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## Qualitative Methodology in Developmental Psychology

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### Abstract

Qualitative methodology presently is gaining increasing recognition in developmental psychology. Although the founders of developmental psychology to a large extent already used qualitative procedures, the field was long dominated by a (post) positivistic quantitative paradigm. The increasing recognition of the sociocultural embeddedness of human development, and of the importance to study individuals' subjective experience, however, calls for adequate methodological procedures that allow for the study of processes of transformation across the life span. The wide range of established procedures in qualitative research offers a promising avenue to advance the field in this direction.

Qualitative research is composed of many different procedures to collect and analyze data. In addition to some general common premises, these procedures are based on distinct theoretical approaches (e.g., social constructionism, ethnomethodology, hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis) to give access to the social, cultural, and psychological realities of the individuals or groups of individuals (e.g., for an overview, see [Flick et al., 2004](#)). A number of handbooks of qualitative research exist in the field of psychology ([Camic et al., 2003](#); [Forrester, 2010](#); [Lyons and Coyle, 2007](#); [Smith, 2008](#); [Willig, 2008](#); [Willig and Stainton-Rogers, 2007](#)) and several chapters are dedicated to qualitative research in the recent American Psychological Association handbook of research methods in psychology ([Cooper, 2012](#)).

This article outlines how qualitative methods can be applied fruitfully – in particular in the field of developmental psychology – by adopting a life-span perspective and considering different contexts of development and different fields of research. To do this, we first give an overview of the history of qualitative research in developmental psychology and introduce some general shared premises of qualitative methodology; we next present an overview of established procedures suitable for collecting and analyzing qualitative data in developmental research.

### The New Interest in Qualitative Developmental Research

Qualitative methods are presently gaining increasing recognition in developmental psychology. This development can be related to the following reasons: for decades, the field – like psychology in general – was dominated by a positivistic and postpositivistic paradigm and accordingly by quantitative methods, such as experiments, surveys, and objective testing.

The focus was primarily on age-related cognitive competencies and their effects on some aspects of social and nonsocial behavior with the aim of identifying general laws of development. Underlying this focus was an understanding of development as a series of universal and natural ('biologically based') processes within the child that are largely independent from historical and cultural contexts. These ontological and epistemological assumptions have been challenged within recent years by a paradigm shift toward an interactional and sociocultural understanding of human psychological functioning and in line with a social constructivist epistemology. Human development now is acknowledged to be inseparably and dialogically intertwined with individuals' participation in mundane everyday social interaction. Through repeated participation in social interaction individuals learn to make sense of their experience and gain an understanding of the world. Hence, increasingly it is acknowledged that human development cannot be understood adequately without taking its cultural embeddedness seriously. Social interactions are always culturally prestructured and the interpretations offered always are constructed culturally versions of the world. This line of reasoning makes developmental psychology inseparable from cultural psychology that is interested in meaning-making processes that occur in social interactions and everyday contexts. Psychological subjects, such as the mind and the self, are conceived of not as entities but as processes that are constituted, or made up, within specific social and cultural practice. Culture is seen as the human ability to draw on interpretative procedures to make sense of one's experience in social interaction, which in turn is embedded in a specific structure of social organization of the society in which someone lives.

Awareness is increasing that mainstream developmental psychology has failed to adequately describe and understand children's ordinary lives and their active participation in their social worlds. Rather than treating children as 'objects' of

research, a stronger focus on the study of their subjective experience is required (Greene and Hogan, 2005; Burman, 2008; Mey, 2010; *see* Street Children: Cultural Concerns). This critique arose with the increasing recognition that individuals are actively acting and potentially self-reflexive subjects and constructors of their own life. Thirty years ago, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977: p. 513) got at the heart of this critique with his well-known statement: "it can be said that much of developmental psychology, as it now exists, is the science of strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time."

Both a dialogical understanding of human development and culture and a recognition of the importance of individual's subjective experience require rethinking the adequacy of prevailing methodological standards. In fact, the very object of developmental psychology – processes of change with age in the psychological functioning of individuals – requires a discrete research program based on a methodology and methods that allow for the study of these developmental processes. Much of the twenty-first century's developmental psychology's standardized methods, however, still are borrowed from the realm of nondevelopmental psychology and hence largely inadequate to capture developmental processes (Valsiner, 2000).

