Hanna Kędzierska¹, Alicja Korzeniecka-Bondar²

(Qualitative) Researcher and Research Practices

Qualitative research is a theoretically and methodologically multi-voiced approach to the examination of social reality. However, as stressed by Mieczysław Malewski (2017), no method is autonomous and no method operates spontaneously. What always precedes the application of any method is the person of the researcher himself or herself. Searching for answers to the questions: *Who is a field researcher?*, and: *Which roles does a field researcher assume?*, Iwona A. Oliwińska reviewed methodology textbooks and collected numerous metaphors that describe the role and status of a researcher (Oliwińska, 2015, pp. 17–18). Following Joe L. Kincheloe and Peter McLaren, she terms the researcher a 'jack of all trades' – a bricoleur who can conduct research utilizing available tools; according to Steiner Kvale, a researcher is a miner or a traveler. She alludes to researchers as home-grown do-it-yourselves (Oliwińska, 2015).

In the introduction to *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*, its authors claim that in qualitative research,

> a researcher is simultaneously a participant and an observer of the lives of their researched subjects. […] attempts to be a participant and witness of the lives of others. […] The central reason for undertaking this ongoing witnessing of the lives of others is the fact that a great many aspects of social life can be seen, felt and analytically articulated only in this manner (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2009, p. 24).

This implicates three basic dimensions that determine the functioning of a researcher in the research process: epistemological, social, and emotional.

1 Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland.
E-MAIL: h.a.kedzierska@uwm.edu.pl ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4187-2764

2 Faculty of Education, University of Białystok, Poland.
E-MAIL: alibon@uwb.edu.pl ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1145-2996

The first dimension relates to the knowledge with which a researcher "enters" into the research process and to the knowledge that is collected during fieldwork. A researcher is part of the studied world and of collected data (Charmaz, 2009). Hence questions as to how to suspend previous knowledge, how to work with multiple theories, how not to be deceived by easy interpretations, how not to treat rich field data only as incidental illustrations for the analyzed problems or evidence for preconceived theses, constantly require in-depth reflections.

The anchoring of a researcher depends on interactions established during one's work, including those mediated via modern technologies. Previous times of pen and paper are gone and modern technologies more and more strongly affect and modify research activities. Such technologies open new fields for exploration, provide modern tools for the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. They pose new challenges as well as expand and extend our understanding of a researcher as being the basic tool for interpretive studies (Wyka, 1993).

Emotions and feelings naturally accompany each stage of the research process. On the one hand, they are an invisible compass, the source of the researcher's self-knowledge allowing one to make decisions that are often difficult; on the other hand, they safeguard the inseparability of ethical issues and research practice. Finding "the golden mean" between the researcher's freedom and what is best for the research subject is often extremely difficult. But the moral obligation that we as researchers undertake when, to paraphrase Emmanuel Levinas, we look into the face of the Other, obliges us to join in a communal discourse concerning responsibility that cannot be avoided, activities undertaken under conditions of fallaciousness and uncertainty, and the inseparability of ethical issues and everyday research practice.

The problematic framework designated by the title of the volume offers, in our view, a vast field for documenting our achievements, reflections, dilemmas, and good practices. We invited researchers of dissimilar experience in terms of research topics, applied research approaches and manners of collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Nevertheless, the Reader will not find in this volume a simple formula as to "how to do" qualitative research. In their introduction to the textbook addressed to students, Clive Seale, Giampietro Gobo, Jaber F. Gubrium, and David Silverman (2007, p. 1) caution against searching for such "recipes" and indicate three major dangers with respect to such an approach:

1. The provision of a set of arid 'principles' which may bear little relationship to the actual researcher's experience entailed in conducting a research project;

2. The tendency to downplay the extent to which performing qualitative research is a craft skill dependent on a practical apprenticeship rather than cookbook knowledge;
3. The concealment of the variety of analytical models and approaches currently employed in qualitative research.

