ORGANIC RESEARCH

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In the early 1990s, I set out to take an indepth look at my own community development practice. I searched everywhere for research approaches and methodologies that suited my aims and context – unsuccessfully. So I picked freely from available methodologies and, with the help of what I learnt from poststructuralists, Maori and ecofeminists, I developed an approach that suited what I wanted to do. Because I was writing a doctoral thesis, I had to legitimize it. I found the easiest way to do this (well actually it was the only way I could find) was to contrast it with two other approaches.

	Dominant	Critical	Organic
Mode	Dualistic linear	Oppositional linear	Holistic Spiraling
Meta-narratives			
power	control over others	control can be shifted	power 'to'
knowledge	discovered	created	
Focus	To establish truth that enables prediction so we can control our world	To expose inherent bias	Balance
Relationships	In control – establishes clear research process	Increasing consideration given to power wielded by researcher	Not in control! Never knows what will happen next let alone know what will happen
Conditions	Controlled as much as possible	'Exact'	Inseparable from researcher
Means	Objective	Dialectical	contexting inclusive
Relation-ships	irrelevant	Oops – be more careful	Central. Research is an integral part of social change process

Dominant approaches to social research arise from positivist ideas about society. The inventor of the term *positivism*, Auguste Comte, believed that a perfect social order could be discovered if we searched carefully enough. Such approaches are characterised by the search for truth through observation, a dualistic notion of object and subject, and the researcher who is presented as an unbiased, outside observer. Those adopting these tenets often believe that valid knowledge can only be produced by these means.

Focus

Positivist research

> has as its primary emphasis control, its dominant methodology technical, and its principal interests probabilistic certainty.
>
> Sears (1992:147)

Researchers seek to establish cause and effect so that the future can be predicted. Historical readings from a range of cultural groupings suggest that humans have a great need to understand and make sense of their world. In pre-Cartesian times, humans tended to believe that mystical beings were the source of all happenings. Descartes and Comte attempted, with considerable success, to establish a different basis for establishing cause and effect. The method they proposed became dominant in western societies.

There are many critiques of the idea that cause and effect are external realities which can be known. For example, the philosopher Feyerabend (1991) argues that cause and effect are a myth. Certainly when I tried to establish cause and effect in my practice, I found myself living in a land of myths. I had to ignore so much of what was happening to even pretend to establish a clear link. For example I ran an education programme which I believe was a vital component of the social change process in

which I was involved. Some who took part in the programme certainly became leaders in the process and they – the leaders – generally agreed the programme was the 'key' to our process. But that hardly establishes cause and effect. What about all the others who wandered away from the programme or who never made it through the door but were still involved in the process?

Neither would I want anyone to replicate the programme. It was designed for particular individuals in a particular context at a particular time. I would not do the same thing now even in the same context because the times 'have a'changed'.

In fact, a key finding was that transporting a method, a structure, or a process from one situation to another generally limits the opportunity for those involved to be involved and fully listened to.

The traditional cause and effect focus is linear. It is certainly easier to define a line and follow it. But I suspect the linear approach is responsible for many ills of our society. I'll give you one example of the injustice it can cause.

A story of linear thinking

A survey carried out by council in 1993 indicated that council's bedsits were not a popular form of housing and that one bedroom units were preferred. In response to this finding, council decided to convert suitable bedsit units in one complex to one bedroom units. I insisted that the tenants who occupied these units be approached first for their consent. Ninety per cent of this elderly community did not want their units converted, primarily because of the increased rentals they would incur. The conversions went ahead.

The cause of tenant discomfort was identified as lack of space. The linear response was to enlarge units. As well as a linear response there was a confusion between what the majority of those in a survey said and the entire affected population. If there had

been no inconvenience and no added cost, there were still significant numbers who did not want larger units. The council's response in this case created greater tenant discomfort and made some people poorer.

Linear thinking within the context of cause and effect is not a universal system. The ancient but Chinese philosophy of Taoism does not recognise cause as a significant factor in understanding our world. Instead Taoists focus on influences, patterns and relationships. This leads to 'rounded' thinking rather than linearity.

> In Chinese pattern-thinking, what might at first seem to be a cause becomes part of the pattern, indistinguishable and inseparable from the effect. Pattern-thinking subsumes the cause, defining it in terms of the effect and making it part of the total pattern. What we in the West call a cause has little importance in Chinese thought. The lines of causality are bent into circles.
>
> Kaptchuk (1983:116)

A further focus of positivist researchers is the establishment of universal truths. This tends to create the illusion that our world consists only of constants, that is, discoverable realities that are the same despite time and place. Attempting to find universal truths in the social sciences has contributed to the creation of the 'norm'. The norm is a concept that establishes a point or a range which is considered by scientists to be the way *most* people are. It is exclusive because significant deviations from the norm lead to the creation of labels such as 'intellectually handicapped' and 'insane' (Foucault 1961). These labels come to be equated with inadequate or wrong in Cartesian dualistic style. Groups of people categorised as falling outside the norm, such as homosexuals or Maori, are often oppressed.

Researcher Position/Conditions

> We have a history of people putting the Maori under a microscope in the same way a scientist looks at an insect. The ones doing the looking are giving themselves the power to define and describe.
>
> M. Mita quoted in Smith (1991:46)

Positivist researchers place themselves, and are placed by positivist political systems, in positions of power. They claim to be able to establish knowledge by using objective methodologies. But 'objectivism is a pathology of cognition that entails silence about the speaker, about his [sic] interests and desires, and how these are socially situated and structurally maintained' (Gouldner 1976:50[1]). By impersonalising their own voice and claiming that no knowledge can be valid unless it is discovered by scientific methodologies, they make other forms of knowledge invisible and/or invalidate them. They therefore claim to be *the* knowledge makers with exclusive power to name and the power to decide what is and is not valid. The claim is reinforced by positivist political and social systems which support researchers' exclusive rights to produce knowledge by only accepting their findings as knowledge.

The failure of positivist researchers to acknowledge the unavoidable impact of their own conditions on their own lives and work leads them to believe they can be objective in their work because they believe they can free themselves from the influence of their conditions. This belief is based on the Cartesian dualistic separating of mind and body. Objectivity can be achieved when the mind and body are successfully separated, leaving the mind free to identify what is present in reality. Establishing objectivity is the key to producing valid knowledge within positivism. It

[1] Quoted in Soderqvist (1991:147).

is achieved by the use of specified methodologies. Positivist researchers' belief that achieving what they call objectivity leads to the revelation of reality means they fail to

acknowledge any reality different to their own. Failure to acknowledge different realities is another mechanism of maintaining control over others.

The conditions of the researcher are controlled by making a 'box' around the variables being studied. In the social sciences, a 'box' can be a laboratory, a set of prescriptions which are designed to cut out other variables such as in the interview process, or a selected demarked situation such as one used for a case study. But these types of boxes affect the factors being studied. For instance, I mention below the case of the obedience experiments conducted in a laboratory by Milgram (1974). Miller (1986) demonstrates the effect of the 'box' on the outcomes of these experiments. As well as the effect of the box itself, there are pressures on the box which permeate its walls. For instance, the researcher conducting interviews within a positivist framework may choose not to conduct the research himself to remove a possible bias. But there is inevitably bias in the choice of topic studied, the selection of people to be interviewed and the design of the questions. Critical theorists argue that the way to avoid bias is to identify it and present it as part of the research.

Means

> There is not an unchanging given, bedrock of prelinguistic construing that we can all somehow or other uncover and use to test the coherence with it of our post-linguistic construing.
>
> Heron (1988:42)

Positivist researchers are concerned with what can be experienced by the human senses. As explained in the preceding chapter, Comte sought to bring knowledge out of the age of mysticism. To achieve this he created a belief that knowledge gained

through direct observation was superior to mystical sources of knowledge. This led to a belief that ‘valid knowledge can be established only by reference to that which is manifested in experience’ (Carr & Kemmis 1986:68). This belief dislodged explanatory devices such as metaphor, analogy, hyperbole and parable (von Foerster 1991). Discrediting these devices led to the separation of fact and fiction and the discrediting of cultural knowledge which employed these devices. The dualisms on which positivism is based allow positivist researchers to hold power by denying or denigrating the subjective, practice and fiction.

A second characteristic of the means of much positivist research is the reducing of all objects to physicalistic description in order to avoid the difficulties of establishing objectivity within broader contexts (Carr & Kemmis 1986:150). Those sciences which are based on number and physical properties are called ‘pure’ while the social sciences are the poor cousins. This leads to the creation of a hierarchy of knowledge within positivism. In the struggle to become ‘pure’, there is a tendency for social scientists to exclude variables from the equation which affect it.

Messer-Davidow (1985) criticises two aspects of what she labels as male methods but are both criticisms of a positivist approach. She criticises research that ‘turns people into objects of observation and control’. She argues that this dehumanises the subjects of research. It is a dualistic approach which enforces the role of the researcher as the legitimate producer of knowledge. She also criticises ‘methods that abstract a literary work from its human contexts to render it the object of interpretation or deconstruction’ (ibid. 11). Methods which decontextualise make anything not in sharp focus invisible and thus can cause oppression/s as well as producing results that can be considered valid only in a very narrow set of conditions.

Positivist researchers may use interviews as one method of gathering information. The following quote about interviews as a research method summarises aspects of positivist means.

> Regarded as an information-gathering tool, the interview is designed to minimise the local, concrete, immediate circumstances of the particular encounter - including the respective personalities of the participants - and to emphasise only those aspects that can be kept general enough and demonstrable enough to be counted. As an encounter between these two particular people the typical interview has no meaning; it is conceived in a framework of other, comparable meetings between other couples, each recorded in such fashion that elements of communication in common can be easily isolated from more idiosyncratic qualities.
>
> Benny & Hughes (1970:196-7)

Relationships

Comte believed that knowledge is gained by observations made by an 'unbiased outside observer' (Winter 1989:27). Because positivist researchers have to be seen to achieve objectivity to have their work considered valid, they make every effort to separate themselves from their subjects. By calling the researched 'subjects', they become the opposite - 'objects'. But the subjects are the objects of their work. To follow the dualism through, this must mean that the researchers are subjects! This half of the equation is ignored by positivist researchers, leading to oppressive relationships between the researcher and the researched.

The positivist methodology requires careful hypothesising and planning of the research before the actual research begins. Validity relies on carrying out these plans carefully and accurately. This requires imposition on, or sometimes manipulation of, the researched. Take, for instance, the famous Milgram experiments (1974). Milgram gained fascinating results from his laboratory testing of people's willingness to administer electric shocks to other people. But to do this he had to manipulate the subjects into a laboratory situation under his control. To be successful in positivist

terms, he had to maintain control of the conditions of the research and of the subjects throughout the experiment. Apart from no doubt traumatising the subjects, his results are now questioned precisely because of the degree of control which made the situation so different from people's day to day lives (Miller 1986).

Milgram was no doubt not concerned about his relationship with his subjects outside of the experimental conditions. It is as though positivist subjects come out of a void and go back into a void with the interaction which takes place between researcher and researched not a consideration. This can lead to fragmentation both for the researcher and the researched. If relationships were to be taken into account, the researcher would be unable to maintain control of the research situation because the relationship with the subject would be seen to influence each interaction. For instance, a positivist interviewer controls the interview situation and the questions. An interviewee can obey or disobey only. The use of questionnaires and surveys allows even greater control with the researched forced to respond within set parameters or not respond at all. A participant observer decides what is important to record and what this means. These acts all perpetuate oppression/s by creating imbalances in relationships and denying the researched a chance to be involved in the process of creating knowledge.