Accordingly, methodological procedures within a qualitative paradigm that aim at reconstructing developmental conditions and contexts, life stories, and individual experiences from the subjective perspective of the participants, as well as sociocultural coconstruction processes of meaning-making, increasingly are called for (Mey, 2010; Valsiner, 2000; Greene and Hogan, 2005). Although neighbor disciplines like sociology, educational science, linguistics, and anthropology have well-established research procedures to study individuals' perspectives and everyday lives across diverse age-groups, mainstream developmental psychology, especially in North America where most developmental research takes place, has long been unaware of these challenges and methodological consequences. Recently, however, the field has seen an emerging period of critical self-reflection and change and a new reorientation toward qualitative methods.

### Pioneers of Qualitative Developmental Psychology

Developmental psychology, in fact, often has benefited from qualitative research: Several of the founding fathers and mothers of the discipline applied distinct interpretative procedures in their work, albeit not in such a systematic way as would be the standard for qualitative methods. They provided many arguments for the establishment and the development of a qualitative developmental psychology, although they never used the label qualitative themselves (for a further discussion of the historical development, see Mey, 2010).

These early works were in line with the main stances of qualitative methodology: They followed a knowledge-producing and theory-generating logic (rather than testing existing theories and *ex ante* formulated hypotheses). They developed theoretical stances strictly from the perspective of the individuals; they tried to avoid artificial settings and to do research in the everyday context of the individuals; and they reflected the process of production and construction of the

data, mostly detailed and in a way of thick description using only a small number of cases.

Taking this into account, it can be stated that some of the most influential developmental theories are derived from qualitative research (e.g., Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Kohlberg's stages of moral development). Although the work is quoted widely in the field, little is mentioned about the methodological approaches they used to come to their conclusions.

Other examples of early ethnography of the children's concrete everyday lives with the aim of setting a counterbalance to the prevailing mainstream in the discipline at the time are the diary studies of their own children by Darwin and Preyer at the end of the nineteenth, and by Clara and William Stern at the beginning of the twentieth century. They kept a separate record for each of their three children that allowed for individual case studies. Only in a second step was the data discussed in relation to a broader theoretical context. In William Stern's approach – the theory of personalism – a qualitative research style was embedded from the very beginning, a fact that often remains unmentioned, while at the same time, Stern often is acknowledged as the one who coined the term 'intelligence quotient'.

Similarly, the ethnographical work on life space of urban children by Martha Muchow, a research associate at Stern's Hamburg Institute is an example of the groundbreaking work in the first decades of the last century. Muchow used different open-ended methods like participant observation, conversations, methods based on essays next to the analyses of documents, and standardized methods. She acknowledged that to understand the particular nature of children requires one to understand the difference between adults (also researchers) and children, a position that also is crucial for contemporary research in the interdisciplinary field of children and childhood studies and children's rights (e.g., see Burman, 2008; Greene and Hogan, 2005). Kurt Lewin's renowned film of a young child learning to sit on a stone that demonstrates the barriers and field forces at play is another example of a radical departure from orthodox research methodology that arose from a dissatisfaction with the apparent triviality of much experimental psychology at the time.

Jean Piaget – probably the most prominent developmental psychologist of the twentieth century – postulated a clear qualitative perspective in his theory of genetic epistemology and his innovations of methods. His research can be described as a version of ethnography: For instance, in his clinical method, Piaget expanded the boundaries of the experimental approach to include context-specific tasks that can be applied to children in everyday life settings. He also considered standardized observations to be unsuitable for the study of child development. According to Piaget, traditional test procedures – such as intelligence test items – fail to address relevant questions, such as inquiry into children's spontaneous interests and their emerging entirely original understandings.

Similarly, Lev Vygotsky's reflections on (developmental) psychological hermeneutics – laid down in his work in 1930s – show how developmental psychology can be built only on qualitative grounds. His demand was that a psychology that wants to investigate 'whole objects' in their complexity requires analysis into units (rather than into elements) while at the same time preserving the whole objects in their complexity. Two case studies presented by Vygotsky's partner Alexandr

Luria – in the context of his ‘romantic science’ – in the second half of the twentieth century are brilliant examples of longitudinal studies that are informative for a qualitative developmental psychology. One of these case studies, described in his book *The Man with a Shattered World*, is about a man who suffered a left brain injury from shell splinters during World War II. The study that is based on more than 3000 pages of diaries and annotations by Luria captures the development of a man over a time span of 25 years. Erikson’s biographical reconstructions – beside his identity theory based on his work as a psychoanalyst – of the lives of prominent persons like Luther or Gandhi, can be seen as movement in this direction.

