

Finding Our Own Voices: Reflections of a Participant

Since I was one who helped give shape and direction to our interpretive inquiry process this first year we came together as a group, this paper is an attempt to capture the meanings that grew out of the experience of our group and our place of speaking as researchers. Many struggles in the form of tensions were revealed in the process of finding ourselves and our place of speaking in this way of knowing. My struggle had to do with how much leadership to offer so as not to be concealing as "expert" but rather revealing as a hermeneutic traveler on the journey. I also faced the resistance of the group to reading the philosophers I had come to "revel in" and the language which for me was a "freeing" experience, but for the group was an alienating one. Through this struggle, the group gave me the opportunity to really own this new language in my experience of it, rather than to merely philosophize about it.

As a group of seven women coming together throughout the year, we sought to explore what interpretive inquiry is about or is like by sharing our experiences together as a group as we were engaged in the process of that exploration. My responsibility now for us, and for others who would seek this form of inquiry, is to conceptually frame the inquiry as we experienced it in reference to features that are ascribed to the interpretive orientation. The intent of this framing is not for the purpose of laying down a method, as that would be contradictory to the life of the inquiry we sought to understand; we sought to uncover possibilities for understanding rather than prescriptions. *The design of such inquiry is said to be retrospective rather than prospective* (Darrach and Silvers 1982), and as such seeks to be accountable to others by showing what was at play throughout the inquiry (the biography of the inquiry and group) which led to the interpretations made.

In seeking to recover my own existential commitment in our interpretive inquiry together (responsibility for my own voice, in our

shared dialog both written and verbal), I will attempt to recover the phenomena that seem to have sprung from, or have been uncovered, in the process of our seeking to understand what interpretive inquiry means. I speak from my own biographical standpoint, not *for* the group, but in such a way that may reveal how I have come to interpret what we have revealed together, in display of the process of interpretive inquiry. The value of this kind of inquiry is not assured by “methodological orthodoxy” but rather by the ability of persons to “express a shared experience in an understandable way” (Barritt et al. 1983, 141). That is the intent of this paper and our symposium today. The text we created through our writing and dialog transcriptions is a record of our search for meaning as we came together from diverse backgrounds with different agendas that unfolded throughout our inquiry. From these different perspectives we were able to come to a variety of insights and fuller understanding. What then was the nature of our experience encountering each other through interpretive inquiry?

A Retrospective View of Our Beginnings: What Is Research?

As we first came together as a group, our course was not necessarily charted in the direction of interpretive inquiry, although several of us had our orientation turned in this direction already. With the exception of one of our participants, we for the most part shared a frustration and a “falling out” with the empirical paradigm in our individual research endeavors, which revealed itself in heightened dissonance experienced after several sessions. Our reflection on the meaning of research in our lives revealed some painful encounters.

The stark display of our initial inquiry together catches glimpses of our flirting with casting aside research in the way we have come to understand it, for want of a better way to communicate our “selves” in the significance of what we do. Jana describes the dilemma so vividly in her struggle with wanting to reclaim a prior life of novelist and writer that she left in pursuit of “objective truth,” where she now finds that she cannot *be* or speak freely. But what stands behind the words she expresses and the meaning of research that brings out this struggle which reveals itself in such anger? As I hear Jana’s words, “maybe this group will help me get out of research, if I can’t make my peace with it,” I am saddened to think of the debilitating hold one view of research has on persons where the only option appears to be to leave if there cannot be a reconciliation of the different worlds in the research process. On the one hand, Jana seeks a disclosure of self in the research

process with a full awakesness of how her "being" in her relationship with teachers is the kind of genuine relationship she would seek to have the teachers share with their students. But then on the other hand, she reveals a skepticism about not wanting to call it research, which in effect communicates the contamination of so precious an encounter of what is real by calling it research. This reveals the question about the place of the researcher and persons studied. *Interpretive inquiry seeks to establish a communicative relationship with persons encountered, and is not seen as a form of inquiry separate from ourselves.* We may cognitively accept that notion, as well as experience it in our way of existing, but then why are we so haunted by "the other" in the way of defining research? As Jana shares: "I can *define* research *exactly* the way I want to, and I can *do* it and I can *be* it and I can *write* it, but other people in my life come in and they have their definition and it *isn't* mine, and they're not going to listen, and they're not interested in listening. Now to some degree I live with that reality too." We began, then, to examine research through different lenses, through our experiences in this group.

