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## 5

## Managing, Analyzing, and Interpreting Data

Once the researcher has settled on a strategy, chosen a site, selected a sample, and determined a method of collecting data, she should discuss how she will record, manage, analyze, and interpret the data. She should also put forward preliminary ideas for writing up the analysis or representing it in some other format. At the proposal stage, this discussion can be brief, but it should provide the reader with a sense that the data will be recorded efficiently and managed in ways that allow for easy retrieval. In addition, the proposal should present initial strategies for analysis and interpretation. The writer should be prepared to provide examples of how the methods of data collection and analysis might proceed; pilot studies or previous research are excellent sources for such examples.

### ❖ RECORDING AND MANAGING DATA

The section of the proposal on research design should include plans for recording data in a systematic manner that is appropriate for the

setting, the participants, or both and that will facilitate analysis. The researcher should demonstrate an awareness that the techniques for recording observations, interactions, and interviews will not intrude excessively on the flow of daily events. In some situations, even taking notes interferes with, inhibits, or in some way acts on the setting and the participants. In the proposal, she should delineate plans to use tape recorders, cameras, and other mechanical devices and demonstrate that she will use data-recording strategies that fit the setting and the participants' sensitivities but only with participants' consent.

In participatory and action research, the researcher's intrusiveness in the setting is not an issue. Because these approaches are fundamentally interactive and include participants quite fully in framing questions and gathering data, the researcher's presence is considered an integral part of the setting. Whatever the qualitative approach, however, researchers should practice and build habits for labeling audiotapes, carrying extra batteries, and finding quiet places for taking notes. Such practices will pay off with data that are intact, complete, organized, and accessible.

In addition, the researcher should plan a system that eases retrieval for analysis. In more objectivist proposals, researchers may have lists of predetermined categories for data coding. Relying on such categories does facilitate retrieval and analysis, but to remain true to qualitative research assumptions, the researcher should plan decision rules for altering those categories during focused analysis. Furthermore, planning for the color coding of notes to keep track of dates, names, titles, attendance at events, chronologies, descriptions of settings, maps, sociograms, and so on is invaluable. In piecing together patterns, defining categories for data analysis, planning further data collection, and especially for writing the final product of the research, color coding is a useful tool. Vignette 19 provides descriptive detail of one such effort.

### VIGNETTE 19

#### Data Management

In her dissertation research on women's socialization in school administration, Marshall (1979) developed a process by which data transcription, organization, and analysis were combined in a single operation. Her entry into the field and interviewing were directed by a conceptual framework and a set of guiding hypotheses.

She conducted data analysis by trying out conceptual levers such as Goode's (1960) role strain theory, identified in the course of the literature review. Goode's theory guided the analysis of data pertaining to conflicts experienced by women entering male sex-typed careers while continuing to live with the stereotypical expectations of mother, wife, and community member. Building on Goode's work, Marshall devised a career-role strain theory that included feminine identity and sexuality crises prompted by the demands of working in a male-normed profession.

Employing constant comparative data analysis, she developed a grounded theory of women's socialization in male sex-typed careers that explained the socialization period of transition. During this period, women resist the pull of aspiration, resent the exclusion, get angry about the double demands, and yet simultaneously create new ways to fill the roles. Observational notes and pre-fieldwork mapping of sites or subjects were recorded on hardback legal pads that could be held in the lap or used on the run. Following each interview, Marshall partially transcribed field notes of audiotaped conversations, selecting conceptually intriguing phrases that either connected with previous literature or suggested patterns emerging from the analysis of previous data.

Preserving the data and meanings on tape and combining transcription with preliminary analysis greatly increased the efficiency of data analysis. The researcher's transcription, done with the literature review, previous data, and earlier analytic memos in mind, became a useful part of data analysis and not mere clerical duty.

This is not to suggest a reprieve from transferring data to index cards, or coding data, from sorting cards to identify overlapping categories, from organizing codes into more inclusive and abstract domains, or from keeping methodological notes, analytic memos, theoretical notes, case summaries, charts, and dummy tables, all of which are steps in analysis. Combining the initial transcription with analysis, however, moved the study forward efficiently and without threat to the exploratory value of qualitative research or to data quality.



Vignette 19 describes one researcher's way of managing thick, complex data. Over the years, researchers have developed a variety of data management strategies, ranging from color and number codings on index cards to computer programs. These techniques are often shared as part of the folklore of fieldwork. Whatever method is devised, it must enable the researcher to organize and make data easily retrievable and manipulable. Most general, introductory texts on qualitative methods provide extended discussions of processes of analyzing data, and we

reference several at the end of this chapter. Below we suggest a process of generic data analysis.