Positivist research and oppression/s

Linear, dualistic thinking amongst positivist researchers contributes to maintaining a knowledge production process which is exclusive. Exclusion is a mechanism which is fundamental to maintaining oppression/s. It operates through denial of people's abilities to make a contribution to the knowledge base, denial of different and valid means of producing knowledge and denigration of the subjective. The effect of the researcher's conditions and control of relationships is denied also, allowing a continuation of the belief that objectivity is possible and that only positivist scientists produce valid knowledge.

Beginnings of change

This century, there has been a major shift away from positivism in research. In the 1920s Bloom established the Chicago school of sociology which pioneered a move from quantitative to qualitative research (Hammersley 1989). The Chicago school accepted many premises of positivism. Knowledge continued to be conceptualised as 'natural', a reality to be discovered by the objective observer. Human beings continued to be conceptualised as fixed personalities, moving through fixed predictable stages. But the key figure in the Chicago school, Bloom, argued that society could not be treated as a natural object as Comte suggested because human behaviour ‘is complex and fluid in character [and is] not reducible to fixed patterns’ (Hammersley 1989:2).

The interpretivist tradition followed this, focusing on a crucial aspect of human existence - that people attach meanings to their actions.

> [I]nterpretivism may be defined as the view that comprehending human behavior [sic], products, and relationships consists solely in reconstructing the self-understandings of those engaged in creating or performing them.
>
> Fay (1996:113)

In this way, interpretivists differ from positivism by arguing that there is no outside reality waiting to be discovered. By exposing the meaning making process for discussion it marked a significant step away from Pavlovian mechanism and prepared the way for critical approaches.

CRITICAL RESEARCH

> Critical social research does not take the apparent social structure, social processes, or accepted history for granted. It tries to dig beneath the surface of appearances. It asks how social systems really work, how ideology or history conceals the processes which oppress and control people.
>
> Harvey (1990:6)

Critical researchers have used many of the methodologies of positivist researchers but the emphasis has been on exposing the dynamics of power (Little 1992:239). Where positivists focus on agency, critical researchers focus on conditions or structure. Within critical approaches validity is linked not so much with objectivity as with a perception that it makes sense of experience. But most critical approaches to research continue 'to be informed by dualistic social theories (men/women, teachers/managers, workers/capitalists, North/South and so on)' (Field 1991:73) which are oppressive.

Action research

There are, of course, many different types of critical research. I want to focus here on action research because that is what I set out to use. According to Tripp (1990), critical action research combines theory and practice. The technical and practical types both ask questions within the constraints of existing structures while the socially critical type 'challenges social construction' (Tripp 1990:161). This socially critical type views 'society as being essentially unjust, but capable, through purposeful human action, of becoming less unjust if not actually just' (Tripp 1990:161). Carr & Kemmis (1986:225) say action research 'is different to conventional science because it is practical, participative and collaborative, emancipatory, interpretive and critical '.

Praxis

Freire's concept of praxis is related to critical action research in that it is cyclical, dialectical, participatory and values rationality.

> Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated.
>
> Freire (1972:41)

He stated that true reflection leads to action and that 'action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection' (Freire 1972:41). Freire was describing praxis as a way out of oppression for the oppressed. By reflecting on their actions, the oppressed could bring about change. The role of the change agent was to allow and encourage this process. I explore the concept of praxis further in the discussion on methodologies in chapter six. Critical action research has similar metanarratives to those of praxis. It involves critical reflection on action with an aim of reducing oppression/s.

Focus

> Action researching is a particular way of critically learning about events in this world in order to change them.
>
> Bawden (1991:21)

A prime difference between the foci of dominant and critical research is that critical research replaces the 'disinterested' stance of poitivists with an openly political agenda and a focus on power and change. Freire (1985:122) took this political stance to the limit when he stated that everything is political and that neutrality 'inevitably favours the power elite against the masses'. Feminist research also constitutes itself in political terms (Coyner 1983:46). It set out to change the place of women in society

(Reinharz 1992).

Zuber-Skerritt (1991:xii) argues that in action research, the focus shifts from content to process.. The focus on process is apparent in feminist research. For instance, Irwin et al. (1995) pay attention to the roles of assistant researchers and subjects in a piece of research. They consult them and ensure that they are informed about each step of the process. Jossi Craig (1983) addressed the physical setting of the interview to change 'the hierarchical and unequal structure of traditional interviewing methods' (Craig 1983). Ball (1992) questions her role as both researcher and someone trying to do anti racist feminist praxis.

Critical researchers also challenge the focus on improvement of more positivist types of action research. The concept of improvement leaves the metanarratives unexamined and assumes that there is a 'natural' linear direction. The cycle/spiral notion which forms the basis of action research suggests that changes do have direction. But what constitutes an improvement depends on different world views. Socially critical action research focuses on social justice. This can still be interpreted as an improvement but it also invokes a power dynamic.

> [S]ocially critical action research in education can be defined as being strategic critical pedagogic action on the part of classroom teachers aimed at increasing social justice. It is productive of and based on knowledge generated by formal research and occurs within the context of critically oriented professional communities. Socially critical action research is informed by the principle of social justice, not in terms of its own ways of working and in terms of its outcomes in and orientation to the community. In practical terms, it is not simply a matter of challenging the system, but of seeking to understand what makes the system be the way it is, and challenging that, while remaining conscious that one's own sense of justice and equality is itself open to question.

Tripp (1991:161)

A story of research focus

My initial aims were

1. to critically examine my own practice which aims at social change
2. to get others to do likewise
3. to identify broader measures which can be used for broader change.[2]

These aims clearly fit within Tripp's definition of socially critical action research (1991:10) because they involved critical reflection on my praxis with the aim of social change. But I became dissatisfied with my aims as work progressed. Focusing on social change by critical reflection increased the ease with which I could ignore other actors' differing aims. While my aim was predominant, critical reflection tended to focus on how to further this aim. Consideration of others' aims seemed unimportant unless they hindered my aim. If I was not to create a situation where I controlled others, I had to enter into negotiations about our differing aims.

This problem of different aims is identified by Glucksman (1994:150) who states that 'those being researched have quite a different interest and relation to their situation' to the researcher's interest in creating knowledge. A further researcher who identifies a difference in aims and acknowledges the relationship of power that exists in the researcher/researched relationship is Leason (1996:34). She found that the difference in aims combined with the power invested in her social status established for her a position of control over her interviewees, despite her attempts to address these issues.

A final danger in the critical approach to research is that the 'oppressed' tend to be the exclusive focus of research. Deshler & Selener (1991:9) challenge this focus,

[2] Journal (10.7:12).

suggesting that ‘research should be focused as much on powerful elites as on oppressed constituencies’. I found that focusing on the oppressed was easier than focusing on the oppressor because their lives are more open to public scrutiny. It is an easy way of perpetuating oppression/s because more research exposes more of their lives while failing to call into question the lives of the oppressors. While my research focused primarily on my own praxis, I found that my recordings tended to focus on tenants. When I wrote about staff I was always aware of the difficulties of any public reflection on my interactions with staff. While tenants may challenge me about an analysis they do not like, staff are more likely to have the ability and inclination to contest my analysis in fora such as courts.

The openly political stance of critical researchers, the increased attention to process and the move away from linear foci are steps toward addressing oppression/s in research processes. But analysis of my praxis suggested there were further aspects of research processes which tended to perpetuate oppression/s. The difference I found between my aims and the aims of other participants in the situation is an example of a research area where oppression/s can be perpetuated if the issue is not addressed, and the tendency to focus on the oppressed is also a danger.

Position/conditions

> Action research seems most appropriate for examining one's own practice. It enables teachers to know what they know, how they know it, and to extend it.
>
> Holly & McLoughlin (1989:261)

In action research, the ‘unbiased outside observer’ of positivism (Winter 1989:27) is replaced by the action researcher who is often a key actor in the situation s/he is researching. It becomes the ‘study of a changing situation from the inside’ (ibid. 27). It is used sometimes to examine the process of the researcher. For instance, teachers use

action research to change their own practice (Zuber-Skerritt 1991, Cohen & Manion 1980, Tripp 1990).

Critical researchers have opened the way for involvement of the researcher in the situation to be researched, and opened a discussion on the validity of research by those who are, or are not, members of the group being researched. For instance, Elliott (1990:8) questions the validity of research by academics who are removed from the situation because they are separated from the 'web of interlocking ideas which operate within [a] context'. This is a clear break from the positivist emphasis on separation of the researcher from the researched. It allows for the repositioning of the researcher in relation to the researched. However, most critical researchers continue to maintain control over the research situation while acknowledging their active participation in the situation.

A story of my position

I had difficulties determining whether I was an insider or outsider in the research situation. I was clearly an insider from the positivist point of view. I was an actor in the situation. But I was also an outsider. For instance, I worked with tenants but was not a tenant. I was a staff member of Wellington City Council but, unlike other staff, my role was to work with tenants. I worked nights and weekends and kept erratic hours during the day. These hours affected the nature of my relationship with coworkers who organised their interactions around office hours. In relation to the research, I was inside myself studying my actions in the context of the outside world as well as my internal thought processes.

Terminologies such as participant observer were not relevant because I was totally involved in the situation I studied. Neither did I feel comfortable with the term action researcher. I was perhaps closer to Leavitt's concept of an activist researcher[3]. This term emphasises the role of the action researcher as a social change agent. I felt more like a researching activist, that is, an activist who analysed her actions. But even this

[3] Private conversation between Jacqueline Leavitt and Elizabeth Clements, July 1997.

term did not fit. Although at different times in the process the action or the research was dominant, my overall position was not adequately explained in terms of insider/outsider or activist researcher/researching activist. Critical theorists did not offer me a satisfactory description of my role.

Another aspect of position within critical approaches is the continuing control maintained over knowledge production. As well as maintaining control over the research process, critical researchers tend to continue to be given, or to give themselves, the power to decide what is authentic knowledge. For instance, Freire (19072:40) refers to the 'unauthentic view of the world' held by the oppressed. This is based on the Marxist concept of false consciousness. In using this term, Freire implied that he could see the world as it really was while the oppressed needed to be taught to see it correctly. In this way critical researchers perpetuate the belief that they can produce authentic knowledge while their subjects have false consciousness.

A story of false consciousness

When I began working with tenants I thought I had a clear picture of them and that if they learnt about their oppression/s they would develop a more correct picture. What I learnt is that my 'clear picture' was based on impressions as an outsider. The insider view was quite different. Neither seemed to be right or wrong. But as the nature of my relationship with tenants developed, our views tended to begin to merge, or if they didn't merge, there was a greater understanding of the difference in perceptions. This was a two way learning process. When I began working with tenants, many tenants saw me as yet another council worker who planned to do things for, or to, them. For some, this changed over time so that my position in council became secondary to my personal relationship with them. For others, I continued to be a council worker whose job was to provide for their needs.

There were mechanisms of oppression/s in the council structure which I could name while many tenants could not name these. But I did not experience the same oppression/s they did so their knowledge of oppressive practices was different to mine.

When we shared our knowledges we were able to make change. In this situation, if I had continued to be sure that the knowledge I produced was more accurate or more valid than that of tenants, this belief would have affected my attitudes toward tenants and my relationships with them. I would perpetuate the belief that their knowledge was invalid by failing to recognise it. On the other hand, if I validated the knowledge they produced while invalidating my own I would create an oppressive situation for myself. Dialogue was necessary to continue the finding out process without maintaining power as the researcher who produces knowledge.

