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Teaching Qualitative Method: as craft, profession, or bricolage?¹

Summary

One way in which a qualitative approach to social research is often taken to be different from a quantitative approach is that it does not amount simply to applying procedures. Instead, what is involved is a much more contingent process, and one in which (as is sometimes said) ‘the researcher is the research instrument’. This has implications for the teaching of qualitative method, most obviously that it cannot be achieved simply by inculcating techniques. Several alternatives to the procedural model can be identified. One suggests that the task is to facilitate the learning, or at least the honing, of a set of flexible skills. This is the ‘craft’ model. However, it can be argued that the uncertain course of most qualitative research means that it involves more than the deployment of skills. Furthermore, a degree of reflexivity in relation to products as well as processes may be required, involving redefinition of the research problem. Here we have the ingredients of the ‘professional’ model which, while involving a continuing emphasis on basic skills, implies a reflexivity that requires wider knowledge of philosophy and social theory. It should be noted, though, that what is prescribed here is a bounded reflexivity, since the goal of research - the production of knowledge - remains fixed, along with those methodological assumptions which are its ‘hinges’. Some qualitative researchers today reject such restricted reflexivity, and this points to the final model that will be discussed, research as ‘bricolage’. Here, all assumptions are to be questioned, indeed subverted. Against the background of these four models – procedural,

craft, professional, and bricolage - some fundamental pedagogical dilemmas arise: how much and what sorts of reflexivity do students need; and, perhaps even more significantly, how much and what sorts of reflexivity can they afford? After all, these days more than ever, there are external demands formally to schedule research and to complete it on time; requirements that are motivated by adoption of the procedural model by powerful stakeholders. Given these uncertainties and pressures, how are we to teach qualitative methodology? And how are we to prepare students for participation in research communities that are currently riven with methodological, philosophical, and political disagreement? There are no generally agreed answers to these questions; and, as a result, teachers of qualitative methodology face some difficult dilemmas.

The teaching of qualitative research methodology is surrounded by a host of difficult issues today, so much so that one sometimes wonders whether the task is even possible; or, at least, whether it can be done well. Of course, it has long been viewed as a tricky enterprise. But now there are additional problems. For one thing, there is so much diversity in forms of qualitative inquiry, each contending with the others, that hard and controversial choices seem to be required; in terms of what can and cannot, should and should not, be covered. At the same time, and perhaps most problematic of all, in Britain and no doubt elsewhere as well, there are external pressures for social research to be codified, and for students to be ‘trained’ in the necessary techniques. Quantitative method is often seen, quite wrongly, as a matter of simply following procedures. And there are demands that this procedural or technical model be extended

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2 The two editions of the Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin and Lincoln 1995 and 2000), and reviews of them (see Snow and Morrill 1995; Walford 2001; Mac an Ghaill 2001), give some sense of the diversity.

3 An interesting counter to this false view is Cathy Marsh’s argument against the use of conventional examinations to assess methodological skills, in the course of which she stresses the importance of ‘creativity’ and ‘methodological flair’ in quantitative research (Marsh 1981).
to qualitative inquiry as well. What this implies is that students need simply to be taught the range of available techniques, along with the rules about when these are - and are not - appropriate; as well as being given practice in their application. Yet, the very character of qualitative research is taken by most of its practitioners to be at odds with this procedural model; and with good reason.

The idea that research is a procedural matter implies that its course can, and should, be planned at the start, and the resulting research design then implemented. However, there are obvious practical reasons why much qualitative research cannot follow this pattern. As Everett Hughes noted: ‘[...] the situations and circumstances in which field observation of human behavior is done are so various that no manual of detailed rules would serve [...]’; though he insists that the basic problems faced by all field researchers are more or less the same (Hughes 1960:x). Doing research in ‘natural’ settings - that is, under conditions that are not specifically designed for carrying out research - and often over relatively long periods of time, means that one must adapt the research process to the situation and to any significant changes in it. This may be necessary even just to 'survive' in the field. Of course there are also specifically methodological reasons why qualitative research cannot usually be a matter of following some pre-specified plan. For one thing, failure to adapt to the situation being studied is likely to maximise reactivity, and thereby to threaten the validity of the research findings. Furthermore, the open-ended approach to data analysis which is characteristic of qualitative research means that what data are required will change over time; they cannot be identified reliably at the beginning.

This is not to deny that there are approximations to procedural rules in qualitative research. One candidate today might be: ‘audio-record interviews’. And, generally speaking, this is good advice. However, it is not an absolute or unproblematic requirement. It is important to be prepared for
the informant who refuses to have an interview recorded. The plans of one of my students were thrown into disarray when the school pupils he intended to interview refused to have their words tape-recorded; he had to learn very rapidly how to take notes while listening and asking questions. There are also cases where audio-recording interviews is likely to result in important issues or views not being mentioned. Another of my students, whose research topic was loneliness, decided (probably quite rightly) that the people she had recruited via an advert in newspapers and magazines would be inhibited by the presence of a tape recorder in talking about their experience. She also realised that, since the interviews were to take place in bars and cafés, there would probably be too much background noise for audio-recording to be of any value. And the point is not just that, as in these cases, ‘normal practice’ may be impossible or inappropriate. Assumptions about normal practice can actually restrict the options considered in planning or carrying out a piece of research. While audio-recording of formal interviews is now usual, ethnographers do not generally try to tape-record the occasional, unpredictable conversations they have with participants during the course of their work. Yet, as a colleague of mine found, in some contexts it may be possible to get permission to do this, carrying the tape recorder with you and switching it on whenever appropriate (see Scarth 1986: 182 and 195-8). So, even in relation to this specific issue, what is possible and desirable is to some extent a contingent matter.