"What Has Been the Nature of My Experience in Coming to This Group?"

Although interpretive inquiry is not a technique to be laid down, there are some indirect methods which may be used to help draw out the hidden structures of experience, which we turned to early in our group. *Written descriptions* of our experience in coming to this group served as a way of access for us to *disclose the foundations of our reflections* on research and the group, and it began to be a way for us to experience interpretive inquiry through doing it, and not just talking about it. As Jana said: "I need more experience using the process . . . I can use the language that is there but the process is a little more deep than that. That's where I need help, because that's exactly what I think I'm not doing when I do deal with writing tasks is get beneath the surface of that particular subject." This concern about not being able to get beneath the surface is exactly the driving force of what interpretive inquiry seeks to do: "*to the things themselves,*" the meaning of which is to work out the fore structures of our understandings in terms of the experienced context. *The primacy of experience* is a major element of this inquiry, which is reflected in its "lived context." This calls for us to put aside our preconceived notions about even the most ordinary concepts and events in order to see them in a new way—to ask questions and provide "lived accounts" which may at first appear even

simple. But if we are to see what stands behind the words, we must move to the *concrete experience*. And so our search for the meaning of “Lived Experience” began (a new expression that we needed to ground) as we confronted our individual landscapes in our formation as researchers and teachers. The promise was compelling: “Experience is ready to give up its secrets when directly confronted” (Schrag 1969, 87). What were some of our “secrets” revealed then? Our experiences confronted revealed our presences in the act of inquiry—a basic condition for knowledge and understanding in the human sciences and education. *We were finding our places of speaking—and responsibility for our own voices*, our existential commitment (Darroch and Silvers 1982). Within this recovery of our “places and voices,” the following foundations or themes emerged from our written descriptions and dialog (reflecting the movement of our inquiry—a “showing” of what was revealed to us).

Expanding Horizons: Anticipation of the Journey

As Diane described it: “Why did I come? That is the easy question. Research! For me, the word is provocative; the process is exhilarating.” Similar expressions revealed the anticipation experienced by the group as a whole:

- Sense of wonder—excitement about new journey together
- Chance for dialog encounter
- Recognition of potential for growth from group
- Sought growth-centered haven of colleagues
- Anticipation of intellectual challenge
- Extend knowledge
- Came to learn
- Enjoyment of research
- Opportunity to share research interests
- Seeking more active life of the mind in research and writing

We were ready to face and confront the boundaries of our thinking in the exploration of different forms of inquiry, and we all embraced a receptivity to an expansion of our horizons:

Understanding a form of inquiry different from one’s own is not dependent on an acceptance of its principles or a moral embrace of its meaning. Rather it is a “hearing” of another investigative practice which, as a recognition of difference, brings into view the limits of one’s own universals that prereflectively have been taken for granted. (Darroch and Silvers 1982, 233)

Sharing an Orientation of Similar Direction

As a new assistant professor, fresh with degree in hand and the ink barely dry on the dissertation, finding a group of colleagues at a new university who shared a similar concern about the embeddedness of research in the empirical paradigm was like "coming home" for me; I came with a desire to probe further into the philosophy and methodology of interpretive inquiry. Others shared a similar "turning" as expressed in the following:

Interpretive inquiry is attractive to me in my dissertation
Came to group out of an invitation and existentialist interest in interpretation
A "coming home" to kindred souls

As we reflected on "coming" to the group, another element that seemed to have a strong "staying" basis for the group surfaced in reference to the disenchantment with the dehumanization of institutionalized relationships.