#### ❖ GENERIC DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES

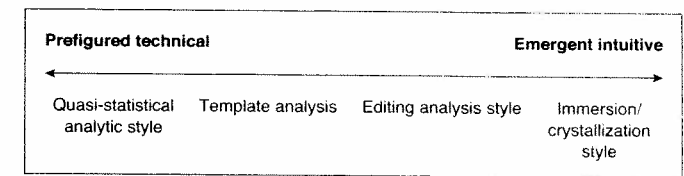
The process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data is messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes; it builds grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). As described by Wolcott (1994), description, analysis, and interpretation, three somewhat distinct activities, are often bundled into the generic term *analysis*. He notes:

By no means do I suggest that the three categories—description, analysis, and interpretation—are mutually exclusive. Nor are lines clearly drawn where description ends and analysis begins, or where analysis becomes interpretation. . . . I do suggest that identifying and distinguishing among the three may serve a useful purpose, especially if the categories can be regarded as varying emphases that qualitative researchers employ to organize and present data. (p. 11)

This section of the research proposal should describe initial decisions about data analysis and should convince the reader that the researcher's knowledge of qualitative analysis encompasses data organization, theme development and interpretation, and report writing. Although none of these can be given exhaustive consideration in the proposal, the researcher should convince the reader that thought and awareness have gone into planning the analysis phase of the study. What follows is a discussion of some considerations the researcher should bring to this section.

Whether the researcher prefigures the analysis before collecting data, begins analyzing while collecting, or collects first and analyzes later depends on the qualitative genre and assumptions of the study. Generating categories of data to collect, like cells in a matrix, can be an important focusing activity for the study. Tightly structured, highly organized data-gathering and data-analyzing schemes, however, often filter out the unusual and the serendipitous—the puzzle that if attended to and pursued would require a recasting of the entire research endeavor. Thus, a balance must be struck between efficiency and design flexibility.

Figure 5.1 A Continuum of Analysis Strategies



SOURCE: Adapted from Crabtree and Miller (1992, pp. 17–20).

Crabtree and Miller (1992) propose a continuum of ideal-type analysis strategies (see Figure 5.1), although they note that “nearly as many analysis strategies exist as qualitative researchers.” At the extreme objectivist end of their continuum are technical, scientific, and standardized strategies in which the researcher has assumed an objectivist stance relative to the inquiry and has stipulated the categories in advance. At the other end are the “immersion strategies,” in which categories are not prefigured and which rely heavily on the researcher’s intuitive and interpretive capacities. What they call “template” and “editing” analysis strategies stand along the continuum, with the template process more prefigured and stipulative than the editing processes (Crabtree & Miller, pp. 17–18). Template strategies apply sets of codes to the data that may undergo revision as the analysis proceeds. Editing strategies are less prefigured. “The interpreter engages the text naively, without a template” (p. 20), searching for segments of text to generate and illustrate categories of meaning. This method is closely allied with recent writing on grounded theory (Charmaz, 2005, 2000; Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

In qualitative studies, data collection and analysis typically go hand in hand to build a coherent interpretation. The researcher is guided by initial concepts and developing understandings that she shifts or modifies as she collects and analyzes the data. Her overall strategy is closer to the interpretive/subjectivist end of the continuum than the technical/objectivist end. In their classical work, still very useful, Schatzman and Strauss (1973) succinctly portray the process of qualitative data collection and analysis:

Qualitative data are exceedingly complex and not readily convertible into standard measurable units of objects seen and heard; they vary in level of abstraction, in frequency of occurrence, in relevance

to central questions in the research. Also, they vary in the source or ground from which they are experienced. Our model researcher starts analyzing very early in the research process. For him, the option represents an *analytic* strategy: he needs to analyze as he goes along both to adjust his observation strategies, shifting some emphasis towards those experiences which bear upon the development of his understanding, and generally, to exercise control over his emerging ideas by virtually simultaneous checking or testing of these ideas. . . . Probably the most fundamental operation in the analysis of qualitative data is that of discovering significant *classes* of things, persons and events and the *properties* which characterize them. In this process, which continues throughout the research, the analyst gradually comes to reveal his own "is's" and "because's": he names classes and links one with another, at first with "simple" statements (propositions) that express the linkages, and continues this process until his propositions fall into *sets*, in an ever-increasing density of linkages. (pp. 108–110)

The researcher should use preliminary research questions and the related literature developed earlier in the proposal as guidelines for data analysis. This earlier grounding and planning can be used to suggest several categories by which the data initially could be coded for subsequent analysis.

As a coherent interpretation with related concepts and themes emerges from analysis, troublesome or incomplete data will lead to new collecting and analysis that serve to strengthen the interpretation. Interpretation takes shape as major modifications become rare and concepts fall into established categories and themes. Analysis will be sufficient when critical categories are defined, relationships between them are established, and they are integrated into an elegant, credible interpretation.

#### ❖ ANALYTIC PROCEDURES

Typical analytic procedures fall into seven phases: (a) organizing the data; (b) immersion in the data; (c) generating categories and themes; (d) coding the data; (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos; (f) searching for alternative understandings; and (g) writing the report or other format for presenting the study. Each phase of data analysis entails data reduction, as the reams of collected data are brought into manageable chunks, and interpretation, as the researcher brings meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants in

the study. At the proposal stage, the researcher should project what this process will entail, in preliminary ways. The procedures to be followed, initial guides for categories, and potential coding schemes all indicate to the reader that this crucial phase of the research will be managed competently.

