Seduction and Betrayal Revisited: Ethical Dilemmas of Insider Research

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Abstract: Newkirk (1996) warns that the research practices which are part of a qualitative approach to research may result in data collection as “an act of seduction” ending in betrayal as participants are reconstructed in the final text to meet the agenda of the researcher. The potential for seduction and betrayal is increased when the researcher is an insider to the participant community. When the researcher is recognized as a member of the participant community there are both advantages in terms of access to rich data and disadvantages as participants share experiences and understandings in ways that would be denied to an outsider. When these friendly conversations are reconstructed and interpreted as research data, the ‘person becomes portrait’ (Stronarch & MacLure 1997) in ways that may not sit well with their sense of self. This paper explores the ways in which these issues were resolved (and not resolved) in a study of English as a second language (ESL) teacher identity, in which the researcher was positioned as a long-standing member of the ESL teacher community.

Newkirk (1996) warns that the research practices that are part of a qualitative approach to research may result in data collection as “an act of seduction” (1996:3) ending in betrayal. Seduction is the process by which participants are recruited for our research. There are the formal aspects of this process. Participants are informed of the nature and purpose of the study. They are provided with explanatory statements, processes for complaint and withdrawal and an ‘informed’ consent form which is signed to indicate both full understanding and willingness to be involved. There are also more subtle, less clearly defined elements at play. The explanatory statement outlines the value of the study and implies the expert knowledge which potential participants have to share for the greater good. The institution behind the research is usually highly regarded. The researcher may also be a recognized and respected figure. The consent form offers protection for participants both in the process of data collection – ‘you may withdraw at any time…, you need not answer any question …’ – and in the publication of the final study – ‘pseudonyms will be used …, all efforts made to preserve the confidentiality of participants …’.

The process of data collection itself, often in the form of a semi or unstructured interview, can be a pleasant enough experience. The interviewer is interested, supportive and appears to agree with all that is being said. For those involved in education this is a novel experience; there are not many people who want to listen to teachers talk about their work.
It is in the stages that follow that this initial seduction becomes betrayal. Interviews are transcribed and transcriptions are often returned to participants. Perhaps comment and clarification is invited; perhaps not. Whatever the process, transcripts are often the cause for participant concern. They are never all that was intended, all that is known, all that was meant to be communicated. There may be further contact between researcher and participant in which both struggle to make shared meaning from the data and the process of analysis in which “person becomes portrait” (Stronarch & MacLure 1997:34). The final portrait may be one pleasing to the participant but it may not and, while it is true that participants have the power to withdraw consent and terminate their involvement in the research, this is rarely done. Many participants accept portraits about which they have some reservations, constructions which seem not quite right. For some, portraits become caricature and they struggle to find a sense of self in the construction offered by the research.

Why does this happen? Newkirk (1996:3) claims that “every qualitative researcher I know has an ethical story to tell, one in which he or she wrestled with … bad news”. By ‘bad news’, Newkirk means the process described above in which participants find themselves, their actions and beliefs, constructed in ways other than they intended, other than as they perceive them to be. Are the processes of data collection and analysis used in qualitative research at fault? Should the explanatory statement remind participants that, while the study may indeed be of value to the wider community, “the most direct benefits accrue to the researcher” (Newkirk 1996:8). Should the consent form include a warning similar to that found on cigarette packets – ‘Participation in this research may be hazardous to your emotional well-being and sense of self’? Should interviewers be required to interrupt participants at regular intervals, reminding them that interest and encouragement to continue talking does not imply agreement with, or approval of, what is being said? Should final reports be only those that end “… and they all lived happily ever after’?

Perhaps it is the nature of qualitative research itself which is the cause of the problem. The notion of qualitative research is one which embraces a wide range of interest groups and is diverse, complex, contradictory and shifting. In the words of Denzin and Lincoln (2000:xi), the ‘field’ of qualitative research is:
defined primarily by a series of essential tensions, contradictions and hesitations. These tensions … work back and forth between competing definitions and conceptions of the field … [Any attempt at clarification is] in the face of paradigmatic differences, inherent contradictions among styles and types of research, and over the barriers of disciplinary, national, racial, cultural and gender differences.

