

質的インタビューにおける研究者の再帰性

The Researcher's Reflexivity in Qualitative Interviews

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ABSTRACT

本稿は著者が研究者としてリフレクティブ・プラクティスの研究実施において質的インタビューに従事した経験を再帰的な手法により述べている。著者は7か月間に渡り、多元的ケース研究を高校の現職英語教師6名を参加者として行った。研究期間中、参加者の教師はジャーナルを毎週記述し、インタビューを毎月受け、フォーカスグループディスカッションに3回従事した。これら3種類の研究手法は参加者の教師にとっては振り返りを促す場であり、リフレクティブな介入と位置付けられ、研究者にとってはデータ収集の場であった。本稿は著者が研究手法の中で殊に不調和を経験し、研究者としての再帰性（reflexivity）に従事する契機となったインタビューに焦点を当て、インタビューデータから不調和を分析し、研究者が再帰性に従事する重要性を述べる。本稿では先ず、研究者の再帰性の定義及びその種類を説明し、次に著者が行った研究を簡単に紹介する。また個々の参加者により多様な発展を遂げたインタビューについて述べ、研究者が直面した不調和を叙述する。そして研究者の自己開示の程度、ラポールによる参加者の操作の危険性等、研究者の再帰性における「落とし穴」について述べ、また、インタビュー終業後も研究参加者に対して倫理的姿勢を持つ重要性を唱える。最後に経験の浅い研究者が質的インタビューを行う際の研究者の再帰性の従事について提案をする。

This paper narrates the author's own reflexive process while conducting interviews in her qualitative research study on reflective practice. This study relied upon the participation of six in-service high-school teachers of English in Japan, over a period of seven months. The six participants were asked to engage in weekly journal keeping, monthly interviews, and three focus group discussions in order to explore how reflective practice works as a development tool for Japanese teachers of English. These methods, referred to as reflective interventions, were the teachers' reflective arenas, as well as the author's source of data. This

paper focuses specifically on the challenges and dissonances faced by the author while conducting the series of interviews, as she engaged in reflexivity. The paper first gives a brief literature review on the concept of the researcher's reflexivity, followed by a short summary of the author's study. It will then describe the divergent courses of development observed in the interviews with the six participants, and the dissonances experienced by the author. Next, the paper discusses potential 'pitfalls' in the researcher's reflexivity, such as the extent to which familiarity and rapport-building may lead to an unconscious manipulation of the interviewees. The author illustrates that being ethical to research participants is an important aspect of the researcher's reflexivity. Furthermore, that engagement in qualitative interviews is an on-going process continuing even after the completion of the study. Finally, she offers suggestions for novice researchers who plan to conduct interviews for qualitative research.

1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a surge of interest in, and increase in the practice of, qualitative research in the social sciences. An essential concept and component of qualitative research, the researcher's reflexivity, has now been fully established (Roulston, 2010). This concept, however, is rather vague, and its actual practice is ambiguous, especially for novice researchers.

Based on the study that I conducted for my Ph.D. thesis (Suzuki, 2014), I present a reflexive narration of the dissonances I experienced while conducting qualitative interviews. I argue for the importance of the researcher's engagement in reflexivity in conducting interviews, not only to ensure a rigorous standard of research, but also to maintain a high standard of ethics, and to do justice to the participants (Seidman, 2013).

I will first give a literature review of the concept of the researcher's reflexivity, followed by a brief introduction of my study. I will then present a brief background about myself, which will be followed by a description of the various development of interviews with different participants. Then, I will discuss the dissonances I experienced in the qualitative interviews, followed by recommendations for novice researchers in conducting qualitative interviews.

2. The researcher's reflexivity

The researcher's reflexivity, defined by Berger (2015) as "the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgment and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (p. 220) has been acknowledged as critical to qualitative research. Those who practice qualitative research regard the researcher themselves as "a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data" (Finlay, 2002, p. 212). In addition, the research is recognized as being "co-constituted, a joint product of the participants, researcher and their relationship" (Finlay, 2002, p. 212). Understanding and meaning are "negotiated within particular social contexts so that another researcher will unfold a different story" (Finlay, 2002, p. 212).

Ping-Chun (2008) states that the primary purpose of examining researcher's involvement in qualitative research through reflexivity is "to acknowledge and interrogate the constitutive role of the researcher in research design, data collection, analysis and knowledge production" (p. 212). Thus, the researcher's reflexivity, which necessitates an ability to evaluate one's positionality and impact on the research process, is believed to encourage

more rigorous research and higher ethical standards (Seidman, 2013).