In short, then, for both practical and methodological reasons, it is not desirable to try to plan and carry out qualitative research under the guidance of some fixed set of methodological rules; though it is advisable to try to anticipate possible difficulties. Rather, there is a need for sensitivity as regards both topic and context; and for adaptation in the field, including flexibility in exploring what might be possible in particular circumstances. A commitment to ‘normal practice’ can get in the way of ‘good practice’.
Of course, *philosophical* arguments are also often used against applying the procedural model to qualitative research. It is sometimes suggested that because every person, including both researcher and researched, has a distinctive socio-cultural location, it is always necessary to *find one’s way* towards any understanding of social situations; how to do this cannot be standardised, or specified beforehand. Equally, there may be an insistence on the importance of creativity in research, and in social life more generally. From this point of view, research can no more be reduced to following rules than can producing a work of art. Or, at least, any attempt at such a reduction will amount to pursuing an inauthentic form of human action - not exercising one’s full powers but acting like a robot - and it will, as a result, misrepresent the nature of human social life. In this vein, Williams writes that, since human conduct ‘is seen [by field researchers] to be the work of self-conscious creativity rather than the product of internal or external predispositions or forces which act to determine conduct’, it is not surprising that for them research itself must partake of the same character. He therefore argues for ‘[...] a view of data creation practices as less the operation of neutral techniques, and more the development and exploitation of intimate participation in the life of those under study’ (Williams 1981:559).

The procedural model has also sometimes been rejected on the grounds that it is ideological: that it systematically obscures the fact that how research is done, and thereby what findings are produced, necessarily reflect the personal and social characteristics of the researcher. In light of this, the demand is often made that qualitative researchers be reflexive: that, throughout the course of inquiry, they continually subject their own practice to scrutiny, in both methodological and ethical terms; and that they make explicit for readers their own role in producing the findings. This is a line of argument that initially arose with the publication of ‘natural histories’ of research, was
given particular emphasis by feminists, and is now widely accepted.\footnote{For a bibliographical guide to ‘natural histories’ of research, see Hammersley 2002c.}

Finally, from postmodernism and other sources may be drawn the idea that the path which any research project follows is necessarily both constitutive and contingent; that it is under the control of nothing and no-one, and \textit{represents} nothing and no-one - certainly not Reality or Rationality. Instead, the research process must be seen as a matter of formally arbitrary 'decisions' among incommensurable possibilities. Here, we are as far as we could be from the idea that research involves following the procedures of scientific method.

There are, then, a variety of grounds on which qualitative researchers reject what I have called the procedural model of inquiry; and it is not difficult to see that these have implications for views about how (and whether) qualitative methodology can be taught. In the next section, I will look at some alternative models of qualitative research, and at their implications for pedagogy.

\textbf{Alternatives to the procedural model}

There are many different ways in which qualitative inquiry can be conceptualised. Here, I will focus on just three: as a craft, as a profession, and as bricolage. These seem to me to capture the most important variations that are relevant to the task we face today in trying to teach others how to do qualitative research.\footnote{It may seem that I have neglected the two most obvious alternatives: qualitative research as science or as art. However, in complicated ways this contrast lies behind the typology I am employing. Rather misleadingly, the procedural model is often seen as exemplifying science, whereas many commentators have emphasised the centrality of creativity to scientific work (see Nisbet 1963 and 1976). Similarly, both science and art involve a craft element. In many, though not all, ways science can be seen as a profession; and some artists have seen their work in this way, while others have rejected that model. Bricolage, as we shall see, has links with technical problem-solving but is also close to certain kinds of modern art. Most discussions of whether social inquiry is a science or an art appear to assume too homogeneous a view of what is to be found on each side of this divide; even though they often recognise that there is some overlap. For a discussion of qualitative inquiry as science and art, see Wolcott 1995.}
Craft work

The notion of a craft is, in some ways, the closest of the three alternatives to the procedural model. Its advocates share an unwillingness to move very far in methodological terms from what is required in actually doing research. Despite this, there are some important differences between these two models. A craft involves learning something that is more tacit and elusive than a set of techniques. As a result, proponents of this model are sometimes antagonistic towards methodology as a specialised activity. Thus, C. Wright Mills, writing about ‘intellectual craftsmanship’, begins his discussion by commenting that ‘useful discussions of method and of theory usually arise as marginal notes on work-in-progress or work about to get under way’ (Mills 1959:25). And he goes on to insist that each researcher must be his or her own methodologist (Mills 1959:26), a point which Becker later reinforced (Becker 1970:ch1). Mills does not deny that codification of procedures can be worthwhile, but he insists that great caution must be exercised about this. He comments that ‘Every craftsman can of course learn something from over-all attempts to codify methods, but it is often not much more than a general kind of awareness’ (Mills 1959:26).

