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SECTION 6

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Prepared for the MA Board by Peter Woods

As we saw in Part 1, Section 1, there is a wide range of different approaches to qualitative research. We shall concentrate here for the most part on the one that has had the most general influence in Britain in recent years - ethnographic work deriving from symbolic interactionism. Studying one approach in some detail gives us an opportunity to follow through the interconnections between initial conceptualizations, data collection techniques, analysis and theory generation and development. At the same time, though, many of the principles and techniques involved are shared in common with other forms of qualitative work.

6.1 MAIN FEATURES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Most forms of qualitative research have the following main features:

- a focus on natural settings;
- an interest in meanings, perspectives and understandings;
- an emphasis on process;
- a concern with inductive analysis and grounded theory.

Let us consider each of these in turn.

A focus on natural settings

Qualitative research is concerned with life as it is lived, things as they happen, situations as they are constructed in the day-to-day, moment-to-moment course of events. This might be contrasted with the setting up of artificial experiments. Qualitative researchers seek lived experiences in real situations. In general, they try not to disturb the scene and to be unobtrusive in their methods in an attempt to ensure that data and analysis closely reflect what is happening.

At the same time, qualitative researchers welcome natural experiments. When ordinary processes are disrupted, basic rules and norms are thrown into relief. Usually, these rules and norms are tacit. They are understood, perhaps subconsciously, by people in a particular situation and may be difficult to discover by a researcher. For example, the 1988 Education Reform Act in England and Wales set off a whole chain of 'natural experiments' as it challenged a number of basic assumptions. The introduction of material for the new curriculum, new teaching methods, institutional change such as school amalgamations, or reforms in school organization such as changing from streamed to mixed-ability groups, are all examples of natural experiments. They allow one to study 'what would happen if ...' as it really happens.

A corollary of a commitment to naturalism is that the researcher makes as few assumptions in advance of the study as possible. Seeley (1966) drew the distinction between the 'making' and 'taking' of research problems. Sociologists, he argued, must make their own problems rather than 'taking' those defined by others. Mac an Ghaill (1989) describes how he changed from the first to the second position during the course of his research on the schooling of black youths. He started by 'taking a problem', accepting 'the white norm': that is, viewing black youths themselves as being the 'problem'. However, placing students at the centre of his research and using qualitative methods to explore their perspectives brought him to a view that this norm was 'distorted, de-racialized and de-gendered' (p. 186). Through the process of research he 'made' a problem generated by what he discovered: namely, that students' behaviour was a response to a 'wider framework of sexism and racism'.

It helps if the researcher 'makes the familiar strange', not taking things for granted, questioning the bases of actions. The problems of studying the familiar are well illustrated by the sociologist Howard S. Becker:

We may have understated a little the difficulty of observing contemporary classrooms. It is not just the survey method of educational testing or any of those things that keeps people from seeing what is going on. I think, instead, that it is first and foremost a matter of it all being so familiar that it becomes impossible to single out events that occur in the classroom as things that have occurred, even when they happen right in front of you. I have not had the experience of observing in elementary and high school classrooms myself, but I have in college classrooms and it takes a tremendous effort of will and imagination to stop seeing the things that are conventionally 'there' to be seen. I have talked to a couple of teams of research people who have sat around in classrooms trying to observe and it is like pulling teeth to get them to see or write anything beyond what 'everyone' knows.

(Becker, 1971, p. 10)

Situations are deemed to be important because they influence behaviour. For example, Lacey (1976, p. 60) noted that many of the teachers in the school of his research were 'sincere in their desire to help and encourage their pupils to learn'. On occasions, however, these 'reasonable, kindly men' turned into 'bellowing, spiteful adversaries. They left the staffroom in good order; it was in the classroom that things went wrong'. Keddie (1971) also noted this change in teachers and advanced an explanation based on the difference between two contexts. In the 'educationist' context, which prevailed outside the classroom, teachers employed definitions derived from theory. For example, they saw streaming by ability as an institutional reinforcement of social-class inequalities. In the 'teacher' context of the classroom, however, their knowledge of pupils derived from streaming and prevailing definitions of 'ability'. Keddie argues that: 'This knowledge of what pupils are like is often at odds with the image of pupils the same teachers may hold as educationists since it derives from streaming, whose validity the educationist denies' (p. 139). Thus, it is argued, teachers are constrained by the circumstances of their work - large classes, examination pressures, mandated curriculum - which might exert a profound influence on their views, attitudes and behaviour. Clearly the research methods need to sample across these contexts to observe their effects.

For this reason, some qualitative researchers prefer fairly lengthy and deep involvement in the natural setting. Social life is complex in its range and variability. It also operates at different levels. Berger (1966, p. 34) talks of social reality having 'many layers of meaning. The discovery of each new layer changes the perception of the whole'. Blumer (1976, p. 15) talks of 'lifting veils'. A school, for example, typically presents a 'public face' to outsiders. A researcher who stays for one or two weeks might discover more than a casual visitor about how the school really works, for public facades cannot be maintained for long. A longer stay is needed and much work is necessary, however, to develop the knowledge, skills and trust that will permit entry into innermost arenas and confidences. This may not be necessary, of course, if the researcher is already an insider; though even this will not ensure complete access, and it may result in other problems of a political or ethical kind.

Methodologically, a focus on natural settings means, firstly, maintaining a certain openness of mind, not pre-judging the matter, nor necessarily settling for first or even second appearances. As in all research, curiosity should be fostered, in this case to see beneath the various layers. What is presented is carefully noted, but the status to be attached to it is temporarily suspended. Guesses might be made, tested along the way and abandoned, changed or revised in the light of later discoveries. Secondly, in its purest form, this kind of investigation is conducted in the actual situation of the object of study and over a period of time. Depending on the area under investigation, it can take months or years working 'in the field'. This is not to say that smaller-scale studies, say of a classroom, or an interview with a teacher or pupil, are without their uses. These will, however, have more limited objectives and be more exploratory. Thirdly, this mode of study has implications for the

relationships the researcher fosters with subjects in the research. People are unlikely to allow total strangers into their private and confidential gatherings, or to tell them their innermost thoughts and secrets without certain guarantees. There must be a certain trust in the researcher, reflected in the 'rapport' traditionally developed between researcher and subjects.

Activity 31 (about 20 minutes)

The advocacy of naturalism is not without its problems. In line with the major focus, it is common for qualitative research reports to try to re-create some part of the reality they have been studying by such techniques as finely detailed description, evocative language and liberal use of participants' own speech. Do you see any problems with such attempts to be naturalistic? Make brief notes on problems arising from the researcher (a) studying and (b) representing natural events.

You might well have asked how it is possible for one researcher to know what is happening or has happened in a certain situation - he or she has only one set of eyes and ears. A classic problem in qualitative research is the 'elsewhere syndrome' - a constant feeling that the important business is happening somewhere other than where the researcher is. Even in the situation where one is, one has to choose a focus. The basis for this selection is not always made clear. Would different researchers choose different foci? Would they see different things in the same situation? Representations of reality in these matters always involve some kind of selection and interpretation. One can guard against abuse of this fact by:

- being aware of it, and making one's selection a principled one, as far as that is possible (for example, by appropriate sampling, an issue discussed in Section 6.2);
- making reasonable claims in the research report;
- making the bases of one's selections and methods clear, and including some biographical information about the researcher. Seen like this, the researcher is not some faultless, detached recorder of an absolute truth, but a participant in the research process.

An interest in meanings, perspectives and understandings

The qualitative researcher seeks to discover the meanings that participants attach to their behaviour, how they interpret situations and what their perspectives are on particular issues. Just as situations can influence perspectives, as discussed above, so perspectives can help determine situations. Thus Denscombe (1980) shows how teachers, faced with an unpopular new policy of 'open' classrooms and team teaching, subtly 'closed' them again by, for example, breaking down the larger group of pupils into three sub-groups and individual members of the teaching team taking responsibility for them.

Equally, some pupils' understanding of the school situation can be vastly different from teachers'. For example, they may see it not as a 'place of learning', but as an 'arena for socializing', for which learning may be counter-productive. Several studies have shown how pupils transform situations to be more in line with their own interests. Turner (1983) gives an example of a pupil who conformed in some lessons, but was disruptive in others. Turner argues that this was because the school did not always provide good teachers and thereby meet the pupil's own ideal of wanting to do well. Bad teachers did not give 'proper lessons', but such lessons were functional in providing the pupil with an opportunity to respond to peer group pressure and 'mess about a bit'.

A similar example arose in the research of Measor and Woods (1984) into the transfer of pupils between schools. The secondary school studied in this research was attempting to dissolve some gender boundaries by having a common curriculum, but pupils noticeably 'regendered' them. (You may remember Measor's

discussion of this in the set reading for Activity 6.) Boys used cakes as weapons and a sewing machine as a train. Girls protested about nasty smells and unisex goggles in physical science. In other words, these lessons were very useful to boys and girls in developing their gender identities. They also became very skilled in the practice of what the authors called 'knife-edging': that is, making the most of their options by delicately balancing some of them in opposition to each other - such as in the example from Turner above, where 'doing well' was counterpoised by 'mucking around'. They could define situations at will, switching between them with polished ease.

Activity 32 (about 20 minutes)

Study the following scenario. Place yourself in the position of (a) the pupils and (b) the teachers, and contrast their points of view. How might different understandings of the situation be at the bottom of the dispute?

The 'blazer-ripping' incident

At one secondary school the school blazer was a prime symbol of teachers' authority and pupils' subordination. The rules for school uniform were enforced with vigour in the interests of maintaining order. On the last day of term, it was traditional for there to be a certain amount of 'blazer-ripping' - symbolic of pupils gaining their freedom. One year, however, a boy's blazer was ripped to shreds early in the week of departure. This precipitated a crisis that disrupted the whole of the week for both teachers and pupils. The teachers launched a major offensive to apprehend and punish the culprits. The boys simply could not understand what all the fuss was about. 'They'd been writing all over blazers, writing their names on them, it's a traditional activity at the end of your school days.'

Complete your analysis of this incident before you read on.

The school uniform, the 'ideal' pupil's appearance, with its associated 'ideal' behaviour, is clearly an important symbol. Unsurprisingly, at the end of compulsory schooling, the desecration of these symbols by pupils is a prominent part of the celebrations, part of the rites of passage that mark transition into adulthood. Such desecration seems to be recognized as a legitimate activity by teachers, too, but only at the proper point of the passage - at the end of the week. The beginning of the week was still 'school', requiring business as usual, governed by school rules. Hence competing definitions of the situation between teachers and pupils were at the root of the problem.

Clearly the research methods employed have to be sensitive to the perspectives of all participants. In addition, the methods must pick up the interaction between perspectives and situation to see how they bear on each other. Researchers must also sample across time, since the same items or activities may mean different things on different occasions. In the case of the blazer-ripping incident, if the researcher took the teachers' perspective the pupils would be blamed for the disorder; if the pupils' perspective were taken, the teachers would appear unreasonable.

Researchers therefore work to obtain 'inside' knowledge of the social life under study. If they are to understand people's outlooks and experiences, researchers must be close to groups, live with them, look at the world from their viewpoints, see them in various situations and in various moods, appreciate the inconsistencies, ambiguities and contradictions in their behaviour, explore the nature and extent of their interests, understand their relationships among themselves and with other groups. In short, researchers should, if possible, adopt the roles of the people being studied. To these ends, researchers have at various times over the past few decades joined such groups as delinquent gangs, hippies, bikers, the teaching staff of a school, or pupils. They have also sometimes made use of roles they are already involved in, carrying out 'insider research'.

The researcher tries to appreciate the culture of groups. The task is to try to capture the meanings that permeate the culture as understood by the participants. The consequences of not doing so have been occasionally illustrated in teacher-pupil studies. Dumont and Wax (1971), for example, showed how a teacher of many years' experience took her pupils' silence and docility as indicating respectful conformity, when in fact it had the opposite meaning within the culture of the Cherokee community to which the pupils belonged. What she was doing was interpreting the pupils' behaviour solely through her own perspective and not theirs. Moore (1992) similarly suggests how a teacher, avowedly working to an anti-racist policy, was operating within an ethnocentric framework in evaluating a pupil's essay.

Close monitoring of scenes is required if we are to identify their inner mysteries. Understandings among pupils and teacher can become extremely recondite, triggered by the briefest of signals among them, which are inaccessible to outsiders. For example, Delamont and Gallon (1986) refer to a 'Horace' joke. A child had spelt horse as 'h o r a c e' and it had been taken up by another child calling out 'Look! There's a Horace outside the window eating the grass'. Thereafter mis-spellers were referred to as 'Horace' or described as 'doing a Horace'. This may seem unremarkable - simply a joking aside - but basically it is a reminder both of group identity and of underlying rules, very important ones concerning correct spelling, which are both dramatized and made more acceptable by being displaced in humour and by being deeply embedded within the classroom culture. The group collectively thus 'owns' the mystery. It is something they have generated and which belongs to them and them alone as a group. The more impenetrable it is to outsiders the more successful it is in these respects.

The interrelationship between behaviour and language and its embeddedness within the social structure of the classroom is well illustrated by Werthman (1963) in describing 'looking cool', a students' response to teachers' transgressions of certain unwritten but tacitly agreed rules. The heavy but ingenious symbolism of the behaviour is expressed here:

of all the techniques used by gang members to communicate rejection of authority, by far the most subtle and most annoying to teachers is demeanour. Both white and Negro gang members have developed a uniform and highly stylized complex of body movements that communicate a casual and disdainful aloofness to anyone making normative claims on their behavior. The complex is referred to by a gang member as 'looking cool', and it is part of a repertoire of stances that include 'looking bad' and 'looking tore down'. The essential ingredients of 'looking cool' are a walking pace that is a little too slow for the occasion, a straight back, shoulders slightly stooped, hands in pockets, and eyes that carefully avert any party to the interaction. There are also clothing aides which enhance the effect such as boot and shoe taps and a hat if the scene takes place indoors.
(Werthman, 1963, pp. 56-7)

This behaviour is distinctive for its superb efficacy. Its message is clear, unmistakable and hurtful, and gives little purchase for counter attack. Werthman's point of entry was the boys' references to 'looking cool', which the researcher then 'unpacked' by observations. Subjects' own references cue one in to important aspects of their culture, whether it is 'dossing or swotting', 'blagging or wagging', having a laugh', or 'bunking off'.

