

DOING QUALITATIVE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN THE MID-1990S: ISSUES, CONTEXTS AND PRACTICALITIES ¹

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ABSTRACT *This is a revised version of a keynote address to the 1995 NZARE Conference. It raises questions about recent developments and issues in qualitative educational research by means of a stream-of-consciousness writing style which juxtaposes conventional literature reviews, e-mail messages, diary entries, and reflections upon research practice. The aim in that is to demonstrate, or simulate, the qualitative methodological inquiries.*

This paper is a slightly revised version of a keynote address to the 1995 Conference of NZARE (New Zealand Association for Research in Education) at Massey University.² It was part of a plenary session which consisted of two 'back to back' presentations on doing educational research in the mid-1990s. Richard Harker was to discuss new techniques in quantitative research and I was invited to review some recent trends and questions in qualitative techniques. At the time this invitation was extended, my office at work and my study at home were cluttered with 75 interview tapes awaiting transcribing or, having been transcribed, awaiting editing and correcting. Around 1500 pages of transcribed interviews were in piles around me. Helen May and I were in the process of completing 150 life-history interviews and were about to enter our data on a NUD-IST data base.³ I was, I informed the organisers, far too busy *doing* qualitative research to theorise about it or to produce a critical review of the literature. I was reassured that I was not being asked to do yet another systematic and dispassionate overview of the literature, but that each speaker would draw our examples from the projects in which we were then engaged. The idea was to talk about how we were *using* the techniques or tools in the course of our everyday researching activities. In particular, we were asked to talk about how we were using computer software.

Accordingly, in this resulting paper I transgress some conventions of academic journal writing by using some of the techniques which, with a few exceptions, postmodernist writers advocate but seldom use. The ways we think, research, and write are always outcomes of the possibilities and constraints of our historical, material, cultural, political, institutional and biographical circumstances. So rather than writing from the stance of a disengaged and detached observer, I make visible the setting in which my ideas are being generated. As feminist postmodernist writers in education increasingly do, I have used literary techniques such as a stream-of-consciousness use of the present tense and textual collages which juxtapose academic and colloquial/personal writing styles (Biklen, 1995; Jones, 1991, 1992; McWilliam, 1995; Middleton, 1993a,

1993b; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). The musical metaphor of a counterpoint - a score which orchestrates many voices - encapsulates the spirit of this paper, as I interweave words and styles from academic texts, from e-mail discussion groups, and from everyday conversations.

To illustrate what I see as some general questions and issues in qualitative research, I draw mainly on my experiences with life-history methods - for I am working with these across many dimensions of my professional life. In one of my undergraduate courses, *Women and Education*, each student conducts a life-history interview of a woman about her experiences in education and contextualises this woman's biographical narrative - her account of her opportunities and choices - in the historical, cultural, economic, geographical and political constraints and possibilities of her time and place (Middleton, 1993a, 1993b). I teach in the 'qualitative module' of our masters course on *Educational Research Methods*, and supervise and examine theses which employ qualitative methods. And as an administrator I am involved in the setting up of support systems for colleagues and students who are doing theses - many of which employ qualitative methods. So the ideas I am bringing together in this presentation should be understood as generated from data which have 'come at me' in the course of these everyday activities.

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

November 1, 1995:

So what are the new issues, the recent developments, which are shaping the kinds of qualitative inquiries which are being carried out in the educational and other social science research communities today? While my own multifaceted involvements immediately suggest several salient themes to me, it is also important to check out my perceptions against those of international authorities and practitioners. Two immediately accessible sources of alternative perspectives and impressions occur to me. A colleague has recently told me about an international Internet discussion group called Qualitative Research, and this seems an opportune moment to connect my thoughts to this interchange. Accordingly I type:

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>To:listserv@uga.cc.uga.edu  
>From:educ_mid@waikato.ac.nz (Sue Middleton)  
>subscribe qualrs-l educ_mid@waikato.ac.nz
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and wait for a response from a list-server somewhere in Georgia.

I then check out my bookshelf. In 1982 Bogdan and Biklen had published a textbook entitled *Qualitative Research for Education*. Ten years later, in 1992, they produced a revised and updated version of this text. They comment that since the first edition

A field that was dominated by measurement, operationalized definitions, variables, hypothesis testing, and statistics has made room for a research that emphasises description, induction, grounded theory,

and the study of people's understanding. We refer to this approach as 'qualitative research' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. ix).

In the mid-1970s and early 1980s those of us who were researching and writing in what was then termed 'the interpretive paradigm' - a set of theoretical standpoints from which we studied those whose experiences and perspectives we researched as creators of their social worlds and sought to view the world from their perspective - had to struggle for the legitimacy of such a perspective. If these authors are correct, qualitative research in education is now accepted as part of the mainstream. In some fields, such as feminist research, it has even become dominant. For example, the March 1995 issue of the British - based international journal *Gender and Education* signalled a change of editorship and the end of the journal's first seven years of existence. In reviewing the contents of this journal from 1988 to the end of 1994 the editors noted that the "methodological approaches taken by contributors to *Gender and Education* lend themselves to predominantly qualitative methods" (Hughes, Lovell & Preston, 1995, p. 4)...

