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Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education 1996 conference, Educational Research: Building New Partnerships. 25-29 November 1996, Singapore.

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Introduction

This paper arose out of two different research projects involving multiple researchers. In the first one a team of researchers was conducting research into children's perspectives on classroom events. In the second, another team was researching teachers' and students' views on classroom discipline, and was employing assistants to interview the students while they interviewed the teachers. The data arising from the interviews indicated differences in nature and quality, and some of it was of limited value in the subsequent analysis. The reasons for this emerged during a comparative analysis of the data. This paper reports the findings of that analysis. In both pieces of research the intention was to obtain the participants' views on the phenomena under investigation. The interviews enabled us to gain explanations and information on material that is not directly accessible: perceptions, attitudes and values, matters which are

difficult to obtain by alternative methods. The kind of interview process employed was described by Hitchcock and Hughes (1989, p. 83) as the semi-structured interview, which allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses. ... Some kind of balance between the interviewer and the interviewee can develop which can provide room for negotiation, discussion, and expansion of the interviewee's responses. The advantage of the semi-structured interview is that the interviewer is in control of the process of obtaining information from the interviewee, but is free to follow new leads as they arise (Bernard, 1988). In the two pieces of research under consideration, the questions were designed differently. In the first study, of children's

perceptions of classroom events, the researchers observed videotapes of lessons and developed a set of questions from each lesson for subsequent interviews with the participants. This allowed consistency of the basic set of questions. In the second study, the researchers were concerned to obtain accounts of events and attitudes when students were sent out of the classroom by the teachers for misbehaviour. A common set of questions provided a basic framework for examining the phenomena and the accompanying attitudes but given the diverse nature of the different events, freedom to move beyond the basic set of questions was essential.

In both pieces of research the interviews were conducted in the schools. We made efforts to ensure the physical context was conducive to effective interviews (Burgess, 1988). In the perceptions research the researchers had the luxury of a block of classrooms in the school to themselves most of the time because declining numbers meant the block was usually vacant (except for occasional lessons by the music teacher, whose invasions played havoc with tape recording). For the discipline research, student interviews were conducted either in the Aboriginal Education Specialist Teacher's office, which was familiar and supportive territory for the students, or in a small room in the library. Teachers were interviewed in an annexe to the staff lounge - also familiar territory to them.

The assumptions that are made about the semi-structured interview can be summarised as follows:

- The interviewee has information that the interviewer wants. The interviewer is seeking to place him or herself in the shoes of the interviewee - to interpret the situation from the viewpoint of the participant. At the commencement of the interview, the interviewer and the interviewee do not share an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and the interviewer's comprehension of, and attitude towards, the phenomena are possibly very different from those of the interviewee. It is likely, however, that the interviewer can only ever come to a partial understanding of the interviewee's viewpoint, partly because the interviewee will have complex and contradictory perspectives and partly because it is not possible to fully encompass

the experience of another person.

- The interviewer initially constructs a frame within which the interviewee responds. By the nature and direction of the questions the interviewer creates meaning from the interviewees responses. This is an essential component of an interview, as McKeown and Freebody (1988) have shown, but rather than it being a one-way construction, respondents are likely to seek information from the interviewer to discover the parameters of the interview, a process that continues throughout the interaction. Given the breadth of understanding of the interviewer, the meaning that is created may be quite partial or strongly biased in certain areas. For full comprehension of meaning, a dialogue in which the interviewee feels free to construct context and events is necessary. In this situation the interviewer must be alert to possibilities and ask questions which point in directions but do not limit the nature of the answer. It should not become a case of the interviewer trying to prove his or her point by selecting limited evidence from the interviewee's reality.

- As Fine (1994) points out, that the interviewee (the Other) does not have one location, one perspective, one reality. There are multiple perspectives and multiple realities, and the positioning of the interviewee must not be limited. The difficulty with this is that the interviewer is limited by his or her experience and knowledge. If the interviewer excludes the possibility of diverse responses and seeks confirmation of previously held notions, knowledge will not be advanced. In researching children this can have the consequence of constructing an ideal view of the child: through our questions we can create a framework that forces the child to respond in ways which

result in a construction of our own making rather than the making of the child. The view that is created may be conscious or unconscious, but the interviewer has the power to construct such a view and to exclude contradictory or alternative views from surfacing. When interviewing children the interviewer has to be sensitive to the cognitive and social framework within which he or she is working, for it may be too sophisticated for the child to understand. Under this circumstance the child may feign understanding and provide answers that seem to satisfy the interviewer.

