Settings, data and analysis in qualitative research

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Unless more recent, the material in this seminar is mostly taken from Holliday (2016)

This material can be found at https://adrianholliday.com/handouts/

Note about approach

> **Postmodern** - recognising and managing intersubjectivity - the implicatedness of the researcher as part of the data (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Holliday & MacDonald 2020)
>
> **Constructivist** - less about reporting what people do and say - more about **why they do and say** - how they construct their worlds and themselves (Berger & Luckmann 1966/1979)
>
> **Ethnographic disciplines** - making the familiar strange, **submission** to the **emergence** of unexpected meanings

Settings

The basis of **thick description** - finding out about whether two boys are winking or twitching by looking at what's going on among a group of onlookers (Geertz 1993: 6, citing Ryle)
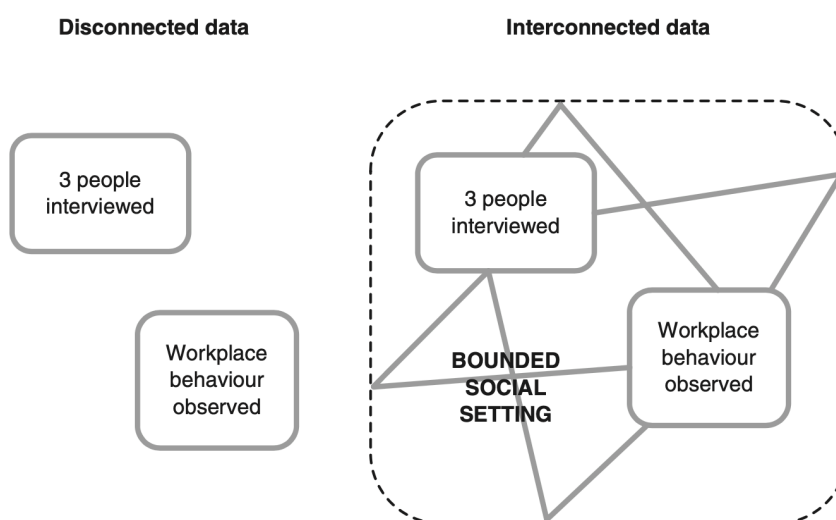
Determined along with questions and methods as a result of initial looking around (Spradley 1980: 32)

Criteria for selection

Access, convenience, and right for researcher positioning - Egyptian student

Sufficient richness of potential data - opening up rather than limiting variables

> The staffing, recent programme changes, the charisma of the choral director, the working relationship with a church organist, faculty interests in a critical vote of the school board, and the lack of student interest in taking up the cla-

rinet. In these particularities lie the vitality, trauma, and uniqueness of the case. (Stake 2005: 457)

Approaching and being in the setting

Gatekeepers

Always looking around - looking for every available clue about what is going on

Using existing systems and procedures - e.g. developing ethics (Mapedzahama & Dune 2017)

Being sensitive, polite and flexible with your plans

Researcher as visitor?

How to behave and dress

> The process of collecting data depends on meticulous time keeping and constant planning and re-planning, always looking ahead in order to be ready for diversions. ... The fact was that I felt privileged to be a researching artist, and since I had been given the permission to be at these institutions I wished to adopt strategies that would enable me to use my time in the best possible way. Making sure that I would arrive a few minutes earlier and leave when they [the teaching staff and students] did helped my status as a colleague, and a co-worker. (Honarbin-Holliday 2005: 47-48)

> I sat discretely at the side trying to make as little impact as possible dressed somewhere between the teachers (smart but casual - e.g. for males chinos and shirt) and the students (casual - jeans and trainers). I considered that my dress fitted in and I was not aware that it affected my relationships with the participants. (Anderson 2003: 129)

> Following a tip from an American journalist who worked at the China Daily office, while I conducted the interviews I kept my notepad on my knee, beneath the table. The interviewee was aware that I was taking notes, but because the notepad was outside her line of vision, she was less inhibited. Meanwhile, I maintained eye contact and gave verbal feedback, so that the exchange resembled a normal conversation. With practice I learnt to take notes without writing on my trouser leg. (Grimshaw 2002: cxxvi)