...My thoughts are suddenly interrupted as a white rectangle blots out the black typescript on my Macintosh screen - the black rooster graphic on the notifier crows "You have new mail." I click on 'OK'. The notifier disappears behind the window of text on which these words appear in response to my keystrokes. I try to remain focussed on this task, but I cannot resist reading what has come up on the Qualitative Research news group. After welcoming me to the list and outlining its procedures and etiquette, it offers a definition of qualitative research which is similar to Bogdan and Biklen's:

Date: Thu, 02 Nov 1995 15:07:29 -0500
From: "L-Soft list server at UGA (1.8b)" <LISTSERV@uga.cc.uga.edu>
Subject: Usage guidelines for QUALRS-L
To: Sue Middleton <educ_mid@WAIKATO.AC.NZ>
Reply-to: QUALRS-L-Request@uga.cc.uga.edu
X-LSV-ListID: QUALRS-L

QUALRS-L USER GUIDE
FROM THE LISTOWNER: JUDITH PREISSLE
ABOUT QUALRS-L

.... I use the label "qualitative research" for approaches to inquiry that depend on elaborated accounts of what we see, hear, taste, touch, smell and experience. It has roots in cultural anthropology, field sociology, and the professional fields. Qualitative research includes field research, case study research, ethnography, document and content analysis, interview and observational research, community study, and life history and biographical studies....

The educational research 'authorities' in New Zealand seem to have accepted the value of qualitative research as a legitimate set of approaches to gaining knowledge and understanding of the educational experiences of teachers and students. Within education departments in universities theses based in part or

exclusively on qualitative approaches are now commonplace. Some funding bodies, such as the Ministry (formerly the Department) of Education have supported large-scale studies based on ethnographic methods, such as Peter Ramsay's (1981) studies of South Auckland schools and his Project CRRISP on curriculum reform (Ramsay 1990); the project on Maori girls' experiences in different kinds of schools directed by Kathie Irwin and others (Carkeek et al, 1994); and the constructivist studies of children's and teachers' understandings of science, mathematics - and, more recently, technological - concepts carried out by Beverley Bell and others in the CSMTER Centre at the University of Waikato (Begg et al., 1990). In addition, a number of projects which combine qualitative and quantitative approaches have been funded - among them Jenny Young-Loveridge's (1990) work on young children's understanding of mathematics; the Monitoring Today's Schools Project (Mitchell et al, 1993); the Smithfield project led by Hugh Lauder (1994); and the Massey-based project on school success directed by Roy Nash and Richard Harker, (1994).

There is a second message in my 'in' mailbox from someone on this list - another New Zealander⁴, who asks:

Date: Sun, 05 Nov 1995 18:27:04 +1300
From: Peter Smith@PSEUDONYM.AC.NZ>
Subject: Qualitative Research
Sender: Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences <QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu>
To: Multiple recipients of list QUALRS-L <QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu>
Reply-to: Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences <QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu>

Hello

... would somebody care to define qualitative research for me (and others here in the department)... I require input from individuals who engage in this research in order to assess whether my viewpoint is valid or mildly/wildly incorrect! At stake is whether this department will continue to support purely qualitative research as a valid method of investigation by its students. Anyway, I attach below the recent answer I gave to another questioner on the sci.psychology.misc usenet group...

He quotes the message from this 'other questioner' on this other user group as follows:

Could anyone give me a brief explanation of qualitative (vs. >quantitative)research? I've recently been talking to a Ph.D. >candidate from a program that likes qualitative research, but >neither she nor her Dean were able to clarify for me how it differs >from mere reportage.

Smith then forwards to our user group the reply to this question which he had sent out to the members of the other (psychology) discussion group with the comment that his "criticisms of qualitative research hinge on whether observations are symbolically or quantitatively encoded or interpreted via introspection and opinion." The series of messages from Smith claim that:

.... In essence "pure" qualitative research relies upon interpretation of observations or events that is totally subjective. There is no attempt made to objectively encode data using pre-specified, rule-based procedures - procedures that can be implemented by any other researcher in EXACTLY the same way. Hence, qualitative research sacrifices ALL methods of evaluation and critical examination except those based upon the same form of subjectivity as the research itself - just opinions. There is simply no procedure available to any other individual to critically evaluate a piece of qualitative research other than to also offer personal comments and perhaps, alternative insights of subjective propositions...

Maybe I was wrong in my comments above about the extent to which qualitative methods have become part of the mainstream in New Zealand... Immediate responses flash in across my screen... I join in. Twenty-four hours later I print out the 40 pages this debate has generated across North America, Britain and Australasia. Much of it went into the first draft of this paper. Then I decided, along with many of the discussion group contributors, that whether or not qualitative methods were 'science' had been thoroughly debated since the mid-1970s. I will share with you excerpts from one such message from Britain:

It took me 7 years of reading and research to get to grips with qualitative methodology ... [including] editing a book on the relationship between 'micro' and 'macro' theory and methods ... I do not see how you can sensibly expect anyone to respond to your challenge in a few moments tapping at a keyboard...