Furthermore, Hosking and Plunt (2010) point out that researchers engaged in qualitative research must attempt to show what is referred to as their “sources of subjectivity” (p. 64), in order to allow readers to evaluate the study in terms of the “quality, accuracy, and usefulness of the research outcomes” (p. 64–65).

Presently, the question posed by the concept of the researcher’s reflexivity is not whether one should engage with it or not, but how, and to what degree, all of which may vary depending upon the aims and focus of research (Finlay, 2002). Finlay (2002) presents five variants of a researcher’s reflexivity: 1) introspection, 2) intersubjective reflection, 3) mutual collaboration, 4) social critique, and 5) discursive deconstruction.

First, reflexivity as introspection emphasizes the value of self-dialogue in the study. With this orientation, researchers often start their papers by presenting their own data, which shows that the researchers’ reflections can be used as the primary data. Second, reflexivity as inter-subjective reflection explores the mutual meanings created between a researcher and a research participant. The focus here is on self-in-relation-to-others, rather than a researcher’s individual reflection. Third, reflexivity in mutual collaboration regards participants as co-researchers, which may extend their involvement to the analysis and evaluation of data, and even as co-writers of the researcher’s paper. Correspondingly, researchers, as participants in the research, may engage in mutual reflective dialogue with other participants (Hosking & Plunt, 2010). Fourth, reflexivity as social critique is concerned with managing the imbalance of power in a research relationship. Tension between a researcher and a participant, perhaps stemming from differences such as gender, social class, and race, is openly acknowledged. Hosking and Plunt

(2010) describe three constructions of reflexivity in order to scrutinize the power imbalance: “removing bias”, “making bias visible”, and engaging in an “ongoing dialoging” (p. 59). They contend the importance of the third construction as research is an “ongoing processes of (re)constructing self (perhaps as a researcher), other (perhaps as the researched) and relationships” (p. 62). They stress that research is a continuous process, such that reflexivity should be a feature of every aspect of a study. Finally, reflexivity as discursive deconstruction maintains that there is no one meaning that can be drawn from language.

In general, reflexivity has two key elements: an understanding of the researcher’s positionality, and an examination of how this positionality affects the research process and outcomes. Numerous scholars have pointed out the importance of unpacking the researcher’s positionality, what Ping-Chun (2008) calls “baggage” (p. 212), and which may include “personal characteristics, such as gender, race, affiliation, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, personal experiences, linguistic tradition, beliefs, biases, preferences, theoretical, political and ideological stances, and emotional responses to participant” (Berger, 2015, p. 220). How this influences the process and outcome of the research is outlined by Bolton (2010), who states that reflexivity is “to strive to understand our complex roles in relation to others” (p. 13), and to examine how we are involved in “creating social or professional structures counter to our own values (destructive of diversity, and institutionalizing power imbalance for example)” (p. 14). Bolton (2010) further delineates the importance of:

becoming aware of the limits of our knowledge, of how our own behaviour plays into organizational practices and why such practices might marginalise groups or exclude individuals. And it is understanding how we relate with others, and between us shape organisational realities’ shared practices and ways

of talking. Thus, we recognise we are active in shaping our surroundings, and begin critically to take circumstances and relationships into consideration rather than merely reacting to them, and help review and revise ethical ways of being and relating. (p. 14)

3. My study

I conducted an exploratory study on reflective practice as a development tool for in-service teachers of English for my Ph.D. thesis. The major tenet of reflective practice in teacher development is that teachers can develop through reflecting on their teaching experiences and ideas, with themselves and with others. It rests on the assumption that the experiences and ideas of teachers are a legitimate form of knowledge, and that teachers are owners and producers of knowledge (Watanabe, 2016). This is in stark contrast to conventional teacher-training seminars wherein professors or researchers, typically through lectures, bestow knowledge upon practicing teachers.