Adjusting roles

> Shamim (1993: 96) and Herrera (1992: 15) negotiating their roles and finding out attitudes to teaching and professionalism

Being open to unexpected data

Spending time

> During these weeks, I waited in lobbies and secretaries' offices for hours, for just moments of interaction fulfilling the procedures required by the study. However, I do not believe that those long hours and days waiting behind doors were wasted, exhausting though they were. They provided a process of socialisation and initiation into the field. It is probable that I consciously and subconsciously renewed and regulated my use of language, analysed degrees of formality as well as informality in social behaviour, familiarised myself with

political and social discourses, and formed a deeper understanding of dress codes. I managed to work out an appropriate and personal dress code as I sat or stood in various spaces. (Honarbin-Holliday 2005: 46)

Going with the politics

I had just been to pay a courtesy call on the dean with the head of department and had met a lecturer from the curriculum department. They both escorted me to the lesson, after showing me the library, and then asked if they could come in and watch. They seemed sensitive to the situation ... and asked me to go and ask BE if it would be all right. I did as they asked ... and s/he agreed. We sat in the front, on the left, to the side. (Obs. 16, site 13, BE) (Holliday 1991: 259)

How people want to be seen - and the reason for carrying out the interview on the balcony

The issue of 'multiple personae' was problematic ... in relation to both the interviewee and the interviewer: ... I felt that I had to be clear about which personae of the politician I wanted to interview. ... Was I talking to the politician X, as Mr. X, the person or as Mr. X, the party leader or as the party itself? It was an arduous exercise. (Delikurt 2006: 160)

Whose realities?

Researcher-constructed boundaries in an existing mélange of social life (Holliday 1999: 255)

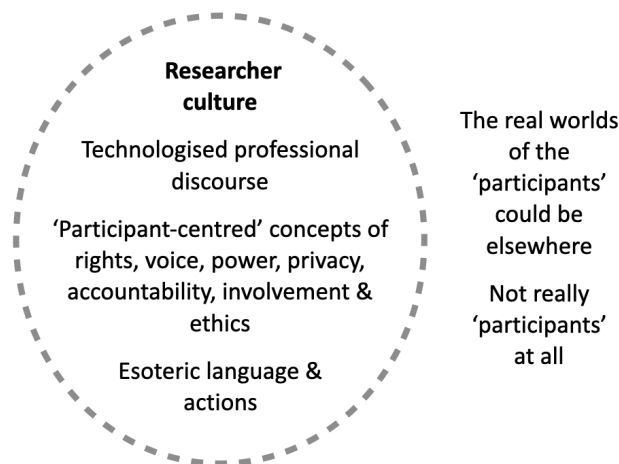A culture as an arbitrary slice of human life
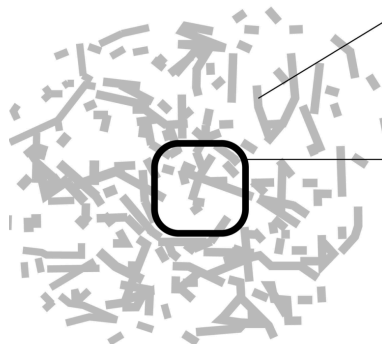
Let's consider a small shop in the high street. Its natural boundaries might seem clear – the definable space inside where the people who work there and customers and all the things for sale and advertising them reside, plus the window for display and the bit of street in front. More debatable might be the store room at the back or the place where the employees take breaks. The designations of these physical domains will be constructed differently by each of all the people involved, depending on what's going on and how they feel.

Engaging with any of this, whether we work there or pass by, is small culture formation on the go. Everyone needs to work out how to respond – to stay or leave, challenge or confirm. This positioning will depend on all the cultural practices and values that all parties bring from elsewhere. (https://adrianholliday.com/what-is-a-small-culture/)

The danger of colonisation

> **Researcher culture**
>
> Technologised professional discourse
>
> 'Participant-centred' concepts of rights, voice, power, privacy, accountability, involvement & ethics
>
> Esoteric language & actions

The real worlds of the 'participants' could be elsewhere

Not really 'participants' at all

Disturbing the scene?

