

CONSTRUCTING ETHNOGRAPHIC RELATIONSHIPS: REFLECTIONS ON KEY ISSUES AND STRUGGLES IN THE FIELD

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ABSTRACT *An ethnographer shares his insights from the field about constructing relationships in research. Focusing on a case study in a New Zealand area school, he reflects on his experiences in the field and the key issues he struggled with related to building relationships. He explores these issues from three theoretical perspectives: building ethical relationships, building trustworthy and authentic relationships, and building relationships as methodology. After identifying these key issues, he discusses some of the choices made in the field, including becoming deeply involved in the school, balancing remaining true to the data and at the same time respecting the dignity of participants, and creating friendships.*

KEY WORDS

Ethnography, Field work, Relationships, Ethics, Constructivism

INTRODUCTION

I am excited to be not only a researcher but also a participant in the school as an agent of change. My background in organization development is helpful in creating this change and systematizing/institutionalizing it. I began on the far end of the continuum as an observer and now find myself moving back and forth along the continuum of observer-participant. (Fieldnotes from Raglan Area School, 21 September 2004)

Conducting ethnographic research fieldwork is a complex and dynamic activity. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the key issues I had to struggle with while doing fieldwork related to relationships. I will identify those issues and briefly explore some aspects of how the choices I made played out in the field. These issues are explored in terms of building ethical relationships, based on trustworthiness and authenticity, in such a way as to be the foundation of the methodology used in the research.

As a result of being awarded a Fulbright Fellowship, I was able to conduct this case study at the Raglan Area School (Te Kura a Rohe o Whaingaroa). Reflecting on that project, I want to explore some of the issues I had to grapple with when going into the field and while conducting the research.

Raglan Area School was chosen for my study because the staff was beginning a professional development program in restorative practices simultaneous with my arrival for the Fulbright study. I wanted to study how the restorative practices training affected the daily lives of the students, teachers, and administrators at the school, particularly in how they responded to student misbehaviour. In that way I could gain some insights into the how the school did or did not support a culture of peace and non-violence. This approach was taken because ethnographies are cultural studies, conducted to learn how a group of people think and behave relative to a certain idea.

Restorative practices are fundamental to the theoretical framework for my work. The idea of restorative practices is based on the theory of restorative justice, which I describe as responding to wrongdoing and conflict with an emphasis on healing the harm, particularly to relationships, incurred by all those people affected by the event.

Raglan Area School was ideal for a case study because it was the only school in the small community of Raglan. I lived in Raglan so I could get to know the students and their families in and outside of school. I encountered them on the beaches, in the stores, and as I walked to and from school during my study. The school proved to be an outstanding choice because it is the only area school in New Zealand that had Māori immersion, bilingual, and mainstream units in one institution. Since the student population was about 50% Māori, I was able to explore my research from a bicultural perspective.

I outlined the purpose of my study in the proposal that I submitted to Fulbright:

I will spend the 2004-2005 academic year in the school conducting a research study to answer two questions:

1. What peace (non-violence) means at the school, and
2. What the daily experiences of the students, teachers, staff, and parents associated with the school's restorative practices relative to creating a culture of care are like.

As an ethnographer, I will work as an anthropologist participating in and observing students in the classroom, hallways, lunchroom, etc. My field research will consist of gathering data through observations, interviews, document collection, and reflective memos. I will use constructivist grounded theory and vignettes to analyse the data. In the end I will produce an ethnography of my work.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Fundamentally, my constructivist worldview influenced this research project, and I believed this approach best suited the purpose of this study. I agree with Denzin and Lincoln (2000) who said, "According to Lincoln and Guba, constructivism adopts a relativist ontology (relativism), a transactional epistemology, and a hermeneutic, dialectical methodology. Users of this paradigm are oriented to the production of reconstructed understandings of the social world" (p. 158).

I did not always hold a constructivist worldview. As a young man I was influenced by my conservative upbringing. As a result I held a bifurcated worldview. People and events were either good or bad, black or white, or right or wrong.