- At issue in the interview is the responsibility of the interviewer to make clear the elements operating on the interviewee. If the latter is in an oppressed condition, is it ethical for the interviewer to ignore that condition and leave him or her in it? Or should the interviewer provide critical awareness through the research, thereby empowering the interviewee, but also calling into question the validity of the research?

- The interviewer should minimise interruptions when a participant is talking. Providing supportive nods, agreement and so on is more appropriate than excess verbalisation which may distract the respondent and lead him or her in unproductive directions. As Keats (1993) notes, it is worthwhile saying little when a participant responds as it may

lead to statements that are choice morsels of information.

Paradigmatic Differences

When using multiple interviewers it is necessary to ensure compatibility of approach and so careful coordination of views on the purpose of the interview is essential. It is necessary to make sure all interviewers are coming from the same perspective otherwise they will use strategies that are not consistent with that perspective.

This was a major problem with one investigation in which I was engaged.

Perspective was not brought to the forefront prior to interviewing and the interviewers initially adopted different stances, resulting in some of the data being of little value.

The purpose of the semi-structured interview depends upon the paradigm in which the researcher is operating. In the two pieces of research, I intended to operate in a constructivist paradigm in which the respondents were believed to be aware of the social situation in which they operate but do not necessarily construct the same reality. The views of the participants would be diverse and reveal differences according to their social context and background.

In the first investigation, into students' perceptions of classroom events, as team leader I was studious about the purpose of the research, spending considerable time discussing our goals for the study. When it came to establishing the perspective framework for the study, however, the marked difference in perspective of one researcher who adopted a critical approach to the interview process resulted in data which was inconsistent with the data collected by the other researchers. To set the context, the following extract of data I collected during interviews with children conducted while we watched videotapes of the lessons in which they had taken part is typical of the kind of interviews conducted. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain student's perceptions of the operation of the classroom as place of social learning.

An effort was made to avoid imposing my views on the interviewee so that the information obtained was hers, influenced minimally by my presence. This is consistent with the constructivist paradigm which seeks to obtain the participant's construction of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). What you are trying to do in the interview is to gain the interviewee's view of the world. It is impossible to avoid influencing the interviewee, but the interviewer should try to minimise this.

Transcript No. 1:

Transcript of Interview

Comment

IMiss Kerr's just telling to check your partner's drawn it the same way. Why is she doing that?Observing events on the videotape and selecting material for questioning.

AnneSo, in case your partner got it wrong then you'd be able to tell them the umm right way...do it again.Student gives her perception of the reason.

I: Who was your partner. Seeking information

Anne: Trin

I: Did Trin get it right? Seeing if the system worked.

Anne: Yeah she did it right but she just she went in one for the line, the vertical line but then she went straight across she didn't go umm she went in one but she went straight to edge but she said it didn't matter. Describing the way her partner has drawn a diagram.

I: Did you get it right.

Anne: Yeah

I: Did Trin check yours?

Anne: Yeah

I: Did she need to?

Anne: Mmmhh Response indicates no.

From the standpoint of critical theory, however, the researcher should function to create consciousness in research settings (Tripp, 1992). One of the interviewers applied this principle to the interviews with respondents, so that if they were unaware of the full extent of the situation in which they were located, the interviewer aided them to a fuller, shared, understanding of the situation. In transcript no. 2, which was conducted in the same piece of research as transcript no. 1, the interviewer helped the participant to a fuller understanding of the situation. It is possible, however, that the context in which the research was conducted was inappropriate: the researcher was operating in a dominant mode rather than establishing an egalitarian relationship in which status differences are minimised (Fontana & Frey 1994).

Transcript No. 2:

I:I: Um, right Elle what about you Does Miss Kerr's questions and prompting and direction does that help you focus on a task like that? Notice in this section that the interviewer provides the answers and seeks the consensus of the respondent.

Elle: Elle: Yes

I:I: In what sort of ways does it help you? Sees if child has an understanding of the processes at work?

Elle: Elle: It just helps us with what to do

I:I: So does it make you feel more comfortable?

Elle: Elle: Yes

I:I: So when you have to do a task like that on your own -

Elle: Elle: Yes

I:I: Does it make you feel more confident to be able to do that on your own? I.e., are you empowered?

