

## **Chapter 6**

### **Writing the Research Text**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter arises from my discovery of analysis as a practical, interpretive and sensemaking activity. When writing up their research, many researchers often deal in generalities rather than discussing in detail concrete issues of interpretation. However there are a number of key elements to 'accountability' within action research, all of them 'methodological'. They involve:

- The provision of retrievable field text;
- The detailed specification of the analytic procedures involved; and
- The in-depth discussion of the interpretive acts that produce the research text.

This might seem to many of us, at least theoretically, to be commonsensical awareness. However, by making this awareness an open and possibly exaggerated - at least explicit - issue this chapter hopes to question our assumptions regarding the epistemological status of the practice of writing the research text and analysis of the field text. It is my intention to raise issues regarding the nature of analysis and what finally gets produced and in so doing, to question the validity of claims regarding such practices and their results. I hope to do so by making explicit and exposing my process as the researcher/author of research text generated from the co-operative inquiry through my story of the analytical stage. I hope to reveal how my story of my sensemaking enabled me to bring my construction of the research world into text, to build a bridge between the research inquiry and my representation of it.

The issues raised here are by no means new or unique as other researchers using an action research approach and feminist methodology have addressed similar issues for themselves (Reason 1988; Marshall, 1981; weick, 1995; Ely et al, 1997; Bhavani, 1997). However, traditional analyses and research done from a positivist paradigm and some from a qualitative paradigm has yet to address in any satisfactory way the problems raised; they have been treated in the main, as merely the nuisance of analysis - an inevitable but ignorable evil. The traditional domain for consideration of and solutions to these issues is ethnomethodology; however, even here, there is neglect and a way of reporting that implies the authority of the author's account. The issues I raise should be

of importance to all involved in research as well as to those encouraging reflective practice and considering methods for facilitating such activity.

Instead of talking about findings and data I want to talk about methodology, field text and research text. In this context I have borrowed from CLandinin & Connelly (1994) their definition of field text and research texts. For them 'field texts' are:

"Texts created by participants and researchers to represent aspects of field experience..... The field text created may be more or less collaboratively constructed, may be more or less researcher influenced". (p.419).

They went on to show the relationship between field text and research text by stating:

Field texts may consist of uniting, captivating family stories, conversations, and even dream texts. But researchers cannot stop things because the task is to discover and construct meaning in those texts. Field texts need to be reconstructed as research texts. Field texts are not in general constructed with a reflective intent; rather, they are close to experience, tend to be descriptive, and are shaped around particular events... Research texts are at a distance from field texts and grow out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance" (p426).

## **My Struggles to Write the Research Text**

### **Making Sense of the Field Text**

I want to highlight, using my story, the problems I encountered as I attempted to make sense of the information collected so far, as I looked for patterns of significant meanings and as I tried to create form by making retrospective sense of the situations in which I have found myself. There was a strong, reflexive quality to this process.

At that point I was reminded of Weick's book "Sensemaking In Organisations" and found helpful his definition of sensemaking and the distinction he makes between interpretation and sensemaking. For Weick sensemaking is about a process, it is "making the subjective into something more tangible" whereas "The act of interpreting implies that something is there, a text in the world, waiting to be discovered or approximated "(Weick, 1995,p.13 &14).

I deliberately did not want to be engaged in interpreting the field text at this stage as there were still lots of questions to be explored and I was left puzzled. I agree with Weick when

he says that “To talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations”(Weick 1995, p.15).

In what follows, I also reveal my external and internal processes as I navigated my way through the field text. I highlight the issues that emerged as I attempted to construct meanings from the stories that had been captured on tapes whilst collaborating with participants in the co-operative inquiry groups, and from my notes and flip charts produced by black students whilst we were engaged in teaching and learning.

### *Working with the material on the tapes*

As I entered the listening stage, that is, listening to the tape recordings of the field text I was purposeful and had an inquiry approach. I asked myself what would be the best way to inquire to make sense of what I was listening to? How would I capture on paper what was dialogue, conversation and debate from tape-recordings, which contained material that was generated from a process that took on its own life? How would I create structure? How would I represent on paper: what we had done, how we had done it, offer my reflections and justify the way I wanted to structure all of that? The tapes contained debates, stories, experiences, and no one tape was similar to the next so where and how would I begin?

