

# Introduction to Qualitative Research

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Readers will be able to do the following:

1. Describe the nature of research.
2. Define qualitative inquiry.
3. Identify and describe the attributes of qualitative inquiry.
4. Compare and contrast qualitative and quantitative research.

## THE NATURE OF RESEARCH

Though this text focuses explicitly on qualitative inquiry, we must first define the term *research* to provide a context for the discussion. Research is viewed in many ways. Practically, it denotes the process of gathering information to find a solution to an identified problem or answer a specific question.<sup>1,2</sup> We all face problems that intuitively engage us in the research process on a daily basis. For example, consider a person who is interested in improving her cardiorespiratory fitness but has a preexisting knee injury that limits her activity level. Budgetary restrictions further complicate her situation. With these problems in mind, she might gather information on equipment options and prices from fitness facilities, retailers, and manufacturers' websites. She might also ask a health care professional, such as an athletic trainer or physical therapist, about different forms of exercise. These responses to the problems make up an informal research process. A more