Elle: Elle: Yes

I:I: Okay - because what worries me sometimes is that you become too dependent on the teacher so you think "I can't do it well" ... "I need the teacher's help" ... but you find the way Miss Kerr does it gives you confidence, to be able to do it on your own at some other time. Seeking consensus with the respondent on the empowering influence of the teacher.

Elle: Elle: Yes

I:I: So when we left did you feel confident about filling in those

boxes. Confirming that the respondent is empowered.

Elle: Elle: Yes (echoed)

I: I: Good

In this interview the researcher is going beyond the intention of the

constructivist expectation of a shared understanding of the participant's views to actively promote awareness of the processes which influence learning and interaction. The interviewer seeks to change the participant rather than simply obtaining the participant's views without influencing them, . As a consequence the data have limited usefulness in a constructivist paper. It is essential in a team situation that researchers negotiate the paradigm in which they are operating. Failure to do this can make the data less useful.

Establishing Empathy and Rapport

The establishment of empathy and rapport is essential if respondents are to accept the interviewer as a valid person to interview them. In the perceptions research, rapport was established over a period of time. Visits were made to the class on a weekly basis so that the children came to accept our presence in the classroom and readily participated in the interviews. In the discipline research, the opportunity for extended contact did not exist because only students who got into trouble were interviewed. Obviously it was not possible to determine in advance who these students would be, so an alternative approach to ensuring effective rapport was used. All the students interviewed in this research were Aboriginal and it was decided to employ Aboriginal interviewers for the study. This would circumvent the need for the researchers to develop the specialised knowledge and skills required to interact empathically with the Aboriginal students (Moyser, 1988). Although it would add another layer of meaning to the research (Fontana & Frey 1994) the semi-structured nature of the interviews and the fact that the interviews were recorded reduced the possibility of misunderstanding. Two principal Aboriginal adults conducted the interviews and their participation was very productive. Both were well known to the students (being parents of students at the school) and demonstrated excellent rapport with them, as the following transcript shows..

Transcript No. 3

Harry Evans 7/12/95

I: You, when you needed to go to the toilet then .. Establishing the cause of the altercation with the teacher

Harry: Yea, it was just between me and her. No other students were involved.

I: Couldn't you have held on till the end of the period? Normally, students were not permitted to go to the toilet during class time.

Harry: There was a half an hour till the end of the class. It was too long to wait.

I: That is a long time when you have to go. Empathy from the interviewer

Harry: And I had already waited for ten minutes. Respondent acknowledges

the support by adding supportive evidence of his difficult situation.

The evident empathy in the interviewer's supportive statement in this interview was typical of her approach to the students who responded very openly and apparently quite honestly about the events that happened and their attitudes towards them. Without making it obvious, this interviewer gave subtle messages to the respondents that she supported them and was sympathetic to their views. Judgment was usually suspended when discussing misdemeanours so the respondents did not feel threatened in the interviews..

In the second piece of research two of the assistants who conducted the interviews were carefully prepared for the interviewing. In particular, they were instructed to use the set of prepared questions as a guide, and to work from there to investigate the students' understanding of events and situations as they arose. This was reflected in the quality of the product. Working with the chief investigator, along with discussion of their initial interviews, ensured that they capitalised on opportunities in the interviews. A third interviewer, however, used at short notice because of the absence

of the others, tended not to investigate beyond the list of questions. recorded notable differences in the nature of interviews. This was despite being verbally instructed on the steps in the interview process.

His participation also may have been less successful because, rather than being a parent of students at the school, he was a qualified teacher. Lack of rapport was evident in the interviews he conducted, both in tone of voice, which unfortunately can't be reproduced here, and also in the way the questions are asked. In particular, his responses to the students' statements were judgmental and he didn't use empathy in his interactions with them. This is clear in transcript no. 4.

Transcript No. 4

I: Can you tell me what happened?

Colin: It happened on Thursday. I was muckin round and that and then I got sent to another teacher, I was throwing honkey nuts and that and then I got sent to Mr Clarke and he put me in contract.

I: Okay, so you were just throwing things around were you? Notice that the interviewer misses some vital pieces of the jigsaw. The implication is that by throwing things the child is infringing school rules and so has established his wrongdoing.

Colin: Yes.

I: And what happened?

Colin I was sent to Mr. Clarke.

I So who caused it? Seeking blame

Colin Me.