I think back to the conversation I had with the NZARE Conference organisers and their use of the image of 'back to back' to describe the placement of the quantitative and qualitative components of the plenary session to which I am contributing. The problem with Smith's question is that it is positioned within a natural science paradigm and is inviting those who work from an 'interpretive' perspective - those who seek to study meanings - to think in terms of concepts which may be outside their paradigm's set of relevances... In the ensuing debate, some (e.g., Shank, 1995) identify a split, or bifurcation, within the qualitative research community. On one side of the split are those who do what several correspondents refer to as 'qualitative analysis' a qualitative research model which fits within a natural science framework. Key issues for this group include what Gary Shank (1995) referred to as "the increasing attention given to the logic and epistemology of qualitative research, with a particular revival of interest in analytic induction." Shank attributes this to the compatibility between such approaches and purpose-built computer software such as NUDIST⁵ - the existence

of the software reinforces and supports the research approach. For such researchers, NUDIST helps in the process of theory generation and forces grounded theorists to be more systematic in their hierarchical categorisation and theory-building processes. Shank argues that on the other side of this split are those who work with story, myth and narrative and in whose work "meaning is taken seriously as an independent concept which is not reducible into some set of truth claims." The paradigmatic origins of such inquiries may be "at right-angles" (Shank, 1995) to some of the core assumptions of the natural science model (such as replicability of results and the disengagement of the researcher from the research process). My own interests are with the latter rather than the former. As I shall outline later in this talk, I am using NUDIST (which has been designed as an instrument for doing grounded theory) for research which is framed otherwise, from a sociological life-history perspective (a simultaneous focus on biography, history and social structure) which is not conceptualised within a grounded theory or hypothesis-generating model.

Date: Tue, 07 Nov 1995 13:09:21 -0500
From: John Dickison <john_dickison@AGCS.CAS.PSU.EDU>
Subject: Framed again
Sender: Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences <QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu>
To: Multiple recipients of list QUALRS-L <QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu>
Reply-to: Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences <QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu>

... While placing something in its context is not the scene of the quantitative researcher, it is vital for the qualitative ones. This should extend to the debate surrounding institutional practices and the primacy that the 'scientific' tradition of modernity has wielded over not only rules for gathering evidence and protocols for its analysis, but also over rules for structuring of academic departments and protocols for allocating resources for their existence. Rationalisations for what research gets funded are not empirical. They are constructed in rhetoric, and are based on very specific--although usually unstated--belief systems...To view the perceived hierarchy of paradigms outside of their political and economic contexts is to be hoodwinked by the very hat-trick which natural science models continue to perpetrate. But legion are the items which have been swept under the ontological rug which could be illuminated by qualitative research. "The way people think," "Why people think what they think," "What impact, if any, a body of ideas has on individuals or on groups," are items not well-suited to a research paradigm whose key assumption is that these human quotients are not merely unimportant, but that they get in the way of the very research act itself...a key step in releasing the stranglehold positivism has on the academy is to stop engaging the debate in its own frame.

Cheers, jeers, sneers, tears and a turn of the gears... --jd

This debate is flashing lightning - like across my screen during the writing of this paper. I can choose to ignore it, to save it for later, or I can admit these intermittent 'news flashes' when, as, and if they arrive. I have chosen to share with you some of these interruptions - these seemingly random collages or textual juxtapositions - as examples of the processes by which are constructed the conceptual environments of the mid-1990s in which we live, think, teach and do research.... Go to Finder. Click on Eudora. I type:

To: Multiple recipients of list QUALS-L <QUALS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu>
From: educ_mid@waikato.ac.nz (Sue Middleton)
Subject: recent developments

Hi there. I am in the process of writing a keynote address to the New Zealand Association for Research in Education Conference (NZARE) which takes place from December 8 - 10. The topic I have been asked to speak about is: 'Recent developments in qualitative research.' Another speaker is doing the same for quantitative methods. It would be interesting, and extremely useful to me, to hear what you out there in cyberspace identify as the key contemporary developments and issues in qualitative research. I have called the paper 'Doing qualitative research in the mid-1990s: Issues, contexts and practicalities.' I am incorporating comments from this discussion group in the paper - fully referenced, of course, according to the very useful referencing system we were sent the other day! In return for your help I will send you a copy of the paper if you send me a personal E-mail message. It will be fascinating to see if you identify the same issues as I am in the process of doing. Thanks in anticipation (I'm trying to finish the thing by Monday...help...)

I click on Send... It will be interesting to see if the replies confirm, add to, and/or challenge what I, in accord with Bogdan and Biklen have identified as key influences and shifts in qualitative educational research since 1980: the relationship of emancipatory social movements (such as decolonisation and feminism) to qualitative research, "postmodernism, deconstruction and qualitative research, and the application of computer technology to the collection and analysis of qualitative data"(Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. ix).

