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Community literacy as a field privileges qualitative research methods, which are well-suited to helping researchers highlight the social context of literacy practices. As the editors' introduction to the Spring 2007 issue of the *Community Literacy Journal* notes, one of the challenges of literacy studies is the methodological quandaries that arise from the work happening in the field; Moore and Warnock argue in particular that community literacy work highlights those tensions because it "assumes some measures of social action, action research, ethnography, shifting notions of 'community,' assumptions about the purposes of education, and the not-always-aligned needs of academics and community members" (9). Thus, while qualitative methods and methodologies often support community literacy work—both research and praxis—we understand that we must approach such methods with an understanding of their complexity, a complexity that is borne out of their embeddedness in an interpretivist philosophical standpoint concerned with understanding and interpreting a complex, ever-shifting social world rich in detailed data. In this synthesis essay, then, I highlight some of the problems and possibilities inherent in a qualitative methodology as well as showcase some of the recent publications featuring this interpretive paradigm.

One of the places we often start in research is with choosing texts to help us ground ourselves in a methodology (or to teach others, as in a class). Given the staggering number that deal with qualitative methods and methodologies, such a task can seem daunting. In particular, many of these texts are borne out of social science fields; thus, they may not explicitly connect to the kinds of studies we perform in writing and in community literacy studies. Recently, members of the Council of Writing Program Administrators listserv, WPA-L, discussed specific methods textbooks; a lively discussion ensued with several suggestions for specific texts. Participants frequently noted that many suggested materials did not focus particularly on composition or a specific, related sub-field (such as community literacy) but instead presented from a broader behaviorist standpoint. Respondents suggested that these publications, if used in the writing classroom, could be easily supplemented with additional materials related to the disciplinary focus of the course. However, several writing-specific methods textbooks were mentioned: *Becoming a Writing Researcher*

(Blakeslee and Fleischer); *Analyzing Streams of Language* (Geisler); *Composition Research: Empirical Designs* (Lauer and Asher); *Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing* (MacNealy); *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work* (Stake); and *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (Merriam). I would like to describe these selected suggestions briefly as they may be helpful for readers who wish to design their own writing research projects or teach students—especially graduate students—about methodological approaches.

First, *Becoming a Writing Researcher* (2007) by Ann Blakeslee and Cathy Fleischer was highly rated by several respondents; one noted that it was accessible, was filled with useful exercises in each chapter, and was specifically attuned to qualitative techniques. Another mentioned that this text had emerged from a masters-level research methods course, presumably making it better attuned to the needs of a classroom audience. The bibliographies included at the end of each chapter make it easy for students to locate additional materials as needed. Cheryl Geisler's *Analyzing Streams of Language: Twelve Steps to the Systematic Coding of Text, Talk, and Other Verbal Data* (2003), though out of print, was well-recommended as an empirical approach to exploring patterns across interviews, conversations, and texts. Similarly, Janice Lauer's and J. William Asher's *Composition Research: Empirical Designs* (1988) was another suggested text that emphasizes empiricism in composition studies; while older than some previously mentioned in this review, it can serve as a useful first introduction to empiricism as the book's intended audience is readers without prior empirical training (3). A respondent stated that the text was rather rigid in its definitions, but that may be effective for its novice audience. A suggested pairing to better critique both qualitative and quantitative methods and designs is Lauer's and Asher's book alongside Mary Sue MacNealy's 1998 text *Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing*, which was noted as most apt for professional writing courses. Robert Stake's *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work* (2010), a more recent offering, was mentioned as an engaging, well-written offering that could be helpful for an undergraduate audience, given its approachable style. Finally, several participants praised Sharan B. Merriam's *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (2009), particularly her way of breaking things down for the reader in an easy-to-follow manner.

While many of these suggested texts discuss the ethics of qualitative research, I believe they can be supplemented with some of the excellent research on qualitative methodologies that has emerged from feminist studies. Peter Mortensen's and Gesa E. Kirsch's edited collection *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy* is a recommended starting point, as it approaches ethics with theoretical complexity—it is not simply a discussion of how to but instead a sophisticated interrogation of why.

As many of the texts discussed previously—by virtue of their practical classroom approach—focus more on the former, Mortensen and Kirsch's collection adds another valuable layer to the conversation. Similarly, Kirsch's and Patricia A. Sullivan's *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research* (1992) offers several chapters that would serve well alongside one of the previously mentioned textbooks to supplement and enhance. For example, Thomas Newkirk's chapter on "The Narrative Roots of the Case Study" and Beverly Moss' "Ethnography and Composition: Studying Language at Home" could easily join a qualitative-based text like Merriam's or Stake's, while Keith Grant-Davie's discussion of validity and reliability in coding data offers a means of bridging qualitative and quantitative research that dovetails nicely with Lauer's and Asher's quantitative work. Gesa Kirsch's chapter on methodological pluralism would excel as a preliminary reading in a methods course to set the scene, so to speak, and prod students to consider knowledge making as a continuously changing enterprise (248). Because this collection was published in 1992, students could be asked how composition studies as a field has reacted to the calls for change evident in Kirsch's chapter: In what ways have we embraced change by becoming more critically aware of methodological pluralism? Are MA and PhD students leaving composition studies programs with a broad understanding of methodologies, thereby better justifying their choice of certain approaches in research? The predominance of qualitative research methods texts suggested in the WPA-L thread is certainly intriguing and invites further investigation vis-à-vis Kirsch's chapter.