Despite these complexities, there is one connecting element of all research which positions itself as qualitative. It is “the avowed humanistic commitment to study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:xvi). It is this single point that is held in common by all who shelter under the large umbrella of qualitative research. It is the point of connection between feminist research, queer theory, race and cultural studies and a myriad of others, including my own study of ESL teacher identity. The philosophical stance behind this commitment is one based on a view of the world in which the ‘realities’ available for study are largely constructed by “community consensus regarding what is ‘real’, what is useful and what has meaning” (Lincoln & Guba 2000:167). If the social world is one largely constructed by those within it, it seems sensible that these perceptions and understandings should be the primary focus of research which seeks to first make these understandings explicit and then to bring some version of them into a wider arena in the form of ‘knowledge’ designed to extend shared understandings of the world.

If the central concern of qualitative research is to study the world from the viewpoint of those within it, is it possible to identify other characteristics? Miles and Huberman (1994:6-7) list several other elements of qualitative research including:

- intense and/prolonged contact with the area under study
- interest in the everyday life of individuals and groups
- attempts to capture a holistic view which remains true to the perceptions of participants
- focus on patterns and themes within the data which should also retain its original form
- researcher as main instrument of data collection
- analysis through words.

These defining characteristics are echoed by Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3-4). Qualitative research is situated in the world as “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. These attempts involve a range of research methods
including "case study; personal experience; introspection; life story [and] interview". A range of approaches, or interpretive practices, are used in data analysis in the “hope of getting a better understanding of the subject matter”.

Flick (1998:5-6) identifies several similar defining features of qualitative research. The first is that the area of study determines the approaches taken, the second that the diversity of participant understandings is acknowledged, the third that the researcher is made an ‘explicit part of knowledge production’ and finally, that discussion and practice utilizes a variety of theoretical approaches and methods.

If the focus of our work is to express the understandings of others in the form of ‘knowledge’ we seem doomed to failure. The understandings expressed are always our own, not those of our participants. Meanings slip between the margins of that which is specific to time and place and that which is transferable to other contexts. Another time with altered components of being – physical, emotional and immediate experiential – results in a different story being told, a story the same and yet not the same.

Understandings appear to be shared, yet meanings are always multi-layered, shifting and subtle. The language we use is overpopulated, peopled with the meanings and intentions of others as well as those imposed upon it in each instance of use. Interview transcripts freeze words in time, but meanings remain fluid. Each time we return to our data, the possibility exists for another and different reading:

Both the researcher and the research are on-going constructions that produce each other and are produced within a myriad of possible relationships. Each real and imagined encounter with another, each real and imagined audience, not only reconstructs the researcher but also reconstructs the research (Adam St Pierre 1998:2).

The ‘realities’ presented by our research are multiply constructed and interpreted – by participants as events and understandings that are given form in text, by the researcher as text becomes interpreted data and by each reader as meaning is taken from the text made available by the researcher. Is it possible, given the complexities described above, to find ethical solutions to the process of ‘person to portrait’? The second part of this paper describes the ethical dilemmas of my own research in which I am positioned as an insider to the participant community. This insider positioning has potential to increase both the effectiveness of the initial seduction and the impact of the final
betrayal. When the researcher is recognized as a member of the participant community, there are both advantages and disadvantages. Barriers are down and experiences and understandings are shared freely in a context of past experiences and understandings seen to be in common between participant and researcher. There is an openness and willingness to share which may not be available to those who are not part of the group. The protective barriers and strategies usually in play in such situations (Measor & Sikes 1992:230) are largely absent and with this comes an increased obligation on the part of the researcher to “protect those who have shared with us” (Denzin 1989:83). The section which follows offers an outline of the study in which these ethical dilemmas occurred and explores the ways in which they were resolved (and not resolved).

The focus of my research was teacher identity as it is understood and enacted by English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers working in government secondary schools in the state of Victoria. My interest in this area comes from both my past work as an ESL teacher in this system and my present work at the tertiary level as an ESL teacher educator. The understandings which inform my work as teacher educator are largely drawn from personal experience, that is in my own enactment of ESL teacher identity. I argued that extending and challenging these personal understandings through exploration of the understandings of others had potential benefit not only for my own work but also for that of others involved at all levels in the teaching of English as a second language (TESL). (It also resulted in a doctoral thesis but this was understood and signaled to participants, it was not the main focus of the explanatory statement).