From Manilla Folders To Cyberspace

Newsflash:

Date: Thu, 09 Nov 1995 14:17:36 -0500 (EST)
From: "Barbara L. Stone" <blstone@nando.net>
Subject: Re: recent developments
To: Sue Middleton <educ_mid@waikato.ac.nz>
MIME-version: 1.0

Sue,

It's clear to me that the "most new" thing in the mid-nineties is the use of computers. I took my last graduate course in qualitative in 1993. At that point Ethnograph and two other programs were being talked about, but I didn't even know anyone who was using them [software designed for qualitative research], and I knew lots of serious qualitative people in education. Now, I sign on to this group and discover how prevalent the programs are, and I feel hopelessly out of date ALREADY.

Let me briefly describe the most basic changes brought about by the computer in the past 15 years in the everyday activities of 'ordinary' (i.e., non-technical expert) graduate students and academics in working with qualitative data. In the early 1980s I was researching for my doctoral thesis which was an investigation of how and why so many feminist teachers who were born and educated in New Zealand in the years immediately following World War Two had come to identify with various forms of feminism and how their feminist theories influenced their work in education (Middleton, 1985). Part of the analysis drew on a series of life-history interviews with twelve feminist teachers. The interview transcripts created what seemed at the time an unmanageable mountain of paper - about 300 pages. The data base for the thesis was created using several photocopies of each transcript, five different coloured felt tip pens (to signify codings), a pair of scissors, and about 36 manilla folders (as the photocopied transcripts were colour coded, cut up and filed in multiple ways). I typed my drafts on a manual typewriter on the kitchen table. Although I had formal access to the university mainframe computer, a Vax, I would have had to isolate myself in the university buildings at night thus separating myself from my family. A university typist retyped my drafts into the mainframe; revisions were done at home with bottles of white-out, ballpoint pen, scissors and Sellotape, then given back to the typist for corrections. In late 1984 to early 1985 mine was the first Education thesis on my campus to make use of the new word processing facilities.

Five years later, in 1990, as a member of David Mitchell's Monitoring Today's Schools research team, I coordinated an initial phase of the study which investigated the educational ideas and priorities of 110 members of Boards of Trustees (the Boards of 16 schools) (Middleton, 1990). Because 16 different interviewers worked on this task (each field worker was based in one school) the life-history interview questions needed to be standardised, although responses to these were open-ended. The data base for this was created on two rolls of wallpaper which extended from one end of my lounge to the other. Again, multiple photocopies, scissors, Sellotape and coloured pens played a major part in the coding and analysis process. I wrote the report directly onto my first home computer, an Amiga 2000, which I had purchased in 1987 and which by 1990 was already becoming obsolete. When the hard copies of my report had been approved by the research team members, I carried the floppy disks of my drafts to the technicians so that they could be translated into the format required for David Mitchell's (the project director's) Macintosh. For many of us, the mid - to late - 1980s were characterised by the stand-alone computer, floppy disks and problems caused by incompatibilities between the different machines. 'Mac users' and 'PC

users' became identifiable subcultural groups in many departments. We oddities like Amiga users became marginalised as the giant corporations struggled for market dominance and ultimately determined what could be bought and serviced on the various campuses. In 1990 I ditched the Amiga and bought a Macintosh Classic.

At this time, like many of my colleagues who engaged in qualitative research, I regarded and used the computer as a kind of enhanced typewriter. Macintoshes and Amigas seduced us into comfortable familiarity by working in terms of metaphors. Instead of handling sheets of paper, we worked with signs and images - electronically generated 'icons' which could be dragged across a screen and placed inside (metaphorical) drawers (Amiga) or folders (Macintosh) or dumped in (metaphorical) trashcans.

Now in the mid-1990s the age of the stand-alone desk-top computer has gone. No longer atomised at insulated desks we can, through a few keystrokes, engage in multiparty conversations across cyberspace - across the globe. As I listen to Joe Cocker's 25th anniversary tour album on the CD ROM in my six month old but almost obsolete Macintosh LC575, I type and E-mail off a message to Nola Campbell, the list owner of We-net, which links Waikato schools:

For sale. Macintosh Classic, 40 megabyte hard disk; Microsoft Word 4 with manuals; Panasonic KX-P1081 dot matrix printer. \$700 the lot. All in good working order...

In the past two years Helen May and I have interviewed 150 teachers and former teachers, ranging in age from 21 to 97, about their educational ideas and where they came from. Our overall aim is to map the tides and currents of educational thought as 'lived' and created by teachers in the course of their everyday lives. Teachers are viewed not 'from the top' as passive recipients of the ideas of policy-makers but as creative strategists whose theories-in-practice are products of their own agency within the constraints and possibilities afforded them by their biographical, historical and material, cultural and geographical situations and the theoretical, conceptual or discursive resources to which their circumstances afford them access.

Helen and I now each have the transcripts of 75 ninety minute interviews, each of which averages approximately 30 pages of ASCII text; Helen and I have around 1500 pages of raw data each; we have 3000 pages in total. However, the availability of purpose-built software for qualitative research means that I find the 3000 pages of raw data which the present project has generated less daunting than the terrifying 300 pages of raw data which I had gathered for my doctorate twelve or so years previously.