### *How I listened to the tapes*

When I sat down with the audio -tapes, I was nervous and excited. I realised that I did not know how to listen so I began by listening according to the structure of the event. I followed a chronological order according to dates and times, beginning with our first meeting. I listened to each group's tapes of all the sessions separately. I chose to work with the Manager's Group first because it held my initial interest and I had contracted to be with this group on my own without Cathy, and chose to write that text separately. I listened to the tape containing our first set of questions, which included what our expectations were of workers. As I gained confidence in listening I later approached listening to the rest of the tapes of the other groups.

I selected the Practitioners' Group next, because I wanted to listen for some of their experiences and expectations of black managers and senior workers. As I listened I heard ways in which the Practitioner Group approached their dialogue. They did explore their expectations but they grounded their explorations in experiences of their social work

training, their work and life. I noted that they had a more holistic, integrated approach to their stories than the managers did; they were less concerned with debates and more with conversations in an open fashion. They were able to focus on their experiences of black people meeting and engaging with other black people and that gave me the idea for of focusing on what later became a chapter on the Black on Black Encounter (see Chapter 7).

I then proceeded to listen to the lecturers/educationalist tapes. I was aware that I was taking into that process the themes and patterns that had already emerged from the other groups. I noticed that this group's tapes had a different quality. They were less engaged in conversations and more in debates. As I listened, I noticed a competitive edge to their discussions; the educationalists were less personal and more in facilitative mode. On reflection, I wonder if it was difficult for some of us to get out of teacher role. I noticed that we talked 'about' rather than 'from'.

As I became familiar with the material again I was transported back into the whole experience. It was as if it was happening in the moment. It felt lived and I became alive. I saw vivid faces and got in touch with the emotions, warmth and excitement I felt during the inquiry as we engaged in conversations. I was pulled into the content of the stories, as a black professional woman and student, as someone who had also been through some of what was being said.

As I listened, I listened for connections, looked for patterns, did a map for every tape and made a note of questions I was left with as I listened to all the tapes of each group. There were too many issues coming at me and I realised that transcribing the tapes would prove very difficult because of the ways in which the stories and conversations went. In the event, the tapes of the group sessions were not fully transcribed although I attempted to transcribe the Managers' Group sessions. Too much field text was generated for the scope of this inquiry. As I made attempts to transcribe, it proved difficult to follow one theme, idea or story. Discussions took a nonlinear form with detours, meandering into hills and valleys, with sharp intakes of breath interspersed with laughter, stories, challenges and questions. Complex connections were being made as people shared their experiences, debated issues, expressed concerns and asked questions. These became group stories which, I believe, represented our connections. I asked inquiry questions like, "What made me think that I could make sense or write something so complex?" "What made me think that I could create something whole out of something

so fragmented?” When we came together as researchers to inquire we could neither find a way that was whole nor could we create one whole story. So how would it be possible to create something whole? Was this possible? The process was fragmented and I was feeling fragmented. I therefore focused on listening for central themes and for the groups’ stories in some of the themes.

### *Practical considerations*

In seeking to assemble resources with which to carry out an analysis for the research text, I cast my net as wide as possible and used the technique of brainstorming. I began in the practical sense with pen and paper, lots of different colours and large pieces of flipchart paper. I began with a process of brainstorming through to mappings in the shape of spider webs. Having completed that task of hours of listening and attentiveness I was faced with a huge amount of information. I was left with pages and pages of mappings from which I had to find some way of making meaning. I felt proud as I looked at the words on the paper and anxious about how I was going to deal with all those words. I experienced information overload which was a complex mixture of quantity, ambiguity and variety, and which I was forced to process.