Each project is a unique whole. During its realization, the researcher each time acquires a different experience. Different experiences are gained when investigating experiences of the excluded in order to improve their situations, and different experiences stem from the participation in an international project related to teacher training. Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson stress that "they [researchers] rarely leave [the field] unaffected by the experience of research" (2000, p. 127). These different "traces" of qualitative research are uncovered by the Authors of the papers collected in this volume.

The volume consists of eleven papers and one review. It opens with Rozalia Ligus' article "Retrieving Lost Knowledge: Researcher, 'Native Researchers' and Shifts in Participatory Action Research" that offers the characteristic of the "new" type of research participants, who organize and are involved in (non-academic) "research/amateur teams" within local communities, becoming collective agents of social action. Monika Wilińska presents the use of video technology in qualitative research to reflect upon the material practices that not only make the world visible but also shed light on the research process through which such worlds become known. Jakub Niedbalski demonstrates methodological and theoretical aspects of research carried out in the environment of people with intellectual disability. The article stresses the applicability of the interpretative perspective, along with the advantages of adopting the grounded theory methodology to research this group of people. Łukasz Michalski begins his paper with a thesis concerning the faint presence of methodologically oriented analyses within the history of education. The article focuses on different research paths, providing an analysis of obstacles for the crystallization of the methodological reflection within the history of education, e.g., the lack of paradigmatic clarity, and also definitional instability of contemporary methodology of history as such. Monika Grochalska examines the constraints and challenges that the researcher of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) faces in practices connected to the research processes. She exemplifies her points by personal experiences gained in the process of conducting the research project "Women in Intimate Relationships". Justyna Spychalska-Stasiak's main interests are scientific conceptualizations of the notion of bricolage relating to the practice of defining, characterizing and embedding its meaning in existing

theoretical approaches. She reconstructs three conceptions of *bricolage*: epistemological *bricolage*, methodological *bricolage*, and hybrid *bricolage*.

In her paper "A Processual Approach to the Study of Transitions of Middle School (Gymnasium)", Hanna Kędzierska presents the results of research into transitions of middle school (gymnasium) teachers who, as a result of the education reform in Poland, were forced either to dissolve their schools or to transform them into other types of schools. The processual approach utilized by the Author allowed her to capture the drama of the battle for schools undertaken by teachers who attempt to maintain previous achievements and organizational culture in newly-established secondary schools (lyceums). Advantages and challenges that emerge when applying qualitative methods to conduct international research are discussed by James Underwood, Marta Kowalczuk-Walędziak, and Joanne Barrow in their paper "International Qualitative Research on Teacher Education: Benefits, Challenges, Future Directions". As argued by the Authors, internalization and globalization of teacher education processes make international qualitative research the primary tool for the discovering of new international phenomena and contexts.

In their paper "Teaching and Research: Implications for Active Learning in Higher Education", Alicja Korzeniecka-Bondar and Beata Kunat present experiences gained from the implementation of the course *The Qualitative Research Methods*, offered in the field of pedagogy (two-year master's programs 3+2 (MA)) at the Faculty of Education of the University of Białystok, realized consistent with the principles of research-based learning. The Authors demonstrate that research-based learning motivates students to develop research attitudes and creates conditions for the most comprehensive development of professional competences.

Biographical work with young adults, as evidenced by Krzysztof Czykier in his "Towards Inner-Directedness: Biographical Narratives of Early Adulthood", is a significant factor in the life-learning process. Oral and written narratives may inspire people to reflect upon what they know and how they can acquire individual meanings and senses from the analysis of their own lifetime experiences. Personal research practice is also depicted by Lidia Bielinis in her paper "Academic Reflective Practice: Tools Supporting the Self-Evaluation Approach". The Author presents examples of tools (computer applications) employed in her teaching practice that, on the one hand, support the education process, and on the other, are an excellent source of (self)evaluation in the work of an academic teacher.

We hope that the voices of the Researchers collected in this volume, researchers who are at different stages of their scientific careers and who employ dissimilar qualitative methodologies in their work, will be noticed and will resonate in broadly understood professional circles.

We would like to thank the Authors for accepting our invitation to provide their contributions to the volume and for their thought-provoking papers which can serve as inspiration for even more advanced qualitative and international explorations.

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