To define and found a qualitative developmental psychology, including rethinking the theoretical and methodical assumptions, it is essential to remember one’s own research tradition. From a twenty-first-century perspective, this early works reveals an understanding that already points to central features of qualitative research, such as wholeness and holistic methods, historicity, and reference to single-case studies, and it is linked closely to some more general premises of a qualitative approach outlined in the next section. Moreover, although early works of developmental psychology focused on early and middle childhood, the field has expanded to include human development over the entire life span.

### **General Methodological Premises of a Qualitative Developmental Psychology**

Since the early days of developmental psychology, a number of systematic procedures have been established based on general premises of a genuinely qualitative paradigm that allow for empirically sound studies. Although these principles make clear that qualitative methods need to be understood on their own epistemological terms, they also can be fruitfully combined with quantitative methods. Within a qualitative paradigm, systematic integration of different procedures is understood as taking different perspectives on the investigated phenomenon to provide a holistic description of the phenomenon. This differs from triangulation approaches that are concerned with the mutual validation of findings or with cross-validation, as found in many mixed-methods studies that are oriented more toward a quantitative paradigm. A genuinely qualitative research style aims to overcome an abstract notion of development, as defined by the increase or decrease of specific abilities or by the transition from one hypostatized development stage to another. Such a style pursues a holistic view of abilities and functions within a developing person and between a developing and actively constructing person in a developing environment. To adequately access individuals’ perception, description, and interpretation of reality, it is committed to the following three general and central principles of qualitative research (see also [Flick et al., 2004](#)).

#### **The Principle of Openness: Individuals’ Perspectives**

Qualitative research generally follows an inductive-deductive and theory-generating logic. The guiding principle of openness aims to appropriately reconstruct (subjective) reality from the subjects’ perspectives. The aim is to use this as a basis to

(further) generate theories, to attain thick descriptions of developmental–psychological phenomena, and to understand the possible different development paths (that run parallel). Theoretical preconceptions by the researchers in qualitative research are understood to be ‘sensitizing concepts’ that can be used fruitfully in the analysis. This is in stark contrast to the traditional conception of development as more or less linear finality (that is defined ex ante from the perspective of the researcher).

#### **The Postulate of Foreignness – Diversification and Development**

The postulate of foreignness is linked closely to the principle of openness. This approach prohibits the researcher from (self-evidently) equating his or her own concepts (of development) with those of the culture, group, or person studied. This is an essential principle in cultural developmental psychology and childhood studies in which the difference between children and adults becomes evident when the ‘culture of the child’ meets the ‘culture of the adult’ (see [Burman, 2008](#)). A qualitative approach helps to prevent researchers from confusing their experiences and concepts with those of the children researched. At the same time, children and childhood studies and related areas of research pose an exceptional challenge for qualitative research as, until now, it has been much focused on language. Forms of expression typical for children can be of limited verbal nature and therefore it often is necessary to interpret preverbal articulation, gestural symbolizations, playful expressions, and the like. Research from the ‘perspective of the children’ or the ‘aging people’ is not possible without additional reflection on the researcher as a person, the way he or she is conducting the research, and consequently the conditions under which scientific knowledge is generated.

#### **The Principle of Communication – Development as a Process**

The relationship between the researcher and the researched also is reflected in the principle of communication. This principle is based on the assumption that all data are jointly constructed by those involved in the situation. Every research situation entails an intervention and hence a modification of the object of research. The principle of communication plays a pivotal role within process analysis and the development of process models, one main task of a qualitative developmental psychology, as it enables one to adequately conceptualize data as having a temporal dimension: that is, data in time that can be analyzed in a sequential and developmental–psychological manner. Any research situation hence needs to be understood not as a unit but as a sequence of events, taking place between those (researchers and researched) involved, that can be analyzed.