> Digging necessarily disturbs the successive strata through which one passes to reach one's goal. But there is a significant difference between this human archaeology and its material counterpart: culture is pervasive and expresses itself in all acts of human beings, whether they are responding to customary or extraordinary stimuli. The values of a society lie as much in its dreams as in the reality it has built. Often it is only by introducing new stimuli that the investigator can peel back the layers of culture and reveal its fundamental assumptions. (MacDougall 1975: 121)

Is this in conflict or agreement with the image of settings being transient and shifting?

What are the implications for representativeness, sampling and triangulation

Data (or material) collection

Many possible choices of method

> Going as far as we can or have to, to get to the bottom of things

> Any devices we can find to help us to see things newly

All determined during the ethnographic process

> Descriptions of places, events, interactions - photographs and drawings

> Appropriate quantitative data

> Recovered and reconstructed events

> > That same afternoon on the training course, a very competent, professional lesson was given by a French trainee teacher. One of her 'native speaker' peers said 'Well, I just have to say this, you sound your final consonants a lot and it is SO unnatural'. (Research Diary: Field Notes: July 2004) (Aboshiha 2008: 148)

> > Measuring just over seven centimetres high and standing in all its nakedness - was the most innocent little doll I had ever seen. … I felt clumsy as the frailty of its limbs brushed against my fingers … four thousand years after its original

> crafting its gentle fibres tugged at my heart strings with phenomenal strength. … Who had cherished this little plaything so long ago? Had they felt as protective and caring as I? (Ovenden 2003: 42-43)

Then writing a whole fictional chapter about taking children to the museum to help understand further - interconnecting a memory of being a teacher with interview data

And more

Fictional literature - e.g. Layla Lalami's The Moor's account - 'a long and fully contextualised, inter-subjective journey to see ourselves from another place (Holliday & Amadasi 2020: 30)

> Reading *Madame Bovary* can tell us more than a 'survey of 472 married women' (Stenhouse 1985: 31)

Research diary entries

> To make better sense of interview data it was important to go back to an earlier stage to read the research diary entires about what happened when the interviews were being set up. (Holliday & Amadasi 2020)

> I cannot therefore claim that the reconstructed autoethnographic accounts which are the mainstay of my empirical material are a true account of what actually happened. This is not just because they relate to events that took place more than 40 years ago. Even if the memory was from days after, it would still be my construction of what happened dependent on the narratives most influencing me at the time - a construction that would change from day to day. Even the few journal extracts which I wrote near to the time were constructions. Even if they had been written on the day of the events, they would still have been constructions influenced by other events. Indeed, the distance of 40 years enables a greater maturity of understanding of how these narratives operate, given that, since then, with a further ten years living and working in Syria then Egypt as an implicated Western English language curriculum developer, I began to understand the nature of the Orientalist grand narrative. (Holliday 2022: 17-18)

Making intersubjective data convincing
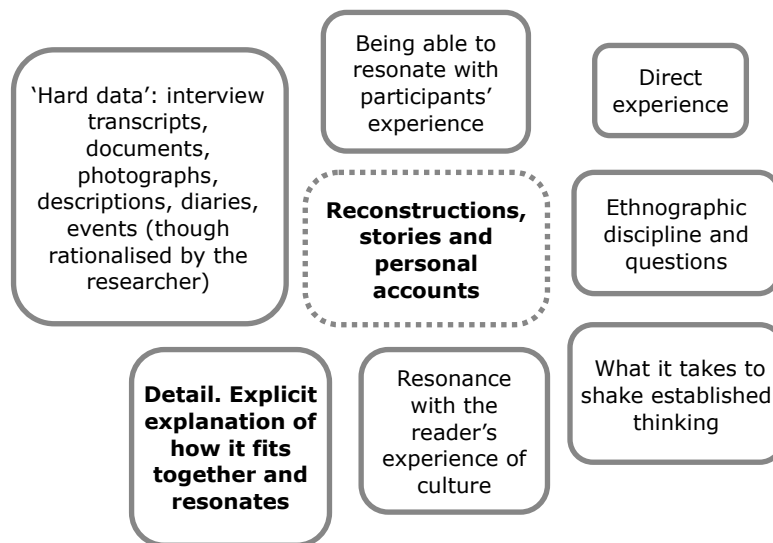
Thick Description

> Examiner: What you say about the university meeting is just your personal opinion
> Student: No, it's not. It connects with other data from interviews with colleagues and …
> Examiner: Can you show us where?