The close connection which exists between past and present identities was both a strength and complexity of the study. As a recognized member of the ESL teacher community in Melbourne, I was given access to the thinking of ESL teachers at a level of intimacy which would not, I think, be available to other researchers. The willingness of ESL teachers to share understandings of their work was largely based on their perception of me as one of them, as a person who understood the realities of teacher work and the development of ESL teacher identity in ways in which others who have not been part of this process may not. This recognition, and the confidences which come from it, is a strength of my research. It is also an area of complexity in that my own ESL teacher identities are the lens through which I view the ESL teacher identities of others. I recognize and understand most readily those enactments of identity which are like my
own. Attempts to resist this mirroring of myself in others may have resulted in over-correction, causing me to reject that with which I feel most comfortable and focus on elements which are at odds with my own image. An added complexity of my position of researcher-as-insider is the possibility that those ESL teachers to whom I talked reshaped their own identities to meet what they perceived to be my expectations. That is, they created themselves as they believed I wished them to be.

My study of ESL teacher identity fits neatly in the field of qualitative research as described earlier in this paper. The study was explicitly committed to an understanding of ESL teacher identity as experienced by the participants in the study. It is participant understandings of identity which are most meaningful for all those involved in their enactment. The study aimed to make the understandings of the teachers involved in the study explicit and available for discussion as a means of increasing knowledge of the area and informing practice. Data collection took place over a period of two years with repeated contact with participants. The interest of the study was in the 'everyday' work of ESL teachers, my role as researcher written into the study as explicitly as I was able and a range of approaches were taken to data collection. Teacher identities were presented, as far as is possible, in the ways in which participants represented them. It was only after this initial presentation that patterns and themes were identified and discussed using a variety of interpretive frames.

There were a number of stages to data collection. The first step was to gain an overall impression of ESL teachers as a total group. Information on factual aspects of identity (such as sex, age, language background and teaching qualifications) was gathered via a questionnaire distributed to all Victorian government secondary schools with ESL staff. The next stage was a series of lengthy (on average between one and two hours) unstructured interviews with teachers who had expressed interest in talking to me about themselves and their work. These interviews were followed by a series of shorter interviews with a small number of teachers. There were nine teachers involved in this stage and I met with each teacher three times throughout the year in which I collected data.

The first stage of data collection, the questionnaire, was unproblematic. I received 215 completed questionnaires, approximately one third of the total possible participant group.
The results of the questionnaire were analyzed, resulted in construction of the ‘typical’ ESL teacher, a woman in her forties, born in Australia of English-speaking background with one year pre-service teacher training in English and ESL and between six and ten years experience as an ESL teacher.

The next step involved selecting a manageable number of teachers from the 68 who had volunteered to be further involved. All teachers who completed the questionnaire had identified themselves as ESL teachers. Those who were willing to be part of this next stage of my research were making another, and stronger, statement of their ESL teacher identity. It was at this stage that my insider status was explicitly recognized by participants. In many cases they signaled their recognition of our shared identity in the form of personal notes on the bottom of the questionnaire. There were best wishes, greetings from friends and ‘you probably don’t remember me but...’ notes. I was recognized and claimed as one of the group in a process of co-construction of identity. I selected twenty participants for Stage Two who were, if not representative of the total group, at least not dissimilar. Given that I have worked as an ESL teacher for twenty years and have a high profile in the area, it was not possible for me to avoid friends, teachers with whom I had worked, people I knew, people to whom I was known. I did, however, exclude any of my ex-students. Including people whom I had taught to be ESL teachers would, I thought, be inappropriate, given the nature of the past relationship. Selection was based on variety and breadth, in that I was keen to make the data as rich as possible. I started the process by sorting possible participants into type (male/female, less and more experienced and so on). After this selection was more or less a lucky dip. Even this early stage was a challenge in which the interests of my research conflicted with bonds of collegiality and friendship. I felt inclined to include teachers I knew, rather than those I did not. I avoided teachers I knew to be ‘difficult’, both as people and as research participants. After I had decided on my participant group, I received a series of phone calls from teachers keen to take part and ‘help in my research’ who had not been chosen.