However, after years of working in the courts, I came to realize people observed events from different perspectives. For example, three people could witness the same accident involving two vehicles and have different stories about what occurred. One witness might be an elderly man walking his dog, another a young mother rushing to take her children to day care before driving to work, and another a teenager driving to school for the second time since receiving a license. Each one saw the accident from a different perspective, and that observation is neither right nor wrong. It is their perspective. As a constructivist I want to understand and reconstruct these perspectives, looking for themes and patterns that form the underlying meaning of the situation.

As a constructivist researcher I came to this study from a position of being in a new culture. Rather than starting this project with preconceived ideas about what I would learn, I deliberately chose to begin from a position of humility and unknowing. As a result I was dependent on creating relationships to be able to conduct the research. In order to create those relationships I knew they needed to be ethical, trustworthy, and authentic, and these elements became an integral part of the research methodology.

DATA COLLECTION

I began my research at Raglan Area School collecting the data for this Fulbright project on the 26th of July 2004. I spent over 400 hours at the school over a period of a year. Spending an extended period of time in the field is characteristic of an ethnography. I collected data in the form of 250 pages of fieldnotes, informal, formal, and focus group interviews with students, staff, and parents, approximately 150 documents, and about 180 pages of journal entries.

I reflected on the data I collected in the form of fieldnotes, journal entries, and feedback from participants. In the field I wrote what Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) termed “jottings” (p. 17) as a form of journal writing. I used a notebook with legal ruled paper so I could write my observation notes on the right-hand side of the page and questions and personal, methodological, and theoretical notes on the left-hand-side. These notes then formed the fieldnotes. Four categories of notes were written: observational, methodological, theoretical, and personal. Primarily, I reflect on the personal notes for this article because they contained my uncensored feeling statements about the research, the people involved, my doubts, my anxieties, and my pleasures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

I kept a journal while I was engaged in fieldwork. I reviewed those journal entries to refresh my memory about my perspectives regarding the research. At the end of each school term I reviewed and reflected on the fieldnotes and produced memos. The memos helped me identify and develop at a deeper level interpretations, questions, and themes that emerged in the fieldnotes and from my field experience (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

I analysed these data using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000) and vignette (Van Maanen, 1988) writing as methods for deconstructing and then reconstructing the data in order to discover the underlying meaning of the data and make sense of the culture of the school. The first set of data were analysed in October and confirmed the themes underlying the theory of a culture of care developed in my dissertation study. However, other data did not fit with those themes and caused me to return to the field to gather more data. Analyzing the second set of data took approximately six weeks over the summer holiday. As part of the analysis I created a visual display of the themes identified so I could see how they related to one another to create patterns.

I shared reflective memos with the participants seeking their comments, and that feedback was reviewed for this paper. These methods were chosen to add trustworthiness to the project. Based on a reflective review of these data, I was able to explore how I built relationships in the field and the choices I made, why I made them, and what effect they had.

BUILDING ETHICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Theoretical Perspective

As a constructivist researcher, I agree with Denzin and Lincoln (2000) that the researcher's ethical responsibilities to the participants are the primary elements of validity of qualitative research in the present moment. Having based my study on a constructivist methodology I was motivated to have a relationship with the participants that helped to represent their multiple voices in a way that was authentic and genuine, rather than imposing my critical analysis on the study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) helped me to understand that in the constructivist paradigm I would act as a "passionate participant" and be the facilitator of a multivoice reconstruction. The aim of the inquiry is to seek understanding and attempt to reconstruct the multiple voices that were part of the inquiry, which is the foundation of the constructivist approach.

Choices

Utilizing a constructivist approach, I gathered data related to the purpose of this study. I wanted to reconstruct the voices of different groups in the school. In the beginning the data covered a wide range of perspectives. After each set of data were analysed, I found emerging themes. Finally, I determined the data were saturated and I was not discovering any new themes relative to my research questions. When the data became saturated, I was confident that I was ready to make findings and present those findings to the participants for their comment.