NUDIST is basically an indexing system with the power to index each text file in multiple and intersecting ways. It works on the metaphor of the genealogical or family tree. The root of this (upside down) tree is the project as a whole. Hanging from the root is the first generation of nodes (or 'children'), which in the case of this project will be the chapters Helen and I have marked out for our book. These loosely correspond with periods of time and the corresponding shifts in education policies and practices. We have, for example, a node for 'World War Two.' Hanging from the 'second generation' tier for World

War Two will be a third generation of children (grandchildren) - perhaps a node each for early childhood, primary and secondary institutions. Within each of these we might create sub-sets (a fourth generation, or great grand-children) of those who were primary school pupils during World War two, those who were at Teachers' College during this time, and those who were primary teachers. Similar hierarchical sub-divisions will be created for each of the other time periods under consideration (for example the time during and since the 1984 - 1990 Fourth Labour Government's educational reforms). NUDIST provides various ways of cross-indexing this data - if we want information, for example, about male or female teachers across categories or subcategories, NUDIST can (provided we instruct it correctly) generate new nodes for us with this information. Gone are the metaphors of files in drawers or folders. One does not cut and paste with NUDIST - a great weight off the minds of those of us who have experienced frequent crashes or freezes of word processing programs when engaged in too much 'cutting and pasting.' With NUDIST one does not 'put' pieces of text 'in' anything. The metaphor is more that of the library catalogue than the office.

RESEARCH AS A SOCIAL PROCESS

Date: Fri, 10 Nov 1995 10:26:25 +0000
From: N.Fielding@soc.surrey.ac.uk (Nigel Fielding)
Subject: keynote address topics
X-Sender: scs1nf@boris.soc.surrey.ac.uk
To: educ_mid@waikato.ac.nz
MIME-version: 1.0

.....A ... compelling development is the increasing attention paid to the 'emotional' and reflexive aspects of fieldwork. Feminist methodology has contributed here but it is not the only source of interest in bringing these matters into account. For example, there has been work on particular techniques appropriate to research on 'sensitive topics'. Such matters inevitably touch on ethics, and on the increasing knowledgeability of research subjects about research itself. In some fields this knowledgeability has led to increasing demands for payment by researchers to communities in exchange for access. This happens quite a bit in criminology; in the US; and, according to an official of the Human Sciences Research Council who recently visited UK, it is an increasingly standard element in research in South Africa.

In this country it has been in the main Maori (Bishop, 1994; Irwin, 1994; L. Smith, 1991) and feminists (Bunkle, 1990; Jones, 1992; Middleton, 1988; 1993) who have explored the articulation of research - its processes, the scientific and other narratives it produces, and the uses to which it is put - to various apparatuses of power. Those whose perspectives and experiences have been excluded, marginalised, distorted or mis-represented in the works of social scientists have critiqued dominant theories in the social sciences as historically, politically, and culturally located; traditional research methodologies as having constructed 'the researched' as objects to be known; and the theories and knowledge they have

produced as often complicit in processes of surveillance, monitoring, regulation and governing (Foucault, 1980; D. Smith, 1990). For example, Edward Said (1985) and others have pointed out that the rationale for colonisation rested on western 'scientific' knowledges of the colonised as 'other' and as inferior (Harding, 1993). As Rosemary Hennessy, drawing on Marxist and feminist positions, has expressed it (1993, p. 8), "in any historical moment modes of intelligibility are closely tied to economic and political practices."

Increasingly, writers are exploring the power relationships between those who are interviewed or observed in qualitative research and those who record, interpret and write about what was said. Research is studied as a political act: for example, who or what gets funded, by whom and why; who gets to read the 'results', how accessibly these are written, where and in what form they are published; the extent and form of the contributions by 'the researched' to the analysis. All of these issues have been made visible in recent writings - particularly in feminist work - and are seen as intrinsic to the research itself. Such an approach is "more aware of its status as narrative and ... is at least suspicious of, if not rejecting outright, the universal and disengaged subject of empiricism" (Hennessy, 1993, p. 101).

The past fifteen years have seen researchers pay "much greater attention to the 'politics of method'... i.e., to the relations of power in the framing of the language of research and in the research act itself" (McWilliam, 1995, p 28). Feminists, post-colonial (particularly in New Zealand Maori) researchers and others have increasingly recognised, taken into account in research design and made visible in their writings the power relations which bring research into being, which shape its processes and which give form to the written texts which result from it. What Ann Oakley termed "the methodology of 'hygienic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production" has been challenged by approaches which recognise "that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (Oakley, 1982, p. 58). Questions raised by such critiques, which in the case of medical research in particular (Bunke, 1980) has even led to legal action, have led to a tightening up of ethical requirements and protocols for researchers and a heightened awareness of social science research as not only embedded in, but as also formative of, the very individuals and societies which are its object of study.

As feminists Helen May and I have been aware of these issues in the design of the life-history project in which we are presently engaged. Although it may not, at first glance, seem to involve tricky ethical dilemmas or the disclosure of sensitive personal information, it does, however, ask people to give us an hour and a half of interview time, to construct with us and a wider reading public a narrative about their educational experiences and ideas and to be involved to some extent in the editing of this narrative. We see the creation of our text - our gift to teachers who are in training, practising and retired - as a collaboration between us and the 150 who gave us their stories. A study like this, which involves one sustained interview, could easily turn into mere 'hit and run' research. In order to make visible some of the unexpected dilemmas which can

arise as one interacts with those being interviewed for research, I shall describe our process in some detail.