Distinctive terminology is not the only clue, however. Subjects may use the same words as the researcher, but intend very different meanings. Cues indicating a term of special significance might be frequency of use, emphasis and generality. Thus pupils' references to 'work' have been shown to vary among different groups. Furthermore, what various pupils understand by 'work' may be considerably different from the researcher. The words themselves are not enough, even though they may be the same as the researcher's. They have to be interpreted. The researcher aims for 'shared meanings, when one feels part of the culture and can interpret words and gestures as they do' (Wax, 1971).

Similarly, we need to know what meaning is attributed to actions by participants and beware of attributing our own.

Activity 33 (allow about 30 minutes)

Consider the following examples of classroom behaviour. In each case, if we were using pre-constructed categories, as in systematic observation, all observed instances of the action would have to be placed within the given categories. These actions could, however, have vastly different meanings to the participants. Note down some of the possibilities in each case.

- (a) student hits other student;
 - (b) teacher asks a question;
 - (c) student works.
-

I shall limit my comments to the first example, which comes from Wilson (1977), leaving you to consider the second and third examples. The qualitative researcher would want to know how the action was understood by those involved:

How do the various participants (the hitter, person being hit, onlookers, teacher) perceive the event?

Do they even see it as aggression?

Do the hitter and person being hit concur on the meaning?

(Wilson, 1977, p. 252)

Wilson goes on to point out that it may not even be an act of aggression. It could, in fact, be the reverse - an act of affection, or part of subcultural norms that indicate 'playful demonstration of strength'. Even if it is aggression, there are many subtleties involved. For example,

The event could be an initiatory first act, or it could be a retribution for previous acts of aggression not necessarily linked immediately in space, time, or kind. The event could be part of a personal relationship between the two students involved, or it could be part of a larger interpersonal network of relations - for example, inter-group hostility.

(Wilson, 1977, p. 252)

There are many other possible meanings to such an act, not all of them readily explainable by the participants. Though it may be impossible to comprehend them all, the researcher aims to uncover as many as possible through long-term observation and close discussion with the actors.

An emphasis on process

As you saw in Part 1, Section 1, educational research in the 1950s and early 1960s was strongly interested in input and output factors, such as parental social class and academic achievement, and in measuring the relationship between the two. Qualitative researchers, by contrast, are concerned with what goes on in between the input and output, that is, with processes. They are interested in how understandings are formed, how meanings are negotiated, how roles are developed, how a curriculum works out, how a policy is formulated and implemented, how a pupil becomes deviant. The qualitative researcher attempts to penetrate the layers of meaning and to uncover and identify the range and depth of situations and perspectives that apply in the area under study. This has been called 'thick description', which Denzin describes thus:

It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in

question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard.

(Denzin, 1989, p. 83)

Quantitative and qualitative methods can work well together here. For example, quantitative methods can show, by before and after tests, that change has occurred and, by surveys, how generally and frequently it occurred. On the other hand, qualitative methods reveal in fine detail just how change occurred in day-to-day activities, negotiations and decisions. Sometimes, however, quantitative and qualitative methods may appear to work against each other. This is well illustrated by studies of pupils' inter-ethnic association. The great majority of work in this area, using predominantly sociometric techniques, had previously found pupils preferring their own ethnic group and not forming many inter-ethnic friendships. Denscombe *et al.* (1986), however, state that this finding was contrary to many teachers' observations in the schools of their research.

Activity 34 (allow about 20 minutes)

On the basis of what has already been said about natural settings, meanings, perspectives and process, how would you set about the qualitative study of pupils' inter-ethnic relationships? Consider what you would look for, how you would do it, how long for, where and what part would be played by the pupils and by teachers, if any.

Let us take the study by Denscombe *et al.* as an example. They studied two multi-ethnic classes, using a range of methods, including extended observation of free association in the classrooms and in the playground. They indeed found a high degree of ethnic integration, which supported the teachers' own observations. This, of course, may be a product of the particular schools studied, but it is also quite likely that the quantitative techniques of the earlier studies failed to capture the complexity of the situation. There could have been many forms of interaction, both conflictual and consensual, both between and within ethnic groups, varying with situations, time and in the nature and the degree of 'friendship'. In the quest for statistically significant results over a larger sample, a great deal of this significant interaction is missed. Furthermore, though the earlier work was about 'friendship', what this actually meant to the participants was not explored.

Qualitative methods, on the other hand, are designed to grasp the complexity and flux of social life. They may reveal that some forms of behaviour are fairly stable, others variable, others emergent and developmental. Some forms of interaction proceed in stages and the research methods need to encompass each stage and its place in the whole. Consider, for example, the process of 'labelling' deviants. Labelling may begin with some comparatively insignificant deviation from one's customary law-abiding role, which in itself is easily normalized. This is primary deviance. Secondary deviance arises out of the social reaction to the former. As Hargreaves *et al.* put it:

(the labelling) creates, under certain conditions, problems for the person who committed the deviant act which can be resolved by the commission of yet further deviant acts and by a self-designation as a deviant person. The paradox is that the social reaction which was intended to control, punish or eliminate the deviant act has come to shape, stabilize and exacerbate the deviance.

(Hargreaves *et al.*, 1975, pp. 5-6)

Consider the stages of the labelling process in the following hypothetical example:

- 1 A girl in a class of schoolchildren likes socializing with her peers during lessons and often talks to her neighbours.
- 2 She is perceived by the teacher in a stereotypical way as a chatterbox, a bit of a nuisance, a low achiever and, on occasions, a little 'sly' in her perpetration of misdeeds.

- 3 She is disciplined, perhaps through sarcasm. The sarcasm stings and promotes feelings of revenge and antagonism, which encourage her to increase her deviant behaviour.
- 4 The teacher meanwhile discusses the girl with colleagues, some of whom may have noted similar tendencies. There develops a consensual view of her deviance and she is treated as such by all her teachers.
- 5 The girl responds with more persistent deviant behaviour which becomes habitual. Eventually, the role becomes internalized and the girl acts out her teachers' expectations. This role may also be reinforced by her own peers' reactions to her.

The initial reaction by the teachers might have been crucial in this development. The 'primary' deviance, if treated in a different way, might have remained at a low level, marginal to the girl's otherwise completely acceptable behaviour. Clearly, it is necessary for the research methods to encompass the whole of this process and to delineate each part of it and their interconnections. If only one part is sampled, the wrong conclusions might be drawn.

Inductive analysis and grounded theory

Qualitative researchers do not, on the whole, start with a theory which they aim to test, though there is no reason why they should not do that if they wish. They mainly work the other way round, seeking to generate theory from data. The theory is then said to be grounded in the social activity it purports to explain (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The debate on differentiation and polarization, mentioned in Part 1, Sections 1.2 and 3.3, is a good example of both the generation and testing of theory. The initial work of Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970) in a secondary modern school and a grammar school, respectively, produced a theory that claimed that where pupils were differentiated by ability, as in streaming or tracking, then a polarization of attitudes into pro- and anti-school would occur among them. Ball (1981) examined this theory in a comprehensive school, finding the process still held under 'banding' (broad streaming arrangements), but was very much modified when mixed-ability classes were introduced. Abraham (1989) set out to explore the extent to which the theory was applicable to a setted comprehensive school in the south of England. He discovered a similar syndrome, but with variations, which led him to conclude that there were other factors helping to modify and promote polarization (such as examination and career pressure and the onset of subject options). Others have used and developed the theory in different settings: Burke (1985) in a sixth-form college; Foster (1990) in a multi-ethnic comprehensive school. This, then, is an example of how qualitative researchers can build on each other's work in a theoretically productive way.

By no means all qualitative researchers are concerned to generate or test theory of this kind in this way. The 'thick' description typically produced is often termed 'theoretical description'. It might involve the generation of an idea or concept that offers to cast new light on the activity under study, such as 'labelling', as discussed earlier. Once an activity or process has been identified in this way, one can study the conditions that give rise to the activity, the context in which it is embedded and how it is managed. Of course, predictive theories can be developed from this kind of analysis and they can then be tested. Another popular form of analysis is the construction of models and typologies. I shall discuss this in Section 6.3, but the important point to note here is the typically inductive nature of qualitative studies.

Summary

We have considered the chief features of a popular approach to qualitative research. First, it involves: a focus on natural settings; 'making' rather than 'taking' problems; making the familiar strange; recognizing the importance of situations; recognizing

that there are different levels of activity in social life. Second, there is an interest in meanings, perspectives and understandings. This involves appreciating different definitions of situations, working to obtain inside knowledge and learning group culture. There is, third, an emphasis on process, on complexity, flux and emergence. Consequently, there is a stress on covering whole processes and on producing a 'thick description' that will encompass this richness. Quantitative methods can work well here with qualitative, though there are dangers. Fourth, the approach is characterized mainly by inductive analysis and grounded theory, (that is, generating theory from data), though one line of development has seen the testing of theory in differentiation-polarization studies. In Section 6.2 we will go on to consider the research methods that follow from this approach.

6.2 THE METHODS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

This discussion of methods is organized around:

- the researcher's self (the main research instrument);
- validity;
- the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research.

The researcher's self

Skills of the researcher

The qualitative researcher works to 'fine-tune' the self. So much depends on what one sees and hears that much rests on one's powers of observation and listening. The kinds of skills that are involved are those of social management: interpersonal skills that facilitate the negotiation of access both into private places and private thoughts, that develop the kind of trust and rapport that encourage people to relax, go about their everyday business in the researcher's presence in their usual way, hold nothing back in an interview. Good social management helps to ensure that there are worthwhile things to be seen and heard. To this end some researchers have cultivated the 'good guy' image, one sympathetic to the group under study. Where there are two or more groups in conflict under study, considerable personal skills are required to handle the role conflict engendered in the researcher and to steer a way through the ethical issues that might be raised.

Though 'naturalism' may be a keynote, things do not just happen and unfold before one's eyes. One's right to witness and take part in other people's lives has to be worked for and earned. Though just 'hanging around' is a not uncommon activity in qualitative research, and quite appropriate in some circumstances, at other times one has to make things happen in the sense of effecting entry to an important event or meeting, arranging interviews, approaching people with a view to conversing with them. For this, one needs interpersonal skills and fine judgement as to when to bring them into play and when to leave things alone. The inclination is to be as unobtrusive as possible, but sometimes important situations are not immediately revealed or access offered.

Once entry is achieved, one needs observational skills. These involve, in the first place, vision: the ability to see and take in a wide range of activities over a period of time. Vision consists of a cultivated power of scanning which ensures that as wide a portion of activity as possible is covered. Scanning will include the less as well as the more obvious places, people and activities. At the same time, the researcher needs powers of discernment - selecting specific aspects for more concentrated scrutiny and greater definition. This inevitably means letting other aspects go by. Two kinds of indicator - strange behaviour and the subjects' own distinctive terms - were mentioned in Section 6.1; others will be discussed below. Once these are detected, how to record material has to be considered. Filming and taping are useful aids where they do not intrude, but in many situations this is neither possible nor appropriate. The researcher therefore cultivates the art of mentally photographing and logging for commitment to written record as soon as possible:

noting key aspects or comments on scraps of paper, or even a sleeve; summarizing incidents with key words that will recall whole incidents; speaking into a dictaphone, punctuating the period of observation with 'recording slots' to insure against 'drowning' in the data; and performing all these activities smoothly in a seamless web both for efficiency and so as not to intrude on the action.

Similarly, skills are needed for interviewing. At the centre of these skills is a persona that shows understanding of and empathy with the interviewee. Such a disposition would appear to be necessary if we are to penetrate 'fronts', achieve access to people's selves and share in their innermost confidences. During an interview the following skills are important: active listening, which shows the other person that you hear and react by essaying interpretations occasionally, both with a view to maintaining the interpretative frame and keeping the other 'warmed up'; focusing, that is, keeping the interviewee to the subject and, in an unobtrusive way, not allowing rambling; infilling and explicating where material is incomplete, unclear or ambiguous; checking for accuracy by pressing points, seeking evidence, rephrasing, summarizing, playing devil's advocate, seeking contrary instances; identifying clues and indicators. There are few straight answers. There is always more to be said. People are of almost infinite depth. In some instances, such as life histories, the discussion may be a voyage of discovery for the subject as well. They may find out new things about themselves, or come to new realizations which, in a curious way, empower them. One ex-teacher, who was constructing his life history with a researcher over a series of ten conversations, each lasting two to three hours, said:

Now the more we talk about it, the more the uncertain things become, you know, fixed. The minute I put it into my words, my words, I've got it. Now the only other way is for me to go away and write it all down, longhand. When I've written it, again it's mine. So that's what I believe about this discussion thing. If you don't write copious notes, if you're not that sort of person, then you must sit down and talk about it.

(Woods and Sikes, 1986, p. 176)

The interview, therefore, is not just a device for gathering information. It is a process of constructing reality to which both parties contribute and by which both are affected. Interviewers put something of themselves into an interview. It may be some contrasting or complementary experiences, perhaps, or some indications of their own personae, or at the very least they act as a sounding board. They come out reflecting on how the interview has affected their thoughts, ideas, viewpoints, theories. The researcher is, however, already looking to the next chain in the construction of the research, be it another interview in a different place, or at a different time, or with a different person; or be it observation, study of documents, questionnaire or whatever.

Thus the researcher is a finely tuned instrument with considerable skills, but is a person nonetheless, with values, beliefs and a self. Since these are all bound up with the research, it is a very personal business. It frequently has as much to do with the understanding of oneself as of the world. For this reason, research diaries are often kept, containing reflexive observations. Thus the report may include some of these observations in a research biography, which acknowledges that the researcher is part of the research process and does not somehow stand outside it.