I met with each of the teachers selected once for an extended unstructured interview about their work as ESL teachers. I started each interview by asking how the teacher became involved in ESL teaching. After this opening question, the conversation went wherever the teacher took it and lasted until the teacher ran out of things she or he
wanted to say – usually about an hour. I expressed interest, asked for clarification or more detail and occasionally signaled my own ESL teacher identity by commenting on a common experience. These sessions took place in a wide variety of venues – wherever was most convenient for the teacher concerned. We met at schools, cafes, pubs, teachers’ homes and, in two cases, my office at university. The choice of setting added an extra dimension to the discourse (Gee 1999) and to the way in which the conversation positioned us as participants. In the schools I felt welcomed as a colleague – a fellow ESL teacher. In the social settings we were meeting as friends. In my office, a location chosen by the two participants, I felt myself to have been positioned as ‘researcher’, rather than teacher, a reaction perhaps due to my own sense of conflicting identity. One of the teachers had approached her principal for special permission to leave school to assist with ‘university research’. The other teacher may have been signaling our shared identity as students – she was going to use the library.

Given that the aim of all qualitative research is to understand the area under study from the perspective of those involved, interviewing is one of the most powerful ways of gaining access to these understandings. It is “the main road to multiple realities” (Stake 1995:64). Interviewing can take several forms, ranging from tightly structured standardized interviews to the type of open-ended unstructured interviews used in my research. Fontana and Frey (2000:652) suggest that unstructured interviewing “can provide a greater breadth of data than other types, given qualitative nature”. They argue that “to learn about people we must treat them as people, and they will work with us to create accounts of their lives (2000:668).

The term ‘unstructured interview’ can be misleading in that questions are provided as a starting point for the interview. Indeed May (2001:124) uses the term ‘focus interview’ as an alternative to ‘unstructured interview’. These questions provide an opening for discussion with the participant free to respond in ways meaningful for them. Other questions throughout the interview emerge from the developing text and are often requests for elaboration or clarification. In that those involved are positioned as equals with shared interests, the unstructured interview has many of the characteristics of conversation, an approach which due to “the underlying trust … may end up probing more deeply than aggressive questioning techniques” (Connelly &Clandinin 1999:137).
Interviews used in this study were all unstructured. An initial focus question was provided after which the direction of the interview was in the hands of the participant. My position as both ESL teacher and researcher combined with pre-existing relationships with the participants meant that these interviews were conversations between colleagues, conversations between friends. The result of this closeness was both a richness of data and the series of ethical dilemmas which are the topic of this paper.

The text created by the unstructured interview is a source of data, often the main source, for the study. This text and the uses made of it are not a mirror of experience (Flick 1998:37). They are constructions of reality by all those involved: participant, researcher and reader, a process of making meaning by transforming the outer world into forms which have sense for individual inner worlds. Participants transform experiences to narrative. Texts based on these narratives are constructed and interpreted by the researcher and the reader again interprets this researcher text. Making this ‘unreal reality’ transparent is a constant challenge for the qualitative researcher and one intimately linked to the transformation of person to portrait. If we can all, participant, researcher and reader, regard the final product in believing disbelief as one understanding of many understandings, then our research will be both less and more powerful. (My response to this dilemma was to make my researcher presence explicit and to provide constant reminders to the reader of the constructed nature of the text. This is discussed in more depth elsewhere).

After the interviews, two copies of the transcript were sent to each participant with a letter of thanks and an invitation to return one copy if there was anything they wanted to change or add. Fourteen teachers added to the transcripts and returned them. Most of these additions were corrections of grammar, though in several cases, additional information was given to clarify something that had been said. These additions, which gave extra information rather than disagreed with what had been said, form part of the text which I analyzed. In one case a section of the interview had been deleted and I made no use of this part of the transcript. This was the first indication that research conversations could be other than data collection exercises. The nature of the conversation had been such that the participant shared aspects of her life which were clearly private. This came about as she made links between her childhood and her
reasons for working as an ESL teacher. When it became apparent that the interview had shifted to sharing of confidences, I turned off the tape recorder and made clear that I had done so. Although the overlap between interview and private conversation was an issue for sensitivity, there was no ethical dilemma. It was clear that the information shared had no part in my research. One teacher wrote several pages of additional thoughts, contacted me to continue the discussion and then went on to write an article for a professional journal based on our conversation. So far, so good in terms of ethical dilemmas.