Haven from a "Crisis in Humanity": Establishing I-Thou Relationships

As Jana begins, "I have been struggling with the dissonance between work-self and personal-self . . . all my life my personal-self loses, or has until recently." Others revealed similar calls to being and staying in the group:

Collegiality at new university
Fills gap created by institutional competition
Help in maintaining sanity in a world interested in objective knowledge
Exciting promise of group to eliminate isolation in a department not sharing interpretive orientation
Tired of defending interpretive perspective with encrusted empiricists
Angered to think of person excluded from reward process because of choosing thread of a different texture

Although the group was a place that nurtured an I-Thou way of relating, it began to be the source of dissonance for some, as we addressed the question, "What has this experience meant in my work life?"

If I address the question honestly, I must say that our encounters cause me to be more frustrated than I ordinarily am. In this group

I have such an opportunity. In real life I am in so many situations where I realize freedom of teachers and students as being seriously circumscribed. I dislike being in such situations, particularly when I feel like the boy with his finger in the dike . . . This group reinforces my own need to become only what I can become; the outside world tries to cast me in a mold. The lack of fit between my preferred setting and the settings in which I ordinarily find myself becomes a source of frustration. (Louise)

Jessie, in response to a work situation wherein a staff member interrupted a conference she was having with a doctoral student because she wanted to say good-bye, revealed these thoughts:

I thought about this incident many times . . . Why was she leaving? . . . I later learned her contract had not been renewed . . . Into the vacuum created by my empty feelings, justified or not, rushed my concerns about the responsibilities we have towards each other . . . as a participant in the decision-making process. Which gifts are appropriate at these times? (Jessie)

Jana described Jessie's realization as having to do with the theme of "suddenly *not* being in a group where everyone knows you and understands you, but being a dehumanized member of a dehumanizing institution."

The struggle that was being expressed was related to Heidegger's notion of "Forfeiture": The struggle against giving over to the "They" (wanting to be yourself—wanting to "be," and feeling the pressure of giving over to how others would like you to be). Embedded in the struggle was the striving for freedom and authenticity within the constraints of a technocratic paradigm:

I sometimes feel like I'm trapped in a box. I want to scream out what I know, but feel the scream being stifled in my throat as it seems to fall on deaf ears. They (planning committee) want to break away from a technical image, but cannot see the contradictions in what competency-based ideology is doing. (Francine)

Other struggles were expressed around the tenure process, giving up the I-ness for tenure, the problem of having work respected for its unique contributions and yet questioning whether you sell your soul in the process. As the group became a place of allowing us to "really be" (a haven at first), it was not taken to be an escape or shelter from the world, as the question was continuously posed: "How do I incorporate my being, the aliveness I feel with other persons during encounter, with the outside world?" (Jessie). Jana shared one such encounter:

I am sitting at a kindergarten table, on a tiny chair in a classroom, now calm after a day of active movement. Quiet is inappropriate;

the two teachers and I are talking now, introducing noise into a deaf world (even though one teacher is deaf, we all rely on signed-voiced English). I am much happier here than writing about features and variables. As we look at the deaf children's journals and what they have communicated, Susan, who is deaf, grows more and more excited. She looks like someone seeing validation of her own intuitions and personal knowledge for the first time. I am energized by this encounter; I am not just working in the context where dialog journals occur, but Susan, Jean, and I are also in a unique encounter right now, a dialog where new meaning is being constructed. I want to yell out "This is it!" But there is no one else to see, and no way to record this moment. But I carry it around with me, a week later, just as I carry, embody, the many other epiphanies in my life that come through such I-thou dialogs with others.

Fear of Being

As much as we were expressing the hopes of what this group would contribute to our "being," there was a hesitancy at first about self-disclosure—an almost fleeing in the face of being, as we came to know and trust one another. "I find myself caught by, humming to the word *being*, not a word I like—too soft, and mushy, but there it is—incarnate, personness, just *being*, reflecting faith and trust rather than good works" (Jana). Similar reservations about self were revealed by the group:

I feel honored to be part of the group where the level of scholarship is far above my own
 How does the group perceive me?
 Initial feeling of reserve in group
 Hesitant about revealing self
 Feel that I am not yet a member of the group
 I am on the periphery
 I am frightened
 Need to "catch up" with group
 Need time to sort out and think
 My silence is my defense

I was experiencing another kind of reservation.

