

SPECIAL SECTION

NEW VOICES IN ETHNOGRAPHY

Mikhail Bahktin (1986) once said that the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, and literature and non-literature are not laid up in heaven. This, to me, means that nothing should prevent a psychologist from writing her case notes into a dramatic monologue, or a social worker concerned about the treatment of terminally ill people expressing this through poetry, or a writer systematically observing a group of people as background information for a story. I think it could also mean that these three authors could all contribute to the same journal. But, we rarely see this. Why, if they are essentially writing about the same world only in slightly different ways do we separate, divide and put up walls?

In this special section of *The Waikato Journal of Education*, I wish to explore the possibilities of bringing like-minded authors from the social sciences and literature together into the same volume; like-minded because of the recent narrative turn in the social sciences where increasingly researchers are abandoning the traditional passive, objective, boring social science voice to express more evocatively peoples' lived experiences. They are doing this by employing dialogue, tone shifts, flashbacks, tension and changing points of view to make their work more lyrical, descriptive and emotionally engaging. Therefore, when a reader feels that he or she has had an encounter with reality, it is actually an encounter with the writer's imagination.

I have assembled writers in this section who employ multiple forms of narrative that move across a range of genres—prose, poetry, narratives of the self and standard ethnography. These texts demonstrate that direct correlations between experience and what gets represented in a text is impossible. They also illustrate how our own moral, intellectual and emotional conditions feature within our research.

The mix of sociologists, psychologists and poets in this section all present works that move above and beyond pure fact. They also acknowledge that their experiences and observations are not simply transferred to the text. Rather, they are always individualistic, personal and subjective. Their vision of life, their dreams and previous experiences colour everything they write. Therefore, their impressions are organised and given temporal directions and positions based on the meanings they have about life. That is how life influences one's research, one's writing. That is how the two—life and work, work and life—are inextricably linked.

I see the work of the contributors to this section not only provoking discussion over the production and evaluation of qualitative research, but also resulting in new stories about the world; stories with tremendous transformative possibilities and the potential to become highly regarded social texts; stories that become widely read and that provide people and groups with more informed ways to think about and understand their lives and the communities they live in.

To place the new writing movement occurring in ethnography into a larger historical and political perspective, I open this section with an interview with

Professor Norman K. Denzin. Our discussion centres on the creation of new forms of ethnography such as ethnographic fiction, ethnographic drama and ethnopoetics and the concerns they raise over the way truth, reality and lives are best depicted. This will be followed by two examples of ethnographic fiction: Robert Rinehart's complex exploration into the life of a young X-Games participant, *Sk8ing*, and Marcelo Diversi's startling portrayal of a child's life on the streets of Brazil, *Late for School*. Next, Pirkko Markula examines her reactions as a dance spectator and how this represents the confusion of our times in, *Dancing Within Postmodernism*. This will be followed by the poetry of Michael David Madonick and Alan Riach, who both express in highly personal ways the specifics of family, childhood and self. To conclude the section, Carl Gordon, a graduate student and budding scholar, examines who he is in his piece, *Recipe for a Research Paradigm: A cup of Reason, a Dash of Passion, and Mix Slowly?*, to determine his philosophical approach to research.

What the future holds for ethnographic writing and mixed-genre journals is of course a mystery to me. However, as you read through this special section I invite you to consider the possibilities, for I am sure that you will see how ethnography, when crafted by authors employing a variety of sensibilities, can move us to previously unheard of heights of understanding.

—Jim Denison