The researcher's own background, interests and values will be influential in selecting a topic for research. There are, however, other criteria used in selecting subjects for study. These include balance, which will direct one to areas and subjects as yet uncovered; refinement and development, where previous studies have not exhausted the topic; relevance, where the research is deemed to be directed toward some social good.

The research subject is thus identified partly by personal interests and values, as are some choices within the study, such as what to concentrate on, whom to see and talk to, what one sees and notices. The conduct of the research, however, is subject to checks and balances. One of these is representative sampling.

Sampling

Representative sampling, or what Ball calls 'naturalistic sampling' (Ball, 1990b, p. 102), covers places, times and persons. Thus, if we were studying teachers' or pupils' perspectives, or the culture of a group, we would need to consider them in different settings, since it is well known that behaviour can differ markedly in different situations, as noted earlier. This goes for interviewing as well as for observation. The character of a discussion and the quality of material can show a marked contrast between an interview held in the formal circumstances of a teacher's office and one held in the informal ambience of a pub. The same point applies to time. Weekly and yearly cycles, for example, are critical in schools. If our research sampled at just the beginnings and ends of terms, weeks or days, we should end up with a distorted study if we were to claim our results applied more generally. Again, if we are seeking to represent a group in our findings, we should ensure that we have sampled across that group according to some appropriate criteria, which might be, for example, age, gender, ethnicity, or subject specialization.

Systematic sampling on this scale is not always possible, but at least the basis of one's sampling as far as it goes should be made clear. Sampling biases easily creep into qualitative work. Ball, for example, describes how he concentrated upon the academic teaching in the school and saw little of the 'non-academic' curriculum. He gave little attention to pastoral work or extra-curricular activities and observed only those lessons to which he could gain access. He admitted that his 'account of the school is as a result profoundly distorted' (Ball, 1984, p. 77). Hammersley also reflects on how, in his research, he made *ad hoc* decisions about which lessons to record, concentrated on oral aspects of classroom work, made irregular visits to the staffroom and indulged in uneven interaction with teachers. All of this raises questions about 'the representativeness of my data to which the lack of systematic sampling gave rise' (Hammersley, 1984, p. 51). In general, it is necessary to aim for 'intentional, systematic and theoretically guided' sampling (Hammersley, 1984, p. 53).

This cannot always be fully achieved in qualitative work because of (a) its initially largely exploratory nature; (b) problems of negotiating access; (c) problems of gathering and processing data using only one set of ears and eyes. Some unrepresentativeness is almost inevitable, therefore. Often, one has to make do with an 'opportunity sample' in those areas where access is offered; or a 'snowball sample', where the sample is developed through personal contact and recommendation. In all these cases the biases should be recognized and no inappropriate claims made.

Research as a construction

However rigorous the methods used, the research is always a construction. This is because researchers must put their own selves into the research and interpret what they see or hear. This is so however much one tries to disguise one's presence. King (1978) took refuge in the 'play house' in an infants' classroom so that he could better observe activity unaffected by his presence. Everyone knew he was there, however, and he had to make sense of what was happening. He would do this by observing, taking notes, talking to the teachers involved, writing up fieldnotes after the event, reflecting on them and doing some initial analysis, which might then guide further investigations, and so on. The research is thus gradually constructed over time. The people concerned, the researcher included, are continually making indications to each other, attributing meanings, interpreting symbols. How researchers do this depends, again, on the kind of self they bring to the interpretation - experiences undergone, interests and values, personal reference groups, affective disposition toward those studied, commitment to causes involved in the research.

This is most clearly illustrated in life histories. The subjects' memories, thoughts and perceptions are of unknown scope and depth, even to themselves. Accounts are built up through successive discussions over a period of time as the life history is reconstructed. A first discussion reveals some parameters and sparks off ideas that are pursued in more detail in the next, and so on, until no new material emerges. Previous conversations are reviewed for accuracy and completeness. Subject and researcher might work between meetings reflecting on the material, refining points, discovering new slants, spotting apparent inconsistencies and contradictions, attempting some preliminary analysis. Again the researcher does not stand above or outside this activity, but shares in it - not just as a trigger to release the other's thoughts, but as a participant in a particular kind of situation, where both parties project part of their selves into the interaction and both construct meanings from it.

How the subjects interpret situations depends on similar factors to those influencing the researcher to some degree, but of key importance is how they perceive the researcher. Delamont shows, by the different appearances she chose when first meeting different groups, how self-presentation might affect access:

When I saw heads I always wore a conservative outfit and real leather gloves. I had a special grey dress and coat, for days when I expected to see the head and some pupils. The coat was knee-length and very conservative-looking, while the dress was mini-length to show the pupils I knew what the fashion was. I would keep the coat on in the head's office, and take it off before I first met the pupils. When observing I tried to dress like the student teachers who were common in all the schools; no trousers, unladdered tights, and no make-up.

(Delamont, 1984, p. 25)

Similarly, it is necessary to know something about how subjects construct the situation with the researcher in it. For example, in interviewing pupils, it is possible they may interpret the situation as a counselling session, or as a spying manoeuvre (in the interests, perhaps, of the teaching staff, inspectorate or parents), or as an opportunity to promote various interests of their own (for example, to wreak revenge, or to secure favours).

Activity 35 (allow about 3 hours)

You should now read 'Self-doubt and soft data: social and technical trajectories in ethnographic fieldwork' by Stephen Ball (Article 3 in Reader 1). As you do so, note what Ball argues is distinctive about participant observation research. What role does he see the researcher's self playing in this type of work, and what is the significance of this for the issue of validity? What form do sampling decisions take in ethnographic research, and why are they important?

Validity

The validity of qualitative research commonly rests upon three main features:

- 1 unobtrusive measures to ensure data reflect the scene studied;
- 2 respondent validation;
- 3 triangulation.

Unobtrusive measures

Some research methods (such as questionnaires) require subjects to react to a stimulus. Unobtrusive measures are non-reactive. It would be difficult for a researcher to be completely unobtrusive, but the less the natural scene is disturbed, the less the danger of people reacting to the researcher's presence. This is one of the reasons why participant observation is a favoured approach among some qualitative researchers. Here, the researcher adopts a recognized role within the

institution, such as a teacher in a school, and follows all the normal processes required of that role. This has several advantages. It makes the researcher a member of the institution under study and thus reduces the distance between researcher and subjects. It gives the researcher access to the same places, people and events as the subjects, a key concern in qualitative research; it gives access to documents relevant to the institutional role, such as confidential reports and records, or children's schoolwork; it permits the use of a number of mechanical aids, such as tape-recorders and cameras, to help 'capture' events that can be analysed at leisure later; it provides personal first-hand experience of that role and a strong basis for understanding the perspectives of incumbents of that role. It might also meet an ethical point, in that one might feel, whatever the purposes and results of the research, a worthwhile contribution is being made to the life of the institution.

The advantages of participant observation outlined above must be balanced against certain disadvantages. If the researcher is a member of the institution before starting the research, a great deal will already be known about the institution, but it will be known mainly as an insider. Such knowledge will be invaluable for its authenticity, but might take a number of things for granted that others might consider problematic. It is therefore necessary to achieve an analytical distance and to render the situation 'anthropologically strange' for, as noted earlier, strangers' perceptions are often sharper than those of inmates. Reflectivity and personal diaries assist here. Collaboration work, involving perhaps colleagues observing one's teaching, have brought new insights.

In areas where one cannot gain direct access, one might have the aid of key informants. These are people within the institution under study with whom the researcher comes to form an especially close relationship. They identify with the researcher and the research objectives to such an extent that they almost become research assistants. The classic example, 'Doc' in Whyte's *Street Corner Society*, told the researcher:

That's right. You tell me what you want to see, and we'll arrange it. When you want some information, I'll ask for it, and you listen. When you want to find out their philosophy of life, I'll start an argument and get it for you. If there's something else you want to get, I'll stage an act for you. Not a scrap you know, but just tell me what you want, and I'll get it for you.

(Whyte, 1955, p. 292)

Clearly key informants can provide vast amounts of information. They provide access to hidden inside places, offer another set of eyes and ears, present an historical dimension. The danger is that one selects or acquires key informants in one's own image, thus compounding one's own biases. Either this should be recognized or one should deliberately try to cultivate a cross-section covering the population in question.

Another drawback is that qualitative research makes great demands on the researcher's energies and time and frequently presents a mass of confusing and intricate data which the researcher has to analyse. Whatever advantages participating brings, it adds to those demands. In the first place, it takes up valuable time. Second, it adds to one's responsibilities. One must meet the requirements of the role and must meet them regularly, on the prescribed terms and at stipulated times. Third, it increases the possibilities of conflict between the two roles - one's objectives as a teacher and those as a researcher may occasionally clash.

Hargreaves (1967) found he had to give up a large part of his 'carefully nurtured teacher-role' because, while participation aided his relationships with the teachers and his appreciation of their concerns, it affected his rapport with some of the pupils, a rapport that was necessary for his project. He therefore stopped teaching and 'from that point my relations with the boys improved to a remarkable extent'. Some tested him out with cheekiness, which he would 'immediately have crushed as a teacher', but when he 'failed to respond as they expected, these attempts at provocation ceased'. It was replaced, gradually, by a form of collusion. 'When they

discovered I would not report them for offences against the school rules which I had observed, the teacher-role began to diminish, and was replaced by a new form of respect and trust.' How did Hargreaves handle the role-infractions he observed or to which he was made privy? A convenient attack of blindness or deafness proved to be invaluable in resolving such problems' (Hargreaves, 1967, pp. 203--4).

Clearly, participating as a teacher may be counter-productive to an investigation into pupils. Participation as a pupil would appear to be ideally indicated here, but is not a practical proposition for most weathered researchers. As one would-be youth notes:

Another important personal feature which changes the research techniques a lot is the fact that I am 6 feet 4 inches tall and that most fourteen-year-olds in Sunderland are considerably smaller than that. This means that the sort of unobtrusive participant observation by hanging around on a corner with them was simply impossible. Rather it would have consisted of a totally different situation where [they] had suddenly picked up this large ally to use in street fights: the existence of this large ally would have grossly changed their actions.

(Corrigan, 1979, p. 14)

Some, though, have managed to do it to advantage and some have been awarded a status of honorary pupil' (Fuller, 1984). More usually one has to manufacture a special role.

It is not difficult to see why some researchers prefer non-participant observation, which today is the more common mode. Here, the researcher has only the role of researcher and observes situations of interest in that capacity. For example, a lesson may be observed from the back of a classroom, a school assembly from the back of the hall, or a staff meeting or playground from behind the sidelines. The researcher is, ideally, not part of these proceedings and adopts 'fly on the wall' techniques (for example, King's use of 'play house') to observe things as undisturbed by the presence of the researcher as possible.

Non-participant observation is a defence against 'going native': an over-identification with people's views so that one's perspective as a researcher is submerged beneath them. In ethnographic work, strong ties are made with the subjects of study. Indeed, we have seen that this is an indispensable requirement if we are to understand their ways of life in any depth. It is necessary, too, to empathize with people's views, to see and feel things as they do. The danger is clear. The empathy may take over and we may find ourselves according primacy to the views of a particular group, interpreting all other material through their eyes and romanticizing activities and beliefs. This is less likely to happen with non-participant observation. Not only does it keep the researcher from real involvement in a role, but by the same token it encourages the cultivation of a detachment necessary for the appraisal of material discovered and presented. This is one of the abiding dilemmas of participant observation - to become involved to the extent of being able to appreciate life as a native, yet to be able to become detached at will in order to be able to represent that life in its proper context. An awareness of the problem aids its resolution but, again, non-participant observation is a precaution for those who find their sympathies easily aroused to the extent where it colours their judgement.

Non-participation does not completely solve these problems, of course. And it also lacks the benefits of participation: ease of access (though key informants might, of course, be available to the non-participant as well as to participant observer); penetrating to the heart of the group; the satisfaction of contributing toward the function of the group or institution and the use of this contribution as a bargaining counter. Which approach one adopts depends on the kind of project and the character, personal disposition and circumstances of the researcher.

There is a sense, as we have seen, in which one is always participating. In the first place, it is difficult not to have an effect on the situation under observation, particularly in sensitive areas such as classrooms. Hargreaves, for example,

describes how, as soon as he began classroom observation, the teachers' perceptions of his role changed and hence their behaviour changed. He was no longer seen as a teacher, but more of an inspector. One teacher 'made the boys work quietly out of textbooks, talked in a whisper to boys at his desk; [another] usually set the form some written work and then joined me at the back of the room, where he chatted with me or told me jokes' (Hargreaves, 1967, p. 196). After one lesson, one teacher commented: 'They've got a bit noisy, haven't they? I think I'll cane a few when you've gone' (p. 17). However much one tries to reduce this effect, there is almost bound to be some influence, which then has to be taken into consideration. The non-participating observer, though not sharing in any of the roles under observation, is nonetheless part of the scene.

Second, one is always participating in the sense that, in any long-term research, it is difficult to avoid becoming involved in some way in the life of the group or institution. There are a number of problems associated with this. By appearing to be 'all things to all people' one runs the risk of being seen as insincere, two-faced and underhand. For example, in situations where deep conflict exists between teachers and pupils, empathizing with both sides in an attempt to understand their perspectives (as in the earlier example of blazer-ripping) can be mistaken for sympathizing and lead to trouble. In certain situations, empathizing with a group can be taken as legitimizing, or at least condoning, the group's behaviour. Where this involves rule- or law-breaking, there can be severe problems. Patrick (1973), for example, gave up his research on a criminal gang when his association with them threatened to involve him in criminal activity. In general, adopting a covert role in order to get as close as possible to the group under observation is regarded as ethically suspect. Most researchers work to a principle of 'informed consent': that is to say, the people being studied know something of what the research is about (by the very nature of qualitative work, it is impossible for them to know all), and agree to it taking place in the manner specified.

