

The Coming of Age of a Qualitative Researcher: The Impact of Qualitative Research in Education Past, Present, and Future

Judith Preissle in Conversation With Robert Faux

Key words:

qualitative research, methods, methodology, teaching qualitative research, academic career, early courses in qualitative methods, intellectual influences, technology, Internet, educational ethnography

Abstract: This conversation centers on the development of the thought and career of Judith PREISSLE. The conversation deals with PREISSLE's formal education and training and the challenges she faced as she embarked on an academic career. In this part of PREISSLE's account we are given a sense of how qualitative approaches to doing research began to take shape and emerge in academics, with the attendant challenges. The conversation then focuses on PREISSLE's current work at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA. She shares her experiences at Georgia and the burgeoning of qualitative research in the curriculum, and the nurturing of new students as they pursue research utilizing qualitative methods. Finally, PREISSLE shares some philosophical insights concerning qualitative research and speculates about the future.

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About the Interview

This interview was conducted via telephone on 31 March 2004. Jude gave expressed permission to be interviewed and she has reviewed the transcript. Nancy BARCA transcribed the taped interview. I contacted Jude via email in early March of 2004 about the possibility of interviewing her for *FQS*. The interview lasted approximately 90 minutes, and could easily have gone on for another 90. This is very much a narrative interview; I kept myself in the background and let Jude talk. It became clear from the start that she is passionate about qualitative research and talked freely about it. [1]

About Judith PREISSLE

Judith PREISSLE is Professor and former Chair of the Department of Social Foundations of Education at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA. Through her teaching and writing PREISSLE has been a leading figure in the

development of qualitative research education in the United States. Among PREISSLE's most important books is one written in collaboration with M.D. LECOMPTE: *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1984). A second edition was published in 1993. Since September 1991 PREISSLE has been the list owner of *QUALRS-L@uga.cc.uga.edu* (Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences) an email discussion group. Through this medium she has been instrumental in establishing a worldwide community of qualitative researchers. You can find more information about Judith PREISSLE [online](#). [2]

1. Intellectual Development

FAUX: Thank you very much. I appreciate you finding time in your hectic schedule to sit and talk with me. First of all, I see from your curriculum vitae that your undergraduate background is in history and then graduate work in social studies of education, and I was just wondering if you could briefly talk about how you came upon those particular paths and how you came to follow them. [3]

PREISSLE: Well, formally, it looks disconnected but the reason I have a history degree from Grinnell is that, which is a tiny undergraduate school in Iowa (USA), it was actually smaller than the junior high school where I taught, and one anthropologist went off for a couple of years on leave during the time that I was doing my major degree work, so I couldn't get a degree in anthropology. [4]

My choices were either sociology or history. I was not interested in the kind of social survey research that was being emphasized by the sociology faculty there. The closest I could get to the kind of questions that I like to ask are the questions the historians were asking. [5]

FAUX: That's interesting. [6]

PREISSLE: Actually quite good training for me, because historians at Grinnell were very involved in the whole discussion of scientific history and what makes history scientific as opposed to literary and I think that, although I don't think I appreciated that as well as I might have, I remembered it. [7]

FAUX: That is important! [8]

PREISSLE: So the history really was like the second choice and because I was getting a degree in history my father pretty much insisted that I get certified to teach at which point I got completely distracted because I loved teaching. I didn't particularly care for teaching history. I taught 12 year-olds. And I'm, you know, maybe I'm just not passionate enough about history as a subject to be effective teaching history to 12 year-olds. [9]

FAUX: And I think to teach 12 year-olds you would have to be passionate to get it across to them. [10]

PREISSE: Well, there are all kinds of qualities that are helpful in teaching 12 year-olds and having a core sense of silliness, which may tell you something about me. At any rate, so I got distracted with teaching but I didn't give up my anthropology and cultural analysis and, if you will, qualitative approach to the world. I basically hammered my way, because my undergraduate performance wasn't particularly strong, to say the least, but my test scores were okay. I got into a Master's program at Minnesota (University of Minnesota, USA) and they happened to have, this was in the 1960's which was a height of one of our curriculum reform movements in the United States and the Minnesota Project Social Studies program had an experimental course for seventh graders in, guess what? Anthropology! So, a) I got into the program, b) I got access to this experimental curriculum, so I wasn't just teaching social studies to 12 year-olds for the following four years, I was teaching anthropology to 12 year-olds and I talked the education faculty into letting me do half my degree work, actually more than half, I think, for the Master's in anthropology. So, I was able to combine two things I was passionate about, one being anthropology and the other being teaching. So both of my advanced degrees are formally in social studies but both of them are cobbled-together programs in anthropology and education. I didn't discover the formal programs in anthropology and education until my second year at Indiana (Indiana University of Indiana, USA) in the doctoral program and I gave some thought to transferring. [11]

I had already actually been accepted at Stanford the year I was looking at doctoral programs, and I knew that George SPINDLER was there who was a major anthropology and education guy, I just didn't, I don't know, I didn't know enough about how things worked to make the connection. I'm a first generation college graduate, so if my advisors didn't know how things were put together, then I didn't know. They, of course, pointed me to the literature but somehow or another I didn't put that together and by my second year at Indiana, I had formed a wonderful mentoring relationship with my dissertation director, Judith FRIEDMAN-HANSEN, who was in the Department of Anthropology. So that's why those, that's why on paper this all looks a little like, "how did this happen?" At any rate, my dissertation study is an ethnographic study and when I came, I interviewed for jobs in social studies because that's what my degree was in, I thought about getting a degree in anthropology when I was looking at programs and the people in anthropology that I talked to at Minnesota said, "you know, this job market is shutting down, so, you know, if you can find kind of applied anthropology work, then that might better suit you." And the other thing is, Robert, I wasn't, I just couldn't give up the direct connection to teaching. Of course, anthropologists teach, but I just, I was really committed to public education and to teacher education and I just didn't want to give up that connection. [12]