I So you caused it did you? Confirming blame.

Colin Muckin around in class and talkin and that.

I What were you doing when you say you were mucking around? What sort

of things were you doing in class? Goes back to the core of the situation.

Colin: Talkin and shoutin.

I: Shouting too were you? More evidence of wrongdoing.

Colin: Yes.

Gender also may have played a part in the quality of the interviews. It may not be simply the status of the interviewer as teacher that limits the above exchange but also the fact that he is a male. In their review of interviewing as a method of data gathering, Fontana and Frey (1994) note the prevalence of male power structures, which certainly applied in the school where the interviews were conducted. The presence of female interviewers who could empathise and identify with the respondents' backgrounds and experiences enabled greater involvement of the students in the interview.

Keats (1993) noted that the interviewer should establish his or her role at the outset of the interview. Unfortunately, in the above case the interviewer continued to portray elements of the teacher role, clearly siding with the school administration by seeking to define behaviour as wrong. Given the subject of the interviews, this was most unfortunate and limited the receptivity of students. When the relationship is an unequal one, as in the case of an adult interviewing a child, care must be taken to avoid undue influence and thereby contaminating the response of the child. The child may be seeking to identify the kind of response the interviewer appears to want and to fail to utilise appropriate empathic strategies may result in answers that are inaccurate. Alternatively, the child will give up on the interview and provide monosyllabic responses. This lack of empathy was in marked contrast to the nature of the interviews conducted with students by the other interviewers, as demonstrated in transcript no. 3.

Listening and Questioning

Apart from avoiding judgmental responses, there are steps the interviewer should take to establish credibility with the respondent in order to obtain quality material and avoid terminating discussion on specific topics too early. It is important for the interviewer to listen to the responses and frame follow up questions in the light of those responses. Furthermore, the interviewer has to demonstrate that he/she has heard what has been said. Consequently follow up questions should be developmental rather than indicate radical shifts in direction, or if the interviewer chooses to change direction because he or she perceives the topic to be exhausted, closure on the topic should acknowledge the statements made by the participant. In the following exchange, however, it is quite clear that the interviewer isn't listening to the responses:

Transcript No. 5

I: And what were you supposed to be doing at the time that you got ..?

Finding out what the teacher expected of students at the time.

Norman Looking at the TV, watching this video.

I What sort of video was it?

Norman Tarzan.

I Tarzan. You weren't too interested? Makes a prior judgment about the respondent's interest. Should have asked, 'What did you think of it?'

Norman It's good really.

I You didn't really want to watch it. Not listening.

Norman Yes, I wanted to watch it.

A problem with inattentiveness or judgment is that it can lead the respondent to believe that the interviewer is either not interested in what is being said or does not care for the respondent's point of view.

In either case, the respondent may decide to terminate the interview, withhold valuable data or fabricate responses. This is evident in the following extract, where the interviewer's introductory comments set the scene for the appropriate response from the participant. As a consequence of these introductory remarks it would be impossible to determine whether the student really felt that way or was influenced by the interviewer. This is considered by Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) to be the major problem with researcher effect. The less structured the interview, the greater the opportunity for the interviewer to influence the respondent's answer.

Transcript No. 6

II: Stan, you were really on task there weren't you? Really getting into the work. Did you feel as though you really wanted to work today? Structuring the respondent's frame for providing an answer.

Stan Yes

I Why do you think you felt like that? Is this a fair question for a 10 year old?

Stan 'Cos, you need to do some work to learn Reciting the litany of the classroom.

I Right, good boy you do Praise. Reinforcing the litany.

I Stan, is Miss Kerr really good at keeping people on task? Programming the interviewee's response.

Stan Yes

I When Miss Kerr sort of gives you little hints about how to look up things quickly, how do you do it, Stan? The student should have been asked 'What skills does Miss Kerr teach that help you look things up?'

Restatement

The interview should take into account the child's level of awareness of the processes around him or her. For example, a pre-adolescent child is likely to have a more limited perspective on his or her internal processes than an older child who is able to operate more reflectively. Even so, children can be quite responsive and verbose on matters of interest to them, as the following interview demonstrates.

In this interview, the interviewer demonstrated clearly the ability to

listen carefully, respond appropriately and follow up on areas requiring clarification. In particular, the interview demonstrates the process of restatement, which is an excellent device for ensuring you have correctly understood what has been said.