The interpretive act remains mysterious in both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. It is a process of bringing meaning to raw, inexpressive data that is necessary whether the researcher's language is standard deviations and means or rich description of ordinary events. Raw data have no inherent meaning; the interpretive act brings meaning to those data and displays that meaning to the reader through the written report. As Patton notes (2002, p. 432), "Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes. But no recipe. . . . [T]he final destination remains unique for each inquirer, known only when—and if—arrived at." With this caution in mind, we offer some general stages to guide the analysis section of the proposal.

#### Organizing the Data

When beginning the more focused stage of analysis, it is important that the researcher should again spend some time organizing the data. While this should be done all along, revisiting the "huge piles" of data at this stage is very important. The researcher can list on note cards the data that have been gathered, perform the minor editing necessary to make field notes retrievable, and generally clean up what seems overwhelming and unmanageable. The researcher should also log the types of data according to dates, names, times, and places where, when, and with whom they were gathered. An example is provided below in Table 5.1:

**Table 5.1** Log of Data-Gathering Activities

Date	Place	Activity	Who	What
3/21/05	Fort River School	Focus group	3 teachers – Joe, Maria, Marcella	Strategies for including students
3/25/05	Fort River School	Observation	Maria's classroom – Amy	Seeing how Amy does math
3/25/05	Amy's home	Interview	Amy's parents	Challenges, supports

At this time, the researcher could also enter the data into one of several software programs designed for the management or the analysis of qualitative data (Richards & Richards, 1994; Tesch, 1990; Weitzman, 2000; Weitzman & Miles, 1995).

### Immersion in the Data

Reading, rereading, and reading through the data once more forces the researcher to become intimately familiar with those data. People, events, and quotations sift constantly through the researcher's mind. As Patton (2002) notes,

The data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous. I have found no way of preparing students for the sheer mass of information they will find themselves confronted with when data collection has ended. Sitting down to make sense out of pages of interviews and whole files of field notes can be overwhelming. Organizing and analyzing a mountain of narrative can seem like an impossible task. (p. 440)

He then underscores how much of qualitative reporting consists of descriptive data, the purpose of which is to display the daily events of the phenomenon under study. Careful attention to how data are being reduced is necessary throughout the research endeavor. In some instances, direct transfer onto predeveloped data recording charts is appropriate, as with the template strategies. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest several schemas for recording qualitative data. Such techniques streamline data management, help ensure reliability across the efforts of several researchers, and are highly recommended for large, complex studies such as multisite case studies (Yin, 2003). In using graphics and schemas, however, the researcher should guard against losing the serendipitous finding.

### Generating Categories and Themes

For researchers relying on editing or immersion strategies, this phase of data analysis is the most difficult, complex, ambiguous, creative, and fun. Although there are few descriptions of this process in the literature, it remains the most amenable to display through example. The analytic process demands a heightened awareness of the data, a focused attention to those data, and an openness to the subtle, tacit undercurrents of social life. Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings

together is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis, and one that can integrate the entire endeavor. Through questioning the data and reflecting on the conceptual framework, the researcher engages the ideas and the data in significant intellectual work. For editing and immersion strategies, he generates the categories through prolonged engagement with the data—the text. These categories then become buckets or baskets into which segments of text are placed.

The process of category generation involves noting patterns evident in the setting and expressed by participants. As categories of meaning emerge, the researcher searches for those that have internal convergence and external divergence (Guba, 1978). That is, the categories should be internally consistent but distinct from one another. Here, the researcher does not search for the exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories of the statistician but, instead, identifies the salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting.

Patton (2002) describes the processes of inductive analysis as “*discovering* patterns, themes, and categories in one's data”, in contrast with deductive analysis where the analytic categories are stipulated beforehand, “according to an existing framework” (p. 453). The researcher may generate “indigenous typologies” (p. 457) or “analyst-constructed typologies” (p. 458) to reflect the understandings expressed by the participants. Indigenous typologies are those created and expressed by participants and are generated through analyses of the local use of language.

Analyst-constructed typologies are those created by the researcher that are grounded in the data but not necessarily used explicitly by participants. In this case, the researcher applies a typology to the data. As with all analysis, this process entails uncovering patterns, themes, and categories but may well run the risk of imposing “a world of meaning on the participants that better reflects the observer's world than the world under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 459–460). In a related strategy, through logical reasoning, classification schemes are crossed with one another to generate new insights or typologies for further exploration in the data. Usually presented in matrix format, these cross-classifications suggest holes in the already-analyzed data, suggesting areas where data might be *logically* uncovered. Patton, however, cautions the researcher not to allow these matrices to lead the analysis but instead to generate sensitizing concepts to guide further explorations: “It is easy for a matrix to begin to manipulate the data as the analyst is tempted to force data into categories created by the cross-classification to fill out the matrix and make it work” (pp. 469–470). An example of a logically constructed matrix is presented in Figure 5.2.

