

WORKING GROUP
INTERVIEWING - A SUPPORT GROUP CONVENOR:
LAURINDA BROWN UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL, SCHOOL
OF EDUCATION

At this meeting Kerry Cripps, a PhD student from Sheffield Hallam University shared with us her methodology through working with us on transcripts from her research and talking about her thoughts and feelings and how they were changing over time. We had intended to compare and contrast this methodology with that of Stephen Hegedus from Southampton University but his work will now form the basis of the next meeting of the Interviewing Support Group at Loughborough in May, 1996.

What follows are the notes prepared by Kerry Cripps in preparation for the session. There seems little point in sharing the transcripts used nor the discussion following those transcripts without Kerry to act as mediator.

Parameters of deconstructive inquiry - a delineation intended to be evocative rather than prescriptive

My current understanding of deconstruction is *not* full nor deep nor wide. It is based almost entirely on my reading of Lather (1991) and the resonances her work has for my experiences and desires. I am explicitly using it as an example of meaning making using concepts that are *not* fully articulated. This is an attempt to contribute to the development of 'forms of inquiry that are "interrupters" of the social relations of dominance (p92)', in particular those between teacher and student, researcher and 'researched'.

Lather (1991) focuses on three significant issues:

- problems of description and interpretation
- the textual staging of knowledge
- the social relations of the research act.

She then develops these with reference to her own work in order to delineate the parameters of deconstructive inquiry. The parameters include:

- revealing the constructed nature of the text
- making the political moment inherent in all methods explicit
- questioning the inequalities between researcher and researched
- de-centring the researcher via self-reflexive critique
- acknowledging that our efforts are both reproductive and transformative
- allowing our work to be emergent and experimental rather than codified and standardised
- maintaining an awareness of the incursion of our beliefs, politics and desires into our inquiries (p99 - 101).

In my thesis I intend to apply these parameters to my own research and attempt to 'write science differently (p123)'. Rather than use a 'mask of objectivity and fact' to conceal the complexity of the issues surrounding the collection of my 'data' I want to reveal the 'structuring and shaping mechanisms' with which I have actively selected, transformed and interpreted "reality" (Zeller 1987 quoted in Lather 1991 p91).

Some possible 'sites of intersection across the differences' between me and the students that I 'researched' that I might 'choose to let emerge' include '*that calculator*', *Failure*, and one which I find difficult to name, which is about the interactions between students' (and researchers), lives, inside and outside of the university.

The above three un-referenced 'quotations' are examples of my poem (not reprinted here) that I gave out's final couplet:

Whose words are these?
I can no longer tell.

Lather calls data analysis 'the black hole of qualitative research (p149)' and using her deconstructivist approach frames a list of questions with which to interrogate her own meaning making process including:

- Did I encourage ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity or did I impose order and structure?
- What is most densely invested?
- What has been muted or repressed?
- How has what I have done shaped, subverted and complicated?
- Have I confronted my own evasions and raised doubts about any illusions of closure?
- Have I questioned the textual staging of knowledge in a way that keeps my own authority from being reified?
- Did I focus on the limits of my own conceptualisations?
- Who are my "Others"?
- What binaries structure my arguments? (p84) I hope ...
... to answer some of these questions about my own research
... to do other than 'impose the researchers understanding of reality', or 'say what things mean via a privileged position and theoretical presuppositions (Gitlin 1988, p18 quoted in Lather p92) ... to see 'ambivalence and differences not as obstacles, but as the very richness of meaning making (p45 - all quotes from Lather)

References

Lather, Patti (1991) *Getting smart: feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. Routledge