To a large extent, what is required for research competence from the point of view of the craft model is the building up of skills; and skills are by their nature practical rather than technical. In other words, they cannot be codified in such a way as to be transmitted simply by explicit instruction from one person to another. As Leonard comments, research

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6 Seale (1999a) has recently argued in favour of the craft model, though he acknowledges the value of philosophical and methodological reflection, which is given much more emphasis in the other two alternatives I will discuss. Research has often been referred to as a craft, but without much explication of what that entails: see, for example, Epstein 1967, Emerson 1987, Bourdieu et al 1991, and Karp 1999.

7 For a discussion of this distinction, see Hammersley 2002a:ch1.
skills are ‘learned by coaching: they are “caught” rather than taught’ (Leonard 2000:187). Furthermore, in general terms, skills are flexible. The skill of riding a bike, for example, involves not only being able to stay on it but also to deal with various routine, and not so routine, contingencies that can arise in the course of the activity; including taking precautionary action against danger from other vehicles. So, the idea of research as a craft not only points to its practical character but also allows for variation in what has to be dealt with, and a consequent recognition that the course of inquiry cannot be pre-programmed or entirely anticipated. Mills captures this with his insistence that the researcher must master method not be mastered by it (Mills 1959:25).

Equally important, the notion of research as a craft involves recognition that one will not always be sure about the exact nature of the problem one faces, and that it may be necessary to try out various strategies in order to find a solution. Relevant here are what Becker refers to as Tricks of the Trade (Becker 1998). In this book he is concerned with the task of analysing data, but this concept can be extended to other aspects of the research process: to research design, data collection, and even to relations in the field.8

In some places Becker writes as if ‘tricks’ referred to ready-made solutions to standard problems. He comments: ‘every trade has its tricks, its solutions to its own distinctive problems, easy ways of doing something lay people have a lot of trouble with. The social science trades, no less than plumbing or carpentry, have their tricks, designed to solve their peculiar problems. Some of these tricks are simple rules of thumb derived from experience, like the advice that putting colourful commemorative stamps on the return envelopes will get more people to send their questionnaires back’ (Becker 1998:2-3).

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8 Elsewhere, Becker has outlined some ‘tricks’ involved in writing up research: see Becker 1986.
However, later he points out that some of the most important tricks are not simple, ready-made solutions:

The word “trick” usually suggests that the device or operation described will make things easier to do. In this case, that’s misleading. To tell the truth, these tricks [the tricks discussed in *Tricks of the Trade*] probably make things harder for the researcher, in a special sense. Instead of making it easier to get a conventional piece of work done, they suggest ways of interfering with the comfortable thought routines academic life promotes and supports by making them the “right” way to do things. This is a case where the “right” is the enemy of the good. What the tricks do is suggest ways to turn things around, to see things differently, in order to create new problems for research, new possibilities for comparing cases and inventing new categories, and the like. All that is work. It’s enjoyable, but it’s more work than if you did things in a routine way that didn’t make you think at all. (pp6-7)

Here we can see the divergence between the procedural and the craft models most clearly. Applied to the research process as a whole, Becker’s notion of ‘tricks of the trade’ would recognise, first of all, that all situations are unique and involve contingent processes of interaction; so that there is always the possibility that what worked on one occasion may not suffice on others. Moreover, it is necessary already to have had some relevant experience in order even to recognise the likely value of particular ‘tricks’. And knowing how to apply them to any specific case requires thought, it is not automatic. In this sense, tricks of the trade are *supplements* to practical experience; they are not algorithmic substitutes for it. Finally, some of them are concerned with disrupting normal, easy routines; they are designed to force the researcher to explore what is possible rather than making do with what is available.
The idea of research as a craft implies that what is involved in teaching methodology is initiating novitiates into an embodied tradition; in the sense of a set of skills and ways of thinking that has been built up collectively over time, and which marks out the expertise of members of the craft by comparison with those outside it. Researchers in a field are assumed to represent a community of practice engaged in distinct forms of ‘situated cognition’ (see Lave and Wenger 1991 and Chaiklin and Lave 1993). And what is required of novitiates is not that they acquire a discrete body of abstract knowledge which they can then simply apply, but that they work their way into a certain form of habitus: an orientation and a range of skills that will enable them to pursue the craft well.

This implies that the emphasis in teaching should be on the practicalities of research, and on introducing students to these in concrete ways. Apprenticeship is the most obvious pedagogical relation in this context; or what Lave and Wenger refer to as ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, where the learner engages in the craft, but only to a limited extent and with limited responsibility for the outcome. And, indeed, Becker reports that he learned how to do sociological work from Everett Hughes, to a large extent ‘by hanging around him and learning to use his tricks, the way apprentices learn craft skills by watching journeymen, who already know them, use them to solve real-life problems’ (Becker 1998:3–4). Also important may be simulation of research tasks, so that students can acquire research skills through practice under the guidance of a teacher who is also a skilled researcher. Hughes was one of pioneers here as well. He describes how it became a standard element of his introductory course in field research that ‘Each student, alone or with another, made a series of observations in a Census Tract or other small area of Chicago outside his everyday experience and reported on these observations almost week by week’ (Hughes 1960:iv). And, of course, the inclusion of a
project element in courses that teach qualitative methodology has become very common today.⁹

As already noted, the emphasis in a craft is very much on doing the work; and interest in methodology is limited to what will be of more or less direct help in this. Mills, for example, argues that ‘serious attention should be paid to general discussions of methodology only when they are in [...] reference to actual work. [...]’. And he comments that if all social scientists followed this ‘obvious and straightforward’ practice ‘at least all of us would then be at work on the problems of [social science]’. He claims that much methodological discussion simply ‘disturb[s] people who are at work’, as well as leading to ‘methodological inhibition’ (Mills 1959:27). In much the same spirit, Seale argues that ‘intense methodological awareness, if engaged too seriously, can create anxieties that hinder practice’, though (like Mills) he recognises that ‘if taken in small doses (methodology) can help to guard against more obvious errors’ (Seale 1999b:475).