With the information overload I felt myself falling back on old patterns of wanting to control. My first response was a rational and logical one of looking at assumptions and drawing some conclusions on the basis of the assumptions. I discovered that the logic of the situation was not overt, known, visible or predictable. The first challenge to my logic was that there was simply more information and more uncertainty than I could handle rationally. The increase in complexity increased my uncertainty because a number of diverse elements were interacting and were interdependent. Complexity also affected what I noticed and what I ignored. I noticed that the greater the complexity the more I searched for cues. I worked and reworked the maps using different colours until I started to see connections. One approach that I took was to focus on any significant statements, opinions, and ideas, which were common to all the groups or to more than one group. I was also interested in any attitudes or experiences *within* each group, which appeared to be in contradiction with one another. I grouped questions and statements and looked for similarities, differences and opposites in the stories and debates. I focused on conflicting attitudes and conflicting actions. I strung together ideas or propositions without connections, at first. There were no logical patterns and I was too challenged to figure out how these things might go together or what they might mean. Interpretations were left open. The words, ‘perhaps’, ‘possibly’, ‘maybe’ played a major part in my thinking. I was

engaged in an intense, interactive process and I was forced to recognise the implications of what I was doing with the material.

#### *Chaos and confusion*

With the amount of rich material, confusion reigned in me. My confusion stemmed from the multiple meanings that could be derived from the text. I needed more cues and varied cues. I felt I needed a mechanism that would enable me to converse, debate and seek clarification with the material. I was tempted to reduce my confusion with formal information processing which was not rich enough and which would have probably lost the richness. I was in chaos; I felt I was in turbulent territory as I engaged in comprehensive but time-consuming information processing. I felt confined and anxious and my defense was distraction. I felt de-skilled and was lacking in experience. The combination of complexity and limited expertise made the process of writing and the events of the inquiry incomprehensible.

However, I noticed that I was moving away from my old fascination, my old pattern of producing a tidy piece of work which was relatively closed and that I was beginning to take a less defensive approach to my work. I was taking an inquiry approach into what I was doing with the field text, cycling through the text, trying to be faithful to the process and authentic with the material. I tried to get clarity with the aid of inquiry questions and feedback from peers, friends, research participants and my supervisors. I noticed a change when I relied more, on my intuition and less on processes of comprehending. I felt more contained. I guess the turbulence threw me back on my intuitions and on noticing how I learn and how I know best. By paying attention not only to the content but to staying with the process and working with my passion and emotionality, I was able to move on. On reflection, I know that when I stayed with structure and content, asking questions of 'how to do' I kept getting stuck and I was left with the messy text. It was messy in the sense that there was no pretence of objectivity. The text was messy because it was not tight and clean.

#### *Representational dilemmas*

I began to worry that I was claiming, for myself at least, that my mappings and sensemaking were intending to unpack or reveal our methods, orientations, stories, and narratives. Whilst I was at this early stage, nowhere near to saying any such things; merely asking some basic questions and displaying patterns. My assumption was that I was beginning a description of the ways in which we had produced this scene and produced it sensibly.

I began to wonder if my analysis, my sense making was indeed what I was hoping it would be. Was I creating order, making sense? My reason for this query was that I began to think that making sense of these materials was different from the activity of the participants who produced/created them. There were differences in terms of the resources available to the other participants doing what they did, and me doing what I did (namely “analysis” “sense making”). Participants or co-researchers, for example make sense moment-by-moment, second-by-second, employing perhaps a “wait-and-see” orientation in their sensemaking. An analyst on the other hand, has the scene as a whole (as it were) in front of him/her. The analyst has plenty of time to make sense of the materials; whereas other participants have a few goes if not “one-go”. Utterances are heard “just one time”, by participants; whereas analysts hear them as often (or not) as they want to if they have access to tape recordings.

One question then is; can an analyst show other co-researchers productive (that is, moment-by-moment) work, with just the resources employed, in just that time, with just those persons present? My feeling was that in doing the analysis I was constructing the scene anew. The scene is not the scene that it was for my co-researchers. I employed assumptions about “analyzability”, “describability”, and “reflexivity” in getting sense making - analysis underway. I would reflect and refer to the conventions of academic presentation - in my case, PhD. - ability and so forth in reporting analysis - as well as having available those other organisational resources afforded by “doing analysis”, “what comes -next” and “repeatability”.

Resources available to and employed by other co-researchers, contribute to the unique unfolding of events as *just those* events. The issue of how to capture the sentiments, emotions and feelings that the participants contributed to these events was my concern.