My fieldnotes and journal entries reflected the struggles I had with not only making sense of the meaning of the data I was collecting but also how to present my findings, particularly the tensions I found, to these people who I not only cared about but respected. I struggled continually with how to write about my research in a way that was constructive and supportive rather than critical and destructive:

Things are beginning to become clearer, and I now understand the dynamic complexity of this school (and any school). While I begin to get some understanding of what peace means at this school, I realize there is not one clear meaning shared by all the members of this school community. So how do I reconstruct the multiple voices I am hearing that give meaning to what I am studying? That is the struggle and difficult work of my research. (Fieldnotes, 10 September, 2004)

So I struggle to put together all these tensions into some meaningful format that informs my research and reflects the meaning of care and biculturalism at Raglan Area School...I trust by analysing this data that the underlying meaning and the way to express that will emerge. It always has in the past. I trust it will again...So the quest to understand the meaning of all this continues, and I so enjoy the journey, the struggle, and the joy of sensemaking. (Journal Entry, 23 November, 2004)

The fieldnote and journal entry noted above express the struggle I had with making sense of the data and being true to the voices of the participants. On the one hand I was committed to representing the data analyses accurately and completely, and on the other hand, I had developed a deep respect for the teachers and administrators of Raglan Area School. I realized that some of the results could be viewed as critical, so I wanted to present my findings in a way that was true to the data and at the same time avoiding an attack on any of the participants. In the end, I asked those persons who I determined would be most likely to be offended by what I wrote to review my field memo first, before I shared it with the whole staff. I considered their comments and made some changes, and in the end I was satisfied that the data was well represented and the dignity of the individuals involved was protected.

I was grateful for choosing the path of the "passionate participant" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) rather than the critical observer. My choice to reconstruct the multiple voices I heard in the field required me to listen to staff and write about the different perspectives people held. This choice encouraged staff to talk openly about tensions at the school and raised the awareness of the school community about those tensions.

Results

Over time I realized that tensions existed in the school, around what the school's mission meant by providing "a quality education in a caring bi-cultural environment." Particularly the staff and students did not share a common understanding of the concepts of "caring" and "bicultural." At the same time I came to have a deep respect for the people at the school, and I wanted to honour their dignity and the dignity of the school. I realized that these tensions mirrored the complex and dynamic community in which this school exists. In the end, I chose to recognize the assets of the community and view the tensions as opportunities to change and improve an already outstanding school.

In addition to addressing the ethical responsibilities in the field, I needed to be trustworthy and authentic. I believe a reciprocal relationship demands an offer and response. In building relationships in the field, I wanted to offer myself to the participants as trustworthy and authentic.

BUILDING TRUSTWORTHY AND AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Theoretical Perspective

Building relationships in the field in the ways suggested involves a different way of thinking about the relationship between the researcher and the participants in the project. Thinking about validity in traditional terms of objectivity and lack of bias no longer applies. Rather, validity is seen in terms of building relationships based on trustworthiness and authenticity.

In regard to a constructivist approach to research based on building relationships I found myself struggling with the idea of validity. In this age of the "Seventh Moment," (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), the descriptive name for the current era in qualitative research, it is difficult for the qualitative researcher, espousing a constructivist epistemology, to find a clear path for talking about validity.

On the one hand you have researchers such as Denzin (1994) and Wolcott (1990) denying the need for referring to validity. On the other, Lather (2001) chooses to use the term validity as a means of "(dis)articulation of positivist hegemony" (p. 241), meaning a way to critically analyse traditional thinking about what is true and real. Whether the discussion is couched in terms of internal and external validity or trustworthiness and authenticity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), the issue of legitimacy of our work cannot be avoided.

Gergen and Gergen (2000) noted traditional efforts to discover and record the trustworthiness of our work are being replaced by such innovations as reflexivity, multiple voicing, literary representation and performance. These innovations are causing researchers to reconceptualize and reframe the conversation about validity.

Lather (2001) provided us with a framework for "thinking differently about how we think about validity in qualitative research in education" (p. 242). She based her conversation about this new framework in terms of "first, the shifts in epistemology and the consequent weakening of homogenous standards, and second, the proliferation of counterpractices of authority in qualitative research" (p. 242).