Transcript No. 7

I Can you tell us like why you get on with okay with the teacher?

Doug This is when I'm not sitting near my mates because she knows I do my work with no-one near me, to distract me but when there's someone sitting next to me you start to talk and she gets mad and if we keep on going she gets mad.

I So that when ever you're sitting with someone you tend to talk. And get drama for it? When you're on your own you don't talk so much?

What do you think the teacher should have done rather than send you out of the class? Do you think she should have done something else or do you think that being sent out of the class was fair? Restatement. Note the implied non-verbal responses from the interviewee here. Also note the use of vernacular - 'drama'.

Also the interviewer has extrapolated from the interviewee's response. This is acceptable. It shows to the interviewee that the interviewer is not stupid.

Doug It wasn't that serious. I don't know why she made us go out of the classroom because of the talk, she started it, she was saying oh why not come to school, and I was just answering back to her tellin her we have to, and she goes, Oh, bein smart now and she sent us out.

The respondent in this interview is much more forthcoming with views than the respondent with the teacher-interviewer. The absence of judgment, the willingness to clearly set the parameters of the interview and the evident early rapport all contribute to an effective interview.

Restatement is an excellent device for demonstrating that you have listened to the answer. In the above interview the restatement of the respondent's answer provided a base from which to launch further questions which clarified the response. Also note the use of vernacular ('drama') which would cement the relationship with the student. Much of the vernacular used by the Aboriginal interviewers was drawn from Aboriginal English and so the problems of lack of inclusion identified by Hosie (1986) would not occur. Rather than being seen by the students as outsiders trying to act as members of a student group, the adults would be seen as bona fide members of a non-school - possibly an anti-school - group.

Notice also how the interviewer extrapolated from the response to judge that being sent out of the room was too harsh a penalty for the offence committed (quite clearly, the teacher was at fault in this incident) and asks what should have been done instead. This approach would have shown the student that the interviewer was alert to the situation and aware of appropriate action: it would have been clear to him that the interviewer was not biased in support of the school.

Clarification

In the following interview extract, the interviewer sought

clarification to ensure she had all the steps in the discipline procedure correct. She outlined her understanding of the process, only to be corrected. Timing also is checked. This is an interview with the same student as Interview 4, and while it started out as an interview for another incident (one of several he was involved in) by Colin, it moved onto the incident for which he was interviewed by the teacher-interviewer. The different approach adopted ensures no judgment and through recapitulation the interviewer quickly arrives at a clarification of the situation, an outcome that was only poorly achieved by the previous interviewer.

Transcript No. 8

I>You gave me the steps which led up to this teacher sending you out. After you got sent out you said that you were sent to another teacher. And that you were throwing honkey nuts at each other on the way. Note the importance of recapitulation. By restating the evidence, the interviewer clarifies the information. In this case, she had it wrong. Colin No. I was throwing honkey nuts at these boys so they could put it in the thing because they were picking up honkey nuts. The interviewee corrects her.

IWas this before you went to the ..?

Colin This was on our way to the class. More clarification.

Clarification obviously was valuable here because it cleared up a misunderstanding. Seeking clarification does not have the same import for the participant as failing to listen: when you can itemise the steps correctly, the former process shows the participant that you have been listening carefully. Even if you get it wrong, the ability to construct a sequence of events from the interview shows you have been listening, although not necessarily comprehending. In the following interview by Patricia, this careful listening is evident, and the followup questions elicit material which indicates the students' perceptions of events.

Transcript No. 9

I:Colin, do you think you were the only, that you were the right kid that was sent out, you were in the wrong or were there other kids involved? A range of possible responses is provided for Colin to respond to, so the interviewer avoids structuring the situation for him.

Colin:Um, yeh there was other kids involved um, and they were mucking around and throwing the cockroach around at people and they never got sent out and the teacher saw em. The participation of other students was a sore point with Colin in this incident.

I:And did she - she didn't tell them to - just [inaudible] Here the interviewer poses a question which encourages the interviewee to provide clarification.

Colin:The only thing she said was just chuck it away and they never chucked it away and they kept on playing and the teacher wouldn't do nothin.

I:How do you feel about that? Note there is no judgmental stance taken

to the student's response.

Colin:Um, I was that wild then cause they cause like when the teacher see me, um and they were out of their seat and when she see me out of my seat talking to these girls about it, um I got sent straight out and I, and them other fellas they got about three or four chances and I didn't even get one.Note the lengthy response. Colin is obviously completely at ease in responding to the interviewer.