The final stage of data collection involved repeated interviews with a small number of teachers over an extended period of time. Selection of participants for this stage of the data collection was again a difficult process. Almost all of the teachers involved in Stage Two were willing to continue their involvement. (The two exceptions were not to be teaching in the year in which I planned this stage of the research – one had been accepted into a Teacher Release to Industry Program (TRIP) and the other was to be on long service leave). Again selection was on the basis of variety, breadth and the desire to learn. The experience of the first interview was also a consideration in that I needed participants who were able to talk easily about their work and who would, I felt, be available and remain interested for the extended period of time needed for this stage of data collection.

In the end eight teachers were involved. They were joined by one more when the teacher who had been on long service leave returned to work in a refugee camp set up for Kosovar refugees and contacted me to indicate that he was now available. Although I offer brief descriptions of each of the participants in an appendix to the final study in an attempt to make the teachers involved live for the reader, I am very much aware of the inadequacy of these descriptions. There is, after all, “no way to stuff a real-live person between the two covers of a text” (Denzin 1989:83). In almost every case some form of prior relationship existed and I attempted to clarify the nature of the relationship. In accordance with ethics requirements, pseudonyms were used for teachers and for schools and I use these names in the discussion that follows. However this use of pseudonyms is in itself problematic.
Teacher reaction to this issue of anonymity was varied. Several teachers were anxious not to be identified; others were keen to have their views openly acknowledged as their own. There were two conflicting areas of concern for me here. The first was that the ESL teacher community in Melbourne is quite small. I knew that teachers involved in my study had talked to others about their involvement. I was also concerned that it would be possible that some participants, because of the nature of their involvement in the area, would be identified despite the use of pseudonyms. (This was in fact the case and several people have told me that one of the most enjoyable aspects of my thesis is playing spot the participant). The second area of concern was that the need for confidentiality prevented participants receiving public recognition and acknowledgement for their contribution to the research:

We must find better ways to honor those people who make our ‘tales of the field’ possible (Williams 1996:42-43).

After the first interview, which focused on change, transcripts were returned to participants. This time I included my own thinking about the issues raised in the conversation. I hoped that, in doing this, I would make my own developing understandings available for discussion and critique, avoiding the finality of the end product, but the approach seemed to stifle rather than encourage discussion and I discontinued the practice with future transcripts. The second interview focused in the students with whom the teacher was working. The final interview focused on the teacher’s plans for the following year.

A pattern was established with responses to the transcripts which was to continue throughout this period of data collection. Tom returned a heavily annotated transcript. Vicky and Alice corrected grammar. Mandy added a few comments on my interpretation of the data, sometimes agreeing, sometimes correcting and giving additional information. A cheery note of best wishes always accompanied these comments. The others did not return the transcripts. Instead they expressed guilt over their failure to do so each time we met. In the light of this reaction, I emphasized that the return of the transcript was a matter of personal choice.

A check on the approach which I had taken for data collection was in the final conversation with teachers. In the closing moments of each conversation I asked for
some feedback on the process, that is the focus question for each session, the resulting conversation and the return of the transcripts for comment. In each case the request for feedback was framed in terms of the participant’s reaction to the process.

In every case the response was positive.

- I found the whole experience very enjoyable – Mandy.
- I am at ease when I am talking to you every time – May.
- I’ve been perfectly happy with what I’ve said and it’s made me think – Sally.
- You’re a friend so it’s been fine – Gary.
- It’s been fantastic – Connie.
- I do feel like I’ve been quite confident … it’s an effective way of collecting data – Vicky.
- ESL teachers generally work well when we get together – Alice.
- The thing is that we’re friends. Like you know when you’re asking me about things … you’re just the person I want to discuss it with … just like a conversation – Stefan.
- It’s been fine. [The process of reading and commenting on the transcripts] has allowed me to reflect on what I’ve said and to add important things that I omitted – Tom.