In order to explore the meaning of reflective practice, I conducted a study with six in-service high school teachers of English in Japan (Ken, Kyoko, Miki, Naomi, Sara, Yoko, all pseudonyms). The study was conducted over a period of seven months, during which time the teachers engaged in monthly interviews, weekly journal writing, and three focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted in their school premises six times for 45 minutes each. With the agreement of the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded, and later transcribed for analysis. Journal writing was exchanged between each teacher and myself via email. The focus group discussions took place at the outset of the study, around the middle, and during the last month of the study. These discussions were approximately 45-minute-long and were audio-recorded with the permission of the

teachers. These three methods were reflective arenas for the teachers, as well as my source of data; therefore, I called them reflective interventions. Among the three reflective interventions, my discussion here is focused on the interviews, as they exhibited the most striking diversity amongst the teachers, served as a catalyst for unexpected professional and personal transformations, and thus for these and other reasons, posed the greatest challenge to me.

4. The interview

The interview provides a lens to allow me, the researcher, to understand the experiences of the participants. As Silverman (2015) states, the aim of the interview is to gain “an ‘authentic’ understanding of peoples’ experiences” (p. 44). Among different styles of interviews, I chose to conduct unstructured interviews. Dowling and Brown (2010) convey how unstructured interviews allow researchers “to explore the world from the perspective of the interviewee and to construct an understanding of how the interviewee makes sense of their experience” (p. 78). Kvale (2006) argues that interviews encourage participants to “freely present their life situations in their own words” (p. 481). Furthermore, the direct, face-to-face interaction that an interviewer has with an interviewee allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants compared to other methods, by providing an opportunity for clarification, probing, and prompting (Dowling & Brown, 2010). The spontaneity of the interviews may also offer “the possibility of modifying one’s line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives” (Robson, 2002, p. 272). Finally, the nonverbal cues observed in interviews may provide important information to interviewers to help understand when interpreting the verbal message (Robson, 2002).

The interview was also employed in this study as

it offers a different mode of communication and arena of expression, compared to journal writing and focus group discussions. Whereas an interview consists of a one-on-one interaction between a participant and a researcher, journal writing is essentially a solitary activity (Lawes, 2006), and a focus group involves multi-directional communication among the participants in the study.

5. The researcher

As an interview is a product of meaning created between an interviewee and an interviewer, it is essential to share my background. At the time of the study, I was a novice researcher conducting qualitative research that required intensive and extensive interaction with participants. My only previous experience as a researcher was with the pilot study that preceded this study, and involved just one participant.

Before embarking on my role as an interviewer in qualitative research, I did have one experience, a rather unpleasant one, of being a participant in a qualitative study. I was interviewed by a friend of mine (at the time) who was conducting research for her Ph.D. thesis. I was asked to talk about 'my turning point as a learner and teacher of English'. The interview was not preceded with an explanation of the study or a consent form, and I was interviewed once for about an hour. It was my first time to be interviewed and I was holding back what I wanted to say, and my friend was talking about half of the time during the interview. Some weeks later, I received a phone call from her to ask if she could interview me again. She told me that after reading the transcript of the interview, she found my interview to be unsatisfactory, and I appeared to be 'an immature teacher'. I was rather upset with her description, and responded that if I seemed 'immature', then that was probably the case. I felt undermined and violated as a participant, and decided to withdraw from

the study. A more unfortunate outcome of this interaction was that our friendship came to an end.

Nonetheless, this bitter experience instilled within me the conviction that when conducting qualitative research, a researcher should not influence what a participant says, should not dominate the interview, and should not offend the participant. In conducting interviews for my Ph.D. thesis, even as a novice researcher, I feared there might be a power imbalance with the participants that would impact the research. They were all high school teachers of English, and I was a university instructor of English at a well-known English language program. I did not want to influence the teachers unduly, nor make them feel that they had to agree with me. Thus, in the interviews, I tried as much as possible to focus on asking questions, not sharing my views, and not responding to questions. The questions I asked were to serve as prompts, and were usually elicited from the journal entries, as well as from the participants' experiences in the study. These questions were written down on a notepad that I brought to the interviews.

6. Development of the interviews

The interview process led to some unexpected challenges and outcomes. To begin with, the interview itself was an intervention that required discussion with the participants about its purpose and its meaning. Farrell (2001) claims the necessity of negotiating reflective interventions before embarking on a study; I found that it was necessary to discuss the interventions during the study as well. Even though I had a set theme for each interview for all the participants (See Table 1), the dialogue and the relationship with each participant developed its own unique course.