**Figure 5.2** An Empirical Typology of Teacher Roles in Dealing With High School Dropouts

	Behaviors towards dropouts		
		Taking responsibility	Shifting responsibility to others
Teachers' beliefs about how to intervene with dropouts	Rehabilitation	Counselor/friend: help kids directly	Referral agent: refer them to other helping agencies
	Maintenance (caretaking)	Traffic cop: just keep them moving through the system	Ostrich: ignore the situation and hope someone else does something
	Punishment	Old-fashioned school master: make them feel the consequences	Complainer: somebody should remove the problem kids

SOURCE: Patton (1990, p. 413). Reprinted by permission.

### Coding the Data

Coding data is the formal representation of analytic thinking. The tough intellectual work of analysis is generating categories and themes. The researcher then applies some coding scheme to those categories and themes and diligently and thoroughly marks passages in the data using the codes. Codes may take several forms: abbreviations of key words, colored dots, numbers—the choice is up to the researcher. Software programs for data analysis typically rely on abbreviations of key words. For example, in a dissertation proposal, Tucker (1996) discussed how she might use the following codes for her data:

TCARE.I.IS: Teacher's caring as demonstrated through listening

TCARE.Q'S: Teacher's caring as demonstrated through honoring questions

TDIS.RACISMO: Teacher's disrespect as demonstrated through overt racism

Were she not using software, she might have planned to use differently colored dots to place on the interview transcripts and field notes or to underline passages with differently colored highlighting pens. Whatever system the researcher plans to use, she should know that the scheme will undergo changes—*coding is not a merely technical task*. As the researcher codes the data, new understandings may well emerge, necessitating changes in the original plan.

### Writing Analytic Memos

Throughout the analytic process—the transformational process, according to Wolcott (1994)—we strongly encourage the researcher to write. Writing notes, reflective memos, thoughts, and insights is invaluable for generating the unusual insights that move the analysis from the mundane and obvious to the creative. Several recent scholars underscore the value of writing early and often throughout the research process but especially during more focused analysis. For example, in *Small-Scale Research*, Knight (2002) begins with a chapter not on designing small-scale research, nor with an overview of research methods, but one on writing. He notes that this chapter is about “the interplay of writing and thinking *from the beginning* of the small-scale inquiry . . . writing as a part of the research process” (p. 1). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) and Richardson (2000) also emphasize the importance of writing—private writing (Knight, 2002) and more public writing—to foster creativity and push one's thinking. As Richardson and St. Pierre (p. 961) note, “Language is a constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality and of the Self.”

Other authors have described a specific form of analytic writing—analytic memos. Schatzman and Strauss's (1973) classic suggestions on observational notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes, and analytic memos are quite useful, as is Maxwell's (1996) discussion of analytic memos. Rossman and Rallis (2003) discuss methodological memos, thematic memos, and theoretical memos (pp. 291–292).

### Offering Interpretations

As categories and themes are developed and coding is well under way, the researcher begins the process whereby she offers integrative interpretations of what she has learned. Often referred to as “telling the story,” interpretation brings meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, categories, developing linkages and a story line that makes sense

and is engaging to read. As Patton notes (2002, p. 480), "Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of the findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order." Part of this phase is evaluating the data for their usefulness and centrality. The researcher should determine how useful the data segments drawn on to support the emerging story are in illuminating the questions being explored and how they are central to the story that is unfolding about the social phenomenon.

### Searching for Alternative Understandings

After the researcher develops categories and themes, his use of coding is well under way, and he has written several analytic memos that summarize key "chunks" of the findings, he begins the process of evaluating the plausibility of his developing understandings and of exploring them through the data. This entails a search through the data during which the researcher challenges the very understanding he is putting forward, searches for negative instances of the patterns, and incorporates these into larger constructs, as necessary.

As the researcher discovers categories and patterns in the data, she should engage in critically challenging the very patterns that seem so apparent. She should search for other plausible explanations for these data and the linkages among them. Alternative explanations *always* exist, and the researcher must identify and describe them, and then demonstrate how the explanation she offers is the most plausible. This recalls the discussion in Chapter 1 concerning *the proposal as an argument* that offers assertions about the data, provides substantial evidence for those assertions, builds a logical interrelationship among them, and presents a summation of how the assertions relate to previous and future research.

### Writing the Report or Representing the Inquiry

Writing about qualitative data cannot be separated from the analytic process, as noted above in the section on writing analytic memos. In fact, it is central to that process, for in choosing words to summarize and reflect the complexity of the data, the researcher is engaging in the interpretive act, lending shape and form—meaning—to mountains of raw data. We suggest that the researcher consider at the proposal stage what modalities she will use for the final reporting. For dissertations, this is typically done by outlining the chapters to be included in the final document. For funded research proposals, reporting may entail periodic written reports as well as conferences, newsletters, documentary

films, or exhibitions. Researchers working in the genres of performance ethnography and autoethnography often present alternative, experimental formats for presenting and re-presenting their findings. Thus, theater skits, poetry, and multimedia presentations could all form the "final product" of work in these genres. Despite interest in alternative dissemination strategies and reporting formats, however, the written report remains the primary mode for reporting the results of research.

There are several models for report writing. Wolcott (1994) describes various ways of balancing description, analysis, and interpretation. Patton (2002) discusses balancing description and interpretation, noting that "Endless description becomes its own muddle. . . . Description provides the skeleton frame for analysis that leads to interpretation" (p. 503).