Respondent validation

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the standard for qualitative research, where the objective is to reconstruct events and the perspectives of those being studied, is the demonstration that the findings and the researcher's interpretations are credible to those who were involved. Who better to judge whether their views, understandings, feelings and experiences were being accurately represented? Thus Willis showed various drafts of his book to the 'lads' who were the subject of his research and included their reactions as an appendix. Here is one extract, which has the lads testifying to how closely Willis had represented their perspectives:

Joey: ... you were someone to pour our hearts out to. You were obviously as old as most of the staff, and yet... they were so far apart from us. They used to sit with us at dinner table but you couldn't really talk to them just 'cos of the fact that they were staff.

John: ... You could understand what they was sayin' and doin' like. Anything that happened you'd understand, like, if they'd done something wrong the night before, you'd just listen, understand, whereas teachers ... you know, they'd say, 'That's wrong' anyway, and you'd think, 'Don't say anymore about it'.

Bill: The main difference is, you listen to us, you want to know what we've got to say; they don't, none of them.

(Willis, 1977, p. 197)

Similarly, Mac an Ghail showed his manuscript to the students featuring in his research. There is nothing more heartening for a researcher to hear than:

Joanne: It's really good. I've read through most of it. I think that you have really captured what it's like for black kids at school.

(Mac an Ghail, 1988, p. 142)

Consider, however, the purport of the following two comments:

Judith: I mean it's bound to be biased, you being for black people but it was because of that, that we really talked to you as we really felt. You knew what you thought about us, you were more aware, but for most white people they hide it and pretend they see us just the same as them but at the same time they treat us differently. As long as you make it clear in your study where you stand then it's OK.

[...]

Judith: In a way you see our lives as being worse than we do because you have an alternative to measure it against. But in another way it's worse for us because you can get on with your life. Tomorrow you can leave Kilby and go to your white areas. But we are always black living in a racist society. You can't really know, feel, what it's like for a black woman. That's why I think that although what you have done is good, I think black women should carry out their own studies.

(Mac an Ghail, 1988, p. 143-4)

This is a reminder that we can never get into another's mind to see exactly how it is working, but these researchers have come as close as any to empathizing with their subjects, although, as Judith astutely observes, any 'bias' should be declared.

Respondent validation, however, may not always be appropriate or desirable. For example, where the subject of study is school processes rather than perspectives, the subjects' view of the research may be strongly influenced, if not completely dominated, by their role within the institution. Scarth reports the response of a 'working party' of seven of the teachers in the school of his research to two draft chapters on time-tabling and examinations:

The first discussion which focused on time-tabling was reduced to the Deputy Head responsible for time-tabling defining the arrangements and trying to identify staff members from their reported comments. The teachers, for their part, were put in the position of being either 'for' the school timetable or 'against' it. This polarisation of viewpoints was even more marked during the second seminar on examinations, and discussion frequently centred on personalities rather than issues. As a result, I was put in the position of, on the one hand, being asked to name the respondents, and on the other, defending staff members' criticisms of the Head and Deputy Head. I did not feel in a position to do either; I couldn't reveal confidential data and I wished to avoid being personally associated with teachers' comments cited in the text. I tried to direct discussion away from simply focusing on personalities by highlighting some of the general patterns across both departments and subjects. Unfortunately the general feeling at the end of the second seminar was such that future meetings were cancelled.

(Scarth, 1985, pp. 78-9)

Thus one may risk, on occasions, giving offence, being misinterpreted, or having one's material used for different purposes. It would never do, of course, to betray any confidences. Some respondent validation, however, is useful. Again it is a matter of judgement when, how and with whom it is used.

Triangulation

The major means of validating accounts and observations and, indeed, anything else in qualitative work is through 'triangulation'. The use of several methods to explore an issue greatly increases the chances of accuracy. For example, we might interview a head teacher with regard to policy concerning new intakes of pupils. The head's view of that policy would be interesting. It would be far more interesting, though, if we also had the benefit of other vantage points: for example, the various meetings that are held with parents, pupils and teachers, the views of

people in these groups, as well as observations of aspects of the policy in action. We should then have a much better idea of the accuracy of the account by the headteacher, its comprehensiveness, strengths and weaknesses, and the actual effect of the policy.

When one wishes to study a teacher's performance in a particular lesson, another form of triangulation would be to:

- discuss with the teacher, beforehand, what was planned for the lesson;
- observe the lesson as it happened;
- discuss with the teacher afterwards what had happened and why, if aims had been modified and how far achieved, etc.

One form of this was practised by Hargreaves *et al.* in their study of how teachers and pupils think about rules in school. Since most of these rules are implicit, rarely articulated or even thought about, the researchers had to take care not to 'impose a structure that would misrepresent and distort common-sense thinking rather than explicate it' (Hargreaves *et al.*, 1975, p. 45). They accordingly used a variety of methods over a lengthy period of participation, including asking teachers and pupils about rules and observing lessons. Teachers were also asked to comment on events that had occurred during the lesson or things that were said in the lesson. These commentaries were then, in turn, analysed.

In yet another form of triangulation, Elliott and Adelman (Open University, 1975) propose that role-partners, such as teachers, pupils and researchers, should cross check each others' accounts to expose discrepancies and inconsistencies.

Lynda Measor gives another illustration.

What is happening is that I'm getting data back about Teacher A from Teacher B or from other person C. This then informs my next set of questions at the next interview. For example, I interviewed D. R. Then I got information about him via the Labour Party and from another teacher. This changed my view of the man somewhat, or to be more accurate, it led me to consider another view of the man, and it led me into a different sort of question with him to get more data on those areas of his personality and attitudes. It also leads into theoretical issues, like the fact that he must have exceptional role-distance qualities. The man in the interview was so very different from the man I've been told about. (personal communication)

One of the commonest forms of triangulation is to combine interviews with observation. Observation will test and fill out accounts given in interviews and vice versa. For example, during observations of a games period, I noticed that one of the main principles that structure pupils' experience appeared to be the fear of being 'shown up' (Woods, 1979). Accounts of being 'shown up' were repeated, voluntarily, and explained at greater length in interviews, where researcher and pupils were able to explore the nature of the experience, when it occurred and whom it concerned. I also observed lessons and other areas of the pupils' day and made particular note of any such incidents. This put me in a stronger position, not only to delineate these incidents accurately, but also to assess the pupils' accounts for bias, exaggeration and misrepresentation. In other words, it gave me a vantage point from which to view those accounts and to consider what they were 'doing' for the pupils - how far, for example, the pupils were 'letting off steam' or 'getting back at the teachers', or even, perhaps, just 'trying it on' with the researcher.

The combination of interviews with observation also permits a fuller participation. During discussions with pupils, for example, another dominant experience I was made aware of was 'being bored'. Time and again, pupils described their boredom, putting great feeling, at times, into their expressions: 'It's so boring, here!'; 'Those lessons were such a drag, what a bore!'. Such expressions brought the realization that the term is actually onomatopoeic: 'It's so bo-or-ing!' delivered with all the pent-up pain and frustration accumulated over a lengthy period. Even so, the point would not have been fully appreciated without the researcher actually observing some of the circumstances particularly conducive to the experience. In these

lessons, with the teacher talking for hour-long stretches in a dull monotone, with very little participation by the pupils, some would occasionally turn to the researcher (sitting at the back of the class) with the same pained expression on their faces as when describing their experience of boredom. He knew exactly how they felt. Observation, then, grounds the related experience in a real-life event.

At this point, you should read two further articles. In their different ways, these illustrate the operation of the principles discussed in Section 6.1 and show the authors' experiences of the methods outlined in Section 6.2. Be sure to give full consideration to the questions attached to each reading before you move on.

The first reading, Lacey's review of his work on *Hightown Grammar*, concerns one of the outstanding works in qualitative research over the past twenty-five years. Lacey was one of the first to move inside the school to study school processes, school organization and its effects, and pupils' and teachers' perspectives. In this article, he discusses his research methodology and he spells out the possibilities and problems of participant observation. He describes how his role changed from teacher-centred to researcher-centred as he became more involved with the students, holding informal discussion groups with them, visiting their homes, inviting them to his home and running a school cricket team. These tactics 'brought an increase, gradual at first and then steep, in the amount of information received about pupils'. Some he studied included most of a group of anti-school boys. They 'provided without doubt the most stimulating and entertaining discussions I enjoyed in the school. The discussions had a life of their own'. Lacey also shows how he avoided 'going native': that is, being taken over by the perspectives of a particular group; how he had to teach in order to appreciate the strains that on occasion turned reasonable, kindly men into bellowing, spiteful adversaries'. Yet, although Lacey's insights demonstrated the penetrative power of participant observation, he considered his main achievement to be the integration of a range of methods, including the use of school documents, questionnaires, sociometric data, interviews, case studies and respondent validation. He shows how these fed into each other to form 'a spiral of understanding ... escalating insights through moving backwards and forward between observation and analysis and understanding'.

Activity 36 (allow about 3 hours)

You should now read 'Problems of sociological fieldwork:: a review of the methodology of *Hightown Grammar*' by C. Lacey (Article 8 in Reader 1).

As you read, pay particular attention to:

- Lacey's personal statement (note the involvement of 'the researcher's self');
- the underlying purpose of the research;
- problems of bias and how he counteracted them;
- his general research strategy;
- problems of role conflict;
- the combining of methods and their integration in the analysis.

When you have finished reading the article:

- (a) note down its strengths and weaknesses;
 - (b) begin compiling a list of the potential strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research in general.
-

The next reading is from Jennifer Nias's book, *Primary Teachers Talking: a study of teaching as work*, one of the most influential and well-regarded qualitative studies of recent years. The book presents a detailed account of the personal and professional experiences of primary teachers in England and Wales. It is a longitudinal study, based on interviews with teachers during their first decade of work and a second set of interviews ten years later. The aim is to provide an account of primary teaching as work from the perspectives of its practitioners; to try

to 'capture the lived realities of teaching as an occupation'. The book illustrates the massive investment of teachers' 'selves' in their work, shows the main factors that contribute to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and looks at teachers' relationships with their colleagues. It reveals what it is like to 'feel like a teacher', showing that it includes learning to live with dilemma, contradiction and paradox; but that their resolution can bring the highest intrinsic rewards.

Activity 37 (allow about 3 hours)

If you have not already done so, you should now read 'Primary teachers talking: a reflexive account of longitudinal research' by J. Nias (Article 9 in Reader1). (This article is also included in the set book *Doing Educational Research*, and you may have chosen to read it for Activity 21. If you read it earlier, use your notes to do this activity, revisiting the article where necessary.)

The article discusses some of the main methodological features of the research from conception to finish. As you read, consider the following:

- (a) How Nias illustrates the principles presented in Sections 6.1 and 6.2:
 - naturalism and natural settings;
 - meanings, perspectives, understandings;
 - emphasis on process;
 - inductive analysis and grounded theory;
 - the researcher's self (commitment, skills, self);
 - validity.
- (b) The part played by chance.
- (c) The approach to interviewing.
- (d) How she went about making sense of the data.
- (e) Problems of authorship.
- (f) Strengths and weaknesses of the research.

Activity 38 (allow about 30 minutes)

On the basis of what you have read so far, note down what you consider to be (a) the strengths and (b) the weaknesses of qualitative research.

6.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ASSESSED

What potential strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research have you noted? On the credit side is the attention to detail, the ability to embrace both verbal and non-verbal behaviour, to penetrate fronts, uncover meanings and reveal the subtlety and complexity of cases or issues. These might reveal conflicts, discrepancies, inconsistencies, contradictions, but these things are typical of everyday life. A multidimensional picture is built up. Qualitative research is strong in portraying perspectives and conveying feelings and experiences. It encompasses processes, natural environments and tends to be less reactive than other forms of research. Actions are contextualized within situations and theory is generated from the empirical data. Although individual qualitative studies might be concerned with single cases, collectively they might form an archive that then becomes available for reinterpretation. Hargreaves (1988), for example, working from a number of existing qualitative studies, developed a different explanation of teaching quality from 'official' ones, which placed emphasis on the personal qualities of teachers. He was interested in why teachers adopted transmission patterns of teaching and suggested that the reasons lay in the social circumstances that attended teaching (such as large cohorts of pupils, low levels of resources, a mandated curriculum) and that lay beyond teachers' control. The different implications for policy of the two theories should be clear. Ball (1987) similarly draws on a number of studies to generate a theory of school organization.

You will have picked out of the Nias reading other strengths, notably: (a) the way her own self (experience, interest, disposition of mind) related to the research and gave her opportunities to advance the work; (b) how the quality of her data 'challenged' her to search for interconnections and she found 'unexpected reefs under my feet'; (c) the benefits of time to think (Nias's study is unusual in its longevity, but as the researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research, it is important to build 'thinking time' into studies); (d) the nature of qualitative data as a seed-bed for ideas, and chaos as a prelude to creativity; (e) the recognition of weaknesses in the study, but with the emphasis with regard to the value of the work on the insights it has generated and how they will be used by others.

As for difficulties and weaknesses, it has been argued that single qualitative studies cannot provide grounds for generalizing across cases, though we have seen how collectively they can be used in this respect. Also, a single case can be the beginning of a general argument, or develop concepts that can be applied to other studies, or have serious repercussions for one claiming universality. Another critique is that immersion in the depths of a qualitative study might lead to 'macro-blindness'. That is to say, the researcher might offer explanations in terms of the situation itself and be unaware of possibly more powerful forces operating externally. Equally, the researcher might be so successful in penetrating the culture of a group that he or she 'goes native' and sees everything from the perspective of the group.