Mann has put forward an even more radical version of this argument. He claims that whatever theoretical or epistemological views researchers hold, they will do research in more or less the same way: that there is a common ‘socio-logic’ that applies to all social scientific research. He comments: ‘Now, students may wish to acquaint themselves with epistemological debates. Perhaps it is necessary for them to do this before they realize that only one philosophical choice is required: to do or not to do research. We would then teach epistemology to show that it doesn’t matter. But as it bores most

⁹ What occurs may not always approximate closely to the pedagogic ideal, needless to say. The projects may be seen as research rather than as simulation of research. And, working on their own projects, students will not necessarily receive the kind of detailed feedback that would be required for the craft to be learned. Equally, the model and feedback provided may not be those of a skilled practitioner but rather those of what, in British parlance concerned with the practical trades, is referred to as a ‘cowboy’! There is also the whole question of how far students should be let loose on the world simply to do projects for pedagogical purposes.
students stiff, there are strong grounds for regarding it as optional candy-floss in our courses’ (Mann 1981:549).

What this makes clear is that the idea of research as a craft carries the implication that there is no great need for students to be taught what we might call the philosophy of social research; indeed, that this may be counterproductive. After all, in the context of the craft model, few demands are made on researchers to justify what they do in terms that extend beyond pragmatic effectiveness. What is important is knowing what works, or what is likely to work, not necessarily why it works; and, even less, what philosophical justification could be provided for using one particular approach to inquiry rather than another. Moreover, while there is considerable flexibility in relation to means, the notion of a craft assumes that what is the intended product of inquiry is fixed and unproblematic; that there is little need for reflection on this. In these various ways, then, the craft model involves minimal reflexivity; and this is an important respect in which it contrasts with the remaining two models.

The researcher as professional

‘Professionalism’ is a concept that has become highly contested, both within the social sciences and beyond. To a large extent, the positive value previously attached to this label has been displaced, and even negated. Professionalism is now widely seen as no more than an occupational strategy designed to resist

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10 In the same issue of the journal in which Mann’s article appears, Halfpenny provides a contrasting view. He argues that different sociological approaches involve radically different philosophical orientations: ‘The consequence is that although different approaches employ what are nominally the same research strategies and data handling techniques, the importance and meaning of a strategy or technique and its place in the research process - the very understanding of its nature - differs from approach to approach. Thus successful teaching demands more than a casual review of the different strategies and techniques that commonly form the chapter headings of research methods texts. Instead, the strategies and techniques must be located within the sociological approaches - the conceptions of data, explanation and theory - that form the context of their employment, for it is only relative to approaches that the merits and demerits of the various strategies and techniques can be assessed’ (Halfpenny 1981:565). Here, perhaps, particular qualitative approaches constitute distinct craft traditions; though it seems likely that what Halfpenny has in mind goes beyond the craft model.
external accountability and/or as a restrictive practice that limits consumer choice. Moreover, the critical challenge to the notion of professionalism has come partly from qualitative researchers (see, for instance, Becker 1970:ch6). Given all this, it might be thought that the notion of qualitative inquiry as a profession lacks plausibility. Nevertheless, it captures an important aspect of the way in which some qualitative researchers have conceptualised their work; even if the term itself is not always employed.\footnote{Ironically, Becker’s (1967) ‘Whose side are we on?’ exemplifies one aspect of this orientation. While this article has generally been treated as an injunction to side with the ‘underdog’, that is not what Becker proposed. His position is actually close to Weber’s principle of value neutrality (see Hammersley 2000:ch3). Other examples of the treatment of research as a professional activity, in senses close to that used here, can be found in Weber’s (1948) essay on ‘science as a vocation’, in Polsky 1971, and in Berger and Kellner 1982. See also Webb and Glesne 1992.}

I will focus on just two elements often associated with professionalism. The first develops out of the notion of a craft. By its nature a craft is specialised: it is directed towards a particular task; and it draws on collective expertise built up in pursuing that task. What is involved here is ‘dedication’, in the sense in which some computers are dedicated to specific tasks. However, the moral sense of ‘dedication’ is also relevant: there is a commitment to put the occupational goal above all others, except perhaps in extremis.