Conditions

The development of action research in the last ten years, led by Australian educators, has led to a greater emphasis on the conditions affecting the research situation. While positivist research seeks to control the conditions, critical action research opens the context of the research to critical consideration (Tripp 1990:161). This type of action research, at least in the field of education employs

> … a dialectical view of rationality as socially-constructed and historically-embedded, [and] sets out to locate the actions of the actor in a broader social and historical framework. It treats the actor as a bearer of the ideology as well as its 'victim'.
>
> Carr & Kemmis (1986:193)

In this statement Carr & Kemmis are referring to the subjects of the research rather than the researcher. While this is necessary if one is to be critical, it is also necessary to critique the position and conditions of the researcher if oppressive interactions are to be avoided (Bell & Roberts 1984, Ball 1992). Researchers who do not critique their position and conditions will not take account of the effect of their way of being, their ability to control the situation and the influences of their past experience and conditioning on the research situation. If there is conditioning or positioning to maintain control over others, oppressive relationships will be reproduced.

Means

Freire radically challenged positivist means by conceptualising theory and practice as inseparable. He linked them with the concept of praxis which is described above. Like Freire, feminist researchers challenged the polarising of theory and practice leading them to reassess how they do research. For instance, Oakley (1981) reassessed the interview method and Reinharz (1983) reassessed experiential analysis.

The detailed means of relevant critical research practices will be discussed in chapter six. This includes Freire's praxis and the methods of critical action researchers. I limit the discussion in this section to the broad outlines of the means of action research.

The methods of action research are based on Kurt Lewin's four phase cycle (1946). The cycle begins with planning and is followed by doing, reflecting and replanning. It is a research process found in use in businesses, schools, community, prisons and hospitals (Cohen & Manion 1980). Lewin's version of action research was considered positivist because it was '(i) an externally initiated intervention designed to assist a client system, (ii) functionalist in orientation, and (iii) prescriptive in practice' (Hopkins 1985 quoted in McNiff 1988:33). But the usage of the term has broadened over time to include both positivist and critical approaches. For instance, there is a focus on change inherent in the cycle/spiral which can be political (McNiff 1988); and although much remains functionalist, Carr & Kemmis (1986:162) redefine Lewin's cycle to mean ' a self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting' while Bawden (1991) builds a self-reflective loop into the process.

Action research methods break the linearity of positivist research by introducing the concepts of cycles and spirals (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988). While cycles and spirals both imply change, there are differences between cycles and spirals. Positivism contains the notion that knowledge does not change over time. It is based on the linear notion of actions and reactions. A *cycle* is a process where events are likely to occur

on a regular basis and in a particular sequence. But there is change each time as, for instance, there is with the seasons. The action research cycle establishes an expectation of both sameness and change, implying that knowledge can change also. The action research spiral incorporates a number of cycles which build on each other to develop a person or situation. The *spiral* implies development or improvement over time (Cohen & Manion 1980, McNiff 1988, Holly & McLoughlin 1989, Tripp 1990), or in Elliott's view, it is about 'improving the quality of action' (Elliott 1982:(ii) quoted in Winter 1989:1).

This functionalist use of the spiral is suitable when specific knowledge is required for a specific problem in a specific situation. For instance, it is suitable for revising on the spot procedures and findings which are applicable immediately (Cohen & Manion 1980:181). To become critical requires questioning the context in which a specific problem occurs. Bawden introduces loops to assist this process. In the first order loop the researcher gets involved, examines different perspectives, patterns these using available banks of knowledge, then translates the theories into action (Bawden 1991:35). This means researchers involve themselves 'directly and fully in experiences which are frequently complex, dynamic and just plain messy' (ibid.:35). In the second order loop, the researcher reflects critically on the first loop by examining 'the way we are going about the way we are going about our learning' (ibid.:36).

A story of action research

Action research was the 'best fit' I could find amongst established methodologies given my aims and my position. In loose terms, it could be said that I spent the last six months of 1992 in the planning phase of the action research cycle, the following eighteen months in the action phase, a further two years in the reflection phase and, from mid 1996 re-entered a planning phase. Bawden's description of two loops reflects my research patterns more closely. The initial reflections led to reflections on the reflections which resulted in deeper shifts than the superficial shifts in the first loop. That is, rather than leading to programming changes, they led to a theoretical and

practical shift in the metanarratives and approach.

However, even this description gives a false impression of tidiness. I did not find that the cycles were distinct from each other. Planning, doing, reflecting and replanning phases overlapped continually and were at multiple levels. They ranged from planning an individual workshop and reflecting on this to planning for change in management which I continue to do. Separating out these cycles proved counterproductive. To work successfully in the ever changing conditions I had to be flexible and prepared to jump parts of the cycle. I seemed to be moving in the opposite direction to those in action research who were developing Lewin's cycle by breaking it into further steps.

It could be said that I was using both functionalist and critical research methods. That is, there was room for 'improvement' within what I was aiming to do. But at the same time I was employing Bawden's second loop to reflect on the underlying power issues. However, the apparent functionalism disappears on closer analysis because changes were not made to improve a 'model' but rather to better fit the situation which had changed from what was. In the above section on positivism I tell stories of situations which did not work towards achieving my aims. But 'improving' my actions was not going to achieve these either. For instance, I planned advertising for the education programme, did it and reflected on the evaluation of its effectiveness. This led to sending out programmes every month instead of once a term. At the time, this suited the participants. This does not mean that the adjustment is 'better' or 'right'. It is what worked at a moment in time. That moment may last or may not as other conditions change.

The positivist form of data interpretation implies that the knowledge is contained in the data while the term 'reflection' exposes the role of the researcher in creating an interpretation. Bawden takes the process a step further by requiring the researcher to critically reflect on the data. The critical dimension requires a questioning of the 'natural'. Within a positivist approach, I would assuming that knowledge is contained in the data and can accurately be discovered if correct methods are used. By following

positivist approved methods to validate the data gathering process I could claim correctness in my interpretations. This denied that data is always selective and thus invalidates other people's versions of events.

Reflecting on the data allowed me to make sense of it for myself at this particular time. Other people can reflect also on the same data and may make different, equally valid sense of it. A critical reflection meant accepting the limitations of my making sense process and the reality that every time I reflected on it, I shifted my sense of it because other changes had occurred in between the two reflections which altered the way I perceived it.

The means of critical action researchers more closely described what I was doing than other research methodologies did. But I found limits to how accurately I could describe what I was doing within the confines of critical action research. It was still too tidy and tidying it up into these types of descriptions disguised aspects that I believed were an integral part of the process.

Relationships

Freire emphasised the shift in the relationship between teacher and student to reflect the concept he held of the production of knowledge. I have not, however, found any writings of his which refer to the relationships involved in research. But it can be inferred from his comments about the relationship between teachers and students that he would determine that a similar relationship is required between researcher and researched if, indeed, the two should be separated at all.

Feminist researchers have paid more attention to the relationship between researcher and researched and taken steps to address oppressive aspects of these relationships (Reinharz 1992). An example of the type of research which can change the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched is participatory research.

The term participatory research is sometimes used to refer to the involvement of the researcher in the situation being researched (Wadsworth 1984), and sometimes refers to the involvement of the subjects of the research in the planning of the research (Gaventa & Lewis: undated, Anderton & Darracott 1991). In these ways, the researcher can share the control of the creation of knowledge by allowing others to define the problem and interpret the results.

In the field of action research, there is also a focus on participative research. For instance, Zuber-Skerritt describes action research as different from conventional science because it is practical, participative and collaborative, emancipatory, interpretive and critical (Zuber-Skerritt 1991:xiv). In his book on action research, Zuber-Skerritt includes cases where participation is restricted to the involvement of a willing colleague or of a teacher (e.g. Zuber-Skerritt 1991, McNiff & Strachan 1991[4]). However, there are different interpretations in practice of what participative and collaborative mean. Winter (1989) quotes the case of an action researcher named Wilkinson (1982) who involved his staff in assessing his own practice. The focus was still on his work. But it led to staff looking at their own practice.

While participatory action research increases the likelihood of change occurring at a school level, it does not alter the relationship between the researcher and researched. Those action researchers who focus their research on their own actions could argue that they are attempting only to change their own practice and therefore no relationship of power is involved. To a large extent, this is true. But if the case is a teacher studying their own practice, the crucial dimension is the relationship between the teacher and the student/s. This is a relationship which involves power. The question is not who else is involved but what control do students have over the changes being considered.

The involvement of others is often called collaboration. Winter defines the term as meaning ‘everyone's point of view will be taken as a contribution to resources for

[4] Quoted in Zuber-Skerritt (1991).

understanding; no-one's point of view will be taken as the final understanding as to what all the other points of view really mean' (Winter 1989:56). He claims that the collaborative approach is about 'examining relationships between the various accounts' (ibid. 59). Collaborating with colleagues is about increasing the chance of change. It is not about changing the nature of the research relationships.

Finally, Jean McNiff brings in a different angle - that of the quality of relationships.

> The second criterion, that of commitment to clients, has intense implications for the politics and ethics of teaching. For being committed to something suggests a thinking awareness. If I am not committed I do not care. If I am committed, then I am acutely aware, and I question. If I do not question, I accept the status quo, and I go along with established systems and attitudes without interfering. I am a servant of the system, and I service it through my passivity.
>
> McNiff (1988:50)

With this statement, she goes to the heart of critical action research. The researcher enters into a committed relationship with her 'clients'. This challenges the distribution of power between researcher, theorist and practitioner (McNiff 1988:20). When researchers and theorists are the experts, teachers are left to become technicians - puppets who have limited determination. The committed relationship acknowledges the effect of the relationship while McNiff's use of the term 'clients' suggests she maintains a position of power.

A story of relationships

The nature of my relationships with those I worked with was a constant subject of my critical inquiry. But the relationships of critical research were not relevant. They were not my clients. Neither were they the researched. I was the subject of my own research and my reflection was aimed at developing an approach to social change which could guide my future work. The only times when I entered the situation as a researcher

were when I carried out interviews and the focus group. At these times, I immediately found that I entered a relationship of power over the researched which led me to discontinue these methods. My relationships with those I worked with were central to my inquiries. But, apart from the specific occasions mentioned, my role as a researcher was seldom in evidence in day to day interactions.

Critical action researchers do not make relationships a central category. Feminist researchers begin the process of exposing relationships where the researcher maintains control over the researched and take steps to change oppressive relationships, without yet making relationships a central category. My praxis suggested this is what needed to happen.

Critical approaches and oppression/s

Critical researchers expose the power imbalances inherent in positivist approaches make changes. However, ending oppression/s requires a complete end to the focus on gaining control over others' lives and our environment, including in the research situation. The focus on 'improvement' is not likely to lead to change in relationships of power. As McNiff (1988) says, it maintains power dynamics unless the power dynamic is specifically questioned. Who the researcher is and how the researcher is positioned have been brought into question by critical researchers. The means used by critical researchers have varied from minor shifts to radical change and the role of researcher seems to unavoidably imply a relationship of power over the researched unless the researched are fully involved and in control of the research process, or there is no such thing as the 'researched'.