The purpose of the first interview was for us to get to know each other, and for the participants to become accustomed to being interviewed. I asked

Table 1

Interview Process and the Focus

	Focus of the interviews
First interview	Exploring the background of teachers and school contexts
Second and Third interviews	Asking specific questions to each participant on their journal entries
Fourth interview	Reflective task: Sharing interview transcriptions with each teacher
Fifth interview	Reflective task: Identifying their own reflective themes
Sixth interview	Reflective task: discussion on the last journal entry

questions focusing on objective information, such as the number of years of teaching experience, years of teaching at a particular school, the courses that they were teaching, and the curriculum of the school. I did not ask questions pertinent to their beliefs and ideas towards teaching during the initial interview.

For the second and the third interviews, I asked questions centered on each teachers' journal entries and I attempted to conduct the interview in a unstructured manner. However, I encountered several obstacles, sometimes common to more than one participant, and other times unique to one individual. What became evident in general during interviews, was that some interviews seemed as 'Q and A interviews.' While the participants responded adequately to the questions, these did not lead to an extensive dialogue. I noticed an overall tendency amongst the participants to wait for a question to be asked, to respond to the question, and then to wait for the next question. This seemed to have prevented the participants from exploring and developing their ideas. However, curiously, after the interview was over and the voice recorder was turned off, they would speak more spontaneously. They would ask me if they responded to the questions 'correctly' and if their data would be useful for me. Some participants apologized if I could not finish asking all the questions listed on my notepad.

Upon reflecting on these 'Q and A sessions', I considered the effects of the following: the use of a notepad in the interviews, and the use of the word

'interview' (Watanabe, 2012). During an interview, I used a notepad with a list of questions so that I would not run out of prompts. Even though I was planning to conduct an unstructured interview where questions would ideally emerge during the interview, there were questions I wanted to ask based on their journal entries. Preparing questions also gave me comfort, as I was concerned about not having anything to say in the interviews. I was afraid of silence in an interview, thinking that it would be a manifestation of my lack of skill as an interviewer. Since the participants and I were sitting facing each other in close proximity, they were able to see the list of questions on the notepad. The list might have given an impression that there were a set of questions to be asked and answered in the interviews. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2002) state that notepads can be identified as "a symbol of the power of the researcher" (p. 209). The use of the notepad could have led the participants to assume the interviewee role, believing that there were questions to be answered (Watanabe, 2012). Subsequently, I consciously limited myself from referring too frequently to the list of questions on the notepad.

A second consideration has to do with the word 'interview' in Japanese. 'Interview' is a loan word from English, frequently used in the Japanese language. The meaning of the word in Japanese is restricted to a 'Q & A' type of discourse, where an interviewer asks a set of questions to an interviewee. Using this word, the participants might

have interpreted their role to be one of answering questions, playing the role of an interviewee (Watanabe, 2012). The use of the word 'interview' was clarified in the second focus group discussion, following the third interviews. The participants were made aware that the interview sessions do not have to follow the Q & A style.

While these were two considerations that came up for the group as a whole, another challenge had to do with a particular participant, whom I call Naomi. Her interviews developed differently from those of the other participants, as she seized control of the interviews and at times, of the questions. Naomi would return and volley questions to me, sometimes a series of them. I felt caught in a bind: if I responded, I feared unduly influencing her response; yet if I did not respond, I might offend her. More than that, I personally felt it was rude not to respond to her questions.

As the interview was a forum for reflection, potential topics could be fundamental questions to their *raison d'être* as teachers. It might be possible for me to ask potentially contentious questions about their teaching, however, if I am returned such a question, could I justify not giving a response because I am the researcher? Would I be entitled to ask contentious questions, yet not be challenged myself? Behar as cited in Etherington (2004) comments on the discrepancy in revelations between a researcher and a participant in research, "We ask for revelations from others but we reveal little or nothing about ourselves; we make others vulnerable but we ourselves remain invulnerable" (p.22). It would appear rude, aloof or arrogant not to respond or make any comments. So as not to offend or discourage her participation in the study, I went along with Naomi's request and responded to her questions.

In another area creating dissonance (for me, at least), Naomi seemed to be in control of the time allotted for her interviews, which often exceeded

80 minutes. But I could not, and did not want to stop her from talking, as I felt it was important for her to have this arena for expression. During these interviews, I often wondered if I would be able to use her data in my research due to her control of the interview, and my participation in the research. However, in the end, I felt that it was more important to offer her a forum for expression and reflection, rather than to adhere strictly to the standard interview procedure so that I could use her data in my Ph.D. thesis. Despite my own discomfort, it could be argued that the interviews with Naomi represented what I was in fact trying to achieve with each participant, as hers were genuinely unstructured, with "minimal direction or control exhibited by the interviewer and the freedom the respondent has to express her subjective feelings as fully and as spontaneously as she chooses or is able" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 356).