Qualitative research can be a high-risk, low-yield enterprise. Negotiating access, attending to sampling, working out whom to interview and what to observe, continuously refining one's research design, can all bring worries. A big concern is 'what sense to make of it all'. Without the benefits of the time enjoyed by Nias, one might not find any 'reefs beneath one's feet' and drown in the maelstrom as a result. Qualitative studies are often accused of being impressionistic, subjective, biased, idiosyncratic and lacking in precision. Although this is a charge that might be made of particular studies, there are rigorous procedures available to withstand the charge, such as triangulation, due attention to sampling, documentation, appropriate claims, reflectivity, and tightness of fit between data collection, analysis and theory. Standards vary widely in these respects among published work. Many overclaim, seeking perhaps to prove a general case by a single instance, even in some instances by a single quotation. They might engage in 'selective perception': that is, seeing what they want to see, turning a blind eye, albeit unconsciously, to other material that might challenge that line of inquiry. They might not make their sampling or selection procedures clear. They might build up a case which interweaves different kinds of evidence that collectively sound convincing, but on closer examination reveal weaknesses. The researchers might tell you nothing of themselves, either as an oversight, or perhaps because the research has been non-reflexive. Clearly, therefore, we need to compile and examine research reports carefully.

The next article you read is a fairly typical example of qualitative work. It is based on research carried out in four inner-city primary schools. Wright aimed to monitor and document the experiences of black children, particularly their interactions with their white peers and with their teachers.

Activity 39 (allow about 6 hours)

You should now read 'Early education: multiracial primary school classrooms' by C. Wright (Article 2 in Reader 2). As you read, make a critical evaluation of the article. What are its strengths and weaknesses? Your approach should be both appreciative, looking for ways in which the author illustrates the principles of qualitative inquiry as discussed earlier, and critical, considering limitations and any deficiencies. The following questions will help to guide your evaluation.

- Is sufficient and satisfactory evidence advanced for the claims that are made?
- Has sufficient attention been paid to sampling of people, place and time?
- What are the chances of another observer at another time yielding similar results?

- What are the possibilities that much of this is selective perception on the part of the researcher?
- Are alternative explanations considered and discounted?
- Are the findings tested?
- Are the findings 'triangulated' by the use of a number of research methods?
- What does the article suggest to you about racial inequality in the classroom?

When you have finished this activity, turn to Section 6.5, 'Comments on activities', where you will find my commentary.

Summary

In this section we have considered the researcher's self as the main research instrument, an instrument that requires fine tuning. Researchers' skills include: social management, important for negotiating access and establishing and maintaining rapport; the ability to be unobtrusive, but to 'make things happen' if and when required; observational skills of scanning and discernment; active listening; and the skill of recording, by mind as well as machine. The researcher's self has its own values and background and these are influential in selecting topics for study. There are, however, other criteria, such as the need for balance. The research should also be subject to rigorous scrutiny, including triangulation, sampling and reflexivity. Yet the research is always a construction, part of the rigour being how explicit this construction is made by the researcher. Another consideration is that the researcher may be perceived differently by different subjects. It is vital to know their perspectives in this matter in order to interpret their contributions to the research.

Next, we considered validity. First, there is the strategy of taking unobtrusive measures to preserve, as far as possible, the natural setting. This includes adopting measures to make the situation anthropologically strange. We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of participant and non-participant observation. Second, I argued that respondent validation has its uses, though it is not always suitable. Third, we considered the strategy of 'triangulation', the combining of methods, researchers, situations or times to add to the strength of the research.

Finally, we reviewed the potential strengths and weakness of qualitative research and evaluated a recent study. In what follows we shall go on to consider the analysis of data produced by these methods.

6.4 ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The articles by Lacey and Nias in Reader 1 have already given you insights into analysis. In qualitative research, as Lacey makes clear, analysis frequently takes place at the same time and in interaction with data collection. Many consider it a mistake to go on accumulating data without examining it from time to time to see if any major themes, issues or categories are emerging. These, in turn, will then direct future data collection in the process known as 'progressive focusing'. Lacey explains this very well in his 'escalation of insights'. If this is not done, the researcher risks becoming swamped in data that are difficult to analyse because of their bulk and all-inclusiveness. Many data may have to be jettisoned and all that is left may be low-level description. Principled analysis helps to organize the data and to generate insights that aid their understanding. In turn, this may lead to new or reformulated theory.

I have organized this section in three parts:

- 1 preliminary and primary analysis;
- 2 category and concept formation;
- 3 the generation of theory.

Preliminary and primary analysis

As interview transcripts are made, or fieldnotes of observation compiled, or documents assembled, the researcher continuously examines the data, perhaps highlighting certain points in the text or making comments in the margins. These may identify what seem to be important points, and note contradictions and inconsistencies, any common themes that seem to be emerging, references to related literature, comparisons and contrasts with other data and so on. The researcher is not just collecting data, but thinking about them and interacting with them. Much of these first attempts at speculative analysis will probably be discarded, but some ideas will no doubt take shape as data collection and analysis proceed. Much of this early activity may appear chaotic and uncoordinated, but as Nias notes in the earlier reading, chaos is a prolific seed-bed for ideas.

Sometimes, because of pressure of time, the notes one makes may be little more than a scribbled comment, or a one-word 'indicator'; at other times, particularly as the research goes on, one might write longer notes or memos, summarizing parts of data that go together but have come from different sources, or rehearsing ideas at greater length. The following three examples illustrate the range of these preliminary reflections.

The first example is illustrated in Figure 2, a marked-up page of an interview, showing the researcher's first reactions on things to note. You should examine this now.

The following extract from an interview with a teacher about the members of his form gives another example of a researcher's initial analysis. The researcher took notes at the interview (this one was not taped) and wrote them up the same evening. A few days later, when time permitted, he reflected on his comments and added some notes.

Teacher

Tim Brown - very disappointing. I noted a decline last year and I spoke to him about it; and he's a right lout isn't he? Always shuffling around with his hands in his pockets, instead of being a nice young man, as he was, but he's far from ...

Researcher

Immediately he reveals his conception of the ideal pupil, at least the behavioural one. Note the importance of appearance and the choice of terminology - a 'right lout' is counterpoised to a 'nice young man' - and a great deal seems to be inferred from his appearance and demeanour. There is a great deal of this among the staff ...he could be subscribing to my double standard hypothesis and assuming that kids may well be different at school from what they are at home; it is what he expects that is important, and the very fact that he sees fit to divide his comment into 'academic' and 'behaviour'. So I conclude, tentatively, that JG is subscribing to the prevailing image of the ideal pupil and that his choice of words and unqualified use of them is an indication of his commitment to that ideal.

These, then, are the first tentative steps in analysis. They may have a certain untidiness about them, their object being to suggest lines of analysis, to point the way to connections with other data and with the literature, to indicate the direction of future enquiries, rather than to round off in neat, considered packages.

Our third example (p. 105) is a more considered note or memo, seeking to launch and develop an idea across a range of data. It is a communication from Lynda Measor, prepared during the course of her work for *Teacher Careers* (Sikes *et al.*, 1985). It is presented as it was written in order to illustrate the emergence of a new theme, carrying with it a sense of excitement at a new discovery, speculation at the possibilities, but also hesitancy in case, after further consideration, it is not such a good idea after all!

i.e. Teacher as 'chief clown' Martin Glass (Chief Clown)

Humorous start to discussion, establishing rapport

M: Yes, some people said type-casting again.

P: Type-casting again - member of staff, yes, and the only member of staff actually in the production.

M: Yes, it was very interesting.

Open question, but aligned to teacher role. P: Well, I think yes, that's what I'd like to ask you about. I mean what was it like being a member of staff amongst all these young people?

M: Well I think really that one of the amazing things of the whole thing was ~~that there were any barriers of any sort.~~ I think there must have been ~~originality, right at the very beginning,~~ although its very difficult to remember exactly what it was like then because things have moved on so much from there, but I can remember right at the very beginning, before - when the chief toys were selected, after all the auditions - we had about two sessions together in a distant room which were ~~sort of breaking down barriers sessions~~ and it was some of the techniques that Sally's learnt at, you know, college and so on, but there were sort of I suppose like ~~things in a way where you had to reach to each other and approach to everyone else - for example, one of the techniques was - think of something which is important to you that's happened in the recent past, or something in your life and tell it to someone else -~~ ~~some either have opted out totally or joined in equally, which I chose~~ ~~to do~~ And then we had things like - choose one of the people here, in the group, and ~~pick one somebody that you like~~ and a quality that ~~you like~~ about that person and tell everyone else about it. Little things like that and before we actually started, amongst the chief toys there was already working a sort of ~~group~~ a sense of ~~group~~ and virtually from the beginning I think - specifically with the chief toys but even later on gradually with all the other toys - there were no us and them barriers at all, it wasn't me, a member of staff, plus the pupils - we were just other different actors, that was it, and really they referred to me by my Christian name and so on and there were no barriers.

No barriers (one aspect of Communitas?)

Teacher strategies to induce 'togetherness' & 'break barriers'

plenty of evidence

Communitas

Equal status roles - no hierarchy, symbolised by

development

Note - pressures on decision point below

NB problems of method

decision point

easing into new roles, and developing the culture of the group

Figure 2 Page of an interview marked up by the researcher

4.1.83

A new idea, and as yet not very well thought out, but here goes. Also I'm not certain if it has been used and talked about by interactionists as I'll try and indicate later. I know the 'bibliography' in other fields - mainly political theory actually. I'm working towards a notion of 'special events' in the individual's life. This would connect into the theme B we have discussed, that of 'critical periods'.

Methodology

How did I come across the idea? As I'm building up numbers of interviews, that is I interview the same person lots of times, I've noticed that they repeat their account of certain incidents, usually fairly important ones in their lives. The other salient factor is that the account is given in the same words each time, with remarkably little variation. In addition this kind of repeating of tales is elicited most often when there has been a gap in my interviewing of a few weeks, so the narrative has gone cold. They cannot immediately recall exactly what they told me before. Then I get the repetition of incidents, and the repetition of phrases, e.g.:

- 1 Matt Bruce on being the leader of the invasion force into Jersey and the way that got him introduced into schools on Jersey.
- 2 Maggie Corbin on the picture in her portfolio of her father; he had a C.P. badge of the Soviet hammer and sickle in his lapel and as a result the headmistress of Varndean, who was interviewing her, found out she was a Communist Party member herself.
- 3 There actually are quite a number in R. C. Clarke, and in Reeves.

Explanations and ideas

It might simply be that the repetition of incidents is due to lapses in memory, especially as people are getting older, that would not be surprising. But there is a problem there, because it fails to explain why these incidents should be repeated in exactly the same phraseology. Why doesn't the lapse of memory extend to that too? Why also is it that it is only certain things, certain incidents, that get repeated?

So maybe we can work towards a notion of 'special events' in people's lives, 'key incidents' yes, around which pivotal decisions revolve, incidents which lead to major decisions or directions being taken.

But it seems to me that there is something else of interest too, and that is what people make of these incidents. A range of devices seem to be employed to make these incidents 'special' or more accurately 'more special'. I'm afraid I delve back into folkloric stuff again; people seem to make a kind of mystique hang around these incidents and events, they make them out of the ordinary, they bestow special 'meaning' and special 'status' upon them. They seem to do this by a variety of oral devices, storytelling, ornate tale-making devices, which have the effect of drawing the listener's attention to them. Humour is used too, or more accurately 'wit'; humorous short phrases surround the telling of the event, and again these act as a signal flag, what Lewis called an 'alerting factor'. I'm also reminded of Sykes' material you found in the article on tale-telling in the factory - some of those devices seem to be at work.

The device seems at a theoretical level to be involved with putting meaning, organization, shape to a life, trying to understand a career? I picked up the idea of 'special event' however from political theory (again I'm afraid it's my thesis material). It comes from people like Sorel and Edelman. They discuss it in terms of the political life of a nation, and point to the way that particular events in that nation's history become special. Bastille Day to the French, and the taking of the Winter Palace to the Russians. It's a bit harder to do for England but maybe the Battle of Britain, or Dunkirk, as an example. These events do get a lot of attention anyway; they are meant to have meaning for the citizens of a nation, in that sense they are 'special'. But for political theorists it is the secondary devices which describe them which are equally significant. It is the film, a TV repetitious coverage, and the telling the tale again and again by many media, which helps build up the mystique. Telling the tale, reciting events, helps make the thing 'remade', 'different' and special. In fact there is more to this from classical theorists, especially those on Greece, with a whole lot of stuff about 'Kerygma', which might I suppose be relevant. It's all about events - real events, being seen as revealing underlying purposes and directions. In a people like the British, who have been very affected by Judaic-Christian and then Darwinian notions of onward progress and purpose underlying it, we might be able to see something of that socialization. Anyway that may be getting too fanciful. You may think the whole thing is too fanciful.

(Measor, 1983, personal communication)

The research team did not consider the idea fanciful. In fact Pat Sikes was able to provide further substantiation from her own data and the theme was written up as one of the key features of a teacher's career. Discovery of the theme was made possible by certain clues - repetition of the incident, use of the same words. There is also something special about the words used, which put one on the alert.

Other clues might be irregularities that one observes, strange events, certain things that people say and the way they say them, things that get people excited, angry, surprised. In the researcher is the recognition that 'something is up', prompting the use of a 'detective's nose' for putting the available pieces of the jigsaw together to form a larger, more meaningful picture. For example, Measor and Woods were cued in to the importance of the myths that surrounded school transfer because a number of pupils prefaced their comments with remarks such as: 'I have heard that...'; 'They tell me that...'; 'There is this story that...'. Clearly, these accounts were connected and there was a special quality to them (Measor and Woods, 1984).

In *The Divided School*, my examination of 'teacher survival' led to the theory that, in situations where constraints on action exceeded the expectations of strong commitment, a struggle for survival would result (Woods, 1979). The theory was initiated by some observations of what appeared to be very strange behaviour. One of these was a chemistry lesson where the teacher taught for seventy minutes, complete with experiment and blackboard work, while the pupils manifestly ignored him. They were clearly doing other things. Only in the last ten minutes of the lesson did they dutifully record the results in their exercise books at his dictation. In another instance, a teacher showed a class a film, even though it was the wrong film that had been delivered and had nothing remotely to do with the subject. Such events seemed to cry out for explanation. Why did people behave in these strange ways?