Convincing networks of intersubjectivity

‘Hard data’: interview transcripts, documents, photographs, descriptions, diaries, events (though rationalised by the researcher)

Being able to resonate with participants’ experience

Direct experience

Reconstructions, stories and personal accounts

Ethnographic discipline and questions

Detail. Explicit explanation of how it fits together and resonates

Resonance with the reader’s experience of culture

What it takes to shake established thinking

Communicating with a community

[1] I wrote the following (Holliday 2005: 25):

> … a presentation I attended at the international TESOL conference some years ago. The whole audience seemed to be English-speaking-Western teachers who were working as expatriates in an East Asian country which I will call Ex to protect the identity of the participants.

> Anonymised ethnographic description (Conference notes 1999)

[2] My colleague questioned my data (Waters 2007: 357):

> Holliday 2005 describes a TESOL conference presentation explaining the culture of an East Asian country, attended by what were assumed to be ‘English-speaking Western teachers’. … The participants in the session were assumed to have used it to construct a racial stereotype of the members of the culture in question. However, despite the very negative nature of this interpretation, no empirical evidence (for example, interview or questionnaire data) is provided to support it. The analysis appears to be based entirely on the author’s own presuppositions.

[3] This was my response (Holliday 2007: 361):

> The conference event must not be seen in isolation, but as part of a thick description which extends across the whole book within which it is presented. … The analysis of the event is thus made in the light of a broader picture emerging from email interviews with 36 colleagues from 14 countries, descriptions of professional behaviour in conferences and other events, two ethnographic studies of teaching and training in British ELT (Anderson 2003; Baxter 2003), and my own personal narrative of professional experience as depicted in documents and reconstructed events. … The role of personal narrative was particularly important in seeing the conference presentation as a critical incident within the thick description.

Interviews

Intervention and co-construction

> Sites where all parties jointly co-construct meanings and make sense of the world (Block 2000; Miller 2011; Talmy 2011)

> Where the researchers themselves 'cannot, in a sense, write stories of others without reflecting' on their 'own histories, social and cultural locations as well as subjectivities and values' (Merrill & West 2009: 5)

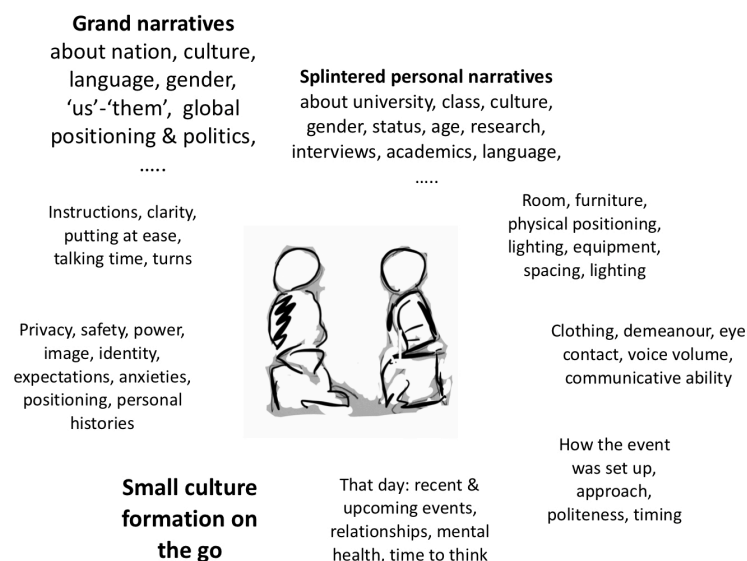> 'A potentially creative space between people' (Merrill & West 2009: 114)

> Narrative negotiation within small culture formation on the go, searching for deCentred third spaces (Holliday & Amadasi 2020)

Choices about conduct

> Equipment - audio and video recorder, camera, pencil and paper - research diary (separating description from interpretation)

>> Recording in public spaces has projected some additional sounds such as the muezzin's call to prayer ... and the roar of the traffic. These are of particular interest to me personally, reminding me of the moments of interaction. (Honarbin-Holliday 2005: 50)

The softness of transcripts

Grand narratives about nation, culture, language, gender, 'us'-'them', global positioning & politics, ...