ORGANIC RESEARCH

> A method … is a series of principles which must be constantly reformulated, in that different, constantly changing situations demand that the principles be interpreted in a different way.
>
> Faundez to Freire (Freire & Faundez 1989:30)

My research was originally framed within critical theoretical terms as stated above. There were aspects of critical research which maintained relevance and other aspects which I needed to change to match the metanarratives of the organic approach and to avoid creating or perpetuating oppression/s. For instance, my analysis of my praxis led me to support Freire's statement that everything is political. While some methodologies became unacceptable in some conditions, the major shift I found necessary was to contextualise these methodologies. Praxis remained a useful concept within an organic approach. But I changed the focus, reconceptualising the role of the researcher, centralising the role of relationships and identifying the principles of an organic approach.

The organic approach, in the case of medical research, assumes that 'the functioning of living organisms is determined by the working together of all organs as an integrated system' (Collins Dictionary 1991). In applying the term 'organic' to research, I indicate the need to examine how the focus of the research, the position of the researcher, the conditions in which the research takes place, the means used and the nature of the relationships in the research situation interact to produce oppression/s or to counter oppression/s. I argue that the separating out of these aspects is a mechanism of oppression/s because it creates an artificial separation where one person can look at another 'objectively' and judge her/him. Conceptualising the aspects as interconnected ties researchers into the situation, and demands that they acknowledge the role they play.

The organic approach in this usage is not limited to the study of the relationships between 'organs' or parts as suggested by traditional ecological theory. Both internal

structures and relationships are studied as a whole. Any unit studied needs to be done so in context. Moll et al (1992) provide us with an example of the value of researching in context. They wanted to improve classroom teaching. Instead of maintaining the classroom boundaries in the study, they went into the homes of their students, found out what knowledge children gain at home and worked with the children and parents to connect home knowledge and classroom knowledge. The connections they made changed the attitudes of the teachers towards the students and the families toward the school. The research process in this case contributed towards the construction of connections between home and school which benefited all involved.

In examining the question of validity in relation to organic research I found Lather's description of 'situated [sic] or embodied or voluptuous validity' to be most relevant (Lather 1995:59). She names five descriptors of situated validity:

> ___ goes too far toward disruptive excess, leaky, runaway, risky practice
> ___embodies a situated, partial, positioned, explicit tentativeness
> ___constructs authority via practices of engagement and self-reflexivity
> ___creates a questioning text that is bounded and unbounded, closed and open
> ___brings ethics and epistemology together.
>
> Lather (1995:55)

Lather says she names categories of validity to 'work toward a practice that erases itself at the same time as it produces itself' (ibid. 62). 'Such a practice makes space for returns, silence, interruptions, and self-criticism, and it points to its own incapacity …' (ibid. 62). This has been my aim in the praxis, the reflection and the writing.

In this section, I discuss how who I am, what I focus on, where I stand, the time and space I live in, the way I carry out my praxis and the nature of my relationships, are interrelated. I demonstrate how taking this approach lessens the chances of perpetuating oppression/s. It weaves together learnings from positive, critical and

feminist approaches with learnings from indigenous research and my own praxis.

Learnings from Maori researchers

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, indigenous peoples have challenged aspects of positivist and critical approaches to research (Irwin 1995, Royal Tangaere 1997, Te Awekotuku 1991, Smith 1991). They refer to research methods used before contact with Europeans. Smith tells us knowledge was gained through 'observation, practice, and the guidance of kuia or kaumatua (elders)' (Smith 1991:50). She and Te Awekotuku (1991:8) agree that some areas of knowledge production included everyone while in other areas, people were carefully selected because of their particular skills and abilities.

It is obvious from the varied historical reports (e.g. Buck 1950, Belich 1996) that the Polynesians who came to Aotearoa/New Zealand had Maori research methodologies were effective because without these they could not have successfully navigated the huge expansions of ocean which they did to get to Aotearoa/New Zealand. They must have developed also survival knowledge such as food preservation to make the voyage. On arrival there is increasing evidence that they quickly adjusted to the new environment, adapting housing, clothing and food production (Belich 1996). They also apparently quickly established what resources were available that they needed throughout the length and breadth of the two major islands (Belich 1996:38). Their successful colonisation of Aotearoa demonstrates that their finding out methods were effective and the information gathered was utilised for the community's good.

Today, the Maori approach to research tends to reflect Maori cultural values. For instance, the value of holism counteracts the oppression/s that arise from dualistic thinking (Whaitiri 1993:18). The concept of people and resources as *taonga*- gifts which we care for - counteracts the idea that resources, people and knowledge are there to be used or to exert control over others. The acknowledgement of the

interconnectedness of people and the land leads researchers to acknowledge their connections with the research, thus avoiding the pitfall of seeing themselves as the exclusive producers of knowledge. The researcher does not produce knowledge. Instead the research process relies on in depth discussion, debate and other oral communications (Whaitiri 1993). The leader of this process is not usually the researcher but the kaumatua (Bishop 1996).

Maori research today therefore tends to be based on factors such as holism where research cannot be cut into little slices with narrower and narrower foci, an inclusive approach which emphasises the primary responsibility of the researcher to the researched, sharing control of the research process with the researched, and an emphasis on the cycles and spirals of learning which are dominant motifs in Maori culture (Pere 1982).

The values and factors in Maori research have little in common with positivist approaches and are markedly different also to critical approaches. The emphasis is not predominantly on critical reflection or looking for contradictions although some Maori researchers do this (e.g. Smith 1993, Jackson 1987) as on finding ways of maintaining the whole. The researcher is not separable from the situation, their work is contextual, that is, it works within acknowledged conditions and, because of the recognition of interconnectedness, there is an emphasis on the creation and recreation of relationships. The enquiry is not academic. Instead it emerges ‘from the experience of people who have been studied, researched, written about, and defined by social scientists’ (Smith 1991:47).

The values of Maori research are the values I found most appropriate in my search for ways to end oppression/s in the research process.

Focus

There are two interrelated foci of research in the organic approach. First, there is a focus on developing understanding and wisdom in an ongoing, holistic process which becomes the basis of further action. Second, there is constant analysis of all recognised aspects of the process in order to avoid creating or perpetuating oppression/s. It is an ongoing learning process without a start or end.

A story of focus

I set out to better understand my own praxis so that I could change it in ways which will undermine oppression/s. I studied my own praxis, my reflections on my praxis and the context in which this occurred. When the period of recording the praxis was completed in May 1994, the focus shifted to reflecting on the recordings and interweaving these with learnings from other aspects of my past experience and recorded learnings of others. This second 'loop' was necessary to identify changes in metanarratives necessary for consistency with the praxis.

I wanted to deal with issues of validity and rigour without setting myself in a position where I was studying 'the other' as this creates an artificial objectivity which perpetuates oppression/s.

Studying one's own praxis is neither new nor do I claim that it is the only possibility for researchers. But in the situation and conditions which I was aiming to research, it appeared the only option which would not contribute to others' oppression/s. I looked to the field of action research because it allowed for examining one's own practice with a view to creating change while still maintaining rigorousness. It had possibilities for the development of understanding. But there was little emphasis in the literature on oppression/s within the research methodologies. This became a limitation because there seemed to be an emphasis on creating validity by rigidly carrying out preplanned methodologies. As stated elsewhere, I found that this required maintaining power over others which is oppressive.

In the area of critical pedagogy, some feminist researchers have chosen to research

their own experience - often in the classroom (e.g. Ellsworth 1989). They have started to tell their own teaching stories, to look at their own practice and at how knowledge is produced in their own situations. For example, one group of women researched their own research experiences, leading them to new insights into their collaboration with male oppression (Drake et al. 1993).

There is a danger in examining one's own practice as self reflexivity can become self absorption. But it does allow a 'freeing' of ‘the researched’ in this practice. One of the problems with it is that others are so much more interesting. If I filled this thesis with tenants’ stories, I would find it easier to capture your imagination and you would be more inclined to see me as offering something. But what I would offer is an interpretation of someone else’s life. This is disempowering taking away their ability to name their own experience. And what is worse is that the people whose words I take and use are those least likely to get to read them. To avoid self absorption requires maintaining an awareness of one's small place in the larger context in which the research happens and maintaining a balance between focusing on what needs to change in the situation and what one has to contribute to that change.

As my study progressed I became increasingly dissatisfied with the concept of knowledge I was employing. In the predominantly positivist context in which I worked, knowledge was increasingly equated to information. To be knowledge it needed to be information produced by positivist methods. But it was still basically an ever increasing store of information. Information can be useful and is sometimes necessary. But I found it was increasingly overemphasised. I also knew that the critical approach within which I began the research emphasised the creation of knowledge. This shifted the emphasis away from accumulated information. But I still felt unsatisfied. I eventually realised that what was missing was the side of knowledge which is about understanding. I preferred a definition of knowledge which involved the use of information to increase understanding.

Understanding contributes to building wisdom. Developing wisdom, as described in

chapter four, is more personal and requires broader methods than positivist and critical research methods. These methods are covered below. Its source of validity is in the ability of others to recognise their own realities within the spoken or written word or a person's actions. It is as much about process and approach as about outcome. Its source of reliability is more similar to positivist and critical approaches with the emphasis being on careful collecting of information, a balancing of components and a rigorous selection process.

Position and Conditions

Feminist theorists such as Stanley & Wise (1993:33) believe that ‘a concern with the power relationship in research is central to feminist thinking’. Organic research goes further by dismissing the researcher as a professional producer of knowledge. An organic perspective on research accepts that knowledge can be produced by people who are not academics. The organic researcher is one person in a complex situation who is attempting to learn from a situation in order to better understand the dynamics and to develop wisdom in how to approach future situations. Other people will be learning in this situation but may not be quite as rigorous in their methods or as thorough in their reflections.

Organic researchers will be part of the situation they study. They acknowledge that they are inseparable from the situation. That is, they affect the situation and the situation affects them. This includes every aspect of their being. It may be possible for an organic researcher to begin as an outsider but when s/he enters the situation, s/he becomes part of it and influences it. An outside researcher can see things that are sometimes invisible to an insider and can therefore offer a perspective which may benefit other participants if these participants are managing the research process. This requires dialogue between the researcher and other participants.

In organic research, the whole person of the researcher enters the situation. Any

attempt to withhold parts of oneself becomes oppressive because it fragments the practitioner/researcher as well as maintaining power over others. Researchers acknowledge that the approach they take 'is conditioned by [their] view of the world, [their] philosophical and ideological position, and by the socio-political context of which [they are] a part' Ellis 1990:23). This is in contrast to action research which is generally used by people who have primary roles in the research situation, such as being a teacher in the classroom where the research is to happen and who tend to examine their specific role. I found that the different roles I took in the situation I studied all needed to be analysed because when I focused on a single role such as my role as researcher I failed to note the influence of other actions of mine. If I tried to analyse everything I did into roles I also lost segments. So I took the approach that I brought my whole being to the research and active situation and it is my whole way of being in the situation that I analysed. As mentioned in chapter three, I realised that I must relate to others in the situation as whole people, not as tenants or staff because by narrowing who they were I excluded parts of their being.

A story of position

I was an integral part of the situation I was recording. The position I held during the period of recording, and the effects of this position are recorded in the chapter on position and conditions. In studying my praxis and my reflections on my praxis, I endeavoured not to distance myself from my work in order to interpret it, but to immerse myself in it in order to learn as much as possible about achieving my aims.