Inconsistencies and contrasts are other matters that arouse interest. Why, for example, should teachers change character so completely between staffroom and classroom, as Lacey noted? Why do they lay claim to certain values and beliefs in the one situation and act out values and beliefs of strong contrast in another? Why do they behave with such irrationality and such pettiness on occasions? Why do pupils 'work' with one teacher and 'raise hell' with another, as Turner (1983) noted? From this latter observation, Turner came to certain conclusions about pupils' interests and school resources and important refinements to notions of 'conformity' and 'deviance'. The investigation of key words, as discussed previously, is another common method for unpacking meanings.

Category and concept foundation

There comes a time when the mass of data embodied in fieldnotes, transcripts and documents has to be ordered in some kind of systematic way, usually by classifying and categorizing. At an elementary level, this simply applies to the data one has. There may be no concept formation, importation or discovery of theory, or creation of new thoughts at this stage. The object is to render one's material in a form conducive to those pursuits. This means ordering data in some kind of integrated, exhaustive, logical, succinct way.

The first step is to identify the major categories, which, in turn, may fall into groups. The data can then be marshalled behind these. What the categories are depends on the kind of study and one's interests. They may be to do with perspectives on a particular issue, certain activities or events, relationships between people, situations and contexts, behaviours and so forth.

The test of the appropriateness of such a scheme is to see whether most of the material can be firmly accommodated within one of the categories and, as far as is possible, within one category alone. Also, the categories should be at the same level of analysis, as should any subcategories. One usually has to have several shots at this before coming to the most appropriate arrangement, reading and re-reading notes and transcripts and experimenting with a number of formulations. It may be helpful to summarize data, tabulate them on a chart, or construct figures and

diagrams. Such distillation helps one to encapsulate more of the material in a glance as it were and thus aids the formulation of categories.

The following are some fairly typical examples of categorization.

Example 1

Paul Willis (1977) 'Elements of a culture' from *Learning to Labour*. These were the major features of 'the lads' culture:

- opposition to authority and rejection of the conformist;
- the informal group;
- dossing, blagging and wagging;
- having a 'laff';
- boredom and excitement;
- sexism;
- racism.

Under these headings, Willis reconstructed the lads' outlook on life, using liberal portions of transcript to build up a graphic and evocative picture. Notice that the categories include a mixture of the lads' own terms, which alerted the researcher to major areas of activity, and Willis' own summarizing features.

Example 2

John Beynon (1984) "'Sussing out" teachers: pupils as data gatherers'. Beynon observed a class of boys during all their lessons in the first half-term of their first year at comprehensive school. The general interest at first was in 'initial encounters' between boys and teachers. He became interested in 'the strategies the boys employed to find out about classrooms and categorize teachers; the specific nature of the "knowledge" they required; and the means they employed to (in their words) "suss-out" teachers' (p. 121). He found there was a main group of boys who used a wide variety of 'sussing' strategies. One of his first tasks, therefore, was to organize his data and identify the kinds of strategies. He found six major groups:

- 1 group formation and communication;
- 2 joking;
- 3 challenging actions (verbal).;
- 4 challenges (non-verbal);
- 5 interventions
- 6 play.

Within these, he put forward sub-groups of activities. For example:

Joking

- open joking;
- jokes based on pupils' names;
- risqué joking;
- lavatorial humour;
- repartee and wit;
- set pieces;
- covert joking;
- 'backchat' and 'lip';
- closed joking;
- Michelle: a private joke.

This, then, shows an organization of data using categories and subcategories, each being graphically described by classroom observations, notes and recorded dialogue and interaction. The effect is to re-create 'what it was like' for these pupils and their teachers and to show the considerable depth and range of their 'sussing' activities.

Example 3

Howard Gannaway (1976) 'Making sense of school'. One of the questions raised in the construction of categories is the interconnections between them. There had been a number of studies of pupils' views of teachers which simply identified certain prominent features. Gannaway was concerned to identify priorities and interrelationships among his categories. He summarized his conclusions in Figure 3.



Figure 3 An evaluation scheme for teachers

Activity 40 (allow about 4 hours)

In this activity you are required to attempt your own analysis of an interview. The interview in question is one of a series that was carried out in researching an outstandingly successful production of the musical *Godspell* put on by Roade School, Northamptonshire.

The Appendix to this section contains an introduction to the interview and a transcript.

- 1 Read the introduction to the interview.
- 2 Listen to the interview on side 1 of the audio-cassette, following the transcript as you do so. It is important to listen to the interview, because the transcript

does not convey mood, strength of feeling, subtle inflections of voice, hesitations, etc. - all of which might be significant in the analysis.

- 3 Study the transcript more carefully. Consider:
 - (a) What did the interviewee, Martyn, gain from the experience?
 - (b) Why did he consider the production such an outstanding success?
 - (c) If you had a chance to re-interview Martyn, what points would you wish to follow up?
 - (d) Note any strengths and limitations in the interviewing technique. (You may find it useful to revise the points made on interviewing in 'Skills of the researcher' in Section 6.2.)
 - 4 Now compare your analysis with mine in Section 6.5, 'Comments on activities'. Note that there are no single correct answers to these questions. Though our answers, especially to questions (a) and (b), might be expected to show some similarities, we might spot some different things and we might organize our answers in different, but equally valid, ways.
-

When you read 'The Magic of *Godspell*' in Activity 41, you will see how this interview fits within the larger framework of the analysis of the whole event. You will also see how the *Godspell* event was compared with others to produce two lines of theoretical interpretation. You should, therefore, be able to see the whole generative process from initial interview, through primary analysis, to secondary analysis involving the identification of core categories and, eventually, to theory.

The generation of theory

Some qualitative studies do not proceed beyond the construction of models and typologies. Even so, this is a useful exercise, since it ensures that notions like 'sussing out' (see Example 2 above) have substance and delineates their major forms. We should want to go on from there, however, if we had the time and resources, to consider why 'sussing out' occurs and why it takes this particular form. The research becomes more theoretical as it moves from 'how' to 'why' questions. To answer these questions we should need to consider three things.

First, we need to seek to understand events from the point of view of the participants and try to discover the pupils' intentions. The second factor is incidence. One would want to know when and where 'sussing out' took place and with whom. Is it limited to initial encounters between teachers and pupils? If it is occurring at other times, another explanation is required. Under what sorts of circumstances does it occur, with what kinds of teachers and what kinds of pupils? Are all pupils involved, or only some? What proportion of the pupils' behaviour is taken up with this kind of activity? This is the contextual aspect. Comparisons need to be made with other sorts of activity. Theory and methodology interact, the emerging theory guiding the next part of the investigation. If there is similar activity elsewhere then the theory may have to be revised.

Third, what are the consequences of sussing-out? The theory would lead us to expect that where the required knowledge was ascertained, where teachers justified their claims to being able to teach and to control, different, more 'settled' behaviour would ensue. Where it was not, the behaviour would presumably continue and perhaps intensify since the boundaries of tolerance would be being seen as lying further and further back. If this is not the case, again the theory may have to be revised.

It is also necessary to explore alternative theories. In the case of 'sussing-out' one would need to consider the possibility that the behaviour was a cultural product (for example, of male, working-class or ethnic culture) or an institutional product (that is, a function of a particular kind of school organization). Several of these possibilities, of course, may be involved: that is, the behaviour may be and probably is multi-functional.

Comparative analysis

The development of the theory proceeds typically through comparative analysis. Instances are compared across a range of situations, over a period of time, among a number of people and through a variety of methods. Attention to sampling is important if the theory being formulated concerns a particular population. Thus comparisons are made among a representative set. Negative cases are sought, for these might perhaps invalidate the argument or suggest contrary explanations. These comparisons may be made both inside and outside the study. These kinds of comparisons, however, can also be used for other purposes - establishing accurate evidence, establishing empirical generalizations, specifying a concept (bringing out the distinctive elements or nature of the case) and verifying theory.

Theorizing begins from the first day of field work with the identification of possible significant events or words, as we saw earlier, leading eventually to identification of categories. As categories and concepts are suggested by the data, so they prefigure the direction of the research in a process known as 'theoretical sampling'. This is to ensure that all categories are identified and filled or groups fully researched. Thus Mac an Ghaill (1988) followed the identification by observation of an anti-school group, the 'Warriors', with the collection of material from school reports and questionnaires on their attitudes to school, which enabled him to build case histories. This is another good illustration of how theory and methodology interrelate, leading to an 'escalation of insights' (Lacey, 1976).

To aid this process the researcher becomes steeped in the data, but at the same time employs devices to ensure breadth and depth of vision. These include the compilation of a field diary, a running commentary on the research with reflections on one's personal involvement; further marginal comments on fieldnotes, as thoughts occur on re-reading them; comparisons and contrasts with other material; further light cast by later discoveries; relevance to other literature; notes concerning validity and reliability; more *aides-memoire*, memos and notes, committing thoughts to paper on interconnections among the data; and some possible concepts and theories. Consulting the literature is an integral part of theory development. It helps to stimulate ideas and to give shape to the emerging theory, thus providing both commentary on, and a stimulus to, study.

Consulting colleagues, for their funds of knowledge and as academic 'sounding-boards', is also helpful. The 'sounding-board' is an important device for helping to articulate and give shape to ideas. What may seem to be brilliant insights to the researcher may be false promises to others. The critical scrutiny of one's peers at this formative stage is very helpful. It may be obtained by discussion (the mere fact of trying to articulate an idea helps give it shape), by circulating papers, by giving seminars.

Another important factor is time. The deeper the involvement, the longer the association, the wider the field of contacts and knowledge, the more intense the reflection, the stronger the promise of 'groundedness'. As Nias remarks in the reading you studied for Activity 37:

The fact that I have worked for so long on the material has enabled my ideas to grow slowly, albeit painfully. They have emerged, separated, recombined, been tested against one another and against those of other people, been rejected, refined, re-shaped. I have had the opportunity to think a great deal over 15 years, about the lives and professional biographies of primary teachers and about their experience of teaching as work. My conclusions, though they are in the last resort those of an outsider, are both truly 'grounded' and have had the benefit of slow ripening in a challenging professional climate.

(Nias, 1991, p. 162)

Nias reminds us that a great deal of thinking has to go into this process and that this is frequently painful, though ultimately highly rewarding. Wrestling with mounds of accumulating material, searching for themes and indicators that will make some

sense of it all, taking some apparently promising routes, only to find they are blind alleys, writing more and more notes and memos, re-reading notes and literature for signs and clues, doing more field work to fill in holes or in the hope of discovering some beacon of light, presenting tentative papers that receive well-formulated and devastating criticisms - all these are part and parcel of the generation of theory.

Grounded theory has not been without its critics. Brown, for example, has argued that the originators of grounded theorising, Glaser and Strauss, are not clear about the nature of grounded theory, nor about the link between such theory and data. They refer to categories and their properties and to hypotheses as 'theory'. Their examples are of a particular kind of data - classificatory, processual - amenable to that kind of analysis, but 'some phenomena involve much greater discontinuity in either time or space or in the level of the systems studied' (Brown, 1973, p. 6). Greater immersion in the field is unlikely to yield useful theories here. Equally plausible alternative explanations from elsewhere may be available, so questions of how one decides among them (that is, methodological issues) must be considered at an early stage. We need a balance, therefore, between verification and exploration and formulation. Bulmer (1979) raises doubts about Glaser and Strauss's *tabula rasa* view of inquiry that urges concentration, and a pure line of research, on the matter in hand, discounting existing concepts (to avoid contamination) until grounded categories have emerged. This must be very difficult to do in well-researched areas. More characteristic is the interplay of data and conceptualization. Also, he wonders, when should the process of category development come to an end? Possibly the method is more suited to the generation of concepts than of testable hypotheses.

In fairness, Glaser and Strauss do acknowledge the construction of theory on existing knowledge, where that already has claims to being well grounded. They also recognize the importance of testing. Their complaint is about testing theory inadequately related to the material it seeks to explain. As for the confusion over theory, the identification of categories and their properties, the emergence of concepts and the formulation of hypotheses represent a clear and well-tried route. The fact is that many qualitative studies do not cover all these stages. This does not mean that they are without worth. Detailed ethnographic description and theory-testing (of reasonably grounded theories) are equally legitimate pursuits for the qualitative researcher.

Activity 41 (allow about 4 hours)

Now read 'The magic of *Godspell*: the educational significance of a dramatic event' by P. Woods (Article 3 in Reader 2).

This article seeks to generate theory from data, which includes the interview you studied earlier. As you read, make notes on the following points:

- (a) What signs are there of any comparative analysis having taken place?
- (b) What forms of categorization are there and whence do they derive?
- (c) What kind of theory is being developed (does it, for example, seek to explain and/or predict)?
- (d) How far is it grounded theory?
- (e) Consider the strengths and weaknesses of the article. Aspects you might include here are validity and reliability, research methods, plausibility and credibility, relevance, claims made, the firmness, clarity and discreteness of the categories and the general argument.

When you have done this, turn to Section 6.5, 'Comments on activities', where you will find a commentary on this activity.

Activity 42 (optional)

If you have time, read 'Time and teachers' work: an analysis of the intensification thesis' by A. Hargreaves (Article 4 in Reader 2). This is a good example of qualitative research being used to test a 'macro' theory.

Summary

In this section we have considered the various stages of analysis, from the first tentative efforts to theory formation. Preliminary and primary analysis begins by highlighting features in fieldnotes or transcripts and making brief marginal notes on important points, suggested issues, interconnections, etc. It proceeds to more extended notes on emerging themes and possible patterns and then to more fully fledged memos, which may be half-way to the draft of a paper, or at least a section of one.

At this stage, the researcher is studying the data and seeking clues to categories, themes and issues, looking for key words, other interesting forms of language, irregularities, strange events, and so on. This, in turn, leads to the formation of categories and concepts. I discussed the main methods and principles involved and considered examples of some typical attempts at forming categories and subcategories. One study had gone further and sought to establish the relative importance of the categories identified and their interconnections. You were then invited to attempt your own primary analysis.

From here we considered the further generation of theory. This could involve the further elaboration of categories and concepts, investigating the conditions that attend them, the context and the consequences.

Theoretical sampling also takes place, ensuring coverage and depth in the emerging pattern. Comparative analysis plays a large part in this process, the researcher constantly comparing within and between cases and seeking negative cases as a rigorous test of the developing theory. In another kind of comparison or testing there is consultation with the literature and among one's peers.