I:And do you think that's fair?

Colin:Nuh, I don't.

I:Any reasons why?

Colin:Um, this sounds pretty stupid but sometimes I think its cause of the colour of my skin, like being black and that and sometimes people they get away with everything and then some in my classes and me either go straight out or get sent out with a pink slip [inaudible] or something, I don't, I never get a chance.Here the interviewer has a range of choices regarding the avenue to pursue. She could address issues of colour, consistency of the teacher's discipline, or the likelihood of repeat offending on the part of colin, who `never got a chance' which implies previous problems.

An interview which results in such insights is the product of sound rapport and empathic interaction between the interviewer and the respondent. The data obtained in this interview gives an insight into the injustices felt by the student and provides an avenue for further research in this area. Contrast this with the limited results obtained

in Interview No. 4, where the brief responses to the interviewer's questions are of little value for further investigation. The non-judgmental character of the interviewer coupled with careful questions seeking clarification assisted in the construction of the student's response.

Persistence

Persistence is sometimes necessary in an interview. It is a delicate element in an interview, however, because of its potential for alienating the respondent if he or she does not wish to answer the question for unstated reasons. If the respondent does not answer a question, the interviewer is placed in a dilemma - continue to press and risk alienation, or give in and leave a potential fertile field of investigation unturned. One solution is to word the question differently so as to ensure the respondent understood what is being asked. This is what happened in the following interview: eventually Colin provides an answer. In this case it may have been that he misunderstood the question and assumed that the interviewer was asking if he disrupted the class on return to the lesson, rather than before being sent out.

Transcript No. 10

I:So do you get sent out from Social Studies, um before or?

Colin:Ah, yeh, I've been sent out lots of times before.The question elicited the anticipated response

I: So do you think you were, you were deliberately, did you deliberately go in there to disrupt the class or yell at the teacher, or? Interviewer tries to pose the question in a non-judgmental way.

Colin: When I, when I come back inside, um, when I come back inside I got straight on with my work. The student doesn't answer the question

I: And you really think that you were the, well you did wrong by yelling, that you were the right person that was sent out. Interviewer has another go at getting the information by rephrasing the question.

Colin: Um. The student doesn't answer the question

I: But there were other kids involved. Interviewer elaborates on the question.

Colin: Yeh, there were um, probably at the time I was the right person to be sent out but um, when the teacher saw em, um, they should of got sent out too. The student now answers the question as to whether he was responsible. The additional questions clarify the question. He sees it as a case of him or others now.

Group Interviews

Notice in this next section you don't always have to ask a question to get the answer. Often, participants will prefer more information than you ask. Careful listening is necessary in order to pick up these items. If they give an answer to a question on your list that hasn't been asked yet, you have to note that it has been answered and refrain from asking it later. Otherwise it is clear that you aren't listening to their reply. This can diminish the quality of the information subsequently provided.

Group interviews can be productive for the researcher, especially when the participants conduct a dialogue on a topic. In the following extract from the first piece of research on students' interpretations of classroom events, the interviewer noted a mention of another student on the video playback of the lesson. The students discussed this topic enthusiastically. There was little need for the interviewer to do more than nod and show interest during the exchange that occurred during this interview.

Note the way in which the interviewer (who, incidentally, was male) probes for responses in this interview. These probes, which the children are obviously willing to respond and the interviewer can maintain a low-key approach with very brief remarks which indicate that he is attending and points to the direction in which the respondents

should go. Much of the elaboration which occurs, however, is supplied by the interaction between the respondents. Here, the interviewer had spend many weeks working with the students, had established trust and had demonstrated that he was interested in their lives at school.

Transcript No. 11

I What's this about Joanne? Mentioned on the video.

Luke They [Joanne and Herbert, another student] hate each other. The opening response from Luke is forthright.

I Why is that?The interviewer follows up with a request for more information.

Luke Like Herbert doesn't really like sitting next to her.

I Herbert doesn't.Repeats response - noncommittal. The interviewer has judged that his input is irrelevant at this stage so plays a minor role, just keeping the pot boiling.

LukeYeah, when we started to change every three weeks and then Herbert got chosen to sit next to Joanne and he goes `Ahhh! , why can't I sit next to a boy?'The class groups were rotated every three weeks, so students sat next to new partners.