In order to address issues of oppression/s, I analysed the roles I was in or was seen to be in. I needed to develop an understanding of the effects of holding a position of power over tenants and being subservient in council in order to avoid reproducing oppression/s and to work at changing the possibility of holding power over tenants or having council hold power over me. In the same way I needed to develop an understanding of the dynamics of power triggered by being female, being white and also by my personal strengths and weaknesses.

The main method of working through the power issues was to form complex and personal relationships with anyone with whom I worked. That is, I had to present myself as a whole multifaceted person and learn to see others in the same way. I outline in chapter three how I first interacted with tenants as tenants rather than as people and what a block this was in my relationships with them. The same applied within council. It was far easier to relate to a manager as a manager and not as a person. But this created unsustainable imbalances. I would begin to act like a victim and this would lessen my ability to lessen oppression/s.

Working constantly on position shifts position. It is not that I change colour or sex but that I change my relationships with others which changes the position as conceptualised by some or all. For instance, being male in Aotearoa/New Zealand today does not mean being an oppressor. But there is a strong tendency for the masculine version of the human species to oppress females of this species. That means that being female is likely to equate with being oppressed. But the oppression is in the relationship between male and female[5]. When this shifts, oppression shifts and with it the perception of position.

Position in this way is shaped by conditions. The organic researcher therefore also looks at the conditions as a whole and weaves research methodologies into the situation in which one is immersed and into an understanding of the conditions which have shaped the context. The organic researcher acknowledges the complexity of situations and the immeasurability and inseparability of the context.

The context includes the major groupings of people, their pasts and present, the social, economic and political influences on these people and the physical environment in which they live. Theory, research, practice and experience meet and mesh in the process of forming understandings of our world.

[5] When referring to male and female here I am not referring to individuals. Neither am I necessarily referring to men exclusively when I refer to ‘male’ or women exclusively when I refer to ‘female’. I use male and female to identify the institutions and groups who are most associated with ‘male’ or ‘female’ characteristics.

I noted also the fluidity of situations. For instance, I tried to record what I thought were straightforward facts to give the reader an indication of the scope of the praxis. I wanted to report the number of housing units owned by council, the number of tenants in housing, and some of the characteristics of these tenants. I found that to write these down as facts for the period of the study meant disguising the constantly changing nature of these features. All these figures changed over the period of recording leaving me only able to give an approximate average or demonstrate a trend if there was one. While it is possible to build in a degree of error and still produce statistics which can help planners, it is more accurate to report the degree of change or stability than to report numbers.

The position of the academic researcher is effectively abolished in organic research. Instead a whole person enters relationships with whole people. This whole person does not control the situation. S/he shares the control with other participants. It is this sharing that undoes controlling relationships and brings balance, not researchers achieving their aims. This person is perhaps more a searcher than a researcher.

Means

> Rigor [sic] is a desire to know, a search for an answer, a critical method of learning.
>
> Freire & Shor (1987:4)

Organic research is about creating understanding and wisdom. Wisdom cannot be gained from reading a book although this may be part of the process. Neither is it gained from analysing the results of a survey or interviewing people, although again, these can add to the process. Instead, the means of organic research are constructed from the weaving together of the constantly changing situation with past knowledge of research means. The means may need to change as the situation changes. If they are

established at the beginning of the research period and strictly followed they give the researcher much greater control and a ‘neat’ piece of research. But it can take control from others to maintain a means when something in the situation is suggesting a change would be suitable. For instance, it would have been easier and ‘neater’ for me to design a tenant education programme and an evaluation system for the entire period and use comparisons between evaluations to determine the effectiveness of the programme. But I constantly adapted both the programme and the evaluation means to the changing demands of the situation and to take account of the constantly altering relationships and understandings between myself and tenants.

Instead of presetting the means, the organic researcher assesses a range of likely means and enters the situation equipped with possibilities for proceeding. That is, the researcher prepares for the research process rather than creating a fixed plan (Cunningham 1988). The situation is constantly reread to ensure that the means being used are not creating or maintaining oppression/s and that they continue to be appropriate to both the situation and the focus of the research.

A story of means

The research was part of my everyday praxis. It was the recording of the journey of change that I undertook with tenants and council, the reflecting on the recordings and the journey, and the linking these reflections with other people’s reflections on similar journeys.

In organic research, the ‘searcher’ bases the selection of methods not only on context but on a set of principles. Principles need to be consistent with the metanarratives and the focus of the organic approach. The principles I developed included respect for all people in the situation, naming my reality and encouraging others to name theirs, making space to negotiate these realities, placing my whole self in the situation and relating to others as whole people, and acknowledging the effect of my position on the situation. I also maintained constant vigilance to ensure that no aspect of my search perpetuated oppression/s.

The means used for this piece of organic research are covered in detail in the following chapter. Some methods were constant such as daily journal recordings while others such as methods of evaluating changed often. I used a multimethod approach to gain the fullest possible picture.

Relationships

Relationships are central to the research process within an organic approach. This approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of people. People are made and remade through their relationships. Anyone involved in a research situation is linked by common humanity, a sharing of time and place, and the interactions that occur in this space. ‘Organic' implies 'belonging to' the situation.

I found that I needed to be aware that my relationships with others affected how people behaved around me. As my aim was to redistribute power I monitored every aspect of my relationship with other people to ensure that I used processes which made a positive use of power and addressed oppressive relationships. To do this I had to have respect for the dignity of people - both as individuals in context and as groups. Valuing the dignity of other people was a principle I used to guide my praxis.

Relationships within an organic approach to research could be conceptualised as opposite to those within a positivist approach. Instead of taking a reductionist stand, I sought to be as inclusive as possible, taking a holistic stand. This required not only acknowledging and addressing issues in personal relationships, but constantly stepping back to acknowledge relationships at the macro level. Deshler & Selener (1988:15) suggest that what they call transformative research which shares the characteristic of holism, should focus on relationships between ‘the micro and the macro, the part and the whole, the local and the global, the subjective and the objective’. This approach to research centralises relationships as does the organic approach to social change.

Organic research and oppression/s

Organic [re]searchers seek to bring about balance by weaving together throughout the period of the research their past learnings with their current situation. They can do this from any position as long as power within a position is recognised and addressed. [Re]searchers see themselves as an integral part of the situation. They are affected by, and affect, the situation. They enter into relationships with people and are changed by them. They seek to be aware of these changes and to constantly seek to undo power relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

Organic [re]search moves away from the linear predictive model of positivism. It is openly political as is critical research and revolves around praxis to a greater degree than is common in critical research. To carry out [re]search organically means to enter a situation as a whole person and relate to others as whole people. The process of relating is reflected on rigorously and systematically with two aims. The first aim of the [re]search process is to become wise rather than to accumulate knowledge while the second aim is to learn to relate to others as whole people, thus transforming oppression/s that may exist in the [re]search situation.

The organic approach to research is totally intertwined with the organic approach to social change. It seeks balance rather than power/knowledge, can happen from any position and conditions, can use a wide variety of means but these means are flexible and are constantly altered throughout the process to ensure maximum fit and to ensure they do not create oppression/s. The relationships of the [re]searcher are monitored to

ensure they enhance the wisdom of both parties, giving as much as they take. The [re]searcher is a social change agent who gathers information about the process, reflects on this information, and reflects on the reflections.

> Multimethod research creates the opportunity to put texts or people in contexts, thus providing a richer and far more accurate interpretation.
>
> Reinharz (1992:213)

Firestone (1987:16) suggests one reason for this is that 'each method type uses different techniques of presentation to project divergent assumptions about the world and different means to persuade the reader of its conclusions'.

Within the dominant approach, methodologies are part of the bank of knowledge. They belong to the established field of knowledge and any deviation from that which has been established needs to be carefully justified in order to establish validity. Positivists describe their methodologies in research reports in order to demonstrate validity by 'proving' objectivity and a basis in experience. Validity of the methodology is a significant contributor to establishing validity of the research findings.

A story of counting change

Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 1990s is a country in the grip of new right ideologies. Part of new right thinking is a belief in number crunching, particularly in relation to dollars and cents. The maxim is 'what can't be costed doesn't have worth'. Local governments follow central government in formulating new means of judging worth. All actions are measured in terms of inputs and outputs. Specialist staff are employed to attach costings to social outputs. As part of this shift to the right, I was asked to compute the worth of 'added value' in the 'output' of establishing a tenant committee.[6]

I refused this request because I believe human interaction is too complex to squash into inputs and outputs. Speaking in terms of inputs and outputs implies that

[6] Journal entry, 10 April 1993 (10.2:34).

something measurable that is put into a system can make a difference which is measurable when/if it comes out of that system. But human interaction is historical, conditioned by context and constantly changing. Even the apparently straightforward action of establishing a tenant committee is complex. First I had to find tenants who wanted to form a committee. If my position required me to start one and I could identify no tenants who wanted one, I would have to negotiate a change in the requirement or manipulate tenants into wanting one by, for instance, offering bribes or requiring participation in return for satisfying identified group wants such as the provision of a community room. If a committee is wanted it takes a number of people to be prepared to come together for discussions. Although I may be the catalyst for this happening can I claim to have started the group? Then there is the problem of what counts as a committee. Does the group need to be meeting regularly, keeping minutes, or making joint decisions? Who decides what counts as a committee?

My input as a council worker plays a role in starting a committee. But to reach an output of this nature requires input from others and depends on local circumstances and conditions. The variables are too numerous to control or measure. I did collect statistics on the numbers of people who attended parts of the tenant education programme and numbers of people who gained certificates (appendix 12). One possible analysis of these figures might is that the programme was statistically insignificant since only about three per cent of tenants attended. The programme would not qualify for central government community education funding because funding in the tertiary area in Aotearoa/New Zealand is allocated according to attendance numbers.

The figures are one tiny part of the jigsaw puzzle which makes up the whole. Taken alone, they cannot possibly answer the question about the success or failure of the programme. Yet many programmes are assessed on this criterion alone.

:

Interviews are a popular methodology with many constructive features.

> [I]nterviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher.
>
> Reinharz (1992:19)

On the other side, Oakley (1981:33) describes interviews as 'techniques and methods of manipulating people and calculatedly treating them as objects in order to get what one wants out of them' (Oakley 1981:33).

Positivists would view my interviews as biased because I knew the interviewees and had personally selected them on a non random basis. I could not justify the selection of the interviewees within a positivist approach. But I could justify the choice within a critical or organic approach. So I went ahead. I chose tenants whom I knew and worked with and whom I believed would be articulate about the conditions in which they lived. I chose those whom I had established relationships with in the hope that the previous relationship would have established a level of trust between us which allowed for more open, frank interviewing. I also chose a mix of male and female, class and culture, age and sexual orientation. I produced all the necessary paperwork, that is letters seeking permission to interview, explanatory letters and an evaluative questionnaire (appendix 14).

Of the five people I chose to interview, two refused and three agreed. The three who agreed had misgivings. One checked throughout the interview that what he told me would not affect his immigration status. Another said that she was used to 'being used' for interviews as she was an unusual 'case'. The third had been interviewed before but thought nothing had changed as a result. Despite these misgivings they all gave me considerable detail about their lives and the conditions in which they lived. They were also articulate about the research process. They were used to telling their stories, seldom saw results from these stories, and they wanted to know what was going to happen to these stories. They quite clearly felt used despite my making every attempt to avoid this, and it did alter my relationship with them. I felt I was perpetuating an

aspect of oppression by taking from these people without giving as one does in dialogue. For this reason, I decided not to continue with further interviews.