Splintered personal narratives about university, class, culture, gender, status, age, research, interviews, academics, language, ...

Instructions, clarity, putting at ease, talking time, turns

Room, furniture, physical positioning, lighting, equipment, spacing, lighting

Privacy, safety, power, image, identity, expectations, anxieties, positioning, personal histories

Clothing, demeanour, eye contact, voice volume, communicative ability

Small culture formation on the go

That day: recent & upcoming events, relationships, mental health, time to think

How the event was set up, approach, politeness, timing

Analysis, coding, themes, events

Lots of methods and technologies with their own communities:

>> I've been trying to return to literature around coding of data as it still seems a bit like a very nebulous process. ... and I have a little project going on where we have a substantial amount of data from ...- email dialogue between our students. It's a challenge knowing the best way to approach this data and I feel a bit like I'm making it up as I go. (Experienced researcher)

Classic thematic analysis (Thornton 1988)

Note that this is not the popular Braun & Clarke reference

1. Temporarily put aside research questions

2. Put all the data together and treat it holistically

3. Look for themes across all data types — with the added facility of searching electronic text for key words

4. Use the themes and sub-themes to structure the data chapters

5. Use the extracts of data that best demonstrate the themes as the main points of discussion in the data chapters

All the interviews were transcribed, coded and sorted thematically. E-mail data, Field Notes and Critical Incidents from the author's Research Diary were also interpreted thematically and these latter either extended the themes arising from the interview data or were crucial in developing new themes. (Aboshiha 2008: 21)

But fairly common overall aims

To make sense of data

Close reading

Disciplines that manage intersubjectivity - making the familiar strange, allowing meanings and the unexpected to emerge, thick description

Allowing the data to speak independently of research questions

Responding to richness and multiple meaning

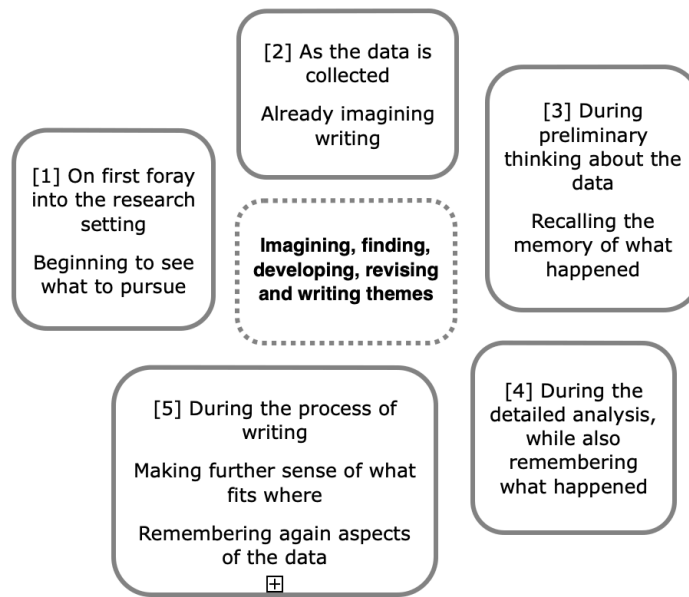Developing structures within which to write

Specialist areas - e.g. critical discourse analysis, semiotics, conversational analysis

Engaging with multiple data forms (interview, fieldnotes, drawings, photographs, observational data etc.)

Viva question: 'What did you do to ensure that the unexpected could emerge from your data?'