Another unexpected development was that -- though it again did not follow protocol -- I did in fact respond more than I could have anticipated to the participants' experiences. For example, two participants, Ken and Kyoko, both in their second year of teaching, were in the early stages of shaping their professional identities. In their interviews, they often confided their fears, and sometimes questioned if they should stay in the profession. When they shared such feelings, I felt I could not just ask them to elaborate. As someone in the same profession, and who has had similar experiences, I also acknowledged their difficulties, and expressed my empathy for their situations.

To give another example of the challenges I felt in my relationships with the participants, Sara, who was in her second year of teaching at a new school, repeatedly expressed her hope that I give her critical comments on her teaching, even though she understood that such feedback was not the purpose of the study. Sara was struggling to teach types of

students whom she had not encountered before -- who were unmotivated to study, and who disregarded what teachers said. As I was not a teacher-trainer, I told her that I was not in the position to give her this kind of feedback. However, I also felt that I wish I could have given her some advice, or have another experienced teacher give her advice (Watanabe, 2016). At the same time, I was not sure if she would accept comments I might offer, as I felt the psychological distance that she created with the students, might be an obstacle. Without my input, however, she significantly changed her approach towards her students during the course of the study, and gained a greater motivation to teach.

7. Discussion

Encountering the unexpected in these interviews allowed me to ponder the challenges, and the dissonance that I experienced between regarding the interviews as a forum for the participants to reflect, and for me, the researcher, to obtain data. As I stated earlier, researcher's reflexivity involves two elements, that is, an examination of one's positionality, and of its influence in the research process and outcome. My exploration of the researcher's reflexivity led me to identify its potential 'pitfalls', such as issues of boundaries and balance when researchers reveal more of one's self, and of rapport-building. I believe that awareness of these pitfalls is important for the scrutiny of the influence of the researcher in the research process and outcome in order to maintain a high standard of ethics in qualitative research. Finally, based on my own dissonant experiences, I would like to offer some advice for novice researchers when they engage in qualitative interviews.

7.1 Reflective arena vs. data source

One aspect I learned through the engagement in

this qualitative study was that the research process does not proceed by the book and that what emerges with the interaction with the participants is the data. As noted, the interviews served as a reflective arena for the participants to reflect on their experiences, and at the same time, they were the source of data for me to complete the study to write up my Ph.D. thesis. I now realize that what the participants expressed in the reflective interventions is the data. I no longer see a discrepancy between the two; however, at the time, I was confronted with a dilemma that derived in part from a conflict between what I had learned in books about conducting interviews, and what I found and felt in my interactions with interviewees.

Before embarking on this study, I felt that I had to obtain 'good,' or so called, 'uncontaminated data', where I did not 'influence' the participants' statements, which led me to decide not to make comments to their responses, nor to respond to their questions. Also, to conduct the interviews properly, I initially felt that I had to be in control of the interviews, that is, I decide when the interviews are completed, and I decide the roles in the interviews – who asks questions and who responds to questions. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state that "An interview is a one-directional questioning- the role of the interviewer is to ask, and the role of the interviewee is to answer" (p. 33). Thus, I was perplexed when Naomi asked me questions, and I responded to her questions, and I did not stop her from talking after 45 minutes had gone by. As I did not play by the book, I thought I would not be able to use her data in my study. In addition, I felt uneasy when I sympathized with the challenges Ken and Kyoko faced in their second year of teaching. I wondered if it was acceptable for me as a researcher in an interview to acknowledge their feelings in this way. These interactions with the participants seem to show that I regarded the interviews as a reflective forum for the participants.

However, at the same time, I was still exploring the meaning of the interviews and my role in the research, as I debated, for example, whether I should respond to Sara's request of giving critical feedback on her teaching.

The ambiguous and paradoxical nature of the interview as a data source, or as a reflective intervention was observed in the participants' responses, as well as my own. The participants asked me, after the IC recorder was turned off, if what they said was 'ok', and if they had responded to all the questions. This suggests that they perceived the interviews as a source of data, and as a place to contribute by providing 'good data', rather than as an arena for them to reflect.