### **Qualitative Methods in Contemporary Developmental Psychology**

As becomes clear from the overview of the historical roots of the field, a number of qualitative methods can be applied fruitfully to developmental psychology research in terms of studying processes and transformations across the life span. Moreover, the

number of established procedures in qualitative research is expanding (see [Flick et al., 2004](#) for an overview). Qualitative research is a heterogeneous field; however, besides the general premises they share, these methods need always to be understood within the respective theoretical and epistemological backgrounds in which they were developed. This implies that some methodologies in qualitative research need to be considered as approaches or research styles rather than as specific methodological procedures, which makes it difficult to allocate them exclusively as procedures for data assessment or data analysis. Overall, however, it is crucial that procedures of data assessment fit the procedures of data analysis with regard to their epistemological stance.

## Procedures for Data Assessment

### Interviews

Interviews are the most commonly used methods in qualitative research (for an overview, see [Flick et al., 2004](#)) and also are prominent in developmental psychology. Some early ambassadors of developmental psychology, like Mary Main or James Marcia, a scholar of Erik Erikson, already developed and popularized specific interview techniques in their line of research (on attachment and identity, respectively). Although many developmental researchers use semistructured interviews that often are closer to questionnaires than to a genuinely qualitative approach, a number of qualitative interview variants available have proved fruitful for developmental-psychological research. They range from special interview techniques that support the dialogue between interviewer and interviewees by using elements from the Rogerian psychotherapy approach to more one-sided and open narrative interviews. Specifics of conducting interviews with children have been discussed, for example, by [Greene and Hogan \(2005\)](#).

### Written Data

Existing written documents are another form of data that can be used to gain insight into developmental processes. Collecting and analyzing diaries was, for instance, a prominent way to study the emotional life and thoughts of adolescents in early developmental psychology. Likewise, diaries can be used to study processes of transition within the family – for example, through the birth of a child and becoming a mother or father. Contrasting the perspectives of men and women can provide interesting insights. Studying diaries also can serve to investigate processes of coping with critical life events over time, like severe illness or mourning a beloved person. A modern version of this line of research is the study of Internet-based presentations (blogs, social networks, personal websites, or newsgroups – e.g., parenthood or in regards to other developmental issues) also referred to as qualitative online research or ‘netnography’ ([Kozinets, 2006](#)). A common procedure in youth and childhood studies is the study of essays produced in the context of school exercises. An interesting aspect in this regard is how the constraints given in this context will contribute to the construction of the data. A final example of written data material used in qualitative developmental research is the completing sentences test – a procedure in which the participants are asked to complete a partial sentence without being given further restrictions.

### Group Discussions and Focus Groups

The terms group discussion and focus group often are used interchangeably. Some scholars, however, relate the term group discussion to a more genuine understanding of qualitative research, whereas the term focus group then is used for structured (standardized) discussions with a group of participants ([Bohnsack, 2004](#)). Group discussions are of particular use when it comes to analyzing how opinions, attitudes, and orientations emerge, constitute, influence, and modify each other in an exchange of views – in a phrase, when it comes to the genesis of (developmental) processes. As such, they are of particular value for developmental psychology. Possible areas of inquiry are the study of patterns of argumentation with respect to specific ways of reasoning, such as moral dilemmas or social rules.

Furthermore, the focus on discursive, argumentative, and communicative contexts opens up additional possibilities to study negotiation processes in age-homogenous and -heterogeneous groups. Likewise, the study of the meaning of (self) socialization in peer cultures is a particularly prominent example of how group discussions do provide an extraordinary access to developmental processes. Group discussions in general provide an opportunity to investigate the genesis of knowledge. Piaget already had convincingly demonstrated how children’s thinking developed after a quarrel took place between children and how during a quarrel or discussion functional moments emerge that initiate the development of self-reflection.

### Qualitative Experiments

Qualitative experiments often remain unnoticed in the methodological literature. Disregarding qualitative experiments may be due to the fact that for many the combination of the experiment (believed to be the epitome of nomothetic science) and qualitative research (and its implications and aims) seems impossible.

