the text. A glossary provides definitions of key terms. The first time a term that may not be clear is used and/or where it is described in the text it is formatted in bold, indicating its inclusion in the glossary. A list of references and author and subject indexes complete the book.

## Beyond the Book

Users of RQI are requested to share their experiences with each other and with me. My e-mail address is beebe@gonzaga.edu. In addition to the website for the book maintained by the publisher, AltaMira/Rowman & Littlefield, I have developed a companion website for the Rapid Qualitative Inquiry, http://rapidqualitativeinquiry.com. A Facebook site for the

book can be found at http://facebook.com/rapidqualitativeinquiry. A blog for the book and the topic of rapid qualitative inquiry can be found at http://rapidqualitativeinquiry.blogspot.com/.

## Additional Readings

### The Essential RQI/RAP Library

In preparing the following list of essential books, I have started with the assumption that expertise in qualitative research methodology is valuable for the RQI team. I have also assumed that there will be times when no one on the team has had prior training in qualitative research methodology and that written materials can provide access to some of the needed expertise. Students in qualitative research courses will find that other books used in their courses also cover the topics in these books. The following books, chosen because I like them and have found them useful, provide both an introduction to the philosophy that underlies qualitative research, to the attitudes necessary to implement it, and details on specific research techniques, including data analysis and preparation of results, relevant to the successful completion of a qualitative research project.

### Two Most Useful References for Everyone

Creswell, John W. 2013. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches.* 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Willis, Jerry W. 2007. *Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### *Most Useful Reference for Someone with a Very Limited Background in Qualitative Research*

Richards, Marvin Lyn, and Janice M. Morse. 2013. *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods.* 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### Other Very Useful References

Agar, Michael. 2013. *The lively science: Remodeling human social research.* Minneapolis, MN: Mill City Press.

Angrosino, Michael. 2007. *Doing cultural anthropology: Projects in ethnographic data collection.* 2nd ed. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Bernard, Russell H. 2011. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.* 5th ed. Lanham, MD: AltaMira.

Chambers, Robert. 2008. *Revolutions in development inquiry*. London: Earthscan.

Marshall, Catherine, and Gretchen B. Rossman. 2011. *Designing qualitative research.* 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Miles, Matthew, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña. 2014. *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook.* 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## Online Resources

The American Anthropological Association's *Anthropology Resources on the Internet*, at http://www.aaanet.org/resources, lists numerous sites with links to anthropology resources. As of 2014 there was an enormous amount of free material available on the Internet at the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and other sites.

The American Anthropological Association offers individuals who do not have access to a college or university library a virtual collection called the *Online Research Library*. This data base includes more than five thousand titles, with more than thirty-six hundred in full text. As of 2014, the annual AAA member rate for the Online Library was $24.99 and the non-member rate was $99.99 (http://www.aaanet.org/publications/Additional-Journal-Access.cfm).

*MIT OpenCourseWare* makes the materials used in the teaching of almost all of MIT's subjects available on the Web, free of charge. MIT offers many anthropology courses. See http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/anthropology/index.htm for a list.

*WikiBooks* has free books and courses online that can be downloaded. These resources include a short qualitative research methods course (http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Social_Research_Methods/Qualitative_Research) and a general AP Cultural Anthropology course (http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Talk:Cultural_Anthropology).

*AnthroBase.com* (http://www.anthrobase.com/) is a searchable, multilingual database of anthropological texts.

## Online Discussion Groups and Access to Selected Journals

*Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs

*International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09518398.asp

*Qualitative Inquiry*, http://qix.sagepub.com/

*The Qualitative Report*, http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/index.html

*Qualitative Research*, http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal201501?siteId=sageus&prodTypes=Journals&q=qualitative+research

*International Journal of Qualitative Methods*: http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/index

*International Review of Qualitative Research*, http://www.lcoastpress.com/journal.php?id=8

*Field Methods*, http://fmx.sagepub.com/

*Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, http://jce.sagepub.com/