Developing analysis throughout the research process

[2] As the data is collected

Already imagining writing

[1] On first foray into the research setting

Beginning to see what to pursue

Imagining, finding, developing, revising and writing themes

[3] During preliminary thinking about the data

Recalling the memory of what happened

[5] During the process of writing

Making further sense of what fits where

Remembering again aspects of the data

[4] During the detailed analysis, while also remembering what happened

Using post-its, walls and office doors, bits of paper

The picture from Ayesha Kamal (2012) shows the beginnings of data chapter formation
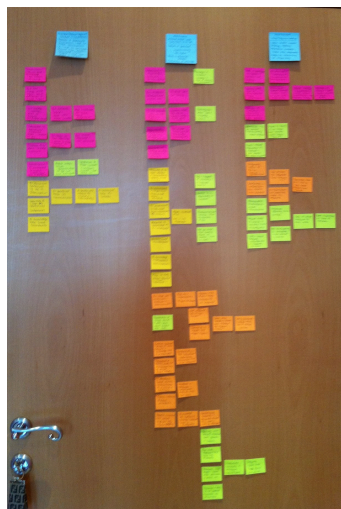
Working with multiple data types

Collins (2016: 154ff):

> The first data corpus to be considered was my set of field notes which at the time consisted of approximately 15,000 words of raw data and included empirical data from the research setting. While a number of entries in the field notes were deemed to be largely insignificant after coding the data, thirty-six entries were considered to be suggestive of nine broad themes that could tentatively be considered. Some of these themes, i.e. 'naming', were ones that I had become aware of during the initial data collection phase and it was also clear that there were themes which overlapped substantially and needed greater clarification. These nine large themes were then tentatively arranged into the three following working groups.
>
> There were also a number of sub-themes within each of these three groups:

- Group 1: Small Cultures; Disciplines and Structures; Teacher/Researcher Beliefs; Teacher/Research Identity; Naming;

- Group 2: Globalisation; Internationalisation; Discursive constructions of students and staff

- Group 3: Institutionalisation; Marketisation; Employability

These groups were not considered as final, but were placed to one side so that other data could be analysed and to allow for thick description and the emergence of additional themes. …

The initial analysis in March allowed me to tentatively identify which data I judged to be of greatest relevance. I analysed the interview data to further establish emerging themes.

I elected not to use special software programmes such as N-vivo for this analysis, but instead read through the data and used a colour coding system which eventually resulted in physical cuttings of extracts of data placed into categories and arranged in a spare room within my home.

I expected there to be substantial overlap between the themes emerging from the field notes and those emerging from the interviews, particularly given that some of the field note entries were comments on particular aspects of the interviews, but I was cautious against forcing data into previously existing categories because I believed that other previously unidentified themes would emerge from what I considered to be a much richer data corpus.

Selecting field note samples

Behind the scenes of Collins (2021)

14/07/17: Interestingly saw a university lecturer swimming in a lane with a few swimmers behind swearing at him. They clearly thought he was swimming in the wrong lane but he seemed fairly oblivious to any of this.

17/07/17: Un-laned area looking fairly chaotic. Young boy swimming around fairly haphazardly. Abandoned float in the middle. No one seemed to be bothered at all. Man lying on side of pool almost like sunbathing. Looks like he is trying to go to sleep. Life guard has a word but not sure what was said. Things generally very chilled.
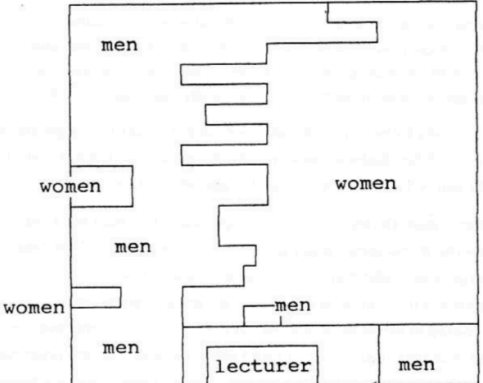
19/07/17: Lots happening today. Not particularly busy but an incident with a fairly elderly man swimming in the fast lane. The other swimmer in the lane was obviously annoyed, but was not a particularly fast swimmer himself. At one point he let out an audible, 'for f**k's sake' when he reached the block and the elderly man started off. A few minutes later the elderly man, while half way down the lane, ducked under the lane ropes into the lane I was sharing. I moved into the lane from where he had come. The previously annoyed swimmer seemed happier and even volunteered to let me pass on the block when I caught up with him. Later when I entered the sauna, there was a discussion between 4 people about the man who had apparently annoyed each of them in some way.