In developmental psychology it was Piaget who recognized the value of experiments within a qualitative design. With his clinical method, which he understood to be an experimental method in the broader sense, Piaget hoped to counterbalance some of the shortcomings of rigid experimental designs. In a similar vein, [Bronfenbrenner \(1977\)](#) in his harsh criticism of experimental methods with regard to ecological validity pleaded for not using experiments as a verification tool but rather as a heuristic strategy.

### Visual Data

The value of nonverbal and visual data and particularly of children’s drawings, films, photos, or other artifacts created during play and other mundane activities can be considered as a valuable source for inquiry. Participants, for example, might be invited to photograph their social and physical environments (like kindergarten, school environments, houses for elderly, etc.) and to explore them with techniques interesting for them. In addition to analyzing the product (e.g., photographs, drawings), analysis of the process of producing (e.g., photographing, drawing) allows one to gain insight into the way individuals construct person–environment relations.

Contrary to photographs, videography and observation studies have gained far-reaching acceptance within developmental psychology (starting with the early work by Gesell or

Lewin). To a large extent, these studies draw on standardized designs and statistical analysis. From a qualitative research perspective, such an approach risks ignoring that records produced in such a way capture only reduced fragments of reality that furthermore are restricted to the static perspective of the camera and, in many respects, are inferior to the human capability for sensual and Gestalt perception. This perspective lends to the illusion that video recordings 'capture' reality – an impression that overlooks that they do not relieve from the duty of interpreting what has been 'captured'. A growing number of developmental psychologists, however, use videography and subscribe to the principles of qualitative research. Most of these studies can be found within cultural and discursive developmental psychology as well as in the field of language socialization (e.g., see the Center on the Everyday Lives of Families [CELF and ICELF]).

### **Participant Observation and Ethnography**

Like qualitative research in general, ethnography does not constitute a single set of methods and procedures, but rather it is marked by systematic but flexible deployment of a variety of such methods as participant observation; videography; field notes; questionnaires; and open, semistructured, and focus group interviews (Jessor et al., 1996; see also Camic et al., 2003). An important common characteristic of ethnography is the sustained contact and involvement with a community that allows the researcher to become deeply engaged in the lives and mundane everyday practices of their participants (one difference to the early studies by people like Preyer's or the Stern's is that in this case, the researcher's involvement in the observed situation is reflected). The aim is to understand meaning from the perspective of the local participants within the context of mundane everyday life. It is this aspect that makes ethnography of vital importance for developmental psychology, as it permits a methodically comprehensive approach to studying human development where it actually takes place. Staying in the field, close to the participants (and their interactions), allows for detailed descriptions of different situations over longer periods of time and is an important strategy for collecting longitudinal data and studying processes of transition and change.

Finally, collecting and systematizing extensive field knowledge helps the researcher to generate adequate interpretations and 'thick descriptions' of a particular phenomenon – a term coined programmatically by Clifford Geertz (1973). Particularly with respect to the study of culturally distinct developmental pathways, ethnographic knowledge that only can be obtained through sustained fieldwork and engagement with the participants is indispensable. This might include, for example, knowledge about caregiver's ideas of good child care, their socialization goals, and an understanding of these goals in light of the prevailing sociocultural and sociohistorical living conditions.

### **Autoethnography**

A procedure that has gained increasing attention in recent years with the raise of postmodern thinking in psychology is 'autoethnography' (Ellis, 2004). This approach to research and writing seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. Methodologically, it combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography and is an approach to research rather than a specific

research method. Through systematic analysis of one's personal experience and by comparing and contrasting this experience against existing research, the researcher aims to identify how personal experience is made possible by being part of a culture or by possessing a particular cultural identity. For developmental psychologists, it offers insights into individual psychological transformation processes across the life span and does so in light of the person's sociocultural embeddedness – for example, the process of becoming a mother, the loss of a beloved person, or coping with illness.