Struggle Between Leadership (Revealing) and Control (Concealing)

As the first meeting unfolded, I sensed some reserve in myself as with the group as a whole. We were a group coming together in dialog, but before we could come together in the "we-ness" of true dialog, we had some barriers to remove in getting to know one another. Although we were united in respect to seeking a support

group, it was apparent we had some different journeys in mind and different notions about how to get there . . . As I thought about my excited interest in pursuing interpretive inquiry, I found myself holding this enthusiasm somewhat in check as I sensed that maybe I was being too selfish and controlling of the group's direction . . . I had a gnawing feeling of exerting too much control. My struggle was at this time how much should I offer in the way of focus and substance? Was more being expected of me? Was I withholding too much? Why was I experiencing this struggle? (I was sensitive to not wanting to be looked at as "expert" wherein that could be concealing. The challenge was to lead in ways that would help in our revealing.) (Francine)

As we were first coming to know one another, we were concerned about initial appearances, which began to give way to trust as we established a communicative relationship through our encounters. This movement seems to be the essence of what Heidegger (1962) had in mind: Relation with others is not one of perception, but of care.

Restorative-Nurturing-Caring: The Pedagogic Relation

Trusting. Restorative. Nurturing. Next session I might even giggle. Perhaps for you, the group, an appropriate heading would be "Inquiry as Being." Right now, for me, an appropriate heading would be "Inquiry as Becoming." I am becoming more trusting, I feel somewhat rejuvenated, and by opening up so completely I've allowed you to nurture. Now I must become more knowledgeable. (Diane)

Mary reveals a similar feeling about the group: "The group has been partly a way of learning to trust yourself."

The expression of care revealed for one another in our group encounters is the essence of the pedagogical relationship, a being (a guiding, a leading) that is oriented toward actualization (van Manen 1984). Caring, as presupposed in these encounters, was experienced in the group in the following ways:

Group nurtures my new being
 A feeling of being well-taken-care-of
 Helping nature of group in guiding each other through questions
 Feeling of fondness and warmth toward each group member
 Excited by sense of caring
 Came to be with persons I respect and love
 Jessie and Louise, a drawing to come—forever their students

A carry-over of this way of being with others was expressed by Mary in reference to her students (the persons in her dissertation inquiry): "I

feel confident that by being careful, full of care as Heidegger has it, they and I can be working toward understanding, toward a unity of truth and being." Another element of this "pedagogic way of being" occurs not just in the verbal transmission, but communication that occurs through gestures and expressive looks as well. That element seemed to be significant for some by the very nature of our group composition: all women.

Women Giggling Together without Embarrassment

It seemed important for some in coming to the group that we were all women:

Importance of being with *women*
 Joined group to work with academic women
 Can giggle together without embarrassment
 Social interest as well

In the life of dialog that calls for a kind of intimacy and sharing through self-disclosure, is it possible for men and women to share horizons as women can with other women or men can with other men? For this group, the dropping of masks where we could "giggle together without embarrassment" seemed to call for a shared understanding only thought possible between women. Maybe it is captured in Jana's reflection: "We can see ourselves, our historical/social selves reflected back from each other." That very perception is one that was reflected, however, by Jane to be somewhat intimidating: "In what ways am I fearful that they (women) will 'see' things and know things that men don't notice?" Despite her acknowledgment of fondness and warmth towards *each* individual in the group, she questions why so many of her animosities are directed towards women in the field. Her reflections found their expression in the following struggle.