Selecting extracts from classroom observation data

Appendix extract from Holliday (1991: 319)

Lesson 39 Interaction: [*There was an awful crush as students coming out met students trying to get in*. [p.207] [*Several students were carrying flowers. One of the men gives a flower to AH, which s/he takes and keeps during part of the lesson - evidence of a profound integration with their culture - s/he holds it as they do*. [p.337] [*It took ten minutes for the class to settle down*. [p.207] I sat on the left amongst the standing men. [*Some of the students did not have notes; however, those who did seemed to have useful data in their hands which helped them cope with the poor mike*. [p.313] There were many serious students sitting at the back. There was some choral repetition for which the students certainly seemed to have prepared in previous group work sessions. Some of the men standing at the front seemed a little flippant, though the majority seemed to be concentrating, interested and learning. [*When students went to the front to write something on the blackboard, even those who hadn't seemed to be concentrating showed that they had been all the time (cf. obs.28)* [p.222]. The words on the audio recording were unclear, but the intonation was clear; and the students repeated, anxious for any sound they could get hold of. [*The procedure seemed to be working, but largely because the lecturer appeared confident and clear about what s/he was doing*. [p.313] I felt s/he could have managed without the mike.

Empty columns awaiting codes

The students are blocked (cf. the American lecturer at site 8 reporting that at times of tension in Palestine, the blocking becomes Palestinians and the rest rather than men and women). As common in many classes, the women tended to be the majority in the front rows. There are classes where the women sit in the front half and the men sit in the back; but I have not seen the reverse situation.		

Coding email interview transcripts (Holliday 2017)

2. What do you think about the dominant view in some areas that doing a PhD in Britain is a particularly Western activity which might not have sufficient recognition of other backgrounds?		
Of the two questions, I think I'm struggling even more with this one. Does this question suggest that the way in which PhDs are structured in the UK is 'Western' and somehow doesn't recognize the backgrounds or talents of 'non-Westerners'? Or, is it suggesting that there is something unique about a 'British PhD'? Or is it suggesting possibly that 'the West' has a certain hegemony or monopoly on 'the business' of doing a PhD so that many 'non-Westerners' come to the UK to do a PhD? I'm not quite sure here…. I guess what I can say is that in my job I encounter a number of students who come to the UK with the idea of doing a PhD, but to many of these students, the whole PhD process is somewhat of a mystery. And yet, I felt exactly the same way when I thought about undertaking one. I didn't really know where to start and toyed with the idea for years. But it all seemed a bit of a mystery even though I was a relative 'insider' working within a university. I was able to get some advice and various people helped me navigate by talking about the process and work etc. But, I think for many people, a PhD is somewhat of a mystery. Now whether that is something that is unique to the UK, I couldn't even hazard a guess, but I wouldn't think so. And I think the element of 'mystery' can affect people regardless of any particular	More difficult The PhD is a mystery for everyone Also for insiders to the university	Different for everyone
The other thing that I have noticed is that there is no single way to do a PhD in Britain and I would guess in other places as well. I hear stories about students doing PhDs in, for example, Mechanical Engineering and while there is some overlap, a lot of what these students do is quite different to what is required of me. Even in other Schools (like Education) where one would expect significant similarities, I hear stories about their processes which leave me slightly surprised or where there appears to be significant differences – not necessarily a value judgment here. So, this is just at 1 university! I can't imagine how many various practices there are across the	Many types in Britain, universities, schools	
I'm aware of some particular differences in different countries or particular universities through talking to students, but these differences seem no more significant than the differences between practices even in just one university such as my own. People do PhDs all over the world.	Also countries	