Lather (2001) paid respect to Lincoln and Guba (1984) for moving the discourse about validity from normative to relational practices. She ends her chapter with this thought:

Situated in the crisis of authority that has occurred across knowledge systems, the challenge is to make productive use of the dilemma of being left to work from traditions of research and discourses of validity that appear no longer adequate to the task. Between the no longer and the not yet lies the possibility of what was impossible under traditional regimes of truth in the human sciences; the invention of other practices of generative methodology out of

recognition of the unnoticed dangers of the techniques we use to conceive and resolve our problems of establishing legitimate knowledge. (p. 247)

In defining the present or "Seventh Moment" Denzin and Lincoln (2000) described qualitative research as embracing two tensions at the same time:

On the one hand, it is drawn to a broad, interpretive, postexperimental, postmodern, feminist and critical sensibility. On the other hand, it is shaped to more narrowly defined positivist, postpositivist, humanistic, and naturalistic conceptions of human experience and its analysis. (p. 1048)

This description also embraces the range of the conversations about validity on one hand and trustworthiness and authenticity on the other. From these tensions, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) proposed four "certainties" about the qualitative researcher to help address the questions raised by this range of conversations:

1. We do not stand outside and above the text as an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer.
2. We must remember we are historically constructed and locally situated as a human observer of the human condition.
3. The meaning we seek to learn about is radically plural, always open, and politically saturated.
4. Our inquiry should be conceptualized as a civic, participatory, collaborative process that joins the researcher and the researched in an ongoing moral dialogue.

Choices

While these four "certainties" are not definitive answers to the lingering questions of how to evaluate the legitimacy of our research work, I believe they provide a framework for judging our work. As a constructivist researcher, I attempted to attend to these "certainties" in my work so that my research would have legitimacy in this "Seventh Moment" and guide my relationship with the participants in the study.

In order to attend to these four certainties, I determined that I needed to become deeply embedded in the life of the school. I knew I was "one of them" when some teachers joked about a message I wrote on the whiteboard in the staff room.

In the staff room I am chuckling to read the fun staff is having with my request for "kiwi recipes." Such comments are written on the board as "it's a protected bird" and "rolled in sushi." So I changed "kiwi" to "New Zealand" and a comment was written, "cannibalism." So then I changed it to "local." The staff are enjoying the fun, and I am feeling quite accepted because these people feel comfortable enough with me to make jokes on me. (Fieldnotes, 28 October, 2004)

As a result of this event I was confident that I was now part of the community and accepted in my role as an observer of the culture of the school. The teachers, in particular, acknowledged that I was beginning to understand the dynamic complexities of life at the school. Most importantly, these people were affirming their willingness to participate in the collaborative work this research required.

Results

Once entrance was gained through ethics approval and consents, I was able to visit the school. Because New Zealand schools are structurally different from the popular single building designs in my home country of America, I first had to learn my way around the different areas. The daily routine was also different, so I got used to morning interval or tea instead of recess, a half-hour long instead of 15 minutes for primary students and no recess for secondary students, and lunch of 45 minutes, instead of the usual 20 minutes in America.

By the end of the first month at the school I found that staff were going about their work and ignoring me for the most part as I slipped in and out of classrooms. By the end of October I sensed I was a member of the community. I looked for signs of acceptance as "one of them." The events surrounding my request for kiwi recipes came as a surprise, and I concluded when staff were comfortable enough to joke with me that I was part of the community.

By attending to the responsibilities for ethical relationships outlined in the "certainties" I gained the trust of Māori students and staff. Since I had never lived with Māori before, learning about *te reo* and *tikanga*, language and culture, was fundamental to building relationships with these people.

I attended camp in November with a Māori teacher and his "boys" to Whangapoua on the Coromandel Peninsula. As a result of spending a period of four days with them, I learned in depth how they felt about the school's approach to discipline. From those conversations I recognized the foundation of the culture of the school in this regard and the key elements of the theory I was developing:

The culture of the school is at the heart of this model. The key element is relationships – building, maintaining, and healing relationships (when wrongdoing and conflict occur) based on respect for the human dignity each of us possesses. Caring for and about others and responding appropriately to care are fundamental to the first two elements (building and maintaining relationships). And we can use our rituals and traditions to model and teach the reciprocal ethic of care. Healing relationships is the work of restorative practices. All three elements need to occur in a unified community that is strongly bonded around a mission of care and bi(multi)culturalism. Teachers need to use constructivist (cooperative) pedagogy and create a learning community in their classroom. Schools need to be a learning organization to support these teachers. Parents need to be involved greatly throughout the school. Teachers and administration need to be accountable (just as students are). Students need to be trusted. Labels need to be

eliminated because – People are not the problem, the problem is the problem. If a person engages in wrongdoing or conflict there must be a way for them to be held accountable (apology and forgiveness), repair the harm resulting to relationships, and be restored with full dignity (respect) in the school community. The family must be totally involved, and the idea of family must be understood as the person/student understand and experiences family, not as the dominant thinking in the school defines family. (Fieldnotes, 1-4 November, 2004)

