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Editorial Introduction

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Editorial Introduction

by
Christina Cruz, Melissa Freeman, and Rebecca Rogers[±]

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Last year, June 10 and 11, 2000, around 100 participants joined us at the New York State University at Albany for the 12th Annual Conference on Ethnographic and Qualitative Research in Education. In envisioning such a conference we sought to find spaces for innovative ways of thinking about representation in interpretive, critical, feminist as well as traditional forms of social science research. We framed our "practical" work in terms of a set of social issues that illuminated the productive tensions in the planning and organizing of the conference to allow what Lincoln and Denzin (1998) refer to as the "crisis in representation" and Marcus (1998) as the "messiness" of interpretive work. In order to contextualize the work in this volume we begin by recognizing the history of participation that led to the conference.

The theme of the conference was *Representation in Research*. This theme created a unique set of issues for us as conference coordinators around what it means to represent research and how the boundaries of an academic conference might support this theme. Usual coordinating issues connected with conferences became interesting points of discussion in trying to accommodate alternative modes of re-presentation in research. Further, while envisioning the possibilities of such a conference we were cognizant of the need to have financial support from a range of University sources - each carrying different and competing ideological agendas.

A critical tension in our efforts was the issue of how institutions are structured in ways that privilege certain forms of intellectual exchange over others. For instance, traditional classrooms suitable for accommodating paper sessions did not fit the demands of plays, dance or murals as a means of re-presenting research. The traditional call for proposals that highlights the five parts of a research study (purpose, related literature/theoretical frameworks, methodology, findings and significance) structures what an "acceptable" conference proposal looks like and was something we thought extensively about. For instance, this format does not allow room for papers that are theoretically driven rather than empirical in their base or a way of discussing a fifty-foot long mural as both the "method" and the "findings."

Further, the review process facilitated an interesting set of discussions around what it meant to assess non-traditional (as well as more traditional) research proposals. In order to work through some of these issues, the coordinating team collaboratively established a review form that addressed not only if a theoretical framework was strong but *what* constituted a strong theoretical framework. These discussions became the foundation for the review sheet for proposals.

As a group we repeatedly confronted our own expectations for interpretive research, where re-presentation occurs in the process and how to structure the space and time within a conference setting to facilitate this exchange. Participating in the coordinating of this conference has allowed us to situate many of the research experiences discussed within a community of practice where

we continue to think about and debate what it means to privilege certain intellectual enterprises at the expense of others.

As it turned out, the two-day conference became a unique intermingling of traditional papers and non-traditional forms of representation. It began with an opening address given by Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles of the University of Toronto along with three of their students: Brenda Brown, Maura McIntyre, and Suzanne Thomas. Their keynote did not end there. They filled three rooms full of artful forms of inquiry and representation that inspired conference goers as they came and went throughout the two days of the conference. They ended the first day with a wonderful evening performance of readings and dancing. The performances were their data represented through their art. The conference culminated with an informative and inspiring address and dialogue with Patti Lather of the University of Ohio. Patti Lather spoke of her research and acceptance and non-acceptance she received from the non-traditional split-text representation used in her recent book *Troubling the Angels*.

In addition to the alternative forms of representation created by the keynote speakers, several participants stretched the boundaries of representation in multiform ways. Works, ranging from tapestries and art or artifact displays to personal narratives, photography, and poetry impressed and inspired most participants. Such alternative forms of representation bring forth new and different forms of knowing. Unlike more traditional styles of theoretical writing, artful representations tap the spatial, physical, emotional, visceral, and sensorial knowings promoting both the occurrence of an aesthetic reading and its experiential value (Brady, 2000; Langer, 1953). Further, such representations offer the possibilities of disruptive "reading" practices that push the boundaries of knowledge construction, production and distribution.

The work included in this edition of *The Qualitative Report* unfortunately fails to convey the variety of alternative approaches to representation and research. It does, however, offer a glimpse of how new forms of writing and more traditional forms of writing not only stand side by side in the ongoing discourse of representation and research, but overlap sometimes more forcefully, sometimes less so in substance and intent. Among the work submitted we have included five pieces. *Exploring the Creative Voice in an Academic Context* by Laura Brearley; *Imposters in the Sacred Grove: Working Class Women in the Academe* by Melanie L. Long, Gaye Ranck Jenkins, and Susan Bracken, *Why Urban Parents Resist Involvement in Their Children's Elementary Education* by Peter McDermott and Julia Rothenburg; *Case Study of Classroom Practice: A "Quiet Form of Research"* by Janice R. Showler, and *Multilayered Representation in Research* by Kathryn DeLawter, Adrienne Sosin, and Julie Mabey.

The University at Albany is once again hosting the Conference on Ethnographic and Qualitative Research in Education, June 2 and 3, 2001. Our theme this year is *Theory in Practice, Practice in Theory*. Once again we are encouraging participants to submit proposals that promote alternative forms of representation in research. Details can be found on our web site at <http://www.albany.edu/eqre/>.

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