Living the Struggle: Annoyance and Commitment

Jane reveals in her reflections on coming to the group that her preparations for the Interpretive Inquiry Group followed a consistent pattern each month:

Annoyance (I don't have time . . . I should be writing)
 I'll just go and won't say anything (I don't understand phenomenology)
 Obsessed with logistics of getting there (what to wear—directions)
 Uncomfortable reestablishing relationships with women, a few I don't know very well (I'm more comfortable around men)
 I grow enthusiastic as each evening goes on

Jana reveals a similar struggle: "Each month I wear down until three days before the meeting I start saying, 'I won't go; I am too busy; all we do is talk and nothing changes' . . . Somehow I find myself on the road at 7:00, driving madly for thirty minutes across the city and countryside to reach the meeting place." When asked by an outsider what the group was like, she responded: "It's like stopping by somebody's office and having a chat—because it's where you get your good ideas." The commitment was there, as expressed by a group recognition: "We may not remember our assignment, but we always come!" Maybe our call came from living out our struggles and tensions there in the group together. I was acutely aware of this need for living out our individual struggles in finding ourselves first before going on to gain further understanding of this inquiry, but I was experiencing a pull in another direction, a different struggle.

Floating and Idle Talk

At the second session as we shared articles that reflected our concerns about curriculum and teacher education, I began to feel that my interest again was different:

I felt somewhat of a struggle within myself to want to engage in common reading wherein we could surface the interpretation together—Merleau Ponty and Heidegger were pronounced in my interests. I began to be fearful that we might get too preoccupied with idle talk, that is, a surface or groundless floating where we have difficulty making the dialog our own. I began to hear an inner voice telling me I should help provide a focus or a grounding . . . I sought to look at my own lived experience of interpretive inquiry, and sought to enter it more fully, but I felt like I was floating—I couldn't seem to find an anchor or common footing to approach our inquiry together. (Francine)

This was my personal struggle. Jana recognized it too in her comment: "I think when we get into continuously revolving discussions, it's usually because we haven't been able to ground it in anything." Another struggle was present for Jana as well.

A "Coming Out" and a "Returning Home": Shedding the Conceptual Skill of the Empirical Paradigm

Jana, who described herself as the angry one in the group, found herself working through an inner struggle (coming out from the empirical paradigm in educational psychology and returning to being a writer of personal interpretation). The anger seemed to arise from "living in silence for so long . . . not speaking, living behind a mask, hoping to be

accepted and acknowledged by those in power." This struggle was revealed in her written description in the following forms:

Frustration with dominant paradigm which doesn't allow me to be
Sees educational research as a sham
Midlife crisis of reexamination
This is a "coming out" (from behind questionnaires)
Fear about moving from potential for impact to having none
Contradiction experienced: Wanting to be accepted by those in
power (research community) and now can't stand to live in that
paradigm
Questions: Who matters?
Feeling that group has allowed me to "get out" of research
Also seems like a "return" to that of being a writer (personal inter-
pretation)
Caught by the word *being*

Jana describes herself as "being in a transition—shedding an old skin and feeling vulnerable." A similar paradigm struggle was revealed, in a broader context, to the world outside where research is done: the schools.

Lived Culture vs. Commodity Culture: Feeling the Tension

Louise addressed this tension:

I seem to dwell in two worlds relative to my research endeavors. My interests—stemming back to my days as a literature major—are in the quality of the "lived experience." However, since I work with students who frequently are planners and policy makers, I am perpetually struggling with questions relative to dealing with the masses, but in an existential level. Is such possible? How does a state make requirements for schooling based on the lived worlds of learners?

The question of using the interpretive process to gain access to lived experience with teachers in classrooms was pursued in the following exchange.

- Louise: When you're dealing with the practical knowledge of teachers you do some of this.
- Mary: The skills test and stuff like that, you know, it has nothing to do with what's going on. You give the children a piece of paper to do for an hour a day, and you know it has nothing to do with what's going on in the life of the classroom.

Jana: . . . But they (the testing people) are being hard scientists who want only hard data; they're able to be removed from the event, and ask teachers to send them test scores, and reports, or whatever.

The question, then, arose of the problems of individual versus culture and its historical context within interpretive inquiry:

Jane: Can one person hold all the culture? How do we get from one individual biography to the larger group context? How will this help me to get to teachers' culture?

Fran: The individual has a historical context. Knowledge is socially constructed. In phenomenology the intent is not just to describe, but also to transcend . . . One cannot do interpretive work without movement toward change.