The camp experience was critical to understanding the culture of the school regarding responding to student wrongdoing and conflict, particularly from a bicultural perspective. This understanding resulted from building a relationship of trust with the Māori staff and students. This trust was strong enough for a Māori student to be honest with me about what it was like to be Māori in mainstream classes:

In answer to my question about what it is like to be a Māori student in senior school, the student replies, "Most of the time the lights are turned off. The light comes on Tuesday afternoon at kapa haka." (Fieldnotes, 28 October, 2004)

I was stunned by this student's response to my interview question. I had not expected such a clear metaphor to explain her feelings about being culturally safe at the school. This quote has caused me to reflect further on how we can create culturally safe schools. I do not believe I would have had the interactions I did with the Māori teachers and students if I were not authentic and trustworthy. I believe they would have been polite but unwilling to share their innermost thoughts about life at the school.

As I spent time in the field I learned that attending to the ethical responsibilities of building relationships and being trustworthy and authentic were not enough. I needed to consider how building relationships could be the foundation of my methodology in the field.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AS METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Perspective

The nature of our society causes an ethnographic researcher like myself to "muddle," as Eisenhart (2001, p. 16) termed it. One of the muddles Eisenhart identified is the ethical responsibility of the ethnographer to the participants in the study. The tension created by this muddle involves the participant observer continuum, where the researcher is constantly seeking to locate their role in the group they are studying between observation, the stance of being disengaged with participants, on one end and participation, being engaged with participants, on the other.

Heshusius' (1994) idea of "participatory consciousness" (p. 16) required me to go to a deeper level in the relationship between the knower and the known. This

form of engagement between the researcher and the informants led me to focus on the other and not myself. As Heshusius explained, participatory consciousness “results from the ability to temporarily let go of all preoccupation with self and move into a state of complete attention” (1994, p. 17).

Participatory consciousness ignores the dualistic debate of objectivity versus subjectivity. Instead, researchers like me ask that the rigour of our work be judged in terms of our methodology and the ethical, including participatory, nature of our research (Heshusius, 1994).

Rather than name my work as participatory action research, I prefer Tillmann-Healy’s (2001) idea of friendship as methodology. From my perspective friendship is the result of deliberately building relationships in the field. In aligning friendship with participatory consciousness (Heshusius, 1994), I was committed to being aware of my role as the researcher in the relationship of friendship and not to use that relationship for selfish or unethical advantage.

Tillmann-Healy (2001) described the practices of friendship in these terms. First, friendship is created and sustained in “conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability” (p. 201). Second, this research should follow the “natural pace of friendship...slow, gradual, and unsteady” (p. 201). Third, the ethic of friendship is “a stance of mutuality, caring, justice, and even love” (p. 202). These three concepts of friendship as research practice are summed up as “radical reciprocity, a move from studying them to studying us” (p. 202). Based on these concepts I was able to be aware of my role with and responsibilities toward participants in the study.

Choices

I entered the field as a participant observer after I secured approval of the University of Waikato's School of Education Ethics Committee and obtained the consent from the principal, board of trustees, teachers and parents of students. This consent included permission to use the name of the school in my writing. In fact, members of the school are proud of the culture of the school and want others to know about the school.

I viewed my role at the school on the continuum of observation to participation and anticipated moving back and forth along that continuum as I engaged with the staff and students. From my experience in previous studies, I was aware that I could quickly fall into the participant role. My experience in this study proved that assumption to be true and helped me build trust with the participants. At the same time I valued the need to be an observer.