Because the term "community literacy" by its verbiage necessitates an examination of community, by extension the people who constitute a community are the focus. While a traditionally positivistic style trains researchers "to be ever vigilant for bias and subjectivity" (Morley 122), qualitative research celebrates the humanity, the people, who make up communities. This celebration of the individual voice—often collectives of voices—is part of what makes interviewing as a method so appealing, as it throws into stark relief the richness of the data and its ability to help readers share in participants' lives via slice-of-life narratives. However, Pamela Takayoshi has argued that compositionists should not privilege stories at the expense of other methodological approaches (127-28). Her reminder is also applicable to community literacy research. In particular, given the ethical complexities that arise with the use of qualitative methodologies in service learning and community literacy efforts, it behooves us to carefully consider our subject positioning, as Nancy Welch observes in her CCC article "'And Now That I Know Them': Composing Mutuality in a Service Learning Course." How do we break away from the binaries of active/passive and literate/illiterate, Welch asks, then argues that "contemporary feminist object-relations theory . . . [offers] the ability to recognize others

as subjects whose lives both overlap and exceed one's own" (247-48). While interviewing as a method is appealing because of its ability to showcase others' voices, it is important that we keep in mind the ethical ramifications of interpretation—that we represent another, not an other; that we turn the lens back on ourselves as well.

Lest this sound hopelessly optimistic or naïve, I turn once more to Welch:

> Potential space, intersubjective exchange, a co-created dance, dialogic play: out of context, such phrases sound terribly idealistic, and it's important to remember that what feminist object-relations theory attempts to do is reclaim these real possibilities in tension . . . Important, too, is to recognize that from a feminist object-relations perspective . . . genuine constructions of mutuality are and should remain more agitated and dynamic than harmonious and calm. (257)

Welch's caution is echoed by Katherine Borland, who also discusses the ethics of representation in participant narratives from a feminist standpoint. Drawing on her experience of attempting to narrate a story related to her by her grandmother, Borland describes the dispute that arose when Beatrice Hanson, her grandmother, argued about the presentation of her narrative: "[Y]our interpretation of the story as a female struggle for autonomy within a hostile male environment is entirely YOUR interpretation. You've read into the story what you wished to—what pleases YOU. . . . The story is no longer MY story at all" (76). Borland's grandmother, and Borland herself, continue by questioning how far the interviewer may go in terms of interpretation. Through later dialogue, she and her grandmother arrived at a narrative that satisfied them both; the revised article described their conflict and its resolution, while Hanson admitted that much of Borland's feminist approach to her story was true. Ultimately, both Welch and Borland argue that co-authorship is a more respectful stance: By ensuring the conversation is just that—a conversation, with equal give and take among the participants—we can perhaps restructure representation as a more reflective, truly representative activity.

Finally, Katrina M. Powell and Pamela Takayoshi urge us to move even beyond collaboration to reciprocation; while difficult, such a move asks us to look not just at the methodological, but the ethical—a shift that they argue shows "a concern with the quality of the relationships we build with research participants—not just in terms of our research questions or the study but in terms of people forming relationships with others" (398). As qualitative work in literacy and service learning is often so intimately tied up with issues of power, agency, and community, reciprocity is key; Kathryn Johnson Gindlesparger's article published in this issue of the *Community Literacy Journal* argues that reciprocity "is a way to counteract the widely-used but

rarely-critiqued deficit models that dominate the nonprofit landscape. If community work is not done with a near constant attention to power dynamics, programming that is intended to help clients actually replicates and rewards structures that take away agency from those being served in community programs".

Ultimately, while qualitative research methods should of course not be privileged at the expense of other potentially appropriate methods, particularly those that are empirical and quantitative, research based in the lived experiences of individuals and their communities is often a strong fit with qualitative approaches such as case studies, interviews, oral histories, and ethnographic methods. Given that community literacy as a subfield of rhetoric and composition is in many ways still nascent, it behooves us when training the next generation of scholars to expose them to multiple methods and methodologies in as much depth as possible. By doing so, we may be able to equip newer students in the field with theoretical foundations that will allow them to continue a tradition of research that shows respect to its participants through its carefully considered ethical underpinnings.

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