This did not invalidate the valuable information gained during the interview process (appendix 15). After all, the methodology is a very popular one precisely because so much can be learnt. For instance, Leason (1996:31) found that not only did she learn from the women she interviewed, but the women she interviewed stated that they appreciated the chance to reflect on their experience and to articulate this experience. But since my aim was to contribute to ending oppression/s, there seemed little sense in continuing with a method which was, at least on this occasion, oppressive. I had exposed, as have others (Oakley 1981, Cornwell 1984), the power issues contained in the interview process, issues that hide under the guise of objectivity.

Following a plan

There were many times during the study when I laid out logical plans for my research. The more carefully I followed my logical plan, the less effective and more controlling was the research. I concluded that while positivist research could produce valuable knowledge, the more mechanistic my approach was, the more oppressive my research was. It was destructive of relationships, led to conclusions that were seldom in the best interests of the researched, and caused further damage in the process. This applied to the whole research process. The process of selecting a topic, developing a hypothesis, reviewing the literature, formulating methodology, carrying out the research and analysing the results is a process that maintains control of what counts as knowledge and reinforces relationships where some control others.

CRITICAL METHODOLOGIES

While it is quite common for researchers to decide on a situation to be studied and turn to the literature to select appropriate, predetermined, and 'approved' methodologies, more and more researchers are challenging the 'established validity' of such methodologies. They identify historical, gender and cultural biases in methodologies. For instance, Oakley (1981) damns the textbook (male) interview style. Reinharz (1992) reports women researchers identifying male bias in ‘objective’ research and trying out many new methodologies. Maori researchers such as Smith (1993) identify the cultural basis of methodologies and set about re-establishing guidelines for Maori research. Tupuola (1993) has begun the same process for Samoan research. These writers practise research within critical and feminist approaches.

A feature of critical approaches is their dialectical nature. ‘ 'Dialectics' is a general theory of the nature of reality and of the process of understanding reality’ (Winter 1989:46). A dialectical approach features change. It opens the way for social change by questioning why things are the way they are.

> Whereas positivist methods suggest that we must observe phenomena exhaustively, and define them precisely in order to identify specific causes and effects, a dialectical approach suggests we subject observed phenomena to ‘critique’. This entails investigating (1) the overall context of relations which gives them a unity in spite of their apparent separateness and (2) the structure of internal contradictions - behind their apparent unity - which gives them a tendency to change, in spite of their apparent fixity.
>
> Winter (1989:52)

The dialectical approach exposes relations of power, thus exposing oppression/s. Without this exposure oppression/s cannot be destroyed. This section addresses two ‘methods’ of the critical approach which I used in my study. The first is Freire’s concept of praxis. The second is critical action research which is an approach I initially attempted to work within. I examine how the use of these approaches helped

or hindered my quest to end oppression/s.

Praxis

> When people do not reflect on their everyday lives, they do not become aware that there is a gap between those ideas and values and the acts we perform in our daily lives.
>
> Freire (1989:25)

Freire used praxis to overcome the gap between theory and practice. Carr & Kemmis (1986:150) describe praxis as

> … action which is considered and consciously theorised, and which may reflexively inform and transform the theory which informed it (p. 150). [I]t is a response to a real historical situation in which an actor is compelled to act on the basis of understanding and commitment (p. 191).

<u>A story of praxis</u>

As noted in the introduction, praxis is fundamental to this thesis, but here I will limit discussion to praxis as a 'method', or more accurately as a finding out process. Although Freire used praxis in relation to working with the oppressed, he also carried out research using praxis. All his recent books are reflections on his practice. I found that praxis was one way out of the positivist quagmire of planned methodologies. Praxis made the process of discovery constantly responsive to changing circumstances.

In the research process, I planned the finding out process but instead of carrying the planned process out with great precision, I constantly took time out from the action to critically reflect on progress and as a result of this reflection altered my original plans. I did this at points where an issue arose because of a clash in principles or values, on completion of a section and when I was planning the next section. For instance, I critically reflected on my method of carrying out the baseline interviews which I described earlier in this chapter. This reflection led me to a decision not to use interviews again because of the perpetuation of oppression/s that occurred in the process. I had to find different and non oppressive ways of collecting information. Each method I used was examined for its potential to maintain and create oppression/s. The process of praxis created a fluidity and hence a responsiveness to changing conditions.

As time passed, and circumstances changed, I reflected on my decision not to use interviews and made a decision to use this methodology again in these changed circumstances because I thought that my relationship with the people I wanted to interview had changed enough for the power imbalance to be gone. In this case, I was wrong. I found further interviews negatively affected my relationships with the people concerned.

The advantage of praxis is not only that one's actions and theories become more coordinated, it is also that few decisions are final. Practising praxis means remaining open to receive new information, to make new interpretations, and to adapt to changes in circumstances. It thus allows for the possibility of identifying and stopping oppressive practices and changing oppressive relationships.[7] But praxis alone was not enough. I found that I needed to expand the action reflection cycle to weave in context, to reflect on the reflecting process and to acknowledge my imbeddedness in the context. Carr & Kemmis (1986:192) claim that praxis can emancipate

[7] It is not sufficient in itself because the method of praxis can equally be used to plan how to be more oppressive.

‘practitioners from the often unseen constraints of assumptions, habits, precedent, coercion and ideology’. In my experience, this is not possible. Praxis offers opportunities to expose these factors and allow for change, but it does not free the practitioner from them. I found that the practitioner needs to be aware that there will always be aspects of one’s actions that one is unaware of. Freeing oneself of one assumption can lead to the creation of another. Praxis allows for reevaluation of conditions and action on some of these conditions some of the time, but does not free us from conditions which constantly shape us. Lather defines praxis as ‘a self-creative activity through which we make the world’ (1991:11). I qualify this to say it is a self creative activity through which we become involved in shaping change.

Critical action research

In the last chapter I discussed the nature of action research. In this chapter I examine the methodologies of critical action research. There is often little difference in the methodologies of the different types of action research described by Tripp (1990). They all tend to use one or more methods including participant observation, ethnographies, interviews, surveys and questionnaires. Reinharz suggests that ‘multimethod research creates the opportunity to put texts or people in contexts, thus providing a richer and far more accurate interpretation’ (1992:213). Information collected through different methods can be triangulated to gain a fuller picture. For instance, the analysis of written documents can make groups with oral histories invisible. Written documents such as minutes also tend to reflect one version of any set of events. There may be many versions. Their primary use is often as 'markers' which can give a researcher a record of dates, decisions, and who was involved (Altrichter 1993).

While these methods and triangulation of data are common to different types of action research, critical action research also includes critical reflection on the data. That is, while the positivist analysis process focuses on gaining an accurate picture of the

situation, critical analyses focus on what power relations can be exposed through the data (McNiff 1988:49). In relation to teachers, this process 'enables teachers to know what they know, how they know it, and to extend it' (Holly & McLoughlin 1989:261).

To examine power relations the

> … research process seeks differences, contradictions, possibilities and questions, or ways of opening up new avenues for action. The initiator of a research process is not an uninvolved observer but an implicated participant, and situations cannot be reduced to a consensus, but must be presented in terms of the multiplicity of viewpoints which make up the situation.
>
> Winter (1989:62)

McNiff (1988:8) argues that many methodologies can be used because the focus is on the inquirer more than the methodologies used. In this way, McNiff and Winter distance critical action research from the positivist concept of the unbiased objective researcher and the observation of natural phenomena. Validity in action research involves the critical ability of the researcher as well as the methodology.

A story of critical action research

There were aspects of my analysis which reflected a critical approach. For instance, I analysed how power works within council and how the power relationship is maintained between council and tenants. I was a social change agent who was systematically monitoring and critically reflecting on my praxis. My aim was to change relationships of power. I also took a rigorous and economical approach (Winter 1987:33) while making 'conscious, critical shifts' so 'that there [was] a sensible and informed sequence in the whole process of enquiry' (Bawden 1991:36).

I found that a high level of awareness is needed to be able to be critically reflective on a situation.

> [T]he real issue of participant observation is not the amount of participation versus observation, but the extent to which the person can question the grounds for the action being carried out.
>
> Wadsworth (1984:40)

I found the level of questioning that was possible was linked to time and situation. There were many instances where I used practical or technical types of action research cycles to make adjustments to the education programme or other social change action. I took time out to critically question the methods, processes and structures. The more major questioning could happen, for instance, when I completed a term and took two to four weeks to stop, assess direction and progress and make changes. Questioning in more depth took more time and required complete removal from the situation. This is a limit to action research as employed by teachers and other professionals. A deeper questioning can be difficult if not impossible for two reasons. First, while being involved in a situation gives one the opportunity to observe in more detail than may otherwise be the case, it can lead also to great difficulty in gaining an overview. Day to day issues block the bigger picture. Secondly, a deeper questioning can lead to an identification of oppressive structures and methods which individuals cannot change without relinquishing their positions. Awareness of oppressive structures can make a position intolerable.

The involvement of others in the research process is often called collaboration. Winter defines the term as meaning ‘everyone's point of view will be taken as a contribution to resources for understanding; no one's point of view will be taken as the final understanding as to what all the other points of view really mean’ (1987:56). Because I was encouraging maximum possible participation in all aspects of the programme planning and execution by tenants, I could not make changes without their agreement. Imposing changes meant taking back control and thus reinforcing tenants’ lack of control. But although what I did may fit within Winter’s definition of collaboration, I would call this low level collaboration because the people I worked with were not

generally involved in discussions about my research plans and were not involved in data collection or writing up the findings. The work remains the story of my praxis and my reflections on my praxis, all of which are shaped by my interactions with others.

The agenda of reducing oppression/s led then to less control for the action researcher, making the process more untidy, less predictable and further from established methodologies.

Critical action research was inclusive of action and reflection. It was fluid and allowing of change. But I found that maintaining the neat cycles described by Lewin or Carr and Kemmis was possible only if I rigidly controlled the process. If I did this, I became separated from the situation and exerted control which could be oppressive.

Conclusions

Praxis is an endless finding out process which requires of the practitioner openness and increasing levels of awareness. That is, it is a practice which does not require exerting power over others or the environment in order to carry out the finding out process, although it can be used to find ways of controlling others as easily as it can be used for finding ways of not controlling others. The use of praxis may require using one's power 'to' but does not require using power 'over'. But I identified limits to its ability to lead to change. Critical action research removes some of the oppressive features of positivism by focusing on the practitioner, combining theory and practice, focusing on change and adopting 'a deliberate openness to new experiences and processes' (McNiff 1988:9). All types have their uses but there are limits to what change can be achieved with each type. Action research which follows a strict planned cycle can maintain and add to the powerlessness of others in the situation by maintaining control of the process, thus limiting real participation.

ORGANIC METHODOLOGIES

The search for a non oppressive finding out process led not to the dismissal of more orthodox methodologies but to the use of these within a different set of metanarratives and in a way which constantly interwove context. I examined my own social change work in its complexity and context, acknowledging the contradictions which became apparent. I searched for available tools to demonstrate this complexity and context. From these I selected tools appropriate to the situation and acceptable to those concerned. I looked for ways of studying the situation which were ethical, respectful of people, allowed people to maintain control, and which allowed for relationships which were not based on control of others. I also had to look at realistic timeframes, and emotional, physical and social limits imposed by studying a situation which I was actively part of creating.