### **Participatory Action Research**

Participatory action research, like ethnography, constitutes a research approach rather than a specific research method and is based on an understanding that research should be conducted not only for but primarily with the people under study (Greene and Hogan, 2005). It commonly is related to the work of Kurt Lewin and has a long tradition within community psychology and social action projects. The outstanding characteristic of action research is its commitment to active, democratic participation, and empowerment of individuals under study as foundation for social change. Procedures range from naturalistic observation to interviews, case studies, surveys, and even experiments. Human psychological functioning is understood to be embedded in and systematically linked to various micro and macro levels of society as postulated in the ecological perspective of Uri Bronfenbrenner (e.g., 1977). This approach has a strong potential for applied developmental psychology, especially for developing intervention programs in many areas and across the life span – for example, to improve the quality of day care centers, youth delinquency prevention programs, preparation programs for parents, family-centered services, and residential homes for elderly. Action research in childhood studies explicitly promotes the participation of children and young people as active researchers to give them a voice and take them seriously as social actors in their own right. Hence, this approach raises the potential for children's self-development and political agency.

### **Procedures for Data Analyses**

Reconstructing subjective experiences and coconstructive meaning-making processes requires adequate and open procedures not only for data assessment but also for data analysis. The material to be analyzed may vary from transcripts derived from interviews or group discussion, essays, observation protocols, diaries, photos, videos, and blogs, to media reports and other collected material. Depending on the specific research question and theoretical background, a number of established procedures are outlined in the following (see also Flick et al., 2004). They can broadly be categorized as coding procedures or and sequential procedures.

### **Qualitative Content Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis is a distinct procedure from quantitative content analysis. This form of analysis is useful for analyzing large amounts of verbal data collected through interviews or focus groups and also offers possibilities for quantification of categories (Schreier, 2012). Its restriction to



a coding manual makes it less appropriate for reconstructing meaning-making processes and for highly open-ended research questions. Thus, it is less suitable for developmental–psychological research that is concerned with the temporal nature of phenomena that need to be reconstructed.

### **Grounded Theory Methodology**

Grounded theory methodology (GTM) is considered to be one of the most popular methods of qualitative research. First formulated within the tradition of the Chicago School of Sociology by Glaser and Strauss and further developed by Strauss and Corbin, it has been developed in a number of ways, leading to a variety of existing versions of GTM (for an overview, see Bryant and Charmaz, 2010). This methodology allows for rigorous and systematic theory development that is grounded in the data. Although GTM envisages an explicit process perspective in its original sociological approach, a procedure elaborated from a genuine developmental–psychological perspective still needs to be developed. Similarly, the paradigm model proposed by Strauss and Corbin as a dynamic conditions–strategies–consequences matrix still needs to be transferred to developmental psychology realms of inquiry.

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Psychological phenomenology recognizes that a whole set of factors leads to differences in people’s perception of reality and is committed to the exploration of individual lived experience. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is composed of a series of sets of factors that aim to interpret the accounts of people of their personal lived experience and explicate an underlying structure in these accounts (see Smith and Dunworth, 2003). Its potential for developmental psychology lies in the focus on the subjective experience of individuals and the possibility to study developmental processes in detail and is suitable for longitudinal designs (e.g., identity change during the transition to motherhood).

### **Discursive Psychology and Discourse Analysis**

In line with the recent sociocultural and interactional turn in the field, discourse analysis as developed within discursive psychology (e.g., see Camic et al., 2003; Willig, 2008) constitutes a particularly promising avenue to developmental psychology research. This procedure is oriented to examining social interaction as the site in which psychological phenomena that traditionally have been conceived of as developing inside the mind (attitudes, traits, knowledge, intentions, agency, emotions, identity) emerge in a process of intersubjective agreement. It treats language not as referential, that is, as a means to refer to these phenomena as hidden ‘entities’ in the isolated mind, but rather as constitutive of social reality and of the mind. Methodologically, it draws on procedures from conversational analysis and applies them to psychological inquiry. It increasingly is used in combination with videography, which allows for paralinguistic features to be included in the analysis. For developmental psychology, it offers possibilities to study early socialization processes in childhood (e.g., in mundane family or peer interactions) as well as locally situated identity construction across the life span (e.g., Bamberg, 2012; for a conversational analytical approach to developmental psychology, see Gardner

and Forrester, 2010). Promising fields of discourse in analytical developmental research include the study of Internet-based communication like chats and blogs as they constitute a central arena for social interaction especially in young people’s everyday life.

Other forms of discourse analysis also aim at somewhat-different research questions – for example, Foucauldian discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, or genre analysis (e.g., see Flick et al., 2004; Willig, 2008 for an overview). Their focus is on institutional and social structures that frame specific discursive events and the ways in which ideological and political domination is reproduced in text and talk. Their relevance for developmental psychological research lies in studies concerned with cultural and historical ideologies of various aspects of human development, like childhood, parenting, or aging.