Taylor and Bogdan (1984, Chapters 8–12) suggest five different approaches. First, in the purely descriptive life history, the author presents one person's account of his or her life, framing that description with an analysis of the social significance of that life. Second is the presentation of data gathered through in-depth interviews and participant observation, where the participants' perspectives are presented and their worldviews structure the report. The third approach attempts to relate practice (the reality of social phenomena) to theory. Descriptive data are summarized, then linked to more general theoretical constructs. Taylor and Bogdan's fourth approach is the most theoretical. To illustrate it, they refer to a study of institutions for individuals with severe cognitive challenges. The report addresses the sociological theory on institutionalization and the symbolic management of conditions in total institutions. Their final approach tries to build theory with data from several types of institutions gathered under a variety of research conditions. They cite a report that addresses issues of the presentation of self under various difficult circumstances and attempts to draw theoretical conclusions across types of institutions, persons, and circumstances.

In his well-known work, *Tales of the Field*, Van Maanen (1988) identifies three different genres in qualitative writing. *Realist tales*, the most easily recognized, display a realistic account of a culture and are published in journals or as scholarly monographs in a third-person voice with a clear separation between researcher and the researched. Established by the grandparents of ethnography—Margaret Mead, William Foote Whyte, Howard Becker, and Bronislaw Malinowski—this tradition set the standards and criteria for credibility, quality, and respectability in qualitative work. Van Maanen views these as frequently "flat, dry and sometimes unbearably dull" (p. 48).

*Confessional tales* are highly personalized accounts with "mini-melodramas of hardships endured in fieldwork" (Van Maanen, 1988,

p. 73). This genre aims to display the author's powers of observation and the discipline of good field habits to call attention to the ways in which building cultural description is part of social science. Powdermaker (1966) is a classic example of this genre.

In *impressionist tales*, the field-worker displays her own experiences as a sort of autoethnography. Bowen's work (1964) provides a classic example; more current ones include Krieger (1985) and Thorne (1983). The separation of the researcher from the researched is blurred in this genre, and the tale is told through the chronology of fieldwork events, drawing attention to the culture under study but also to the experiences that were integral to the cultural description and interpretation.

Considerations of one's positionality, ethics, and political stance affect report writing. One may choose to present many truths or multiple perspectives or claim to identify a single truth. Choosing to say "I interpreted this event" rather than "the data revealed" must be a clear decision. Postmodern and feminist discussions help researchers clarify such decisions. Writing *your* truth about others' lives is an assertion of power and can violate earlier assertions about working ethically and sensitively with participants (Tierney & Lincoln, 1997; Lather, 1991).

Four genres of qualitative research and their attendant reporting are worthy of special mention—case studies, action research, performance ethnography, and autoethnography. All begin with the assumption that research must begin in natural settings and incorporate sociopolitical contexts; they may use the full array of data collection strategies; and their typical reporting formats are quite different.

#### *Case Study Reports*

Reports of research on a specific organization, program, or process (or some set of these) are often called case studies (Yin, 2003). Case studies rely on historical and document analysis, interviewing, and typically, some forms of observation for data collection. A rich tradition of community studies, organizational research, and program evaluations documents the illustrative power of research that focuses in depth and in detail on specific instances of a phenomenon. Case studies take the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytic reporting formats.

#### *Action Research Reporting*

Research with practitioners, and often *by* practitioners, who want to improve their own situation and that of others and to discover and solve problems is called action research. Research questions are

defined collaboratively with participants; the researcher's role is often that of a facilitator who expands the questions through consultation, problem posing, and knowledge of existing literature. Although action research follows traditions of systematic inquiry, innovative and evolving data collection strategies may shift as the inquiry proceeds (Selener, 1997; Stringer, 1999). Reporting from action research may take several forms. A written report may be collaboratively produced, depending on the interests and needs of participants. Frequently, short oral reports or displays of lessons learned in photo montages, exhibitions, or documentary films are preferred.

Because action research is fundamentally determined by participants—for their own uses—rather than by the scholarly needs of the researcher, the reporting should be true to that guiding principle. Reporting, whatever form it takes, has built-in relevance. Usefulness to participants may be more important than methodological rigor (Argyris & Schön, 1991). The researcher, as participant, may become a trusted insider with access seldom possible in more traditional observer roles (Cole, 1991). Often, action researchers take an activist, critical, and emancipatory stance, using the research process as an empowering process in an organization or a community (Cancian & Armstead, 1992; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1970; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Reason, 1994).

Researchers hope their reports will contribute to societal improvement, either directly in action and participatory approaches or indirectly by enhancing policy or programmatic decisions. (See the discussion of a study's potential significance in Chapter 2.) Choosing participatory action research, however, can be an ideological stance, a determination to try to change the world in direct ways, as Vignette 20 illustrates.

### VIGNETTE 20

#### **Planning Reporting for Qualitative Participatory Evaluation**

Research design and data collection strategies can be structured to facilitate the active participation of the individuals being researched. An example of this is the work of Paul Castelloe, a graduate student in social work who designed a participatory evaluation study of the Learning Together program in North Carolina (Castelloe & Legerton, 1998). The program is designed to serve two purposes: (a) increase the school preparation of children, ages 3 to 5, with no



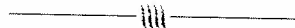
other preschool experience, and (b) strengthen their caregivers' capacity to provide education and development support.