The prime differences between my use of methodologies within an organic approach and usage of methodologies by positivist and critical researchers are described in the previous chapter. The context is woven into the research just as the methodologies are woven into the context. Relationships are constantly monitored for oppressive elements. Every effort is made to enhance the learning of all involved, not just the researcher's. This means the 'researcher' creates and recreates relationships, changing her/himself in the process.

In organic research, the methods are not just matched to the context; they grow out of the place being studied in an ongoing way and are woven continuously into the fabric of the study. Established research methodologies are a set of experiences to draw on alongside the situation, the qualities, experience and position of the researcher and the other people involved. They are a fund of knowledge. But instead of withdrawing cash and using it in exchange for gleaning other knowledge, the fund is knowledge which

can be brought into the situation and its use negotiated with other participants. It needs to be able to change in the process, not just to be applied. If the researcher is not to control the situation, it will change, sometimes unpredictably, making previously negotiated means unacceptable or inappropriate. Change may be needed. Likewise methods which may be effective and appropriate in one situation may add to oppressive relationships in another situation.

The experience of others' use of established methodologies allows the researcher to avoid some of the pitfalls others have experienced when using any particular method. But the aim shifts from perfecting the method to ensuring a method is appropriate for the context, is non oppressive and provides reliable material. Every method only produces a small part of a story. I therefore aimed to identify what part of a story each method could tell and identify a set of methods which would tell other parts of the story.

The action and the research are more intertwined than in action research. This is achieved by focusing on the aim and the learning process and being guided by these to evolve the methodologies. If the research is conceptualised primarily in terms of methodologies, it has a tendency to become mechanistic and for the researcher to impose methodologies on the situation. The organic approach requires a holistic approach to research which is viewed as a learning process.

The social change agent is both a researcher and an activist. Praxis is used to create and recreate knowledge, understanding and to build wisdom. The methods of organic research therefore maintain fluidity. Careful planning at the beginning involves considering a variety of methods which may or may not be used. The rest of this chapter tells the story of the research process in as much as it can be separated from the action process.

A story of 'data collection'

In November 1992, six months after becoming employed as a tenant adviser by

Wellington City Council, I realised that I had an opportunity to both create and study social change in a local environment. I had already collated material and recorded day to day happenings, using an action reflection model developed over many years of community development work. Over the period of the study, these methods continued to evolve.

In my study I recorded actions, events and thoughts in diaries and journals, collected and analysed documentation and statistics, researched archives, carried out evaluations, interviews and surveys, a focus group, was occasionally a participant observer and carried out literature reviews.

Recordings

There were three main sets of recordings:

- diaries from 1992 to 1994

These record appointments and action plans, and indicate action taken.

- 12 log books

Holly & McLoughlin (1989) define log books as ‘factual’ recordings of events. My log books are similar to 'running records' used in observations (Irwin & Bushnell 1980), although less thorough because I was usually a participant in the situation I was observing. They are quick notes made throughout the day from meetings and discussions, passing scraps of information, ideas and requests. The log books are 32-leaf or 40-leaf exercise books which I call workbooks. Like all my records, the log books do not belong strictly in one category. The log book is the book I carried with me. If I thought I would forget a thought, I would record the thought in the log book. Likewise they contain from time to time ideas and plans as well as records.

- 13 journals

Holly & McLoughlin (1989:50) identify eight types of journals: journalistic, analytical, evaluative, ethnographic, therapeutic, reflective, introspective and creative.

My journals were predominantly analytical and reflective but covered all these categories. The journals primarily record my reflections on each day and notes taken from readings. I used old 360-page diaries for these journals. The reflective writing was usually done after midnight. Depending on the contents of the 'log book' for the day I would write notes about what actually happened in the day, and write reflections on my actions.

These journals are interspersed with comments on my personal life, and occasionally notes from phone conversations and such. While a totally systematic researcher may keep each set of records separate, this proved impractical for me. The type of work meant that I was constantly travelling from one complex to another and often attending meetings at night. Rather than not recording something because I had the wrong book, I decided it was more to the point to record in whatever was available at the time. It was not always obvious which parts of a day's action was relevant to the study at the time of writing. Again, where in doubt, I chose to record rather than miss out.

Collecting materials

From the beginning of my employment with Wellington City Council I collected materials relevant to the focus of my praxis. These included:

- materials relating to my employment including

job descriptions
letters of appointment
pay slips
correspondence
monthly reports
performance reviews
training material

- materials relating to the tenant education programme including

leaflets (appendix three)
calendars (appendix four)
workshop plans
workshop notes
advertising materials
correspondence
certificates (appendix 16)
'tick-off sheets' (appendix three)
photos taken in workshops

- agendas and minutes of tenant committee meetings
- tenant newsletters
- Wellington City Council housing material, annual plans and reports
- media cuttings featuring tenants, council housing, housing in general and council in general.

Historical records

I searched council files and council's archives for historical material relating to the housing department. The Turnbull Library provided historical records of tenant organisations.

Evaluations of the education programme

The formal methods used were two written evaluations and a focus group. These are described in the stories earlier in this chapter. The formal evaluations at best allowed me to report to council that tenants reported that they found the programme useful. This supplemented the information I collected on numbers of workshops held, numbers attending and numbers of certificates issued (appendix 12). As a method of collecting information for future planning or for judging the effectiveness of the

programme in bringing about change, they had little use. By far the most successful forms of evaluation were the unplanned dialogues. Evaluation happens all the time, almost like a subtext to life. At many meetings, evaluations would be spontaneous. And I would learn far more after meetings and workshops over a cup of tea. One instant of this was about one month after ceasing employment with the Wellington City Council. I attended a Wellington Housing Association of Tenants (WHAT!) executive meeting and was told that the programme had stopped. The chairperson was most concerned about this. He said that the programme was 'the key' to tenant organisation.[8]

Another evaluation story occurred in 1996 at a tenant hui. I was asked to talk about the history of WHAT! in the opening session of a tenant hui. As part of this history I talked about the education programme. There was a spontaneous evaluation where people who had been involved talked about their experiences and their wish to have the programme continued. There was also a discussion of some of the problems the programme had and what could be done to change things that had not worked.
On 29 January 1997, 2.5 years after I ceased working on the programme, I received a call from a WHAT! member asking for copies of all the programme material because WHAT! were intending to start the programme again. There is agreement amongst involved tenants and between these tenants and myself that the programme provided a place to make the tenant movement happen. The more involved tenants were in the programme, the longer and stronger their involvement has been.

Two effective methods of evaluation, that is, methods which told me a) that the programme was wanted, and b) that it achieved its aim of creating social change, proved to be dialogue which was initiated by those who took part in the programme, and observation of tenant action and focus over time. Guidelines for future programming were best gained by attending tenant gatherings, listening to their concerns and building an evolving programme based on day to day information.

[8] Journal entry, 6 July 1994 (10.6:161).

Interviews

As I mentioned earlier, despite my decision to avoid interviews made after completing the baseline interviews described above, I made a decision in mid 1994 to complete a small series of evaluative interviews because I believed the context had changed enough for this to happen. I individually interviewed ex-WHAT! Chairperson Frank Broomfield, ex-General Manager of housing Emele Duituturaga, ex-Tenant Services Manager Diana East and a housing officer.[9] I had a prepared list of topics and open questions for the interviews. The topics were the same for each but the questions were altered to suit each person. These interviews took place in my or the individual's home, according to their wishes, and each was tape recorded. The tape recordings were selectively transcribed, returned to the person for checking and for any additional comments they wished to make. Permission to use the material was gained.

The purpose of these interviews was to provide another source of data to triangulate. I selected individuals who had played key roles in my praxis, with whom I had strong relationships and who were in positions of relative power. I believed these factors would contribute to overcoming the oppressive nature of interviewing experienced earlier in the process. However, I was unhappy with the results. While my relationships with these people did not deteriorate as a result of the interviews, the process artificially altered the normal flow of communication causing stilted responses which are less informative than a normal flow. All those interviewed were extremely articulate but the only advantage I identified of using a more formal interview style was to gain permission for use of comments before the communication occurred.

Participant observation

Participant observation is 'observation of a social situation by someone taking part in that situation (Wadsworth 1984:40). This is not a method preferred by positivists because any participation, according to positivists, lessens the researcher's ability to be objective, thus lessening the validity of the research. A constructivist would say

[9] Each of these interviewees named gave me written permission to name them. See appendix 18 for a copy of the permission form.

that the researcher cannot be separated from the researched (Steier 1991:10). If this stance is taken, researchers can take note of the effect of their involvement or presence on the research situation and account for this in their findings.

The issue of how much participation is happening compared to the amount of observation taking place only arises within approaches which objectivity is considered possible and desirable. In critical research, the discussion is instead about the 'extent to which the person can question the grounds for the action being carried out (Wadsworth 1984:40). In organic research, the social change agent is involved by definition. There may be times within the context of her/his work when a social situation can be observed and recorded in a setting. Like critical research, the issue is how these notes are used. In organic research the social change agent observes in order to understand their setting and to examine their own process. Notes made within this approach are therefore not used to judge others but rather to aid reflection on one's own process.

When I was free to observe I used my workbooks to record observations. Where this was not possible because of the degree of participation, I noted observations in my nightly journal recordings.

Literature reviews

Positivist researchers tend to require students to review the literature in the field of interest before deciding what and how they will add to the field of knowledge (Isaac & Michael 1971:16). My purpose in reviewing literature was different. First, I sought to discover how other people interpreted aspects of social change. Secondly, I sought to discover people who may have already articulated what I was seeking to articulate. This is what Merriam (1990:62) calls an integrative review, or in the case of research methodologies a methodological review. Thirdly, I sought to check my experience and ideas against those of others. I wanted to learn from others' ideas in order to clarify my own.

I first reviewed Freire's work and that of related critical theorists, especially in the education area. Other fields of interest continued to arise as I searched for compatible frameworks. For instance, I reviewed literature on self determination, critical theories, housing, research and methodologies, adult education, and the literature on power and consciousness. As the study progressed, I turned more to poststructuralist writers, to indigenous writers and to the field of ecofeminism.

I used the literature on research to

a) expand my methodological choices e.g. focus groups;
b) discover what other researchers had identified as the capabilities and limitations of each methodology; and
c) label the methods I had identified and look for the degree of 'fit' between what I was doing and identified methodologies.

There is not one particular section in this thesis which reviews the literature. Rather the 'reviews' are integrated throughout the thesis.

A story of analysis

After two years of recording my praxis and reflections on this praxis, I began the process of reflecting on the praxis. As with the process of praxis, I wove together learnings from past experience of analysis with the material I had collected. The method of analysis evolved as it progressed. The first step was to bring order to the vast quantity of material. I adopted a grounded theory approach to the written material, coding and categorising every line of written notes. I used the categories to find the major aspects of social change. But rather than organising the categories into a coherent whole in order to describe what was happening in 'objective' terms, I wrote stories.

With the help of the analysed notes, the written records, tapes, photos and memories, I compiled the story of the tenant education programme, the story of WHAT! and the

story of the research process. I then critically analysed these to unpack my praxis, to seek its theoretical origins and to construct the organic approach. I also continued to discuss my thoughts with some tenants. Finally I also coded notes on literature reviews and submitted this material to the same process.