In each of these responses I am trusted colleague and friend. The implications (and responsibilities) resulting from this sort of researcher-participant relationship were to become more clear as I analyzed and wrote about the data I had collected.

The sources of information available in this exploration of ESL teacher identity and work were the dialogue between ESL teachers and researcher, who is also ESL teacher, the internal dialogue between researcher as researcher and researcher as ESL teacher, the dialogue between researcher and reader, each of them located in wider contexts of time, place and relationships of power. That in this multi-voiced research world, my role as most privileged player in the representation and reconstruction of others could result in my voice speaking over, as well as for, others, was an issue of ongoing concern.

The quandary facing researchers giving voice to others is how best to deal with the shifting kaleidoscope of meanings to capture the patterns of understandings which those teachers involved in the study give to themselves and their experiences, how best to
"reveal the interpreted world of interacting individuals" (Denzin 1989:30) in ways which ring true both for those involved and for those who read the discussion of these ‘interpreted worlds’. Even as we acknowledge the transient and partially comprehended nature of meanings constructed through language, we are also aware of the 'unreal reality' which these meanings assume in the daily lives of all of us.

The approach taken in my research was to contextualize these conversations both within the wider historical context of ESL teacher work in Victoria and within the specific biographical and teaching context of individual teachers. I also made my own teacher story explicit and then sought to allow the voices of others to speak freely. The complexities of multi-layered meanings were approached through a two-pronged analysis of discourse. There was first a focus on explicit understandings of ESL teacher work and identity, followed by consideration of implicit understandings embodied in representational uses of language - an approach which views language as first transparent and then as opaque (Beavis 1997). This is not to suggest that one version is more 'true' than another. It was an attempt to combine recognition of teacher realities with an exploration of the richness of implicit meanings expressed at other levels of language use. I hoped that the teachers involved continued to feel ownership of their stories and of the final product through the sharing of transcripts and draft materials. Teacher responses to my understandings were included as views which confirmed, extended or offered alternate ways of understanding the material. My way into the data then was to use a multi-layered approach to discourse which explored both explicit and implicit elements of ESL teacher identities which were both specific and meaningful as expression of shared experiences and understandings.

Writing the Other

“Miracles or no miracles’, quoth Sancho, “people should take heed of what they say and write of other folk, and not set anything down that comes uppermost”. (Cervantes – The Adventures of Don Quixote quoted in Newkirk (1996:3)

Writing about the teachers involved in this study followed the usual procedures of negotiation common to case study research, interview transcripts distributed for comment, revision and addition, draft chapters shared with participants. The process was, to some extent at least, a collaborative one. I attempted to “allow others to speak in
and through [the text] with their own powers of recognition, representation and persuasion intact” (Sullivan 1996:106). Despite these efforts I am conscious that, through selection of data, through identification of what I perceived to be key themes, relevant quotes and ways of being that echoed my own understandings of ESL teacher identity, the process was one of construction, rather than representation, of these teachers. Perhaps this is inescapable. Stronarch & MacLure (1997) warn of the difficulties in writing the other. The paradox is that, as researchers, we know any story to be only one of the many that are possible and in its telling to silence others. We know that each time we revisit data, we see it differently – that we can never ‘get it right’. Despite this, as both researchers and as readers, we accept accounts as unproblematic. Accounts which are unambiguous, coherent and which reach a point of closure, a state of ‘happy ever after’, are comfortable as text. The danger in such texts is that, in representing particular ways of being, we both reinforce those and deny others. A goal for research which ‘transforms people into portraits’ must be to produce accounts which:

deny the reader that comfort of a shared ground with the author, foreground ambivalence and undermine the authority of their own assertions (Stronarch & MacLure 1997:57).

**Interviews as conversation**

Interviews, like all other forms of language use, are social practice, discoursal sites of power and struggle. Mishler (1986) reminds us of the dialogic nature of interviews.

The essence of interviewing [is] that it is an occasion of two persons speaking to each other … a form of discourse … a joint product of what interviewees and interviewer talk about together and how they talk to each other (1986:vii).