Jane: I think it's arrogant if we think that when we understand how a group operates then you can change. Culture isn't open to deliberate one-person onslaught of change.

Fran: Change for the sake of improving the human condition. We don't impose change but provide the conditions for others to seek change, an empowering.

Mary: Freire is talking about hopeless conditions for people.

Fran: The conditions were different, but idea the same—to break into false consciousness . . . and help people (teachers) realize their options . . . break into power structures.

Jana: Only because of groups like this can we go back and live dangerously. You are not dangerous by yourself. Only in a group can you get the language. I couldn't do this without this dialog. Out there there is no shared reality. We owe a debt of gratitude to the empiricists for our being here!

What Jana is saying here is similar to a Freirian notion of change and is also reflected in Darroch and Silvers (1982): Finding out what an experience is like in the words of the one experiencing it creates a new discourse that is empowering. It gives power back to individuals and does not merely hold onto an expert's view as educator or researcher or philosopher. We were beginning to "own" our way of talking about interpretive inquiry, by experiencing it, but not without a struggle.

The Uninitiated: Language and the House of Being or Not Being?

I came to this group enamored with my prior experience of doing interpretive inquiry, hoping to grapple with the "great works" of those writing about interpretive philosophy so as to "ground" my under-

standing in the tradition which I had come to value and practice. I came with a language that I had newly acquired from my hermeneutic phenomenological study, and which I felt to be revealing of a different way of thinking that I was thrilled about having found. I thought everyone would experience the same exhilaration about a language that helped break the empirical spell heretofore cast on research. As I read one of the reviews of our proposal for AERA, suggesting that we see beyond the language "dripping with a heavy dose of newly discovered educational jargon," I was painfully reminded of the alienation that language can create.

Language was a concern that surfaced again and again in our writing and in our discourse. After an attempt at some "grounding" by reading Darroch and Silvers, Jane reveals her frustration: "Is this process one for the elite? Is it a new set of jargon or metalanguage?" She talked about her own research with teachers and their discourse in stories to give language to what they're doing. The goal for her is to deal in simple, clear language—not elitist jargon. And Mary said: "I don't like the language, but like the process of looking." Other concerns reflected in the first written description were:

Overwhelmed by vocabulary

Are you asking me to exchange one language for another?

Always comes back to language—where being is connected to saying it

Or as Jessie questions: "Is it necessary, important to invent new words, to propose new definitions for commonly used words, or words that the 'others' use? Is seemingly cumbersome language necessary to celebrate one's uniqueness or to communicate the notion that there are viable alternatives to more common research methods?" Another concern was expressed about work with school people, trying to communicate in a language where there is shared understanding—a translation being necessary. Such a concern might be "grounded" in Gadamer's view of language and the hermeneutical problem:

Every translation is at the same time an interpretation . . . If we really master a language, then no translation is necessary . . . For you understand a language by living it . . . Thus the hermeneutical problem is not one of the correct mastery of language, but of the proper understanding of that which takes place through the medium of language. (Gadamer 1975, 346)

Our hermeneutical problem became clear as we sought to understand what was taking place in our inquiry through language.

Hermeneutical Borderline

Gadamer sheds light here again:

Translation, like all interpretation, is a highlighting. A translator must understand that highlighting is part of his task. Obviously he must not leave open whatever is not clear to him, but must declare himself. Yet there are border-line cases in which . . . something is, in fact, unclear. But precisely these hermeneutical border-line cases show the straits in which the translator finds himself . . . He must state clearly how he understands. (p. 348)

I find a clear example of this occurring in our September meeting, as portions of the dialog reveal. Jana was talking about a change in her research focus, wherein she wants to study the event, “not analyze and manipulate its residue.” The dialog unfolded in the following manner.