### **Metaphor Analysis**

A more linguistic approach that could be applied fruitfully in future developmental–psychological research is metaphor analysis (Schmitt, 2000). The use of metaphor analysis is obvious in that the term ‘development’ can be understood as a metaphor itself (although mostly restricted to the path-metaphor; e.g., ‘to forge ahead,’ ‘to stay behind’) or can further enter concepts of education (e.g., ‘to look after’/‘to protect,’ ‘keep an eye on’). A metaphor analysis offers an exceptional potential for the reconstruction of the description of development from the perspective of the subject, for instance, as a deficit-oriented imagery in such terms as ‘age degeneration’ or ‘loss of functioning’ and their important role for understanding aging.

### **Narrative Psychology and Narrative Analysis**

Narrative analysis is concerned with the structure, content, and function of stories in written and oral communication (Bamberg, 2012; Crossley, 2000; see also, Camic et al., 2003; Lyons and Coyle, 2007; Flick et al., 2004). It emerged from the narrative turn in psychology and the seminal work of Jerome Bruner more than 20 years ago. Another early forerunner of narrative analysis can be seen in Nelson’s classic case study of a 2-year-old. Analyses of autobiographical life stories provide the opportunity to explicitly address temporality and the individual’s reconstruction of developmental processes and are linked closely with the study of narrative identity. Social–constructivist approaches, however, stress the local and situated nature of identity construction and are more concerned with the analysis of ‘small stories’ in mundane everyday interaction (Bamberg, 2012).

### **Video Analysis**

Video recordings allow one to capture the high complexity of mundane social interaction and accordingly offer a number of possibilities for qualitative analysis, depending on the specific research question and epistemological stance of the researcher (Heath et al., 2010). Videographed data, for instance, can be used partly in interview studies and group discussions as an additional source of information, or as part of larger ethnographic research (e.g., for the study of social interaction in kindergarten, at school, or within the family). Although technological advancements allow for increasingly sophisticated

analysis of video material, transcription of selected portions that will be analyzed in more detail usually is required after a substantive review of the data corpus. The most prominent procedures for qualitative video analysis in developmental psychology are discourse and conversation analysis. Embedded in a longitudinal and ethnographically informed design, it allows microanalytical analysis of change and transformation of interactional patterns over time and, hence, the study of developmental processes.

### **Performative Social Science**

Performative social science refers to the deployment of different forms of artistic performance in the execution of a scientific project (Gergen and Gergen, 2010). Its aim is to offer a social constructionist alternative to traditional empiricist forms of communication in social science, such as theater, dance, fiction, poetry, or multimedia performances. It challenges the assumption that traditional forms of social science writing are the only suitable way to communicate scientific knowledge. Research findings, for example, might be presented in a poetic form or with visual and auditory expositions of data as a new way to disseminate and appropriate scientific research. This procedure strives for an interdisciplinary exchange between science and arts by creating new ways to make findings available and understandable to the participants under study.

### **Future Directions**

The history of qualitative developmental psychology since its beginnings 120 years ago provides us with a variety of examples of how qualitative methods can advance our understanding of human developmental processes. Besides classic procedures like interviews and observations, recent technical advancements have led to several new forms of collecting and analyzing data. A number of computer programs have been developed specifically for qualitative research (Aquad, Atlas.ti, Dedoose, HyperRESEARCH, MAXQDA, NVivo, QDA Miner, XSight, Qiqqa, Transana). Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) allows one to systematically retrieve, organize, and efficiently manage larger data sets and hence to expand the size of the samples. New approaches have emerged from various paradigmatic shifts within the past decades like the narrative turn, discursive turn, interactional and sociocultural turn, and more recently the performative turn embedded within the postmodern turn. Moreover, an increasing interdisciplinary exchange allows for adapting procedures originally developed in different disciplines for the specific demands of the field. In the twenty-first century, qualitative research in developmental psychology is a flourishing field that can be applied to studies of emotional, cognitive, social, and language development across all age-groups, developmental contexts, and cultural milieus.