Drawing on the work of Fraser (1997) as well as Mouffe and LeClau (1985), Castelloe designed his research project with a radical democratic philosophy to create an evaluation process committed to sharing power with research participants. Although traditional research designs place the researcher(s) in the sole position of determining research design and creating research questions, participatory action research brings the individuals being studied into the research process. With his interest in grassroots change and democratic processes, Castelloe democratically structured his study to collect data in a way that would include participants. This approach led to data collection techniques designed to include individuals at all levels (including those traditionally silenced in a study—the individuals that a policy is supposed to help—caregivers and students).

Castelloe designed his study to teach the program staff and community members the skills required to conduct an evaluation. In this role, he decided to serve as facilitator and "colaborer" in the collaborative evaluation process. The direction, plan, questions, and goals of the evaluation were designed to be done collaboratively by Castelloe and the program staff, program participants, and the community in which the program is located.

The primary data collection techniques selected were in-depth interviews, observational methods, and focus-group interviews. He created several strategies to include participants in the research decision-making process. For example, he developed interview questions in collaboration with program administrators, program staff, and community members and asked them to provide feedback on data transcripts.

His philosophy and rationale concerning democratic process served to guide his overall approach to include participants in the research process and examine whether the Learning Together program was democratic, participatory, and inclusive. Collectively, Castelloe and the participants determined how and when reporting would take place. These deliberations strengthened the democratic principles of their work together.



#### *Performance Ethnography Representation*

Performance ethnography is the "staged re-enactment of ethnographically derived notes" (Alexander, 2005, p. 411) in which culture is represented in performed, embodied ways, rather than exclusively textual ones. The notion of performance comes from the idea that cultural materials and understandings can be presented as drama, with the attendant scripts, props, sets, costumes, and movement (McCall, 2000).

Thus, representation in performance ethnography is not only a text (the ethnography, the script) but also an embodied, transient depiction of cultural knowledge (a staged production). Recent writing about performance ethnography, however, asserts its critical, liberatory potential. As Alexander notes, some, but not all, of the work in this genre is politically and practically allied with the principles of critical pedagogy (2005, p. 424).

#### *The Autoethnography*

Autoethnography takes up some of the challenges offered by performance ethnography to disturb and challenge traditional notions of representation in qualitative research. Holman Jones (2005), who expresses her work and politics primarily through poetry, writes that autoethnography "overlaps with, and is indebted to, research and writing practices in anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, journalism, and communication . . . to say nothing of our favorite storytellers, poets, and musicians" (p. 765). Representation in autoethnography may take a traditional form such as text, often closely resembling a research report in which the author and her voice are central to the narrative. Other forms may be poetry or a theatrical performance or musical production. Representation in autoethnography is presenting one's own story with the implied or explicit assertion that the personal narrative instructs, disrupts, incites to action, and calls into question politics, culture, and identity.

Vignette 21 is taken directly from an autoethnography written by Tassaporn (Pan) Sariyant (2002). Her literature review is extraordinarily creative and theoretically interesting. While "performed" differently from most literature reviews, it holds true to the precepts of autoethnography and is engaging to read.

### **VIGNETTE 21**

#### **Pan in (Academic) Wonderland: Discourse Review**

Knowing requires a knower. Enter any great library and one is surrounded by so much waste paper until the texts collected there are decoded. The "knowledge" of the library collection is underwritten by bodies of knowers, those who can interpret, evaluate, or, in a word, read (MacIntyre, 1981, quoted in Steedman, 1991: 53).

I don't know how long I have been sitting here. I must have dozed off on that chair for a long time. My back aches. My eyes are burning. When I look around, I notice that the few people who sat reading not far from me are not there anymore. The early afternoon sunlight that was shining through the window near the table where I sat reading is already gone. The atmosphere of the room at this moment gives me a creepy, uneasy feeling. The room looks quite dim. Rows and rows of gigantic bookshelves look spooky, like walls of a mysterious dungeon. It makes me think that some unexpected things might be lurking behind any of them. However, I don't want to leave this library room before I finish reading a couple of more books that I had taken from the shelves when I came in. I quickly brush those silly images out of my head.

After standing and stretching my weary body for a moment, I walk toward the light switch that I remember seeing on a wall at the opposite corner. As I walk toward the wall, out of the corner of my eye I suddenly notice several silhouette figures sitting quietly around a table in that very corner. Who are these people? Why do they sit talking in the dark? Ghosts of the library? A sudden cold fear runs down my spine. Goose bumps cover my whole body. I cannot decide whether I should run out of that room or go to the light switch and turn it on as quick as possible. Before I can do anything, I hear a gentle voice from the table calling, "Are you coming to join us?" I stand frozen. Another figure waves a hand, beckoning me to the table and saying, "Please turn the light on and come to join us here." Although I am horrified with the thought that those figures will vanish as soon as the light is on, I quickly flick the light on.