Our first task was to find teachers and former teachers to interview. We started with retired teachers we knew - my first interviews were with a former colleague and a relative. We then used our professional networks to locate likely informants. We put notices in campus newsletters, in the NZARE newsletter INPUT, then contacted individuals whose names were suggested to us by others, such as other interviewees. We could have gone on forever! Our first contact was over the phone. In my 77 approaches to teachers I had only two refusals, both of which were at this initial telephone contact stage. Both were male secondary teachers, one in his first year, the other in a senior position - and both were interested, apologetic, but too busy in the particular few days I would be in their town.

The phone call was followed up immediately with a one-page letter which explained the overall focus and purpose of the project. Included with this was a one-page 'biographical outline' form for them to fill in. This provided me with the names of schools they had attended as pupils and in which they had taught and the dates they had been there and helped to avoid the stress of struggling to recall dates during the interview. They also received a consent form at this stage which promised that only brief anonymous excerpts from the interviews would be used unless consent was given at a later stage to the use of names. All but two of my 75 interviews were in the teachers' homes. I was almost always offered tea when I arrived and put at my ease as we got to know one another. In the lounges and dining-rooms of retired couples, the spouse was sometimes present and contributed additional material to the interview. Sometimes I was offered lunch and taken sight-seeing. When I interviewed beginning teachers it was often in flats, with very limited communal space. Young women took me into their bedrooms, their private spaces for sleeping, working and dreaming. When interviewing young men I was keenly aware that here I was, a middle-aged stranger, occupying the only communal space (the kitchen-dining room) in the flat. The flatmates tip-toed in and out and brought me cups of instant coffee and biscuits.

After an interview I often received handwritten letters. The following illustrations are composites made up from the kinds of feedback we have received in letters from our interviewees. Because we did not seek people's consent to use their letters, I have not published actual letters in this paper:

Dear Sue:

Henry and I were delighted to meet you today. I trust that your interviews are rewarding in that you are able to extrapolate the necessary information. I remember the British writer about progressive infant rooms about whom I spoke, - Edna Mellor". I know that a number of teachers read her work with enthusiasm. Regards and Seasons greetings. (Mary, aged 75)

The 75 interviews took me two years - one a week during teaching terms; clusters of interviews during non-teaching times, especially when out of town. After one of the typists had completed a transcript I listened to the tape, manually corrected

any errors I could detect, edited the transcript on disk, printed it out, then sent it out to the interviewee with a covering letter and a second consent form. In this letter I asked each interviewee to read the transcript. At this stage they could keep the transcript if it was satisfactory and return the second consent form in which they were asked to choose a name for themselves to be known by in the study. Many of the older teachers have given written permission for us to use their real names.

On the bookshelf beside my computer is a thick grey ring binder - an old EastLight file - its pages ordered by alphabetical tabs. These organise the paper files I keep on each interviewee: each person's biographical outline form, the initial consent form, second consent form (with choice of name) as well as any other correspondence. The age of paper files is not quite over. Only a few of my interviewees have E-mail (the teacher-educators)...I have received many handwritten letters from those I have interviewed, for example those written in response to receipt of the edited transcripts. I have often found myself writing back to elderly people in handwriting. Some are appalled by the appearance of transcribed text in comparison with written language and request detailed editing of the text to bring it into line with 'correct usage.' I guess it's not surprising that many of the elderly teachers have reacted strongly to the 'slang' of their spoken words:

Dear Sue:

... I was intrigued by what I said. Some of the grammar is not up to Proficiency standards. I could see where my thinking ran ahead of my tongue - sorry about that... Sincerely yours...

Sue:

Thankyou for the transcript. I think it must have been dreadful transcribing my interview. Lots of repeating and using 'then'. Ghastly.

There are many further corrections to be made before interviewees are satisfied with their transcripts, for example with respect to the spelling of the names of people or places.

One of our informants was so dissatisfied with his transcript that he had spent four days retyping it on a manual typewriter. The 'o' is distorted and it would confuse the electronic scanner. But it did not take a skilled copy typist long to re-renter it on disk and the result was worth it. Some value the transcript as a family record and have said that they will pass it on to their children and grandchildren. A few of the older interviewees have died since the interviews and, in each case, I have managed to locate, correspond with and send transcripts and other correspondence to one of their children. I have offered the family a copy of the original tape. Family members have expressed appreciation for these tapes and have written moving accounts of their responses to hearing their father's or mother's voice again.

This project juxtaposes technologies from different eras: handwriting, manual typewriters and East Light files; computers, cyberspace and NUDIST. As I thumb through the huge East Light file, another E-mail message comes at me:

From: Karen Milligan <kmillign@UTKUX.UTCC.UTK.EDU>
Subject: Re: Discussion lists as data
Sender: Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences <QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu>
To: Multiple recipients of list QUALRS-L <QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu>
Reply-to: Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences <QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu>

I am a graduate student in education taking my first course in qualitative research methods... Are there any grounded theorists or other qualitative

> researchers out there who have drawn upon conversations in
> electronic discussion lists or news groups as the primary data
> for analysis in a project?