### **Coming through the struggles and finding form**

#### **Patterns and Themes**

How in practical terms could I then make use of this material, except by categorising and using themes? I needed to think, for example, about whether I would develop themes and arguments through a narrow treatment of the field text or by using our field text to engage with much broader, more general themes. I approached my work in relation to themes with a belief that the themes did not ‘reside’ in the field text, and if we just look hard

enough they will 'emerge'. I then began to look for the patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes either within individuals' personal accounts, individual group account and or across all the inquiry groups. The sorting through the material for these patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes, which constituted the inquiry that shaped the field text into research text was created by my internal experience as well as my relationship to the inquiry and participants.

During the initial analysis of the field text, I found it very hard to get away from the impact of the stories. Each story was unique, and some had been painful and had had a major effect on some co-researchers' lives. As I wrote I felt responsible, obligated and experienced a sense of commitment to ensuring that I reflected their 'truth'. I certainly had an emotional and ethical relationship to the participants and to the inquiry and that continued to be evoked as I listened to audio tapes and wrote.

I was both angry at and hurt by what I heard and it was difficult to see beyond this to any patterns or groupings in the text. I related earlier, my experience in trying to move beyond the bits and pieces of statements to a more holistic statement of the essence of the field text. I spent many hours there and many more with notebooks and tape recordings. I had lots of thoughts, lots of ideas and still lots more questions and not many answers, which left me feeling frustrated. I read and reread my notes and summaries until the anger and pain began to subside and I began to see some patterns emerging. The attempt to identify and then find appropriate words for what I considered the essence, the theme of our findings was difficult. I made many different attempts at grouping before settling on broad groupings like, 'support', 'connections', and 'identity', 'Myth of the super black manager'.

Building categories was important to subsequent thematic analysis. My thematic analysis by its nature developed over time. I discovered that whilst teasing out themes was essential, the way I wrote about them was not set in stone. I, therefore, found different ways to present and illustrate the themes, which also included not writing theme statements directly. I was hit with multiple themes to choose from but I was concerned with statements of what were, to me, important meanings, essential to understanding what was perceived as at the heart of the culture or experience we studied. I arrived at my analysis through a process of 'sorting' and 'sifting'. Practically speaking I listed many themes, went through processes of refining and combining them. I sorted through the whole for my understanding of patterns that ran throughout and lifted them out to make a



general statement about them or selected those that seemed most salient, or most relevant, to the story I have chosen to tell. As I engaged with themes and 'metathemes' I was involved in a 'metatwist' of reflecting back on the research process as well as on the field text.

#### *Subjectivity in choosing themes*

I am aware that I may have chosen themes because they might have seemed 'interesting' since (for example) they were familiar or confirmed my prejudices. I believed that some themes resided in my head from my thinking about the research purpose and the field text, creating links, as I understood them. The crucial factor was my growing awareness that I was looking more for explanations and processes. I came to realise that if my real interest was in explanations and perceptions, then it was greater depth rather than breadth that was required in the research text and that I had to listen to the tape recordings several times for what the participants were saying.

I began to readdress some of the concepts and notions I had brought with me into the research, such as how we construct our experiences into 'positive' and 'negative', notions of success. This necessitated shedding my own ideas and preconceptions of wanting to accentuate the positives. This was because I noticed that more of the 'negatives' of our experiences were being told. Participants did not conceptualise what was going on in terms of positives or successes as such but asked questions about how we could be more positive and more supportive to each other.

It seemed that I had an almost constant struggle between trying to hold on to security with the ideas I brought to the research arena, and the uncertainty of negotiating uncharted territory. My original concepts of "agency" negatives" "positives", 'success', 'empowerment' gave me at least a working structure compared with the insecurity of putting these ideas on one side to broaden my framework.

### **Analysing, Theorising and Writing**

#### Theorising

My theorising involved thinking with the field text. That meant "going beyond" the field text to develop ideas. I am referring here to the processes of generalising and theorising which entails expressing ideas more formally. I thought about theory as having and using ideas. In thinking about the research process, Dey (1993, p.51) described theory "simply as an idea about how other ideas can be related".

### *Use of Ideas and Theories*

The interweaving of analysis with the use of ideas can occur at different levels and at different stages of the research. During the early stages of my sensemaking I was also reading for ideas from literature on feminist methodology, where the emphasis is on understanding the social and cultural context of events as well as the events themselves.