My approach was to create a space which would allow teachers to talk freely about themselves and their work in all its ambiguities and complexities. Any analysis of conversation shows the way in which speakers work together to share understandings, to clarify and make meaning of the topic under discussion. Ambiguity and complexity are part of the richness of multiple and overlapping discourses and identities and are clarified through conversation rather than by artificial attempts to limit responses through a tightly structured interview schedule.
Interviewing was a process of ‘collaborative discussion’ (Gee 1999:123), open-ended and unstructured, an approach to data collection in line with understandings of language and meaning at the heart of the study. After an initial focus question, the interviews followed the fluid interactive ebb and flow of conversation. My researcher authority was also a thing of ebb and flow. While, as researcher, I was responsible for organizing the interview and, at times, initiating discussion, the direction of each conversation was largely determined by the teacher involved. A general starting point was provided but after this my role was that of interested listener, a role at which I became more proficient as the study proceeded.

More structured interviews, with clearly outlined parameters for discussion, may protect participants in so far as they define borders but they would also limit discussion to what the researcher has seen to be possible. As researchers we have an obligation to “protect those who have shared with us” (Denzin 1989:83) but participants in research are not “fearful victims who open their lives and souls because they are told or asked to. People have boundaries and strategies to protect themselves in research situations” (Measor & Sikes 1992:230. While, to some extent, I accept this view of research participants I am also aware that, in the writing, it is my hand that holds the pen (or operates the keyboard) and there is power in the textual constructions of others which is difficult to resist once these constructions are in place. Stronarch and MacLure (1997:54) describe this process of ‘transformation of persons into portraits’.

The issue of control and who ‘has’ it – researcher or subject – is a complex one. There were interesting political switches in the relationship between the researcher and subject at different points in the research process. … These are the neglected disjunctions in the politics of the research process, and one of way of interpreting them is as a covert struggle: the authors conciliatory in face-to-face encounters, but implacable in the construction of their texts (Stronarch & MacLure 1997:54).

**Bad News**

Newkirk (1996:3) quotes the passage from Cervantes which I used to open this section in his discussion of ethical issues in qualitative research, specifically the issue of what he calls ‘bad news’. He describes the process by which those being studied are first seduced and then betrayed. The explanation of the research, the consent form which is signed, the supportive, interested and encouraging interviewer all work together to
create conditions in which the participants share themselves with the openness and honesty usually reserved for exchanges between friends. The ethical dilemma for the researcher is that friends accept the obligation of not telling anyone things that will hurt them, while researchers rarely alert participants to the possibility that “our rendering of them may be partially or wholly negative” (Newkirk 1996:3). Newkirk reminds us, very forcefully, that “the most direct benefits come to the researcher and the most direct harms often to the subject” (1996:8). We therefore have an ethical responsibility to share ‘bad news’ before publication and to offer the opportunity for an alternative dissenting voice to be included in the final text.

The close relationships between researcher and those who were the object of the research made this dilemma a very real issue for me. It was also an issue most relevant for those teacher participants with whom a relationship of friendship already existed. It was these teachers who were most likely to share private aspects of their teaching (and who had most right to call upon the obligations of friendship as protection). Williams (1996) suggests that ‘bad news’ should only be published with the consent of the participant. I found myself unwilling to hand over authorial control to this extent but bad news for some participants did exist in my reading of the data. I constructed some teachers in some sections of the data in ways other than the ways they perceive themselves to be. In each case the teacher concerned read my understanding of the data and there was discussion of this. The opportunity was been given for additional comments in the form of ‘dissenting voice’, a strategy suggested by Newkirk. Some teachers responded by offering extensive written comments and these were included. However, I am aware that even in this process, authority rests with me and most powerful voice is mine. Other teachers chose not to do this, several because they saw that aspect of their teaching identity as one belonging to past time and place. To quote Gary, “That’s how it was then. It’s not how I am as a teacher but it’s how it was then”.

One other teacher who expressed concern at my understanding of her ESL teacher identity was not able to offer an alternate voice. Although she was willing for her story to remain as part of the study, she was unhappy about the way in which she was portrayed. I am aware of her distress and realize that, despite my best efforts to make it otherwise, for her at least this process was indeed one of ‘seduction and betrayal’.
Bibliography