Having sufficient time for this whole process is vital, as is the recognition that it involves a great deal of thought, frequently painful and sometimes apparently chaotic. We reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of grounded theory, before, in a final exercise, exploring an example of theorizing from qualitative research.

6.5 COMMENTS ON ACTIVITIES*Comment on Activity 39*

The strength of the article in my opinion lies in the quality of its empirical material. The author has successfully negotiated access into these schools and is observing typical processes, undisturbed and unaffected by her presence. Their representation appears to be accurate, being the product of tape recordings and detailed note-taking. The researcher has clearly generated good rapport with both pupils and teachers, and thus she unearths valuable material from both sides of the 'culture clash'. She is concerned to find out their perceptions and is careful not to lead or guide them as she pursues this aim. See, for example, her probing questions on pages 36-7 and her pursuance of a theme in 'Further probing ... 'on page 43.

Several of the sequences describing interactions with pupils do appear to have quite strong validity. For instance, the episodes showing certain pupils being 'picked on' or 'shown up' (such as Marcus on pages 30-32, Calvin on pages 34-5) make comparisons within the example. The transcripts and fieldnotes seem to show that other children were acting in a similar way to the pupil selected out, but were

treated differently. Similarly, the author advances other voices in support of her own to strengthen points made, as with the black nursery nurse on page 27, and different age-ranges of children, as on page 37. On occasions she uses multi-methods to triangulate her findings: for example, following up observation with interviews, as on page 29.

There are, however, some parts of the article that are more questionable. Some assertions are made without supporting evidence, especially with regard to quantitative or frequency statements. For example, on page 28 reference is made to 'the least attention', 'rarely invited', 'greater classroom co-operation'; on page 32 it is asserted that 'Afro-Caribbean boys received a disproportionate amount of teachers' negative attentions' and 'there was a tendency ...'; teachers 'were observed to be more inclined to turn a blind eye ...', whereas behaviour committed by other pupils was 'rarely overlooked'; '... such reprimands often went beyond discipline ...'. No evidence is advanced to support these claims. In fairness, it is quite customary for ethnographers to quantify in this way, though this does not undermine the point. Such claims would be greatly strengthened by the use of systematic observation.

Then there are questions about sampling and alternative explanations. For example, examine the incident involving Marcus, described on pages 30–32. What we need to know here is what it is about Marcus that causes the teacher to select him out for censure. We are led to assume that it is because he is Afro-Caribbean, but could it be something else? Does this teacher systematically put down black children by comparison with whites? Are there white children that she picks on in this way? If so, what do all such pupils have in common? Is this teacher's behaviour sustained at other times and in other places? In other words, there might be something peculiar to that situation that led to that particular result. The author does advance other evidence to suggest that the white teachers in general discriminated against Afro-Caribbean boys and, while this offers some support, it does not pin down the Marcus example as strongly as it might.

There seems to be a gender element as well as a racial one operating. Might there not also be a social-class factor? One is led to ask this after identifying that it is not only black boys that earn the bulk of the teachers' censure, but only some black boys. There might also be other factors. Carl, for example, on pages 33–4, is singled out not only from white but from black boys. We are not told why this should be so, apart from the teacher's cryptic reference to the fact that he was 'bright'. There appear to be a number of factors operating.

Elsewhere, points could have been strengthened by further triangulation. For example, it is not uncommon for groups of children to claim they are victimized by their teachers. It is almost required practice for school pupils. When claims are supported by other groups, however, they are considerably strengthened. Thus, for example, on pages 36–7, the case for discrimination against these black pupils has been reasonably well argued, but would have greatly benefited from the testimony of white pupils.

Finally, a criticism often made of some ethnographies is that they are snapshots of interactional processes frozen in time. In the article, examples are selected from four schools to make the case for massive discrimination against black pupils in many different ways across all the schools. We know little, however, of the schools' histories and backgrounds, let alone the areas that they serve, the schools' policies with regard to multiculturalism, their ethos and culture, and the flow of thoughts and events in which the interactions are situated. Consequently, it is difficult to appraise fully the material that is presented.

Nonetheless, the article is in line with other literature. It is not unusual for teachers to define the educational problem as being with the pupils, in this case the Asian children's perceived language difficulties and the Afro-Caribbean children's behaviour (see, for example, Mac an Ghail, 1988). In consequence, children as young as four years old are labelled as 'disruptive', for example, and possibly launched on a deviant career not of their making. This leads to more difficulties,

more rejection and, in secondary schools, allocation to lower streams, even though they may be of equivalent or better ability than their white peers (Wright, 1986). Thus it may not be so much a matter of 'underachievement' on the part of these pupils, as used to be maintained (for example, Community Relations Commission, 1976), as structured inequality and disadvantage. The argument is that it is the school or the educational system that is 'underachieving'. The teachers on the whole do not appear to intend these outcomes. Indeed, it is probably true to say that their intentions are exactly the opposite. Like the vast majority of primary school teachers they are caring, committed and concerned to do their best for all children, equally. However, research such as Wright's suggests that they are not operating from a base that is equal for all children but from an ethnocentric one that makes particular judgements that discriminate against those who do not subscribe to it.

Comment on Activity 40

My analysis of the interview is as follows:

(a) What Martyn gained

- (i) A great deal of personal satisfaction at doing a job well and bringing the bare words to life, for themselves and for others.
- (ii) Stronger personal relationships, especially with pupils. There was a carry-over into his role as a teacher. There were still boundaries between teachers and pupils, but these had become softened in his case - humanized in a sense - since the pupils recognized there had to be some boundaries, but recognized them for what they were. Martyn gave examples.
- (iii) A 'fantastic experience', 'such fun', 'the best thing I've been involved in'.

We usually think in terms of what students gain from these activities, but Martyn's comments suggest considerable development of the teachers. This became a prominent theme of the research in general.

(b) Why was the project so successful?

I identified five main factors from Martyn's account

- (i) Teamwork, togetherness, both in the larger group formed by the whole cast and in smaller groups. Particular features of this mentioned were:
 - Levelling. There was no hierarchy. They were all equal, despite different roles, ages, and gender in the school generally.
 - Group identity. Groups developed their own special culture.
 - Creativity. They were extremely creative in doing this.

You may have noted the enthusiasm with which Martyn spoke about this feature. This alerts us to the possibility that this was an extra-special factor. Together with others' contributions, this went toward the characterization of 'communitas', which you can read about shortly in Activity 41.
- (ii) Total involvement and commitment, especially 'post-December'.
- (iii) Methods of production and preparation. Martyn gave several examples of preparatory games and of the group's being left scope for development and improvisation. With contributions from others, we should be seeking to identify the theory of learning behind Sally's approach. From this account, it could be democratic-participatory, but we need more evidence.
- (iv) Personal contributions. Especially, here, from Sally, the director, and Nick Phillips, a drama expert, whose visit one weekend seemed vital. These

were obviously key people. In the article on *Godspell*, these are called respectively the 'critical agent' (the one centrally responsible) and a 'critical other' (someone not centrally involved for long, but who played a key role).

- (v) Content. The play *Godspell* was a powerful one, in Martyn's opinion, carrying basic messages from the scriptures and a range of emotions, expressed in the moving music enhanced by Sally's adaptation, which created the groups of toys in a way that they reflected all humanity.

How do these factors interrelate? I see them in this sequence: content (the play); critical agent (Sally conceives the idea and makes plans); adaptation (she adapts the play to her particular purposes); methods of production; involvement; *communitas*. They are not factors operating all at the same level therefore. The *communitas* might be considered the most distinctive feature, but it was a product of other factors. In other words, it was as much an expression of the success of the play as a cause of it.

(c) *Follow-up interview*

If I had the opportunity to follow up this interview, I should want to ask Martyn for more information and his opinion about:

- (i) Stages that the play went through (it 'kept getting resurrected') and how they contrasted with one another.
- (ii) The main individuals involved - Sally, Nick and the musical director (this last not mentioned here). One may have a hunch that they displayed some charismatic qualities, which helps to explain the tremendous spirit felt by the cast and the sense of 'magic' in the production.
- (iii) The school from which the production was generated. Was the great success of the play a result, for example, of declared policy in the area of the creative arts?
- (iv) High moments and low moments, successes and difficulties during the production period.
- (v) Any surprises - at himself, or others.

As in the first interview, this would form a loose structure. I should expect Martyn, as previously, to raise some points I had not thought of (points (iv) and (v) are designed for this purpose) and I should want to retain flexibility to follow those up. Of course, this is by no means the only way forward. There are others that are equally appropriate.

(d) *Strengths and limitations of the interviewing technique*

This was not the most exacting test of one's interviewing skills, as Martyn was such an excellent interviewee. He is very articulate and managed to squeeze a great deal of interesting material into a short space of time. He illustrates his points with examples. Even so, it is easy to make a mess of it! Questions you might consider are: How unobtrusive is the interviewer? How appropriate are follow-up questions? Are there any opportunities missed? Are there any leading questions (that is, leading the interviewee towards a particular answer)? Have you any views on the 'tone' of the interview, for example, in establishing and maintaining rapport?

Comment on Activity 41

In the main research to which this article relates, there were comparisons reported to have been made between the outstanding educational events studied and they were seen to have common properties. From these comparisons, the concept of a 'critical event' was generated. Initial categorization took the form of identifying the main features of critical events — radical change, real learning, *communitas*, a

distinctive structure, favourable conditions. Then subcategories within them (for example, specifying the conditions) were identified. With some of the main features, it is not so much a matter of subcategories as detailed qualitative exposition (as with 'relevant learning'). This article then takes another outstanding event at a different level of schooling (secondary as opposed to primary) and compares it with the model of a critical event derived from the earlier study. It is a kind of test of the original concept, but under different conditions. Evidence is advanced to show that it does have the properties of a critical event and we may reasonably conclude, therefore, that such events do not just occur in primary schools, but have wider generality.

Comparative analysis also takes place within the categories. For example, by comparing the students' experiences, I concluded that 'personal' and 'emotional' development were the main features of 'radical change'. Similarly, within these, the development took a certain form. For example, the main aspects of personal development were increased confidence and control, ability to improvise and new realization of self. The grounds for advancing these as main aspects should be that they generally apply to some degree and do not just pertain to individuals. They are major themes, in other words, arising from the comparative analysis.

This critical event was particularly strong in the area of 'communitas', and this enabled a more detailed specification of subcategories ('special culture', 'discovering others', etc.), again derived from comparative analysis across the personal experience of members of the cast - and Martyn, judging from the analysis of his interview. It also added to the conceptualization of structure, appearing to be a multi-critical event with three separate stages, complete as critical events within themselves and building on each other.

The kind of analysis here is what might be termed 'conceptual development'. It attempts to generate new insights into educational activities and thus advance our understanding of them. It seeks to explain what is special about these events and why they might be regarded as 'critical'. This, I would claim, has a current educational significance in the light of debates about pedagogy. The article also suggests at what levels of schooling and in what subject areas critical events occur. Further research would be needed to see if and how they occurred more generally. The article does not make explicit predictions about what is needed for a critical event to occur, but it is strongly implicit that certain conditions are favourable (school ethos, critical agent, etc.). This also needs further testing.

In the second part of the article, the *Godspell* material is used to test David Hargreaves' 'traumatic theory of aesthetic learning'. Again, this is a test of a theory under different conditions. Hargreaves' theory was derived from work among adults and their experiences of art; my research involved secondary-school students and drama. *Godspell* confirmed the traumatic features identified by Hargreaves, though with some refinements. Again, comparative analysis was used across the respondents. I went on to argue that the traumatic experience, if it is to be educationally productive, must be situated within a more gradual theory of learning. Some of the elements of this are then given. The status of this theory is very tentative at this stage. It is 'suggested' by the *Godspell* material and points the way to further research.

This article also illustrates how qualitative research can be:

- (a) large-scale, as applied, for example, to a number of critical events;
- (b) medium-scale, as applied, perhaps, to one event; or
- (c) small-scale, where the object of study might be one part or aspect of an event, such as 'communitas' or 'trauma', or one person's experience, or the related conditions, and so forth.

Theoretical and conceptual development is more limited in small-scale work, for clearly the same range of opportunities for comparative analysis is not there. However, some important data can be gathered, some interesting refinements made to established work and significant applications of such work to new areas or issues can be made.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW WITH A MEMBER OF THE *GODSPELL* CAST

Introduction to the interview

The Roade School's production of the musical *Godspell* began its career in September 1988. Five performances were given at the school in December and that, normally, would have been the end of it. However, the show was selected for the National Student Drama Festival at Cambridge and there, in March to April 1989, it won a top award. The school gave a final production to the general public in Northampton's spacious Derngate Centre in the following October.

This final production was attended by Peter Woods. Shortly afterwards he contacted the producer, who made a large number of documents, reviews, scripts, tapes and videos available. She also arranged for Woods to interview members of the cast, as well as herself and the musical director.

As a researcher Woods' aim was to try to understand the event as an educational experience, how the participants saw their involvement, what they had gained from it and what were the factors behind the success of the production. It was one of a series of exceptional educational events that Woods was studying at the time.

The interview with Martyn, chief clown in the production, took place in the head of creative arts' office at school and was tape recorded. It was held during part of one of Martyn's free periods and was one of a series of interviews fitted into the day and one for which only a limited amount of time was available (about 15-20 minutes).

There was still an air of excitement about the production among the participants. It had been a traumatic, emotional experience, which some were still trying to come to terms with. It had also been, in part, an aesthetic experience, which they do not find easy to express in words. Also, in wanting to know how this event might have contributed to personal development, Woods was touching on areas that people might not have reflected upon. He was wanting details of all these things, but also needed to capture the spirit of the enterprise, the nature and ethos of the culture of the group.

The transcript

The following is the transcript of the interview to be used in Activity 40 (Section 6.4). It is presented as recorded, without revision. You should use it in conjunction with the recorded interview which is on side 1 of the audio-cassette.