To my relief, they do not disappear. Under the soft fluorescent light from the ceiling above them, those silhouette figures turn out to be seven scholarly looking women and men—precisely five women and two men—who sit smiling at me. They are not ghosts as I initially thought. Although their faces look familiar, I cannot recall where I have seen them. . . . A Caucasian man, sitting on the right of a white-bearded old man, urges me, "Come and join the dialogue with us." Dialogue with these people? Oh, my word! They look so scholarly, so knowledgeable. What am I going to say or discuss with them? "Come, sit next to me. There is a chair here." A kind, motherly woman, who sits on the left of the white-bearded old man, points at an empty chair beside her. . . .

I quickly introduce myself as I sit down. "My name is Pan, a Thai doctoral student at the Center for International Education. I am at the stage of writing my dissertation. I work in the Department of Nonformal Education in Thailand. Generally, my work revolves around education for community development. I am interested in exploring the relationships among discourses on development, nonformal education, and pedagogy for empowerment, especially for rural Thai women, and I want to—"

"Wait." Before I finish my sentence, the white-bearded old man interrupts. "You are not going to do your dissertation research on all those subjects, are you?" I shake my head and say no. The short-haired woman asks the question that I am afraid to face. "What is really your focus?" I drop my

eyes to the table and admit with a great shame, "I am not quite sure yet." When I look up, I see sympathetic looks on every face. I hear a quickly whispered phrase, "rookie academician," which makes my ears turn red with embarrassment. Before I can think of how to defend myself, the woman with dark hair on my right suggests, "Why don't we begin by asking her why she wants to know about those subjects, what she wants to get from those discourses, and how those discourses have anything to do with her dissertation topic. Then we can give her some suggestions later." She turns to me and says, "Could you elaborate on that for us?" My face suddenly turns pale with intimidation as every pair of questioning eyes fixes on me.



In a somewhat more traditional vein, the following two vignettes depict challenges and considerations that researchers brought to writing up their reports. Vignette 22 shows how analysis and writing are interwoven throughout a study, and Vignette 23 comes from a study of incest in which the challenges of writing were substantial.

## VIGNETTE 22

### Interspersing Reporting and Analysis

Often, data analysis and writing up the research are thought of and portrayed as two discrete processes. Increasingly, however, researchers are using the writing up of research as an opportunity to display, in the body of the report, how data analysis evolved. Gerstl-Pepin (1998) accomplished this quite elegantly in her study of educational reform.

Gerstl-Pepin constructed a theoretical framework to critically examine whether an arts-based educational reform movement in North Carolina functioned as a counterpublic sphere (Fraser, 1997) and led to democratically structured educational policy and reform. Although interested in examining theoretical issues concerning the prospects for democratically structured reform, she was also interested in telling the story of the reform movement.

To balance these two interests, Gerstl-Pepin decided to take an approach similar to that of Lather and Smithies (1997) and weave her shifts in thinking about research questions into the body of the text. Her interest in including the researcher's evolving thought processes arose out of an awareness of shifting research paradigms that highlight the subjectivity of the researcher. While analyzing the data, Gerstl-Pepin encountered teachable moments in the research process in which her conceptualization and understanding of

the research developed and shifted. She included these pieces within the narrative story about the reform movement as separate boxes of text and titled these pieces "Interludes: Reflections on the Research." They were included at various points in the narrative, depicting shifts in her thinking process and research focus. These pieces served as stories within the story and were intended to allow the reader to participate not only in the story of the reform process but also in the discovery process for the researcher.

Philosophical inquiry and shifting paradigms highlight the subjectivity of the researcher and her relationship to the research process. Placing analytic memos, methodological notes, or interludes in the report makes these processes transparent. Our last vignette for this chapter, Vignette 23, presents the ethical dilemmas of reporting about taboo topics.

### VIGNETTE 23

#### Talking Taboo: Continuing the Research Relationship

During analysis and reporting data, Kiegelmann (1997) was inventive with methods to protect her research participants. This is always important, but for her research on brother-sister incest she was particularly attuned to how participants had trusted her with emotion-laden and highly sensitive aspects of their lives. One had even shared her childhood journal in which she wrote just minutes after the incest occurred. Kiegelmann and the participants had become a support group, continuing to meet after the research was finished.

As data analysis proceeded, Kiegelmann identified themes and noted the range of nuances in the study participants' talk. Previous literatures guided her, especially writings about girls' views of femininity, of "good girls," and girls' ways of knowing. Three voice clusters emerged: silent voices, embodied voices, and naming voices. Anticipating the need to report, to have validity checks, and to regain permission for using their words, Kiegelmann created biographies of each woman and sent them to the women, inviting their comments. She received feedback and commentary from them, which she incorporated into her writing. As she neared completion, she sent a draft of the full study to all of them. Each participant used this opportunity to offer more details but not to change the interpretations. Furthermore, she invited

the participants to write statements directly to the readers of the research, giving the women the final word. Thus, the trusting relationships were maintained beyond the time of the study, the study's truthfulness was increased, and she avoided taking away power and control over the representation of their lives from the participants.