Grounded Theory

Before beginning the [re]search, I intended to take a grounded theory approach both to the literature and to the collected material and recordings. The appeal of grounded theory was in its phenomenological rather than logical basis. That is, it is based on people's experience, not logic. This provided a qualitative means of understanding the world of people and their relationships and structures. The second area of appeal was in its rigorous nature. As Darkenwald (1980) writes, many will not choose to use grounded theory because it is work intensive. But it goes much further than constructing a description of a situation as positivist ethnographies do, and is more methodical than the impressionistic manner in which most field work seems to be analysed. However, I have not 'applied' the method of grounded theory, but rather learnt from the writings of grounded theorists and applied these learnings to my situation.

In 1967, Glaser and Strauss outlined the grounded theory approach to generating theory in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. The approach was quite different to the positivist approach which was dominant at the time. This was based on logical deductions with data collected to prove, or disprove a hypothesis. Glaser and Strauss were working in the sociological field and were no doubt influenced by the Chicago school which paved the way for the acceptance of qualitative research. As well as adopting a qualitative approach, Glaser & Strauss did not enter the field with a hypothesis to test, but entered with an open mind. They collected a wide range of data which they then coded and categorised. As categories evolved they went back to the field to look for more evidence which explains and proves/disproves these categories. Once 'saturation' is reached, patterns are identified in the categories and these patterns form a theory.

Since 1967, grounded theory has been further developed by Glaser & Strauss (1978), and adapted to the field of adult education by researchers such as Darkenwald (1980) and Battersby (1981). Glaser says in *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978), that he extends the openness of their approach to data collection to the method of grounded theory. He encouraged the contributions of researchers to its ongoing development.

Glaser & Strauss (1967) grounded their research by entering a 'field' as researchers, taking copious notes, then going back to their own territory (home or work) to code and search for patterns emerging from the data. I did not observe from outside the situation as I was an active participant in it. Being active made the types of observation recordings used by Glaser & Strauss impossible.

After ten months of recording, I sat down one day and looked with horror at the rapidly growing pile of material that had accumulated. While reading was specifically aimed at 'saturating' my pre-chosen categories, I consciously worked to separate what I learnt from reading, from the categories which evolved from the 'data'. Within the organic approach, the categories are conceptualised along more constructivist lines. That is, they do not emerge from the data so much as being a weaving together of the social change agent's previous conceptualisations and categories with the material being analysed. This point is made also by Glaser (1978:4).

At this point, the grounded theory approach ceased again. I found coding too limited for the collected and recorded material. Instead I coded the written material primarily by areas. These were

- tenant education
- tenant committees
- tenant commentaries
- staff commentaries
- other commentaries e.g. other community workers

I collated the information from each area and used these notes as guidelines to write stories. The notes acted as memory prompts for considerably more complex stories than my extensive notes recorded. I then coded these stories into 118 analytical categories and five broader categories (appendix 17). Further reflection on these suggested a focus on balance within an organic approach with the aspects described in chapters seven to ten.

One major difference between my methodological practice and grounded theory is in the aims. While grounded theory aims to understand human interactions, I wanted social change. But I also aimed not to flounder in the mire of poststructuralism, nor to liberate people from oppression/s, but instead to find methods and practices which redistribute power and resources and where values such as care and respect are dominant.

Like Glaser & Strauss I aimed to give back to those I collected information from. However, Glaser & Strauss found they gave back most to the 'knowledgeable' (1967). This use of grounded theory can further add to power imbalances if theory making is done with those who have power anyhow. I aimed to give most back to those who 'know' in everyday terms rather than in theory, and can say ‘oh yes’ to a pattern which describes their experience. This provides an opportunity to change patterns and to apply knowledge more broadly.

Grounded theory aims to identify patterns. In doing so it tends to overlook the contradictions inherent in any situation. I sought to identify contradictions as well as patterns. To do this, I needed something different to a grounded theory approach.

Triangulation

I wanted to take an approach in which the shortcomings of one method of data collection could be checked against another. For instance, I was very aware that the minutes recorded very little of what actually happened at meetings and that even what

they did record was often of doubtful validity. But by matching the minutes against my notes which, in turn, acted as memory jogs, I could gain a fuller understanding of the situation.

Triangulation was used on different levels from checking the date and place of a particular workshop to gaining an appreciation of the contradictions among the three player/s - the tenants, the council and myself. While triangulation checked detail and demonstrated contradictions, it still had limits. The findings felt hollow and depthless. Triangulation provided rigour but there is an assumption in the use of triangulation that it is possible to accurately represent reality. It also leads to a written presentation where the researcher does all the analysis and the reader/s have little space to make their own interpretations.

Stories

> … we like story because story going with your body.
>
> Neidje (1989:120)

The analysis process I developed has similarities to that devised by Drake, Elliott & Castle (1993). They wanted a process of identifying the theories implicit in their research. Each of these women compiled a story of her own research process and told the story to the other two. They jointly reflected on each others' stories. They found that 'the typical components of a story [setting, theme, characters, conflict, plot, climax and resolution] could offer insights into the implicit thinking patterns embedded within our stories' (1993:293). I did not set out to identify the theories implicit in my praxis but found that this is what happened. Unlike Drake et al. I did not analyse these with a group. Instead I report the stories, not to support or disprove arguments but to 'vivify' interpretations (Lather 1991:96), allowing the reader to gain their own insights. This gives them a shared basis with me to consider the arguments presented. The stories become the basis of validity rather than method or argument.

Stories have been used as a method of passing on history, cultural patterns, morals,

gossip and probably all sorts of human interaction in both oral and written cultures. Miller (1990:5) describes story as the ‘personification and patterning of events around a theme or figure of significance to a particular culture. It involves time, location, and a sequence of events’. But it involves much more.

> At one level, story is a mode of knowing that captures in a special fashion the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs. We come to understand sorrow or love or joy or indecision in particularly rich ways through the characters and incidents we become familiar with in novels or plays. The richness and nuance cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact, or abstract propositions.
>
> Miller (1990:66)

Presenting stories allows the transmission of more deeply contextualised accounts and avoids the presentation of positivist descriptions. They expose the research process more completely than the usual reporting of scientific method allows. Bruner (1985:6) suggests that story also ‘accommodates ambiguity and dilemma as central figures or themes’ while ‘paradigmatic or scientific knowledge requires consistency and no contradiction’.

I aimed to portray the contradictions as well as the patterns, the complexity as well as the simplicity in my story telling. I also use stories both in the analysis process and in the writing process to avoid the presentation of positivist (and critical) descriptions of an independent reality. Steier suggests that we see research as ‘telling ourselves a story about ourselves’ (Steier 1991:3). This neatly summarises my intention in using stories. The expression in stories also enables me to show my perceptions of being challenged by others in the setting who have different perceptions to mine, and having to negotiate these perceptions in order to undo oppressions.`

Over the last two years I have analysed my learning from books that I identified as 'good' novels - stories told by very competent storytellers. I discovered that I learnt

more about human nature from these books than I learnt from most sociological, psychological and philosophical works of 'non fiction' because they are multidimensional. 'Good' storytellers can reflect us back to ourselves, often leaving the reader to learn what s/he can from the telling. The non fiction literature on human nature tends to follow some issues through in a systematic manner. This thoroughness can shed light also on who and what we are. But it often lacks the depth and loses the ability to portray the complexity of fiction's storytelling. It is also much more difficult to relate what is learnt from an academic text to everyday life. Novels, however, can impact immediately. There is recognition of a pattern or a characteristic, a heightened awareness, and this can lead to a change in behaviour because the learning tends to be more than a 'head' recognition. It tends to include learning at an emotional level.

As Doyle (1992) states, stories can challenge 'truths' which ignore context, character, contradiction and complexity. They also step over the fact/fiction dualism. They avoid poststructuralist tendencies to contradict themselves by presenting analysis as 'truths' while questioning the existence of such truths. This in turn addresses issues of power. While there is no doubt that I have power because my version of this story is probably the only version on paper, my telling does not dismiss the possibility of different and equally valid tellings. I have worked to show the complexities, the contradictions, the richness and nuances, and I have stressed the limits of my ‘knowing’ of the situation. I hope this allows the reader to develop their own learnings.

Like other aspects of this thesis I found that making stories applied at many different stages of the thesis. During the action period I wrote the story of each day in my journal. Like Carter (1993), I encouraged the telling of stories in workshops as a means of bringing out each person's contribution. I told stories myself in workshops to demonstrate points in a context. I told people my personal stories to break down barriers of position and present myself as a person, not a position holder. The development of the methodology is a story in itself, as is the thesis process.

Van Maanen (1988), an ethnographer, divided tales anthropologists tell into four types

- the confessional tale, the realist tale, the impressionist tale and the critical tale. Van Maanen says one tale can fall into more than one typology. I found this to be the case. I wanted to avoid being 'confessional' but if oppression/s are about labelling others, then I can only name for myself and those like me. Both the confessional tale and the realist tale are concerned with validity. My concern with validity drove me into realist mode. I did this by discussing what I understood of the situation, how others responded, and by reporting modes of data collection and analysis. However, my realist versions are tempered by a belief that I cannot present a correct version of reality.

The impressionist tale gained its name from impressionist art, which van Maanen describes as ‘tightly focused, vibrant, exact and imaginative’ (1988:103). These tales tell the extraordinary rather than the mundane, are told in terms of characters rather than types, and are disjointed rather than seamless. They grasp for the ‘particular, contextual and unusual’ (p.119) and tend to show the superficiality of other styles. I have included impressionist tales to demonstrate these facets to the reader. Impressionist tales verge on the use of people to demonstrate points. This has a tendency to reduce the 'used' person to a character. While care is taken to make those concerned anonymous, this can be very difficult in a small country such as Aotearoa/New Zealand (Middleton 1993).

I have avoided telling 'critical' tales, which examine the political and economic workings of society in the initial tellings so that readers have more space to make their own interpretations. However, further chapters present my analyses of the initial stories. The critical analysis suggested five aspects which were significant to any change process:- focus, position, conditions, means and relationships.

Reflections on stories

I take the stories a stage further than van Maanen does by reflecting on both the stories and my construction of them. This ‘methodology’ led to a total reorientation of the thesis. In deconstructing the stories I identified elements in them of the three different

approaches of positivism, critical theory and organic theory, and the effect of these different approaches. I realised that positivists want to gain control over others and the environment, critical theorists want to expose oppression/s. But the organic approach is about changing the nature of the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressors so that both turn instead to living their own balanced lives.

The writing process

Finding a writing structure in which I could demonstrate the inseparability of the parts, demonstrate the cyclic nature of the learning process, and leave the reader with their own authority intact, proved to be one of the most difficult tasks. Writing on one aspect led continuously to changes in other aspects.

I have attempted to address these issues by placing research findings in their context in stories, and by clearly claiming my own thoughts with the use of the present tense. Some repetition became unavoidable because of the holistic and cyclic nature of the ideas and processes.

Ongoing dialogue

As the thesis analysis and writing has progressed, I have continued to read and to dialogue with tenants and friends about how to end oppression/s. I have maintained also some involvement with those active in tenant politics. These dialogues and involvements continued to affect my analysis. They are discussed in the latter spirals of this thesis.

CONCLUSIONS

While some methodologies are considered more or less valid within the three different approaches covered, methodologies cannot usually be classified as belonging totally to any one approach. The focus of the work and the context in which they are used is more revealing of the approach than the methodology itself.

I used principles to guide my selection of methodologies. I treated established methodologies as other people's learning, examining possible choices for applicability and potential to generate oppressive interactions. Rather than selecting a methodology or methodologies, I learnt from other people's experience of using these methodologies and took elements of them which fitted my criteria and the context.