I felt it important to be able to go beyond the local setting of the research and to engage with the formal ideas at a more general level. In that sense I went beyond the field text and beyond the original setting of the research. I thought I needed to engage with ideas that are derived from and related to social settings of many kinds. I was prepared to engage in creative intellectual work and to speculate about the field text in order to have ideas. I was also prepared to try out a number of different ideas; to link my ideas with those of others, and so to move conceptually from my own research setting to a more general level of analytic thought. I was mindful about the timing of this, and that I should honour the process and length of time required in staying in the local research setting and with my ideas from the research.

Having ideas is part of every aspect of the research process. My analysis of the text was informed by my own ideas about what was going on and was informed by some participants' views of what they thought was going on. The kinds of ideas I used or drew from were influenced by my understanding, sympathy and curiosity in relation to particular "schools" of ideas - for example black feminist thought, feminist ideas, post modernist thought, phenomenology, psychology, gestalt theory, groupwork theory.

These ideas were used to guide my exploration and sensemaking of the text in the context of the social world. I was mindful not to follow previous scholarship slavishly but to adapt and transform it in the sensemaking of my own ideas. Theories were drawn on repeatedly as ideas were formulated, tried out, modified, rejected, or polished. Ideas came from multiple sources. I was actively engaged with published literature for available ideas. The work of others was inspected for how their ideas could inform my sensemaking. I looked to fictional, biographical, autobiographical and journalistic writing to furnish my ideas, as academic writing in my narrow specialty was limited. So I was engaged in wide and eclectic reading, borrowing concepts.

As ideas grew out of the field text I noted something about the information at hand. I speculated about possible interpretative frameworks - drawn from my general knowledge and from my specialised reading in the social sciences and black literature - that might help to account for what I was observing, seeing and noticing. These, in turn, helped to throw light on other aspects of the field text, which in turn helped me to extend the framework of general ideas and concepts. In this manner, I believe my interaction with the field text grew, in an organic fashion, towards a broad, encompassing analysis.

I had no option about the generation and use of theoretical ideas for my analysis. As Silverman (1993, p.46) notes, theorising cannot easily be divorced from analysis: "We only come to look at things in certain ways because we have adapted, either tacitly or explicitly, certain ways of seeing. This means that, in observational research, data collection, hypotheses - construction and theory building are not three separate things but are interwoven with one another". Reflective research practice also asks for a similar process of integration of theorising and analysis.

### Analysing and Writing

Writing actually deepened my level of analytical endeavour. How I wrote was effectively, an analytic issue. I reflected upon and made strategic decisions about the level and direction of my texts and other kinds of writing. Writing was a positive act of sensemaking and finding the 'right' language to write the text was a struggle for me. I was challenged to find an appropriate language to capture our struggles to find our language in the private and public space we had created in the inquiry groups. I struggled with efforts to communicate what sometimes went beyond standard uses of language. Some experiences were impossible to render into English. So what did I take myself to be doing when I tried to communicate our experiences in English, in acceptable language for an academic audience? I found that I had to nurture my voice and value my writing as a method of knowing and it freed me from trying to write a single text in which everything was said to everyone.

My analytical ideas were developed and tried out in the process of writing. In my analysis, I traced the causes of certain phenomena backwards and outwards by providing arguments from a socio historical perspective to explain certain phenomena. I needed an approach, which went beyond the real contradiction between the needs of individual students and professionals and the needs of the economic and political order. In 'going beyond' I did not want to remove the contradictions or negative experiences, or explain these away. I wanted, instead, to address the problem or issue as I perceived it.

Analysis is not simply a matter of classifying, categorising, coding or collating field text. It is not simply a question of identifying forms of speech or regularities of action. 'Analysis is about the representation or reconstruction of social phenomena' (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p.108). We do not simply "collect" field texts; we fashion them out of our transaction with others. Likewise we do not merely report what we find. We create accounts of social life and in doing so we construct versions of the social worlds and the social actors which we interact with. It is, therefore, inescapable that analysis implies representation. Thinking about how to represent our field text also forced me to think about the meanings and understandings, voices and experiences presented in the field text.