7.2 Responsibility as a researcher and an interviewer

Interviews are complex dialogues where meaning is constituted between a researcher and a participant, who are inherently embedded in a relationship with an imbalance of power (Finlay, 2002). The researchers' responsibility within this context is to do one's best to be fair (Seidman, 2013). Seidman (2013) believes that even though it is impossible to resolve all the inequalities pertinent to interview relationships, the researchers "do have the responsibility to be conscious of them" (p. 111). He further argues that "equity" must be the goal that researchers strive for in in-depth interviewing. By "equity" he means "a balance between means and ends, between what is sought and what is given, between process and product, and a sense of fairness and justice that pervades the relationship between participant and interviewer" (p. 111).

One way to show a sense of justice is to accept the responsibility in the development and outcome of research. Providing a supportive, non-threatening environment in which a participant feels comfortable to share their experiences in-depth, is the responsibility of the researcher

(Roulston, 2010). Moreover, Seidman (2013) writes that we need to be good listeners in interviews, but I would take this a step further and state that we need to draw out what the participants wish to express.

If a dialogue does not spontaneously develop between the two parties, then that is what is generated through the interaction. However, as researchers who hold the power in this relationship and as interviewers, I feel that we need to take more responsibility for the development or underdevelopment of the interview by reflecting on ourselves, rather than blaming 'problematic' participants (Watanabe, 2016). As Ping-Chun (2008) points out "when researcher and informant have difficulty engaging in a meaningful exchange, the researcher should explore the reasons for failure with humility and a strong spirit of inquiry" (p. 219). Berger (2015) describes this as turning the lens to the researchers, to acknowledge and take responsibility for positionality in research, and to consider the impact that the setting, the participants, the questions asked, the data collected, and the interpretation might have on the research process. As a way of engaging in reflexivity, Ping-Chun (2008) suggests that researchers be encouraged to ask questions about their participation and interactions when conducting research, such as "How did differences arise?", and "What was the basis of the tension and conflict?" (p. 219). Seidman (2013) stresses that striving for equity is a methodological, as well as ethical imperative. As such, equity is the basis for cultivating the rapport that is necessary for the participants to be willing to express their views with a researcher. However, the concept of rapport-building, also needs to be examined, and will be discussed next.

7.3 Pitfalls in rapport-building

Using Seidman's (2013) words, the extent to which an interviewer reveals him/herself in the interview is an issue of balance -- between

“exposing yourself” and “keep[ing] the focus of attention to the participants’ experiences” (p. 98). When an interview is a reflective forum, such as in my study, an interviewer’s input, for example, responding to questions, might be helpful for the participants to facilitate reflection. It might also foster a stronger rapport with the participants. However, at the same time, as Seidman (2013) points out, it is crucial to “preserve the autonomy of the participant’s words and to keep the focus of attention on his or her experience” (p. 98) rather than on the researcher. Etherington (2004) cautions that the extensive and intensive focus on the researcher’s experience might make the research “self-indulgent or narcissistic” (p. 19). Furthermore, Berger (2015) warns that researchers need to be careful in their disclosures so as not to be imposing or intrusive, nor to prompt the interviewees to parrot back what the researchers said. For example, even though Naomi expressed appreciation that I replied to her questions. I often wondered if I might have inadvertently influenced her responses or what she might have said had I not responded as fully.

There are risks to rapport-building, described by Finlay (2002) and Roulston (2010) as “pitfalls” in that rapport building, which might be an expression to be ethical to the participants, could and probably allow the researchers opportunities to ask difficult questions, to go more deeply into controversial subjects. Stacey as cited in Seidman (2013) warns that “the greater the intimacy and the apparent mutuality of the relationship between the researcher and the researched, the greater is the danger of the exploitation of the participant” (p. 24).

I was faced with this dissonance as I felt uncomfortable sharing the results of my study with the participants. I was reluctant to tell them that a book based on my Ph.D. thesis would be published, as some of my analysis might seem rather critical. Although the purpose of my research study was to contribute to the field of reflective practice, the dissonance that I experienced came

from the fact that I did not share the analysis with the participants. I am not necessarily supporting the idea of mutual discourse in the data analysis introduced earlier, but I did wonder if I was being fair to the participants. Based on the rapport that we developed, the participants confided in me. This became data that I analyzed, and have published it without their input. This discomfort led me to consider researcher’s reflexivity in the dissemination of data which I discuss next.