Writing in the late 1960s in support of this commitment, Polsky notes what he describes as ‘a retrograde development’: that a number of sociologists have promoted ‘extra-scientific goals in the name of science’ (Polsky 1971:115). And this is a trend that has continued, albeit taking on new political colours: those of Marxism, anarchism, feminism, anti-racism, and disability activism (see Hammersley 2000). One effect of this has been that commitment to the professional model can generate opposition; as one of my students discovered. He was hired as a research fellow on a project concerned with investigating the implementation of a multi-cultural and anti-racist policy in a secondary school, and he used this study as the
basis for his PhD (see Foster 1990). He was committed to providing an objective account of relevant practices in the school, but experienced considerable pressure to adopt a more partisan approach. This came not from the school but from other researchers. His report that there was little sign of systematic racism on the part of school personnel led to his being attacked as unable to recognise the racism that was allegedly taking place ‘under his nose’ (Connolly 1992:142); that his work was ‘disabling rather than enabling’ (Blair 1993:64); and that he was himself racist (Gillborn 1995). Such unpleasant, and unjustifiable, reactions raise questions about what one’s responsibilities are to students who adopt the professional model in a context where it is not generally supported.12

The other, closely associated, feature of the professional model is autonomy: that professionals must be able to exercise discretion in pursuing the occupational task. This should operate both at an individual and at a collective level. It is necessary for professionals to pursue their vocational goal in the way that they judge to be most effective, exercising a licence not just in terms of the selection of means but also in interpreting the meaning of the occupational task in particular cases. In these terms, the professional must have the autonomy to be a reflective practitioner (Schön 1983).

At the same time, in the context of the professional model, this autonomy is properly limited, in both individual and collective terms. Above all, it is restricted to what can be justified as necessary for pursuit of the occupational task. This has interesting implications at the level of individual autonomy, in terms of what should and should not be tolerated by researchers on the part of one another; an issue that takes on further complexity in the context of teaching. Today, the tendency is for the boundaries of toleration to be set by general ethical and political principles; and an implication of my

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discussion of Foster’s case is that this may unjustifiably restrict academic freedom. However, there will also be respects in which the distinctive character of professional autonomy restricts what is well within the boundaries of wider ethical and political legitimacy. In particular, what is open to proscription here is anything that is not justifiable as necessary for pursuit of the occupational goal; and, especially, anything that is inimical to pursuit of that goal.

These implications of the professional model can be illustrated by considering how to respond to a student who wishes to study childhood sexual abuse, approaching it from a constructionist point of view which suggests that it is only constituted as a phenomenon in and through accounts given of it. While this approach is likely to be regarded in the wider political realm as ill-founded and insulting to those who have suffered such abuse, from the point of view of the professional model this is no reason to rule it out in an academic context. But doubts about its legitimacy can be raised on other grounds, to the extent that the student claims that whether childhood sexual abuse occurred in any particular instance is simply a matter of how the events concerned are narrated. This, it might be argued, denies some basic presuppositions of research: that there are phenomena independent of researchers’ accounts of them, and that there cannot be contradictory truths about the world. Of course, on the basis of these presuppositions, the professional model would also rule out research applying such an extreme constructionist perspective to any other phenomenon, including sexual differences, and ethnicity.13

I have never been faced with a case quite like this, but I have supervised a student whose project seemed initially to raise

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13 Consistency in the application of such a ruling would also be demanded by the professional model, as against the ‘ontological gerrymandering’ which frequently occurs (see Woolgar and Pawluch 1985). It is important to note that the category ‘childhood sexual abuse’ is an evaluative one, so that there will be different value frameworks in terms of which it could be defined; and social researchers can make no authoritative choice among these. The point, however, that - once a particular framework has been selected to define the phenomenon for the purposes of study - whether or not childhood sexual abuse occurred is independent of our accounts of it.
these problems. She did indeed set out to study the discursive structuring of an account of childhood sexual abuse. However, in her approach there was no suggestion that claims of abuse are simply fabrications, only ‘true’ if found persuasive; nor that the particular account she examined was untrue or fictitious. And what she produced was, in my view, a very illuminating analysis of how a particular case of childhood sexual abuse was discursively formulated (see Davies 1995). Nevertheless, her research, and that of Foster, point to difficult issues associated with the professional model, and in broader terms too. Is the teacher of qualitative method responsible for the ethics of students’ work? And, if so, what ethical standards should be adopted in a context where there is a lack of consensus among researchers, and in the wider community?

The idea of qualitative research as a profession has some important pedagogical implications. First of all, we should note that, as with the craft model, it places considerable emphasis on the learning of practical skills; and so apprenticeship and simulation are likely to be a significant element of the education of researchers in qualitative methodology on this model too. However, the two distinctive features of professions I have identified carry additional requirements. ‘Dedication’, for example, indicates the need to emphasise the ethical obligations of research. Yet, as I noted, the ethics of a profession are different from, and may even be in conflict with, what is believed to be ethical in other terms. The central emphasis must be on the duty of the researcher to try to ensure that what he or she produces is sound knowledge, not falsehood; though, of course, that goal should not be pursued at any cost - other ethical considerations will also have to be taken into account (see Hammersley 2002b).

Another pedagogical implication stems from the fact that, by comparison with the craft model, the professional model involves the exercise of considerable reflexivity on the part of researchers, both individually and collectively, about how they
pursue their work. This requires that new entrants acquire the cognitive resources necessary to engage in such reflection; they need to be introduced to literature on methodology, social theory, and philosophy that will facilitate this. Furthermore, they must learn to participate in communal discussion about these matters, even if only vicariously at first.