- M: Yes, some people said type-casting again.
- P: Type-casting again - member of staff, yes, and the only member of staff actually in the production.
- M: Yes, it was very interesting.
- P: Well, I think yes, that's what I'd like to ask you about. I mean what was it like being a member of staff amongst all these young people?
- M: Well, I think really that one of the amazing things of the whole thing was that there weren't any barriers of any sort. I think there must have been originally, right at the very beginning, although it's very difficult to remember exactly what it was like then because things have moved on so much from there. But I can remember right at the very beginning, before - when the chief toys were selected, after all the auditions - we had about two sessions together in a distant room which were sort of breaking down barriers sessions, and it was some of the techniques that Sally's learnt at, you know, college and so on. But they were sort of, I suppose, like games, in a way, where you had to react to each other and report back to everyone else.

For example, one of the techniques was - 'Think of something which is important to you that's happened in the recent past, or something in your life and tell it to someone else' - and, you know, I could either have opted out totally or joined in totally, which - I chose the latter course as it happens. And then we had things like - 'Choose one of the people here, in the groups, and pick out a quality that you admire and a quality that you dislike about that person and tell everyone else about it' - little things like that. And before we actually started, amongst the chief toys there was already working a sort of a group identity, a sense of togetherness, and virtually from the beginning I think - specifically with the chief toys but even later on gradually with all the other toys - there were no us and them barriers at all. It wasn't me, a member of staff, plus the pupils - we were just other different actors, that was it, and really they referred to me by my Christian name and so on and there were no barriers.

- P: So, you noticed a change in their attitude towards you, as the thing went on?
- M: Yes, particularly those who were in, I suppose, the group I was working with - all the other clowns. Part of the technique that Sally used in producing the play was getting the groups to work on their own identities and therefore she would say, 'Right, now, at this point I want you to get from here on the stage over there. Now, you're going to be singing the following lines. Now you have got to work out how you're going to get there, what you're going to be doing *en route*'. And we would have to get together and think, well, as clowns, you know, how are we going to react to this? What's the likely way that we can get from A to B? And this was all teamwork really, and it's amazing how creative people were in those situations. I was constantly amazed by the ideas that they came up with. But there, you know, you were putting yourself - I was putting myself - into the role, and they were putting themselves into the same sort of role and we were just, you know, on the same level. That was more gradual, especially with the younger ones obviously - although having said 'younger ones', the youngest we went down to was third years, so they were the older pupils anyway. But, if you like, those who I had less contact with initially in the play, it took them longer for the barriers to break down, I suppose you could say.
- P: Longer for their perception of you as a teacher to be surpassed by their perception of you as a player?
- M: That's right - as just another member of the cast. Absolutely, yes. But I think by the time we'd done the show at Christmas and then we went on to the next stage of producing it for Cambridge. By that time we had a session together with Nick Phillips from Cambridge and that was another weekend where there were activities where everyone made fools of themselves basically - you know in front of everyone else, and we were all sort of becoming part of a team this way - and I think by then all members of the cast had got the same conception, I think, bar one or two who were slightly more cynical, I think.
- P: Interesting. Do you think this has a carry-over into your teacher role - into your ordinary life at school.
- M: Oh, yes, absolutely. I suppose I've never been involved in something which has been - I mean I've been involved in lots of productions in the past, not just here but sort of outside of school as well - I've never been involved in something where the same techniques have been used, of getting everyone to contribute in that way, to participate in the choreography of the thing. And I've never really been in something where a real sense of identity has been produced in the way it was for this. And when I see some of the kids now walking around the school or even in my lessons, you know, I don't think of them -

I look at them and I think of them as a clown or ballet dancer or a raggy doll or something like that. I find it very difficult to sort of forget. It was a very big - very strange - experience really. I don't think I've ever gone through anything like it before.

- P: I'm not sure whether that's a good thing or a bad thing - when you say you look at them and you still see them within their roles.
- M: Well, no. Well, I suppose I do to a certain extent, but I think it is more a question of our relationship, the ease of relationship. Talking to one another is different. I don't really think I see them, you know, prancing around the stage like a - I can't disassociate some of them with what they looked like in the play.
- P: I find it difficult, having just seen one performance, and I actually see them - I naturally associate them - with who they were. But teachers and pupils, perhaps not so much in this school though I should imagine it's hard to avoid the traditional role altogether, usually have some kind of boundary between them, don't they? They're fairly clearly demarcated. This sort of enterprise dissolves that and -
- M: Not totally, I don't think, because I think that the pupils still see the drama that we were participating in as being something, if you like, with boundaries - round their life, which is to do with the drama. When they come back into the classroom, they find it very difficult to sort of think of it as being a continuation of a situation. So I think for them it's a strange position to be in. They come into my classroom and they remember the relaxed atmosphere that we had on the *Godspell* set and that sort of thing, but - and they know that they can talk to me like that, at the end of a lesson, for example, or even when I'm walking around the class helping in particular situations - but they know that they can't just suddenly, in the middle of a lesson, speak to me in that way. They have a concept of, you know, there are lines over which they must not tread in the demarcation between teacher/pupil.
- P: Different rules apply in that situation?
- M: Yes, that's right - quite different rules. But having said that, it does facilitate relationships, because I think you can have - if I think of just one pupil, one particular pupil who I actually played together with in the previous production - that was a sticky relationship. I felt that that person wasn't happy with the relationship, having to play it opposite a member of staff, and they found it very difficult to cope with and couldn't cope with it. That actually had repercussions in the classroom as well; and then after a period of time, I found that person in my group again. The situation was defused earlier by the fact that, because I had a middle group and this person was actually quite good, I was actually able justifiably to move her up into a different group - a better group - and so I lost her for the half year. Then I found her again in my group this year, and working on *Godspell* actually did improve that situation because it was a totally different show. The atmosphere was different, and that really improved our working relationship in class, which was a definite bonus.
- P: You've mentioned one factor which will have contributed towards the success of *Godspell*, the enormous work - preparatory work - that went into building up the team spirit, as it were. What other factors, do you think, contributed?
- M: To the success of it?
- P: To making it - yes - I mean you know, it received considerable acclaim -
- M: I think school productions by and large, thinking back even to my own school days, tend to rest upon the small nucleus of

really outstanding actors/actresses who perpetuate the school drama. They take all the leading roles every time and they are obviously very talented. But you've then got the others who have to make up the numbers and I think that most school dramas tend to fall into that category: and I think to a certain extent that it's true to say that in this particular one there were some people who started off being so totally wooden that it was going to be the same thing, and yet somehow got so involved with what they were doing - and I think 100% that this was post-December - this was after the time we'd done it really at school and when Nick Phillips had been up and worked with us - it was when we were working towards the Cambridge production - that - what I'm trying to say is, by the first set of productions it hadn't really gelled to that extent. But I think what made it so special was that absolutely everyone got caught up in the show, whether it's the show itself and the content of it. I think it is partly, because it was such a good piece to be in. It was partly the way it was handled, partly the preparation beforehand and partly the piece itself, that brought absolutely everyone into it. And I think I must have - I said somewhere, when I was giving a talk on the show at some point - that every single person was actually acting 100% and some of these really wooden characters were no longer - somehow got transformed into actors. And I think that's one of the points that the critics at Cambridge picked up too, the fact that there weren't any weak links in the sense that there wasn't someone sitting on the edge of the stage who lost interest after five minutes, sat around twiddling their thumbs, you know, whatever. Everyone was in it 100% of the time and I think that was what made it. I think it must be something in the show because reading David Essex's letter - because David Essex wrote to us before we put the show on at the Derngate - and he had, he said that - I'm just reading it across behind your shoulder there - that there was something magical about the show itself which somehow had an effect on everyone and he talked in terms of the same, the group of people who were in the first original show still being very close friends as a result of having taken part in it. So I think there must be some element in the show itself, which is interesting because a lot of critics said, you know, 'Oh *Godspell*, what a dated sort of show to do!' And many of them had a very poor opinion of the show itself. But I think that having worked in it, I think there's something about it which somehow gets people involved.

- P: Can you put your finger on that Martyn? I mean, if you want to look at the critics - the devil's advocates - I mean, the Times Ed. - I mean I've seen these because Sally's shown them to me — 'dated script, flat' you know 'bit syrupy, sugary in places' you know - I've seen these comments about people who just don't like the American schmaltz - another term.
- M: Well, I don't actually think that's true. The script itself, apart from one or two adaptations, is straight from the New Testament. I mean it's verbatim, and in that sense it's what you make it. The script is there, the message is there if you like, although it's not specifically trying to change the text, if you like, to get a message. It's just straight text with songs interposed. I think it's got to be something to do with the way it's put on as well, and I know our interpretation of it is totally different from any way it had been performed before, but, I don't know, I think there's something fairly gripping in the message that it puts across, whether you think its syrupy or what. I think it's just a straightforward message which comes across.
- P: Well, 'magical' is, sort of, conjures up connotations of the mysterious, something that is difficult to explain, which is probably why it is to difficult to explain what exactly is magical about it. It's a term that is often used in a fairly loose sense in

that - yes, this is a great performance - and I don't know whether that's the sense that David Essex is using it, I wouldn't know - but I think there is a combination of factors here that produced something special. Now, taking the David Essex letter again, presumably there are other ways of doing it that you could say another combination of factors could produce the same effect. You could end up in a very common or garden production. Presumably there have been a number of productions of *Godspell*- lots of them have been very ordinary I should imagine, but I suppose the message which is a powerful one - the music must have something to do with it?

M: I think the songs are very memorable and moving. I think they express certain ideas and thoughts which come in at that particular time in the play and fit in with the characters that are performing the songs, so that you've got - well take my song for example, it's an old hymn that's given a re-vamp musically - and it fits in with, well in our terms, our production - it fits in with the character of the clown, someone who on the exterior -

P: What was your song again? Just remind me.

M: 'We plough the fields and scatter' - it's sort of, as I understood the character of the clown, it was someone who outwardly is very extrovert and bubbly and larks around and tells jokes and that sort of thing, but inside has got a very serious side, as many clowns have - you know, real life clowns have - someone who thinks about life and can come out with some very profound statements. And it was the clown at his most serious at that point, when he's singing that. And, to me, each character in the play - each doll - represented a sort of type of human being, that you've got the soldiers, for example, who are very self-opinionated, rather stiff and starchy in their character and find it very difficult to be emotional, to show their emotions. And you've got the very naive, baby dolls who are bubbly and sort of kind and never see double meanings in anything. It's all very straightforward, and when Jo sings her song as the chief baby doll, that again fits into the character. Her relationship with Jesus is being explored in the song. So, for me, I mean, we had to make sense of the play as individuals. My interpretation - the way I saw it unfolding before my eyes - was enhanced by Sally's production, because I saw a lot more in it by virtue of the different characters who formed the toys than perhaps I would have done in the original production, I think. And I think that, to me, that's what made the play really mean something. I could see all humanity represented by the toys and their characteristics, and that's what we were trying to portray, and the fact that when the Jesus figure came into our midst, he had an effect on all types of human beings. He had a magnetic, mystical, magical attraction, and I think that's what we, what happened to us during the play, we became suddenly transformed into the characters that we represented and Jesus had this attraction to us and on us. And we came out of ourselves, and we were able to form a relationship with him and have hope for the future which was leading us into the garden.

P: That is the basic main message of the piece and that was how the toys were equipped to actually go out of the nursery attic into the outside world?

M: Yes, it was through his death that the way out was opened up, and all the toys were able to then go out into the garden through his death for them. And obviously they thought it was going to be a sad end, but, and were absolutely cut down when, you know, they realized he was dying - going to die - and of course you get that dreadful scene of anguish when the toys are trying to get out of the garden, and they go to their pictures on the wall and they're absolutely desperately shattered by the whole thing. And then, of course, Jesus rises from the dead and

unlocks the door. They take his dead body out and he rises from the dead, and they realize they're out, and the prison of the attic is no longer there.

- P: And they're equipped with the moral message that has been conveyed in the various parables.
- M: That's right. And they're now prepared to actually go out into this new world and give them out. The message has got in.
- P: Yes, yes, I mean there are various sort of epicentres of the magic, aren't there?
- M: Yes.
- P: Going on, yes. This - it presumably developed over the time, you said that [hello, have we had our ration?]
- M: Very nearly.
- P: Well can I ask you, Martyn, what you feel you personally got out of being a member of this production?
- M: Heavens!
- P: You've been in a lot of others, presumably?
- M: Yes. I suppose a sense of great satisfaction in doing something well as a team, realizing that something that was bare words in a book actually as we did it, actually came to life and that not only did we think it came to life, it seemed to come to life for other people -I suppose that in itself was a great sense of satisfaction - personal satisfaction, so that's one thing - doing a job well. Secondly, I suppose the sort of relationships that built up during the play with other people. You know once you've gone through that sort of experience, it's something which you can't change, relationships you've established with people just generally -I mean, forget about the fact that pupils — they're pupils - they're just human beings basically (some of them anyway) - those sort of relationships which have been established during that time won't change. Well, they will change with time but, you know you've deepened relationships with people, and that's all come out of working together, so there's that angle. I think it's just - the whole thing was just a fantastic experience - it's an experience with its highs and its lows and it was such fun, apart from anything else - really such fun.
- P: Within your experience of performing in these things, it rates fairly high?
- M: I would say it's the best thing that I've been involved in. I mean, I've had other, I've taken part in other things where I suppose you could say I perhaps had a larger part to play in the sense of more words to say or more songs to sing on my own or whatever. There are other things that I've done which I've totally enjoyed but I think this stands out as the most enjoyable by a long way. It's taken longer, for a start. It's taken a bigger chunk of time than anything else I've ever done because it kept on being resurrected.
- P: A larger part of yourself, as well - because of what you put into it.
- M: Because you had to give more I think. It's quite shattering actually participating in it, it's amazing how drained you were after a performance. I mean obviously you are drained after a public performance of anything, but I think one gave more in this, I think I gave more, than perhaps anything else I had done.
- P: Smashing. Thanks very much.