### **Representation of voice in the Research Text**

#### **Representation – Multiple Voices**

I became stuck when I felt over responsible for putting out in public multiple voices. I felt that I was too close to the material and I required some level of distance to be able to see clearly. I did not want to be conceived of as holding all the power in this regard, but I was constantly plagued with the thought, will I capture and represent the voices in a truly authentic way?

As I wrote the research text there were issues around voice which I was aware that I had not considered. I reminded myself that I had to consider the voice that is heard and how it is heard. I later became aware that I had included extracts in such a way that they appeared negative and I had not included enough positive stories. This was as result of feedback on a draft of the research text from some co-researchers. I realised that I had included the voices in such a way as to obscure/omit or silence important parts of our collaborative inquiry. I was then left with more questions and dilemmas about voices, both about my voice as author/co-researcher and the voices of other co-researchers. I continued to struggle to speak the research text in multiple voices. My silence, both those I chose, those of which I was unaware and those I became aware of are also issues of voice in the research text.

#### ***Finding my Voice***

Having written the first draft of the research text I realised that my voice was missing from the extracts I chose to include. I noticed that I did not account for my own experiences and I was disappearing from the text. Did I fail to record my own private thoughts,

problems and anxieties simply in order to remain 'objective'? What were the events and themes which I left out? I had begun very clearly, in my research, with the idea that I was not taking an objective or 'scientific' approach to the research. Why then, through taking a public research role, did I allow my own perspective to be drowned out? In the act of checking for validity (see Chapter 9) I received feedback on my writing of drafts from friends, academic colleagues and research participants who have, in fact, suggested that I must have 'suppressed' certain things in order to present the research text in the way that I did. Some aspects of their appraisal dismayed me, as it was so close to what had happened. Were my private omissions so obvious to outsiders?

I realised that in taking the approach of writing 'about' rather than 'from' I had depersonalised the research text and made it easier not to include myself. This was not intentional, so I had to take the text from what I 'talked about' to something that 'is' talking 'from' the event of the inquiry. I returned to the field text and made another attempt to transcribe some of the taped group sessions. I wanted to represent dialogue, this time, but I still found it too difficult and time consuming to transcribe. So I gave up.

By excluding my voice I was giving the impression that I had nothing to say or that the bulk of what I had to say was as the author of the text and in the creation of the research text. I felt I was inadvertently taking on a more powerful role as author, having expert knowledge and ability to give meaning.

I was so preoccupied with accuracy, representations, authenticity and integrity, responsibility to 'others' that I was producing more of the work of other co-researchers. I did not show clearly, explicitly, evidently the part I played in enabling the discussions and conversations to develop nor indeed, did I assist other participants to make meaning as we went along.

When the veil of silence was lifted and I realised that I had something to say and felt the power of my voice, I still struggled with finding a way of saying what I wanted to speak. I had the dilemma of sorting out how to be in the text. Geertz (1988) captures my sentiment in this statement: "being there in the text is even more difficult than being there in the field".

My reading of the first full write up of the research text revealed to me that the balance of my sensemaking and analysis of the field text was overpowering – too much

interpretation and not enough field text. I ran the risk of obscuring subjectivity. Also, I noticed in one of the chapters of the research text that other writers and other theories were dominating parts of the text. I struggled to put my own stamp on the work. I experienced my struggle for a research voice as living on a knife-edge. I struggled to express my own voice in the midst of the text in the same way that I struggled to assert my more personal and intimate voice in the midst of the inquiry. I was, at all times, attempting to create a research text that would speak to and reflect on the participants' voices. I was also aware that I was exposing myself, to legitimate criticism from participants and from readers.

How, as Malinowski (1994) notes do you cope with presenting what he glosses as 'my subjective reaction', when this includes anxieties and concerns. What price, then, should you be prepared to pay for setting full 'reflexivity' on the page? I am still not sure. Nevertheless in writing this chapter, I am taking this opportunity to give voice to my silence now as well as in the whole thesis. I think of this process as the development of my voice after silence

### **Audiences and Readers**

I care very much about the ongoing relationship with the participants as well as with the ways in which and for what purpose the research text would be read, so that made a big difference to the way I wanted to write the text and to how it was finally written. I had to keep in mind my audience and think about the kind of written work desired. I was also faced with the political challenge of presenting in public to a white, academic audience the experiences that were shared in an all black setting. Further concerns were: that the material might be dismissed or devalued; might not be seen as original, might not be seen as good enough; might be misunderstood; or that the material may provoke anger or might be too challenging. Writing for a multiple and diverse audience therefore created for me a problem for me. This was mixed with an excitement at the thought that this might be breaking new ground. I was also holding myself back by the statement, which I had internalised as a child that "*black people should not wash their linen in public*". I feared highlighting too much difference or not presenting the difference well enough.