My role at the school was a deliberate choice. I did not want to be in an authoritative or disciplinarian position. I wanted to be able to hold meaningful conversations and observe routine behaviours:

What I have is an unusual role in schools, where individuals are traditionally isolated, and I permeate all those artificial barriers that isolate people by simply walking into a classroom and asking permission to be there. Not knowing what to do, the teacher says yes. So I observe, hear and experience things at a level no one else

does and that is the essence of being an ethnographer – living within the school at a level that no one else does. (Fieldnotes, 16 August, 2004)

I deliberately chose a role in the school that would allow me to walk around freely and observe the daily life of the school from a unique perspective. I was not bound by roles of power and discipline and as a result was able to learn about the school's culture at a deeper level. Rather, I was intent on building relationships with teachers and students. Some of these relationships evolved into friendships. I was touched by the depth of those friendships at the farewell (poroporoaki) held at the school in my honour. The entire school was there, and after I spoke, students and staff talked and gave me many gifts.

Results

The first person I met from the Raglan Area School was the Deputy Principal. I quickly realized he would be an excellent gatekeeper for my project. I was not certain what my role at the school would be:

I did meet with Deputy Principal and Principal at the Raglan Area School yesterday. I feel quite welcomed... The Deputy Principal introduced himself again and immediately began showing us pictures of his carving (Māori)...I was struck by how he wanted to share something about himself with us when we met.

I too am reflecting on the meeting this week at Raglan Area School. I am impressed with the relationships that are developing in this important work. I am humbled and privileged by it all. I feel a deep sense of clarity and commitment to the ethics and values I hold so dearly.

An ethnography is a journey, and I need to record that journey – both internally and externally, what is happening around me and inside me...I do have some ideas and expectations about the journey and I chronicle those in my proposal. Those expectations may or may not fit my study. (Journal entry, 1 July, 2004)

At the beginning of my study I realized how important the idea of building relationships was, particularly with people who had the power to allow me access to the site. Beyond that, these early relationships proved to be some of the most valuable for understanding the data I collected. Later in the field I reflected upon my entry into and acceptance at the school:

I am now blending in and people are talking to me freely. That is the position an ethnographer is hoping to achieve. Both students and teachers are talking with me openly. I appreciate their honesty. (Fieldnotes, 27 August, 2004)

As an ethnographer I am concerned about people behaving in ways that are natural, rather than staged because of my presence. I am also concerned they will talk in ways that are authentic and true rather than telling me what they think I want to

hear or what someone in authority wants them to say. The openness of the students and teachers gave me confidence that I was learning about the real culture of the school. I believe the rich data I obtained was a direct result of the emphasis on building relationships.

The principal of the school exhibited support for my research while introducing me to visitors. Later in the school year, several staff supported me by attending a presentation I was giving to the faculty of the School of Education at the University of Waikato:

The Principal...introduces me as Doctor Tom, a person with knowledge and wisdom, which is putting knowledge into action. He is working on positive peer relationships, he says. (Fieldnotes, 20 August, 2004)

I am feeling good about this project and particularly how these people have not only accepted me but support me. I am humbled by how they are coming to my talk on Friday at the university. It means so much to me. What an affirmation for me and my work (Fieldnotes, 5 October 2004). At the university...the Raglan Area School whanau arrive to taukoko (support) me with whakatau (greeting) and karakia (prayer) led by a colleague at the university. (Fieldnotes, 8 October, 2004)

At the end of the first three months of the study I felt the Principal and staff not only accepted me but also supported my research and me personally as they would support any other member of the school community. As a result of building relationships and becoming recognized and supported as a member of the community, I began formal interviews in November. These interviews provided rich data. I noticed the teachers, in particular, were sharing their reflective thoughts with me:

We need to learn to look at ourselves critically or nothing will happen. We are afraid to look too hard, and because we are, we tend to depersonalize and be professional so we feel safe. We are quick to criticize but not good at self-reflection...We need to be respectful of each other and realize that we are different and at the same time part of one place and one family. We need to open ourselves, particularly our minds, and model being affirming of others. (Teacher interview, 16 November, 2004)

I treasure interview data such as this because people are thinking as they speak rather than reciting a rote response. As a result I gain rich insights into how staff perceive the culture of the school.