What issues would need to be considered in an interview study that was based on interviews done via e-mail rather than face to face?

POSTMODERNISM AND DECONSTRUCTIVE WRITING

Date: Fri, 10 Nov 1995 13:56:22 -0500 (EST)
From: "Carolyn Ellis (SOC)" <cellis@chuma.cas.usf.edu>
Subject: Re: recent developments
X-Sender: cellis@chuma
To: Sue Middleton <educ_mid@WAIKATO.AC.NZ>
MIME-version: 1.0

Hi, I hope you will include the move to narrative writing and analysis, autoethnography, ethnopoetics and ethnodrama.

The term postmodernism is much misunderstood and the impenetrable jargons of some of the more pretentious writers who claim to work within such a framework sometimes inspire terror in their readers. I understand 'postmodernism' to refer to the age we are living in, the salient features of which include a change in the material base of capitalism with the locus of wealth and power shifting from the production and distribution of commodities to the production, distribution and control of knowledge and information (Harvey, 1989; Lyotard, 1984). The 'master narratives' which used to help us to research the social structures of the industrial capitalist (or modern) world are seen as products of the social hierarchies and apparatuses of power of that era and therefore as lacking for the social science projects of the postmodern age. This does not mean that modernist accounts, such as liberalism and Marxism, are rejected by all postmodernist writers in their entirety. Rather, concepts from these older theories are used and blended with newer concepts, for example those emerging from the critiques of groups whose worldviews were rendered invisible or marginal by the various modernist 'knowledges.' For example, feminist materialism is a contemporary blending of neo-Marxist, feminist and poststructuralist ideas (Barrett, 1991; Hennessey, 1993; Middleton, 1993; Weiner, 1994). What I have been attempting to illustrate in the

way I have put this paper together are some implications of this postmodern age for the ways we conceptualise, do and write qualitative educational research as the twentieth century draws to its end.

In a recent polemical text, *Nattering on the net: Women, power and cyberspace*, the popular Australian feminist author, Dale Spender, who, like many of us who do educational research, was born during the post World War Two baby boom and is now in her late forties, argued that:

We are the last generation to be reared within a culture in which print is the primary information medium. Because we have grown up and become skilled in a print-based community, we have developed certain ways of making sense of the world. We are, to some extent, what print has made us. And now we have to change (Spender, 1995, p xv).

Print, she argues, has characterised the 'mode of information' (Poster, 1984) of the modern (or industrial) age, the age of standardisation in which emerged the various 'bodies of knowledge' (or academic disciplines) to which as teachers and members of professional organisations, we bear allegiance (Lyotard, 1984). But, as Spender puts it, there is:

a new flexibility associated with the electronic media which is at odds with the very idea of standardisation and regulation. Even when print appears on the screen, it is not fixed; it moves, it can be changed. There isn't the same sense of a finished product, or of a fixed meaning. Electronic 'publications' have an air of fluidity, fleetingness, ephemerality about them. Pluralism and diversity are much more the current values, than standardisation (Ibid, p. 14).

In capitalist countries, the dominant political philosophy of the Modern Age has been liberal individualism - a notion which has also been formative of the academic profession and "the notion of the individual creative author as one who produces original material which is the intellectual property of the writer" (Spender, Ibid, p. xxii).

Date: Fri, 10 Nov 1995 02:30:42 -0600 (CST)
From: Marie Nelson <mnel@nlu.nl.edu>
Subject: Trends in interp. research
To: educ_mid@WAIKATO.AC.NZ
Cc: mnel@nlu.nl.edu
MIME-version: 1.0

Sue, good luck with your keynote. I have one or two ideas for you.

An increasing (but always present) commitment in my own research over the past two decades is to publishing in a reader-friendly voice that can be read and understood by non-specialists... I used every narrative technique of which I was aware--character setting, suspense, dialogue, the revealing detail--to keep readers turning the pages to find

out what would happen next as I traced the detective story of my research, layering my inductively arrived at insights one on the other in the fashion in which they'd emerged. My goal: to step readers vicariously through the feelings and decision making processes I had experienced during the course of my study, even while holding their attention so they would enjoy reading on. I figured if I did not, no one would read the thing. ... In other words, I'm becoming more and more political. Scratch that. It occurs to me that everything is political. How's this: As a writer and educational researcher, I'm becoming increasingly aware of the price society pays for my field's exclusionary linguistic practices. So, while I can't exactly say this is a trend, it is a direction in which I myself have been moving for years, and I've encouraged dozens of graduate students to do the same.