I was mindful of my audience and readers, at all times, and wanted to establish a relationship with them. This concern for readers, as further collaborators in the process of the work, raises the question: who are the readers? I realised that I could not determine

precisely how the text would be read as reading is an active process, and no text can have a completely fixed meaning. On the other hand, I had an implied audience of readers in mind as I wrote. It was clear from the beginning that I was writing for various audiences: (1) those with whom I had co-researched; black students, social work managers and trainers, colleagues, and other black professionals. (2) Colleagues with whom I would be working on making changes to our social work course. (3) Wider audiences of black people in the community, who might be able to relate my account to their own experiences. I also had another audience in mind; academic social scientists that I wished to convince of the rigour and richness of this method of work.

My immediate practical question concerned the first three of my audiences: how would the research text have to be presented, such that these three audiences could simultaneously feel that their differing purposes and concerns were taken into consideration? The existence of these complex audiences was, at times, a constraint and, at other times, acted as a discipline for selecting a small proportion of the field text. A sense of audience was crucial in my approach to both form and content. Different texts inscribed different analyses - different viewpoints, different emphases and different subject matter - and thus constructed the research text itself in different ways.

Writing as a doctoral student restricted my focus to academic readership but I did not let this restrict my analysis to one and only one perspective, or my style to a single mode. Deciding whom I was writing for still implied decisions about what I was writing *about*, for *what* reasons, and from what *perspectives*. I was aware that I could design and produce different texts from the same research, but such decisions were part of the process of analysis. Analysis, therefore, and the ways in which I chose to represent the field text could not be separated, so analysis cannot be divorced from representation.

The implied readership had a bearing not only on how I crafted the work - in terms of style, for example - but also on how I conceptualised it. An audience of readers implied shared knowledge and assumptions about what was relevant to what. I wrote this text in the light of styles that are characteristics of disciplines, schools of thought and are characterised by particular conventions - of organisation and language - that are of direct relevance to major analytic perspectives.

I wanted the research text to be material that could be used by black people and recognised that it was up to me to represent that material in order to meet that aim and

reach that audience as well as read academic readers. I was therefore faced with the challenge of a diversity of representations and a variety of genres. How I chose to represent the field texts and wrote the research text was not obvious and unproblematic. It was clear, however, when reading through my notes from the tapes and the first draft of my research text that I was presenting an account which contained a 'voice' directed to an audience outside the text, relating personal to wider public meanings. This suggested to me that my accounts were incomplete. This was further confirmed by the feedback given to me by some of the research participants who read drafts. The way in which I was writing the research text seemed to have meant that I maintained a 'public' voice (which I felt would be acceptable academically).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have tried to show that creating research texts calls for a creative as well as a disciplined interaction with field texts. Field texts, analysed with close attention to detail, understood in terms of their internal patterns and forms, are one possible use in developing theoretical ideas about social processes and cultural forms which has relevance beyond those field texts themselves.

I have also tried to show that modes of writing and other forms of representation are fundamental to the work of the research text. Inevitably, I feel this chapter has probably raised more questions than answers. There seemed to be so many obstacles to producing a truly 'reflexive' account. How personal and 'truthful' does that personal account have to be, or is the search for private truth a fruitless way of approaching 'objectivity' by the back door? Which of the private and public voices that emerged through the research should I have listened to and written up? One cannot deny the power of the author in selecting, organising and presenting the field text, regardless of the approach taken. Whosoever voice is heard, it cannot be wholly the co-researchers' but with an open and relatively unstructured approach, the filter is likely to be larger than with a close, structured, positivist framework. I eventually produced an account, which I thought would satisfy the examiners of my Ph.D. thesis. Yet I am not satisfied. The hidden voices are still occupying my thoughts.