Finding events instead of themes

This perception of the creatively co-constructed interview leads us to depart from the more established presentation of data through themes that emerge from coding. Instead, as with Amadasi and Holliday (2017), we have selected events that we feel best demonstrate the interplay of narratives, especially where the student leads us, the researchers, to contribute our own personal and occasionally grand narratives with our own agendas. They demonstrate how our own knowledge of particular grand narratives enables us both to analyse the data and to take part in the interviews. …

Event 1: strategic holding back
In the first event, S tells us about an argument she has had with her 'host mother' about breaking her accommodation contract. Here, she describes how she does not reveal her anger during the confrontation but tells us what she was thinking when told that she can 'never be part of this culture':

(Amadasi & Holliday 2018: 246)

The events include the interviewer and show their intersubjective role

Encourages recall of the wider nature of the event and what led up to it

For example, a key to why S says what she says, and what she means, is how she is encouraged by the researchers and how she responded to the setting up of the interviews

Does this reduce the colonising impact of the interview event?

Conflicting interpretations - researcher bias

The event just before 'the data'

1. In a conference workshop, we were asked to work in groups to analyse English language classroom teacher-student interaction data after seeing a fifteen-minute video sequence of the same event

2. There were five adult students - four women wearing hijab, and one male student. The male student, who seemed to have a similar cultural background to the women talked quite a lot

3. The was a consensus that this was an example of male domination

4. **However**, I had been allowed to see the video of the whole class

5. Before the sequence, the male student hadn't spoken at all; and several of the women had challenged the male British teacher in his interpretation of a newspaper article about plane hijack by a 'Muslim terrorist'

6. The teacher wanted to look at the language; the women students wanted to talk about the discourse politics of the article

7. After I had seen the whole video, thinking that he was imposing a Western agenda, I met the teacher. He told me how hard he tried to understand what his students wanted to talk about.

What sorts of grand and personal narratives can influence how we interpret data?

Reacting to the unexpected - perhaps with new theory

Duan (2007) found in personal diaries of Chinese school children a de-centred hybridity discourse that 'although we work hard for our exams, we are also desperate for personal time away from examinations' and that 'nobody understands who we really are'

This became his initial thesis - in Figure 1 - that their hybridity discourse opposes the dominant discourse that they only work for exams
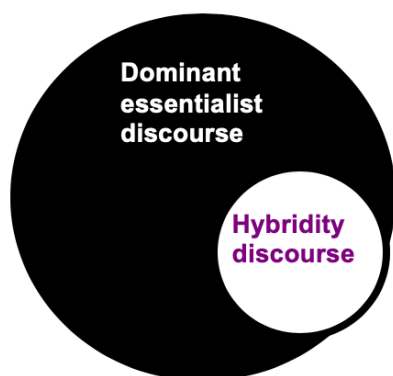
Figure 1
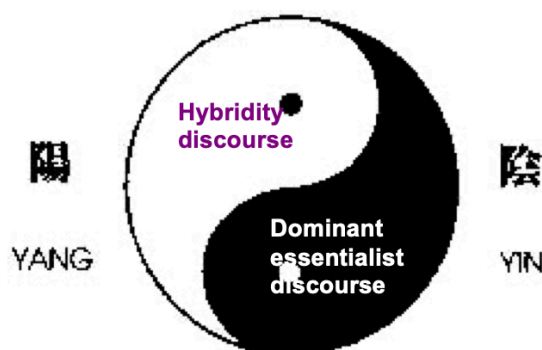
Figure 2

However, when interviewed, the very same school children overwhelmingly told him the opposite - that 'we are only interested in exams', thus confirming the dominant discourse

He therefore had to think again

He found the Taoist concept of yin and yang useful - where competing discourses can operate within the same person - Figure 2

'Sitting on my data'

> What I meant by 'sitting on my data' was that if we could forget … the distinctions of data as 'them' and the researcher as the 'self', then we may arrive at a better understanding of the issues under scrutiny. I found that the whole data, like a flower bed, may, from a distance, appear to be brown, but when observed close-up, be found to contain vivid whites, reds or yellows. The researcher needs then to identify which colour among the flowers she considers most significant, and to alter her gaze accordingly. (Duan 2007: 71)

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