At the same time, though, this reflexivity is bounded: like autonomy, it is framed by commitment to the goal of pursuing knowledge. Professionals are not required to ‘question all assumptions’, nor allowed to be freely creative in rethinking the occupational task. The medical practitioner, as an individual, and medical practitioners collectively, cannot legitimately redefine the goal of medicine as, say, to maximise the economic productivity of the work force, or to eliminate the sick in order to improve the average health of the population. Any such change in occupational task lies outside their realm of discretion; though attempts at change in these and other directions are open to legitimate resistance by them. Exactly the same is true of the researcher, according to the professional model. While professionalism implies considerable licence, it still involves a contract with lay people and their representatives about the goal of the activity, and this restricts researcher autonomy and the sort of reflexivity that is appropriate.

So while, in the terms used here, a profession requires more reflexivity on the part of its practitioners, and therefore on the part of those entering it, than does a craft, reflexivity is not valued for its own sake, only insofar as it serves the occupational goal. Indeed, new entrants must be socialised into a commitment to that goal, and to the ethics associated with it. This is perhaps the sharpest point of conflict between the professional model and the view of qualitative research as bricolage, which I will discuss in the next section.
Research as bricolage

The term ‘bricolage’ is used here to cover those views of research which treat it as an art - in a sense that extends beyond the notion of craft, and is quite opposed to the idea of a profession. In contemporary French usage, ‘bricolage’ refers to ‘do it yourself’, and ‘bricoleur’ is usually employed to refer to a ‘handyman’. There is also a more specialised interpretation deriving from the work of the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. Here, bricolage, like craft, implies a pragmatic orientation, but it is distinctive in that it requires using creatively what is already at hand, rather than seeking out and applying specially designed, standard techniques:

In its old sense the verb ‘bricoler’ applied to ball games and billiards, to hunting, shooting and riding. It was however always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle. And in our own time the ‘bricoleur’ is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman. (Levi-Strauss 1966:16-17)

In craft and professional terms, this creativity could be interpreted negatively, as use of the wrong tools for the job. However, from the perspective of the bricoleur it is a positive feature.

Levi-Strauss refers to intellectual as well as practical bricolage, focusing in the former case on the contrast that is often drawn between ‘primitive’ and ‘civilised’ thought, and the cognitive hierarchy which this involves. He contrasts mythical thinking, what he calls ‘the science of the concrete’, with modern science. While he does not see the former as simply inferior to the latter, he does regard them as different modes of thought: intellectual bricolage works with sensory appearances, whereas in his view science identifies underlying structural
principles. He sees art as lying somewhere between bricolage and science, in its capacity to symbolise underlying structural determinants through the representation of concrete individual forms.

For Levi-Strauss, anthropology is a science, and therefore anthropological research is not itself a form of bricolage or even of art. He emphasises that, despite some similarities, there is a real difference between the scientist or engineer and the bricoleur, in that the former is ‘always trying to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilisation while the “bricoleur” by inclination or necessity always remains within them’ (Levi-Strauss 1966:19). However, some writers, notably Denzin and Lincoln, have argued that ‘the multiple methodologies of qualitative research may be viewed as a bricolage, and the researcher as a bricoleur’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:3). They take much of the meaning of these terms from Levi-Strauss, though they also reformulate and elaborate on it, drawing on other sources as well. For example, they quote Nelson et al (1992) describing the methodology of cultural studies as bricolage, in that it is ‘pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive’ (p2).14

In some respects, what Denzin and Lincoln recommend under the heading of ‘bricolage’ is not at odds with the craft or professional models. At one point they describe it as ‘the combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study’, this adding ‘rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:2). However, in other places it is quite clear that they have in mind a radical break with what has previously passed for qualitative research. In the second edition of their Handbook, they comment, ‘We are all interpretive bricoleurs stuck in the present working against the past as we move into the future’

14 Interestingly, Derrida anticipates the notion of ‘ethnographic bricolage’. He also argues that the distinction between engineer and bricoleur undermines itself, suggesting that the engineer may be a myth produced by the bricoleur (Derrida 1978:285).
(Denzin and Lincoln 2000:xv). In this new edition, they describe the qualitative researcher as ‘bricoleur and quiltmaker’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:4; emphasis added); and also draw an analogy with montage in films. They declare that: ‘the interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage - that is, a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:4). This is an ‘emergent construction’ which ‘changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation are added to the puzzle’.

It is fairly clear from this that for Denzin and Lincoln what bricolage produces is art; in fact, a kind of ‘collage’. They comment that interpretive bricolage involves ‘aesthetic issues, an aesthetics of representation that goes beyond the pragmatic, or the practical’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:4); and there is also a political dimension. They write:

In texts based on the metaphors of montage, quilt making, and jazz improvisation, many different things are going on at the same time - different voices, different perspectives, points of view, angles of vision. Like performance texts, works that use montage simultaneously create and enact moral meaning. They move from the personal to the political, the local to the historical and the cultural. These are dialogical texts. They presume an active audience. They create spaces for give-and-take between reader and writer. They do more than turn the other into the object of the social science gaze [...]. (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:5)

So, the bricolage model involves a significant move away from a scientific conception of qualitative inquiry - whether interpreted in terms of the procedural, craft, or professional models - and towards viewing it as a form of art. But it is worth noting a significant ambiguity in the meaning of ‘art’ here. In its older usage, the term was close in sense to ‘craft’. In the twentieth century, however, ‘art’ has increasingly come to be
applied only to what is creative, novel, surprising, or even shocking. Indeed, craft skill sometimes plays little or no role. What has become central to much contemporary art is personal expression and audience impact. Moreover, some art in the twentieth century has been precisely concerned with subverting the distinction between art and not-art, and with ironicising the high status of art while yet capitalising on it.