7.4 Researcher’s reflexivity in the dissemination of data

Awareness of the researcher’s reflexivity is often targeted towards the research participants, the process, and outcome of the research (Berger, 2015). As Croker (2016) argues, I would like to take it further, to encompass the dissemination of research.

My interactions with the participants several years after the completion of the study taught me the impact and the meaning of the data for the participants. In publishing a book based on my Ph.D. thesis, I decided to present the participants’ original data in Japanese on the publishers’ website, as a way to present the participants’ voices for readers of Japanese. I had obtained prior written consent from the participants that after the completion of the study, the data would be my possession. However, I wanted to obtain their consent again when I published their data in Japanese on a publisher’s website, which I felt was a different scenario than using their data, translated into English, for a Ph.D. thesis. In obtaining consent from the participants, all said that they were not concerned with the data translated into English. Publishing the original Japanese data, however, led to a different reaction. Several asked me to obscure some descriptions out of concern that it might lead to identifying them, or it might contribute to a readers’ negative evaluation, e.g., of a particular high school in Japan. I realized that

what they shared with me through the study was their implicit understanding of its anonymous nature, and also of their trust in me. I argue that a completion of the interviews in a study does not necessarily mean the completion of the research process and that the dissemination of data is still a part of the process where researchers need to be ethical to participants.

7.5 Recommendations

Unfortunately, teaching reflexivity has not taken root as we do not witness it in practice and in literature. This is described by Pin-Chun (2008) as “a disservice to the next generation of researchers, who will need skills and reflective insights to develop into mature and independent qualitative researchers” (p. 211). Based on the challenges and dissonances that I experienced as a novice researcher, I would like to make some suggestions in conducting qualitative interviews.

Firstly, novice researchers should be encouraged to become conscious of their ‘baggage visible’, that is, the lenses people wear in conducting research, and related to this, how they interact with others (Ping-Chun, 2008). Ping-Chun (2008) points out that making one’s baggage visible is one purpose of teaching reflexivity. This can be done through conducting and transcribing a mock interview, and keeping field notes and a researcher’s journal.

Also, through the mock interview, the novice researchers can experience challenges in conducting interviews, that is, it is necessary for one to form specific open-ended questions while he/she is actively attending to what an interviewer is saying in an attempt to draw out thick narratives from the interviewer (Ping-Chun, 2008). The novice researchers can work with a supervisor, or someone else with experience in qualitative interviews, and study their own interview transcripts (Roulston, 2010), evaluating the kind and number of questions asked, the comments offered, and the responses

received.

Another suggestion is that once one has learned about qualitative research techniques, and once a research process has been initiated, that the novice researcher should not be concerned with orchestrating the perfect interview -- interviews develop differently with different participants, depending upon the interactions with the researcher (Seidman, 2013). Instead, one should focus on the participant in front of them. It might be helpful for novice researchers to remember that conducting qualitative interviews is not solely about being equipped with the right techniques, nor about following interview protocol to the letter, but also entails interacting with the participants in the moment, in an ethical and respectful manner.

8. Conclusion

Based on the challenges and dissonances I experienced in my study, I have argued for the importance of researchers to engage in reflexivity when conducting interviews for qualitative research. I pointed out its potential risks, issues to do with balance, boundaries, and disclosure. Also, I suggested that researchers need to be reflexive in the presentation of data, and that this reflexivity is a dialogue with the participants which extends even after the completion of a study.

Through interacting with my participants in the study, I became aware of the richness and of a kind of reverence, in their data. I echo Seidman’s (2013) description of interviewing and participants:

...interviewing is a prerogative beyond the common advantage of others. Interviewers seek and are given the opportunity to enter the lives of their participants. Participants share and reflect on their experience with their interviewers. They entrust their interviews with a part of themselves. They make themselves vulnerable to their interviewers (p. 144).

With greater awareness now of the generosity of these participants, I would again like to emphasize how important it is for a researcher to be as fair and ethical as possible. Each of us can probably recall our attraction to qualitative research, as an attempt to move away from “seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations” (Kvale, 2006, p. 11). Our failure as qualitative researchers will be to disregard our reflexivity, and an ethical sensibility when we engage in interviews, thereby manipulating the participants under a friendly guise of egalitarianism.

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