After spending over 400 hours at the Raglan Area School I continued to "muddle" about my relationships in the field (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 16). However, after reflecting on my fieldnotes and journal entries and staff feedback I gained insights into what I had learned. The results of the research at Raglan Area School were focused on creating positive relationships in a school environment. However,

one of the greatest lessons learned was how I needed to create relationships with members of the school community that were authentic, trustworthy, and ethical.

I acquired an unusual role in the school as a researcher. I was not a teacher or administrator, and the staff and students quickly figured out that I did not have the power of grading or disciplining them. So they were relaxed with me in the classroom, on the playground, in the staff room, and elsewhere and began to confide in me.

I realized I was engaged in the "radical reciprocity" that Tillmann-Healy (2001, pp. 201-202) talked about. I was involved in the everyday life of the school, engaging in numerous conversations and being authentic and genuine. Despite my tendency to want things to move along, I was patient with the natural ebb and flow of developing relationships. Eventually I came to care for these people and desired to return the friendship they had extended to me by writing about what I had learned from them in as authentic and respectful way as possible.

CONCLUSIONS

From my experience in the field working on this case study, I learned that ethnographic research is an exchange or reciprocal process. The people at Raglan Area School were willing to let me do research at their school, and they expected me to give something back in return. As a researcher in the "Seventh Moment" I agree that I have an ethical responsibility to be an insider rather than an outsider, to bring the best of who and what I am to the context I am studying, to be open to how the data are saturated with multiple meanings, and to realize that research is an ongoing dialogue with the people involved in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Choosing a constructivist approach to this study was a deliberate choice and had consequences. I had to continually balance the requirement to be true to the meanings that emerged from the data analyses with fidelity to the relationships I had built in the field, particularly related to honouring the dignity of the people I had come to regard as friends.

I attended to the four "certainties" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) by: choosing to (1) become an integral part of the school community, (2) remember that I came from a different context and needed to be aware of who people are and how they behave in the context I was studying, (3) be open to multiple meanings for the ideas that I was researching, and that these meanings are complex and dynamic, and (4) create a dialogic relationship with the participants so that together we are creating a collaborative research process.

I engaged in building relationships as the foundation of my research methodology because I wanted to gather the richest data I could in order to learn about the meanings of what I was observing and hearing at the deepest level. As a result I participated in the daily life of the school, conversing regularly with the staff, engaging in conversations with students both at school and while walking to and from school, and helping out at the school with such things as relieving, evaluating programs, and doing statistical analysis of standardized test results. I was patient with the process of developing friendships, letting that process follow its

natural course, rather than trying to control its evolution. Over time the relationships became reciprocal, based on mutual respect.

During the study I learned the Māori concept for the approach to this study is encapsulated in the word “whakawhanaungatanga.” This term means building collaborative relationships in the research setting in order to accurately represent the voices of the people (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). In this context the meaning involved being true to the voices of Māori and Pākehā alike.

In the end, I chose to present my findings in a positive and respectful way. This choice was reflected in the way I wrote the preface to my second reflective memo:

As I mentioned in the first memo, to understand this analysis we need to realize schools are complex and dynamic organizations. They reflect and are a microcosm of our society. Nowhere else in our society do the different dimensions of culture come together in such a small space. Schools serve a diverse range of stakeholders and can expect differences and should support, encourage, and celebrate those differences, not letting one perspective dominate over another. The tensions resulting from these differences are to be expected and can provide the energy for improving the school.

The work of an ethnographer is to learn how groups of people give meaning to certain ideas. I learned that the school’s mission to “provide a quality education in a caring bicultural environment” is interpreted differently amongst the members of the school community. I do not view the tensions resulting from these differences as a negative comment. Rather, these tensions create the energy for change. The school has the potential for change, particularly in the areas of pedagogy, curriculum, and treatment of students because it has a mission which provides a vision for change, the size of the school is small and therefore creates flexibility, and the community is constantly undergoing change.

I deliberately chose to write my findings in this way in order to attend to two fundamental responsibilities I assumed: being true to the data and respecting the dignity of those involved in the study. As a result I collected rich data that allowed me to feel confident that my findings were trustworthy and accurately reflected the voices of the participants. I was also confident that my work represented the meanings this group of people attached to the concept of peace and how the Raglan Area School community implemented restorative practices into the daily life in an effort to create a culture of peace and non-violence.

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