Marie Wilson Nelson
National-Louis University

A significant new development in qualitative research in the social sciences, including and perhaps especially in education, has been the emergence of experimental ways of writing which are transgressive of the conventions of linearity, standardisation (or replicability) and detachment (objectivity) which have been required in the natural science models. There are several reasons for such innovations. One has been the blurring - even collapsing - of disciplinary boundaries as new cross- or trans-disciplinary fields of study have been created. Women's studies, cultural studies, Māori/multicultural studies and media studies are some obvious examples. The creation of these new fields has meant that people who would previously have been in separate departments, read different journals, and attended different conferences now work freely together. In fields such as women's studies, which now has claimed a space, albeit continually under threat, within the academy, what used to be unclimbable fences, such as those between social sciences and literary theory, have now been demolished. Literary theory is used as a basis for deconstructing educational policy texts. Psychoanalytic theory is used to deconstruct research reports. No longer conceptualising ourselves as disengaged observers, deconstructionist researchers include in our written accounts the situated story of our researching and writing processes and interactions - "investigations into the conditions of possibility which make certain meanings allowable and which also acknowledge their own historicity" (Hennessy, 1993, p. 7). The 'historicity' or experiential grounding of our own accounts is seen as a legitimate part of our research problem and topic of inclusion as we seek to study in our own works "the determinative powers of discourse in constituting practices that are intimately responsible for - as Said put it - 'how people thought, lived and spoke'" (Barrett, 1991, p. 131).

The inclusion of the standpoint from which the authorial voice originates in the writing of research is not a license for undisciplined self-indulgence. Rather, if done well, it can help us to do 'better science' by making visible to the reader the processes which are hidden beneath the mask of disembodied uninvolvement which traditional accounts have required. What are the historical, political and cultural circumstances in which certain types of research questions get asked?

Which of them are made possible and why (through access to supervision, funding, etc)? How and why were particular methodological choices made (such as whether to do ethnography or life-history)? What were the conditions of possibility for the choice of analytic and interpretive techniques, such as symbolic interactionism, grounded theory, or deconstruction? How and why have particular concepts or theories been used (neo-Marxism, behaviourism, feminism etc)? Postmodernist writings problematise these issues as a central part of the research.

For example, in 1991, Alison Jones published a book which re-theorised the doctoral thesis she had done in the mid-1980s by revealing the historical and institutional origins of the neo-Marxist problematic in which the original study had been conceptualised. Drawing on post-modernist writers such as Patti Lather (1990) she demonstrated how one could tell other than neo-Marxist stories about her ethnographic data. Contrary to popular opinion, this does not mean that "postmodernist philosophy" consists of "foolish... notions of there being no reality other than that which exists within the personal frame of the observer" ('Smith' - see note 4). Rather, it means that it is useful to make visible in our writings the ways in which the conceptual frames which researchers bring to bear when they ask questions, observe and write are themselves historical, cultural etc products. Making visible the historicity of one's own analyses can lead to better science rather than relativistic chaos. An increasing number of doctoral theses (e.g., Schultz, 1995) and other academic writings in education (especially, but not exclusively feminist works) are taking such a perspective (McWilliam, 1985; Middleton, 1993a, 1995).

CONCLUSION

In response to NZARE's request to identify "recent developments in qualitative educational research" I have raised questions about what it means to ask questions, engage in researching encounters with others, to analyse and interpret these, and to write about them in the postmodern age as increasingly we experience ourselves and our research communities as nodes in multiple and intersecting networks rather than as individuals in hierarchies; authorship as ephemeral and communal; theories as fragmented and concepts as floating between disciplines; data as auditory or visual, static and moving; writing in terms of the production of collages, pastiches and juxtapositions rather than linear text. And, by the form in which I have chosen to present this paper, I hope to have demonstrated for you some of the developments which have been the subject matter of this presentation.

There are issues of access to technology in various settings such as families, schools and other educational institutions, and settings in the wider community, such as public resources like libraries. Indeed, the question of who gets access to the new technologies, the hardware, the software and the know-how, is emerging as one of the key issues of participation and equity as the twentieth century draws to its close.

FOOTNOTES

1. The writing of this paper has involved me in debates with other participants in the Internet discussion group Qualitative Research [QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu]. This has involved academics, librarians and journalists in debating whether or not messages sent to newsgroups are 'in the public domain' and may be quoted in academic publications in the same way as, for example, letters to the editors of newspapers or radio broadcasts. I view such materials as equivalent. However, some members of the list said that their spontaneity and freedom of expression would be inhibited if they felt that hastily written messages could be transfixed into print and incorporated into academic publications as sourced quotations. In order to respect such feelings, I have obtained (electronically) written consent from those whom I have quoted directly in this publication. In one case I have, for other ethical reasons, chosen to use a pseudonym (for both the person's name and E-mail address). I would like to thank the participants in this discussion group for their help.
2. Sue Middleton, *Doing Qualitative Educational Research In The Mid-1990s: Issues, Contexts And Practicalities*. Keynote address, NZARE Conference, Massey University, Palmerston North, December 7 - 10, 1995.
3. NUDIST is an acronym for Non -numerical Unstructured Data - Indexing, Searching and Theorising. It was developed by QSR (Qualitative Solutions and Research) at La Trobe University.
4. I have used a pseudonym for this contributor and his E-mail address.
5. See note 3.

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