Tina Herbert always calls Joanne names.

Luke Sometimes he tells lies, like,

Tina Joanne says....

Luke Sometimes Joanne says nothing. He'll say `Joanne stop squealing at me'.

Tina Like Joanne pushed him and Joanne doesn't, he pushes Joanne.

I And so he tells on her.

Luke Like today.

Tina Joanne always tells on Herbert, and Herbert don't like Joanne and umm, (inaudible) you should know by now that Joanne will dob on you.

Luke And he said something back and then Miss Kerr said, last time he got in trouble he got in trouble already and he was pulling faces and Miss Kerr said `I beg your pardon'. And he said something again.

Tina Like `I always get jarred'.

I And does he?Interviewer demonstrates knowledge of Aboriginal English by asking the right question.

Luke Yes. Mostly.

I What do you think Tina?Ensuring a well rounded view.

Tina Yep.

Luke Cause she sitting next to me and I hear every single word.Offers corroborating information.

I You hear every word?Repeats response for confirmation.

Luke Yeah. She does her work and he just kicks under the table and then he says `Joanne'. And then Joanne kicks him back.

Finally, poor rapport and empathy can be seen to diminish the quantity of data obtained. Contrast interviews conducted by the good interviewers, in which the students have more to say than the interviewer on many occasions. In this interview, despite the extended questions, Norman is replying with one word answers. Norman has given up in the interview and is merely tolerating the event.

Transcript No. 12

IDo you think the teacher may have been picking on you?

NormanNo.

IYou don't think so? She wasn't, so what actually happened was really something because of your fault. Can you tell me Norman was there anything out of class that may have caused you to do what you did?What evidence might have been missed here?

Use of the first name: clearly a marker of dominance.

NormanNup. Nothing.

IHave you had any problems with this particular teacher before or is this the first time?The monosyllabic responses inhibit the interviewer

from extending the interview into new areas. There are no leads given.

NormanI had this same teacher before.

IHave you had any problems with her before?

NormanOnly once.

IOnly once? But you don't feel as though there is a problem there with her though do you?

NormanNo. She's an alright teacher.

IOkay, good, so you agree that she's a good teacher?Once again an interrogatory tone. Also no freedom of response. The use of 'agree' implies that this is the interviewer's turf. The interviewer is using questions that direct responses.

NormanYes.

IYou haven't had any problems with this particular teacher before? No problems whatsoever? Okay, that's good. You normally get on well with her?Notice the praise for good behaviour. It is this sort of statement that puts the respondent offside.

NormanYes.

IYou do? And since the incident you haven't had any problems with her at all?The confirmatory question acts as a guide to the kind of response sought.

NormanNo.

Conclusion

Effective interviewing is a complex task requiring attendance to a variety of criteria at once. The quality of data obtained can vary considerably depending upon the skill of the interviewer in establishing rapport, following up leads and demonstrating attention and interest. Some characteristics of the good interviewer are dependent upon ascribed, rather than earned, status, so that identification with the interviewer is made possible by being of the same ethnic group, so that in the case of interviewing Aboriginal children without the benefit of extensive rapport building, it may be useful to use Aboriginal interviewers. The establishment of rapport and empathy can help to offset this factor, while group identification can be negated by the interviewer's adoption of statuses that respondents have problems relating to in the interview situation. In the interviews described in this paper, it is clear that the adoption of the dominant teacher role in interviews is quite counterproductive to obtaining quality data.

The interviewer has to simultaneously reflect on the information being provided in order to relate it to prior information; plan the next question; decide whether to pose the question or make provision for the respondent to answer it in his or her own time. Most importantly, the respondent has to be convinced that the interviewer is not an adversary but is at the very least impartial. Using a variety of skills the

interviewer can develop a positive relationship with the respondent and obtain quality information.

The interviewer's perspective on the interview process also contributes to the kind of interview that is conducted, so that a critical interview will be conducted differently from a constructivist interview. There needs to be a high level of consistency among the elements of the interview in each case: a critical interviewer, for example, cannot demonstrate a dominant role in the interview, or else the benefit of the perspective is lost.

Fontana and Frey (1994) refer to interviewing as 'the art of science'. There is certainly much of art in the process of obtaining sound data through the interview. Many of the factors that contribute to the quality interview, however, can be developed through careful attention to rapport and empathy as well as careful listening and responding.

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