The meaning that Denzin and Lincoln give to ‘bricolage’ is close to this modern notion of art. Crudely speaking, such art is concerned with imaginative freedom, and to a large extent this means freedom from the constraints of ‘reality’. Thus, in the case of impressionism freedom took the form of a focus on the subjectivity of perception. In the case of cubism, it was a freeing of the artist from having to adopt a single perspective. With surrealism the preoccupation was freedom from censorship by the conscious mind, so that the task became exploration of the unconscious as a creative realm below, or beyond, the everyday world. And a similar search for freedom seems to underly the idea of qualitative research as bricolage.

What are the implications of thinking about qualitative research as bricolage, or as art, for whether and how it can be taught? It seems that almost by definition the bricoleur is self-taught - that is what leads to the ingenuity and novelty of what is produced. Indeed, it might even be argued that bricoleurs are born not made, and from this point of view too any attempt at teaching them would be counter-productive. Perhaps the only task for pedagogy here is to encourage students to question all assumptions, to abandon what they have come to take for granted in their lives. Here, reflexivity becomes an all-embracing, but essentially negative, task. Moreover, whereas in the professional model reflexivity required, as its fuel, a sound knowledge of relevant literatures, the orientation of the

15 Without using the term ‘bricolage’ or its associates, Wolcott sees qualitative inquiry as having an important artistic dimension and relegates to ‘craft’ those elements of fieldwork that can be inculcated. However, he is clear that these craft elements are very important.
bricoleur to those literatures must presumably be the same as that towards any other resource: they should be approached in an *ad hoc* and selective way, being used for whatever purposes seem worthwhile at the time. Here, too, guidance is likely to be regarded as an obstruction, or at least as an irrelevance.

**Generic problems**

I want to end by noting that whichever of these alternative models we select as a guide in teaching qualitative research methodology, we are faced with two generic problems. The first, mentioned earlier, is that there is considerable pressure today for qualitative inquiry to be proceduralised, and for students to be ‘trained’ in its techniques; in a manner that is at odds with good research of any kind. The emphasis here is on students being given ‘access’ to the various techniques that make up qualitative (and also quantitative) inquiry, and provided with practical instruction in using these techniques. This pressure leaves little scope for apprenticeship, for reflexivity, or for introducing students to the literatures that are required to feed this; even though the need for such things may be formally acknowledged. As a teacher, one is faced with a choice between having to present qualitative research simply as a set of techniques, or trying to challenge this model through one’s teaching, while yet recognising that this may be to the disadvantage of one’s students in career terms. So, there are difficult issues about how to react to this pressure - especially since some of it comes from students themselves.

Closely related is the problem of mass higher education, and its extension to the postgraduate level. Previously, postgraduate, and prior to that even undergraduate, courses could be directed primarily at the task of preparing a new generation of academics in the relevant discipline, even though a substantial proportion of students would not follow this path. Today, even more than before, it is difficult to defend such an
approach, either by an appeal to the value of liberal education or through arguing that an academic education has the capacity to develop generic skills that are of value in other occupations. Even at postgraduate level, the pressure is more and more towards serving the occupational needs of students, which often seems to amount to meeting the demands of likely future employers. This is an increasingly common theme in the realm of methodology teaching. In Britain, the methodological training which the Economic and Social Research Council insists all research students in the social sciences should have is aimed not just at facilitating their own research, thereby potentially fitting them for work as academic researchers and teachers, but also at preparing them for the much wider range of jobs that involve a ‘research’ component, such as setting up and running accountability regimes within large organisations (Collinson 1998). Yet, there are serious questions to be asked about the compatibility of these different ‘missions’.¹⁶

The second generic problem is how to prepare students for participation in a research community that is riven by methodological, philosophical and even political disputes. Should one teach a range of different approaches within the field of qualitative research, presenting each as legitimate? Or should one teach the approach that one believes is most valuable, and refuse to teach any that one regards as unjustifiable? In support of the first position, it can be argued that students need to have an accurate sense of the full range of approaches to qualitative inquiry, and of the arguments for and against these, so that they can make a reasoned choice for themselves and engage in dialogue with those who adopt a different approach. In support of the second position, it can be proposed that it would be a disservice to students to introduce

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¹⁶ In Britain, and some other places, the pressure for methodological ‘training’ of students along the lines of the procedural model has run in parallel with government attempts to re-shape the character of social and educational research. The aim has been to make it serve ‘evidence-based’ policymaking and practice better (see Hammersley 2002a).
them to approaches that are valueless. Or it might be suggested that since the different approaches are incommensurable, it is not possible or healthy for students to learn more than one.

The first position is clearly exemplified in a recent text, where a range of very different qualitative research traditions is presented and exemplified on equal terms (Travers 2001). The approaches covered include grounded theorising, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, feminist methodology, and postmodern ethnography. Travers argues that his book is ‘democratic’, empowering students in making their own choices about which approach to adopt in their own work (Travers 2002:458). He sees it as a text for courses which ‘review a wide range of methodologies and approaches’ and also as a ‘self-help guide’ for students who do not have access to such a course (Travers 2001:viii). This might be seen as presenting ‘packages of techniques for the student consumer’ as if the choice were equivalent to using Word Perfect or Word to type one’s thesis (Yates 1997:489). However, Travers provides discussion of the rationales for the different approaches as well as accounts of what they involve in practical terms.