- Jane: I just have one difference, umm, you said the word *residue*? . . . Well one of the things I was reacting to, umm . . . let me turn to Diane’s writing here first. She says governs—hermeneutics governs the search for meaning and temporality seems to be a salient feature. It is an act of historical understanding. Understanding is the key . . . This snapped it into a whole construct for me. I have, like I teach social studies methods, and the first day every year, I always say, and I have to go to language for this, is that I’m trying to explain what social studies is, you know, and I say, everything, even the things that are happening right now have happened in the past. I mean, as soon as something happens, then, it’s an event that happened in the past. And the only way you get to it . . . is by examining the *residue* of social events. So I really like the idea of residue because I look to symbols; it is, and language really is residue. I mean, as soon as the event has happened, all you have is human testimony, whether it’s an old artifact that’s been there for two thousand years or whether it’s just what you’ve said about what I have written. So, I think there’s the issue of whether you want to manipulate it or not, but it’s all examination of residue. So I like the word.
- Jana: I think when I was writing it, it was more the idea of having little bits and pieces somehow separated out from your past.
- Jane: But you get residue.

- Jana: The writing we do here I like. Writing about this I do not consider somehow analyzing or manipulating the event or its meanings . . . It is historical understanding . . . If one looks on residue as real, as pieces of persons left behind and events that one encounters, then all we're doing here is part of trying to capture this inquiry as it goes along, and I think we are going to value our pieces of writing . . . There's a different attitude toward this group and its data.
- Jane: I still am having trouble with the word *manipulate* . . . I want to go back to the difference in understanding and explaining; cause I think that's where it's at; I don't think it's manipulation. I mean, the thing that I'm trying to get at is just how do you understand and explain . . . Don't we sort of explain things to understand them, so I'm not real sure if it's a dichotomy . . . You know, I think it's almost an approach to life . . . What's so fascinating, in one of our introductory courses when you teach about writing objectives, the first word they're taught not ever to use is *understand*!
- Jane: It seems to me much of the essence of what the interpretive inquiry process is, such as we're doing is effecting some changes, some *reexamination*. I don't find that characteristic of the traditional research model that we get into, where it *claims* to examine assumptions, the facts, the truth, but in effect only tries to *prove* that which is assumed.

At this point we were beginning to reveal our differences in understanding and clearly trying to articulate what was unclear, which led to the questioning of assumptions.

A Crisis of Question: Unveiling Assumptions

A most powerful confrontation of self, regarding assumptions about persons, strikes at the core of understanding found in existence:

You see, I guess I find that I'm in a position more frequently here defending the other, and it, the true dissonance is not created outside, and when I first wrote restorative nurturance, I was quoting Jana, and it was what you said at the meeting I last attended. When I heard those words I was in shock! And it was like, oh my heavens—opposite from you! And, and I was traumatized that I was so apart, and that's why I spoke of it. I was not sharing that sense with the group, and I had to look closely with them, having

written the dissertation and having worked so closely with them, having written, umm, after literally, Jessie giving me Madsen's book, *The Image of Man*, and talking about persons as proactive, and all the words I wrote about, and then turned around and set them down to multiple regression, and talked about accounting for variance, and the struggle I'm having is trying to determine if the assumptions *are* different. And Francine, I was *so* pleased, when I read your pages, and at the end, we had asked the same question. Can a person, umm, hold both threads at the same time and still try to weave a pattern that makes sense, and, that's why language is so important, and it's so important in the research that *you* do, and it's so *distant* from me! And that's why when we were talking, and Jane said when we force people into a forced-choice questionnaire, we try to quantify that, have we taken away the subjective meaning of the experience and I said, or have we substituted a common language so that we can speak with persons about themselves. I'm not sure, and this is my struggle, to see whether I'm giving lip service to my assumptions about persons and it's frightening as hell. (Diane)

And then Diane said: "Thank you for forcing me to speak." Does this not then express the heart of what our inquiry attempted and realized, what we also find in Darroch and Silvers:

Introducing a form of inquiry in this sense allows not only a first entrance for others but a first leaving for oneself. It is, for those who undertake to recover their own movement-in-inquiry, an attempt through difference and doubt to confront and disclose a silence—a silence which announces itself when we have arrived at the limits of shared understanding. (1982, 233)

References

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