Recent textbooks of developmental psychology not only acknowledge qualitative methods but also dedicate whole chapters to the topic (e.g., Smith and Dunworth, 2003). But have these methods really arrived in developmental psychology? Indeed, in a 1999 roundtable discussion, nearly two-thirds of editors of English-language mental health and

child development journals argued in favor of publishing more empirical qualitative studies to, as they emphasized, initiate a necessary shift in this area of research (see Mey, 2010). Conversely, some of the most important mainstream journals in the field persist in opposing publication of genuinely qualitative research. Although interest has been increasing in mixed-method designs in the past years, the qualitative part of such designs often consists of open procedures rather than genuinely qualitative methods that are used within a quantitative paradigm. A systematic integration of genuinely qualitative and quantitative research designs seems to be difficult in light of the distinct epistemological underpinnings. If, however, we take one of the central criteria for the any empirical study seriously – the adequacy of the method for the phenomena under study – then the decision for or against specific methods needs to be derived from the research questions and the object of investigation, respectively. Newer methodological developments provide a number of opportunities to help the field study what it aims to study – that is, processes of change with age in the psychological functioning of individuals – in a systematic and more effective way. An adequately reflected methodological pluralism in light of the nature of human development as embedded in mundane everyday interaction and meaning-making processes within culturally prestructured patterns of society constitutes a promising avenue to advance the field.

*See also:* Developmental Research across Cultures and Nations: Challenges, Biases, and Cautions; Mother-Child Communication: Cultural Differences.

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## Relevant Websites

- [www.qualitative-research.net](http://www.qualitative-research.net) – Forum: Qualitative Social Research.
- <http://www.qualitative-forschung.de/en/index.html> – Qualitative research at Forschung.
- <http://www.listserv.uga.edu/archives/qualrs-l.html> – The University of Georgia - Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences.
- <http://www.clarku.edu/~mbamberg/> – Dr. Michael Bamberg - Clark University.
- <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/socialsciences/research/groups/darg/> – Loughborough University - Discourse and Rhetoric Group.
- <http://www.celf.ucla.edu/pages/about.php> (access date on 03.04.13.) – Center on Everyday Lives of Families.
- <http://icelf.weebly.com/english-version.html> – ICELF - Italian Center on Everyday Lives of Families.
- <http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk> – The Open University - Children's Research Centre.
- [http://www.aaanet.org/sections/spa/?page\\_id=190](http://www.aaanet.org/sections/spa/?page_id=190) – Society for Psychological Anthropology.
- [https://email.rutgers.edu/mailman/listinfo/exploring\\_childhood\\_studies](https://email.rutgers.edu/mailman/listinfo/exploring_childhood_studies) – Exploring Childhood studies - Rutgers University.
- <http://www.celf.ucla.edu/pages/about.php> (accessed on 03.04.13.) – Center on the Everyday Lives of Families [CELF and ICELF].



Developmental psychologists study a wide range of theoretical areas, such as biological, social, emotion, and cognitive processes. Empirical research in this area tends to be dominated by psychologists from Western cultures such as North American and Europe, although during the 1980s Japanese researchers began making a valid contribution to the field. The three goals of developmental psychology are to describe, explain, and to optimize development (Baltes, Reese, & Lipsitt, 1980). To describe development it is necessary to focus both on typical patterns of change (normative development) and 2 Psychological research relevant to developmental psychology. 3 - 4 Cognitive development. 5 - 8 Social development.Â Theory and practice in qualitative research. 1. Distinguish between qualitative and quantitative data. 2. Explain strengths and limitations of a qualitative approach to research. 3. To what extent can findings be generalized from qualitative studies? 4. Discuss ethical considerations in qualitative research. 5. Discuss sampling techniques appropriate to qualitative research (for example, purposive sampling, snowball sampling). 6. Explain effects of participant expectations and researcher bias in qualitative research. Considerations Towards a "Qualitative Developmental Psychology". GÃ¼nter Mey. Abstract: This contribution begins with a brief description of the three phases of developmental psychology in regards to their predominant methodical orientations. The use and analysis of qualitative documents as a characteristic research strategy could only be discovered in the first phase. Following this introduction is a brief summary of some new directions connected to the early phase of developmental psychology, which are based on the analyses of para-literary documents, observations and interviews.