This vignette reveals a highly ethical sensitivity to the participants in the study. Kiegelmann honored their life stories and voices throughout the process. This involved several iterations: writing biographies, sending them to the participants for commentary, incorporating their feedback, sending the full draft for further commentary, and incorporating the women's final comments in the final document. Although this process was time-consuming, it expressed Kiegelmann's deep commitment to the women and to the ethical conduct of her study.

Into the various phases of data analysis and report writing are woven considerations of the soundness, usefulness, and ethical conduct of the qualitative research study. Some consideration should be given to issues of the value, truthfulness, and soundness of the study throughout the design of the proposal. Considerations of role, for example, should address the personal biography of the researcher and how that might shape events and meanings. In what ways is the research, whether participatory or more objectivist, altering the flow of daily life? Selection of the setting and sampling of people and behaviors within that setting should consider the soundness of those decisions and present a clear rationale that has guided those choices. Chapter 7 continues this discussion of considerations of the soundness and ethical conduct of the study.

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Chapters 3, 4, and 5 have brought the reader through the complex, sometimes tedious process of building a design and choosing research methods for the research study. This section of the proposal should demonstrate that the researcher is competent to conduct the research; knowledgeable about the issues, dilemmas, choices, and decisions to be made in the design and conduct of the research; and immersed in the literature that provides guidance for the qualitative researcher. The research design should be well written and should reveal a sensitivity to various issues, the capacity to be reflective about the nature of

inquiry and the substantive questions at hand, and a willingness to tolerate some ambiguity during the conduct of the study. These qualities will stand the researcher in good stead over the course of the research. In addition, however, the researcher should demonstrate some knowledge of the management of resources in the design of a qualitative study. This is the focus of the next chapter.

### DIALOGUE BETWEEN LEARNERS

*Melanie,*

OK, on to the next topic! Gretchen and I were talking yesterday about the "everdayness" of qualitative research practices. That is, those practices that some would find the most laborious and tedious (i.e., making sure you have fresh batteries in your recorder, the right notebook for note-taking, ink in your pen, etc.). If I'm obsessive about anything, I suppose it's these little things. My worst fear is sitting in an interview or focus group and my recorder runs out of batteries, or that I reach the place where the interview is to occur 20 minutes late (or on the wrong day). As a result, I have a drawer full of half-used batteries because I replace them so often and I often arrive at my interview sites incredibly early. I suppose I just want to be able to focus on the task at hand when I'm interviewing, etc. I mentioned to Gretchen that it was like going on a trip with the gas tank 3/4 empty. I start out on the road and inevitably my eye begins to fixate a bit on the gas gauge as I look for signs of it moving toward the red line. I begin to wonder when I should stop, how much farther can I make it? Meanwhile, I miss all of the sights and sounds that are the trip.

OK, admittedly, this might just be me and my strange fear of running out of gas/batteries. However, I do think that sometimes we talk so earnestly about the philosophy or theory behind qualitative work that we forget that there are these everyday events that actually make up the research project. For example, I have terrible handwriting. Yet, when I'm taking field notes or conducting interviews I have a tendency to speed up my writing, to scribble. Not a good thing. There's nothing worse than returning to your field notes a few hours later and having to undergo a lengthy translation of your own handwriting. I try to get around

this by being very thorough in my preparations, yet there is always something that comes up.

The latest chapter I've read, Chapter 5, deals quite a bit with writing up the report (whether it be a dissertation proposal or otherwise). Of course, in order to write the report, you have to know when you've finished collecting and analyzing your data. This is a problem for me. There's no final answer in qualitative research, it seems like you can keep going back for more. When do you know you're done? Sometimes I worry that my fear of actually writing the report will keep me in the data collection/analysis stage forever! I suppose I'll need to jump off that bridge when I come to it . . .

Hope things are well with you. Enjoy the weekend,

Aaron

*Hi Aaron,*

So, back after a weekend reprieve. I can't argue with much that you said in your last e-mail. There are so many little tasks to take into account before an interview, for example, that the tasks overwhelm the actual purpose of the interview! My handwriting falls apart during an interview, too—thank goodness for my little digital recorder.

To me, the everydayness is the result of detail-oriented work. I double-check my supplies before I go teach a class; I scribble illegible notes while I'm skimming journal articles; I obsess about asking worthless questions before a job interview. Attention to detail has to play a part in the research process or we would miss much of the research we're trying to collect! There's a fine line, as you point out, between obsession and natural cautiousness—the battery-thing does hinge on obsession :)—but that obsessive tendency may save us later down the road when we come up against questions in the analysis and can actually refer to our notes or our carefully transcribed interview to find the answer.

As for knowing we're finished, I think you have to put your best effort forward but recognize that it's always a process. One

of my professors really helped me with this when he reminded me that the data is always mine, and I can always return to it with a fresh approach, a new idea, a different lens. One of the reasons I'm drawn to qualitative research is the ability to present an answer instead of the one answer—so that gives me permission to move on, knowing that my research isn't a one-way trip.

Thanks bunches —must plan my lesson for tomorrow!

Melanie

#### ❖ FURTHER READING

##### On Data Analysis

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