The second approach has been advocated by Yvonna Lincoln. She argues that, given the way in which commitment to a particular paradigm ‘permeates every act even tangentially associated with inquiry’, ‘we have to make a commitment as inquirers to one or the other (paradigm) and behave in a fashion congruent with its dictates until we choose another system. To do otherwise is not only to commit paradigmatic perjury, it is to invite psychological disaster’ (Lincoln 1990:81). Thus, she claims that ‘training in multiple paradigms (at least in more than a historical sense) is training for schizophrenia’. Instead, ‘we probably ought to recognize the profound commitments people make to worldviews and create centers where such training can go on, much as there are centers where psychologists can train

17 This need not reflect an entirely intolerant attitude: one might accept that other approaches can legitimately be taught on other courses or in other institutions.
to be Freudians, or Jungians, or Adlerians [...]’ (Lincoln 1990:87). Of course, it might be argued that this position is even more likely to reify the different approaches than the first.

Needless to say, there are midway positions between these extremes, and the majority of teachers of qualitative method are probably at neither end of the spectrum. Presumably, even if one presents what is believed to be the best way of doing qualitative research, there is still an obligation to prepare students for participation in a situation where there are very different approaches. They need to know something of the alternatives, the issues which separate them, and the debates about those issues. In short, we should encourage students to become neither ostriches nor fighting cocks.

However, there is a practical problem here. The issues separating different approaches to qualitative inquiry are, to a considerable extent, fundamental philosophical ones about which there is a considerable, and often quite difficult, literature. Thus, it is not uncommon for the work of various philosophers to be referred to in the methodological literature, some of whom are renowned for their obscurity. Are we to try to introduce students to this philosophical literature so that they can properly understand the issues and the references that are included in contributions to the debates? And, if we believe that they need these background resources, how are we to enable them to acquire what is necessary while at the same time also giving them sufficient chance to develop and hone their research skills? There is surely not time, nor perhaps energy, to do both these things in full. So, some compromise position has to be reached, but it is not clear what would be an appropriate one in present circumstances.

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18 MacIntyre (1990:232-4) seems to reach something like the same position as Lincoln in his discussion of ‘rival versions of moral inquiry’. Pallas (2001:11), while arguing for an approach closer to that of Travers, recognises the danger of ‘dissociative identity’.

19 There are, for example, several references to the work of Heidegger even in the first edition of Denzin and Lincoln’s Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). An associated problem is that some of the discussions of philosophical issues and positions within the literature of social research methodology are themselves inaccurate and misleading.
Conclusion

As Williams has noted, ‘there remains something comfortable about any style of research that is teachable and learnable by reference to a set of well articulated procedural rules adhered to amongst a community of researchers’ (Williams 1981:558). It is not difficult to see the appeal of the procedural model, and it is an especially tempting mirage from the point of view of anyone charged with the responsibility of teaching research methodology. However, that model is at odds with some of the realities of qualitative inquiry (and of research more generally), and with the way in which most qualitative researchers think about their work today. In this chapter I have discussed three alternatives to the procedural model, organised around the notions of craft, profession, and bricolage; and I have sketched the pedagogical implications of these alternatives.

It is perhaps worth emphasising that all these models capture at least some aspects of qualitative inquiry, and of what is involved in teaching it. There are parts of qualitative research practice that can be proceduralised, to a degree. For example, just as once one has decided which statistical technique to employ it is a matter of following the rules, similarly having decided what mode of transcription to employ in processing audio recording data it is a matter of observing the conventions. And students do need to know what these conventions are, and to be encouraged to stick to them (unless there are very good reasons for not doing so). It is perhaps even less controversial to suggest that qualitative inquiry matches the craft model: that it involves skills, that these skills can be learned, and that learning them can be facilitated by a teacher providing an example of good practice and supplying helpful feedback on performance. Of course, many qualitative researchers would insist that rather more reflexivity is required than the craft model implies;
though, as I have indicated, there is disagreement about the proper scope of reflexivity, and this has very significant implications for pedagogy. Finally, most qualitative researchers - even those who, like me, deny that qualitative research is a form of art, in anything like the contemporary sense of that term - would accept that it is creative in important respects and that the notion of bricolage has *some* value: making the best of what is available in order to gain some overall sense of a situation is an essential element of qualitative inquiry. One might also accept that while in teaching methodology one can reasonably hope to make students better at research, one cannot make all of them - or, actually, *make* any of them - good researchers.

In the final section I raised some generic problems that we have to face almost whichever model we adopt. The first is external pressure to proceduralise qualitative method and thereby to facilitate the efficient training of new researchers. And I suggested that this problem has been compounded by the rise of mass postgraduate education, where the likely destinations of students are diverse and - as a result - so also are the expected ‘learning outcomes’. The second problem concerned preparing students for work in a research community that is not organised around a consensual view of the purpose of inquiry, and how it can best be pursued. Here the question is how much diversity to present to students, and in what depth to introduce different approaches and the issues that divide them; while yet also dealing with the more practical aspects of research education.

Given the existence of sharply different conceptions of qualitative inquiry within the research community, along with mounting external pressure to apply the procedural model, teachers of qualitative methodology face some difficult dilemmas at the present time.
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