2. Academic Development and Teaching

PREISSLE: I did not go looking for a job in qualitative research ... there weren't any! [13]

FAUX: Well, I was going to ask you about that. [14]

PREISSLE: It was 1975, I mean I didn't even give it a thought! I didn't think of myself as a research methodologist, at all. Period. [15]

FAUX: Did you think of yourself as a "qualitative person"? [16]

PREISSLE: I thought of myself in 1975 as a teacher educator with skills in anthropology, conceptual and methodological. [17]

And I knew, I knew, with this funky education doctorate that I wasn't going to get hired in an anthropology department, but that was never a goal. I mean, I sort of said from the beginning, that's not going to happen. And so, just do your anthropology as part of something else. This is just happenstance that one of the jobs I applied for was a job here at the University of Georgia teaching elementary social studies methods, even though I hadn't been an elementary school teacher, I had been a middle school teacher and I worked at Indiana, and the social studies I worked with was elementary. So I picked up some years of working in elementary schools with elementary school teachers, pre-service and in-service at Indiana. And I worked in their social foundations program which wasn't really a social foundations program in those days. So here I am interviewing for this job and what they liked the best about me was that my mentor and I had an article in *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (1974). So they liked that. And they liked the kind of research I was doing because they didn't have anybody here that knew how to teach it and in my ... I don't know, arrogance, I don't know what to call it, I said I could when they asked me. You know, this is okay, this is like 5 o'clock and they said "by 8 o'clock tomorrow morning we'll want a syllabus for a course." So I went back to my room and I had a good cry. And then I called my mentor and a couple of other people to send the references I needed and I put together a syllabus for a course in qualitative research. [18]

FAUX: I don't believe it. [19]

PREISSLE: This was I don't know, this was in January, I didn't even have my degree yet. And I gave it to them the next day and they were very impressed and they decided that even though the position wasn't a qualitative research position that they were going to hire me and my responsibilities in addition to teaching elementary social studies methods to pre-service teachers would be to develop and teach qualitative research and to develop an educational anthropology component. There was a course taught at that time out of the Department of Anthropology and so they wanted closer ties and they wanted development there. So that's how I got this job here at Georgia and I have to tell you that I knew the other people in the job market, I mean, they were my friends and some of them

were far better qualified in elementary social studies than I was. I just lucked out. Because I taught my first qualitative course in the spring of 1976, I had just a handful of students, just enough for the course to make. When I taught it the second time in 1978, it was oversubscribed. By 1979, I believe it was 1979, I first offered a second course because the people who had had the first course wanted it, and by 1984 or 1985 I wasn't teaching elementary social studies anymore, there were other people who could do that, they could cover that but they didn't have anybody else to cover the qualitative material. And like many qualitative research instructors of my generation, I learned my methods in an apprenticeship relationship and then taught myself how to teach these methods. It's been about 20 years now since I've done any kind of social studies methods. Since then, I've been working entirely either in our qualitative research program or in our social foundations program working in anthropology of education. I still have contact with teachers through those two routes. [20]

FAUX: Would you mind describing your first course? Exactly what was qualitative research then? What was the material you covered? [21]

PREISSLE: I actually have that syllabus somewhere. A good chunk of it was rationale. I think that the courses as they developed actually developed not in anthropology where a lot of us got our training but in either applied areas like education or maybe in sociology, and mostly the courses developed in a context where the research methods people took were primarily quantitative methods. So typically, you spend quite a bit of time looking at materials that gave rationales for why you would do qualitative research, and a lot of the publications that were coming out especially in education and sociology at that time were justifications, so there was a fair amount of material available. So there was that, the whole, why do this? How is this similar to and different from, quantitative work, and then how do you do it? How do you do it? How do you interview somebody? How do you observe? And the materials we used were limited. A lot of us used Jim SPRADLEY's (1979) book on participant observation and the ethnographic interview. We used GLASER and STRAUSS (1967), of course. We used SCHATZMAN and STRAUSS (1973). The materials were really limited. And almost immediately we were up against the lack of examples. [22]

Early on, here at Georgia, we had people from every place coming in and we still do taking these courses. They come from arts and sciences. They come from business. They come from accounting and business. And the biggest issue is that in some areas, accounting being one of them, education generally being another one, social work, there weren't the kind of rich examples that you find, even in sociology. And so that was a challenge. There were a few. I taught Harry WOLCOTT's (1973) *The Man in the Principal's Office* a lot as an example. And then the other big issue that most of us ran into is conceptualization, because I'd had so many anthropology courses as part of my training, I'd had a lot of theory. I'd had a lot of culture theory, you know. I'd had a lot of theory work. And the students I was teaching, some of them might have curriculum theory but they didn't have much, and they might have had kind of a taste of psychological theory but they didn't have much theory of how to look at group phenomena. So that

was another challenge, trying to find adequate materials, and we still don't have very good materials in that area that synthesize the kinds of conceptual theoretical frames that we need. I think those were the general areas that were in that course. We were on quarters then and so this was a five-hour, five quarter-hour course. And then what happened with the second course, if we didn't offer it in 1979, then probably it was offered in 1980 or 1981, along in there. That really became a, "now that you have all this data, what the hell are you going to do with it?" In some respects, it was a lab course. It did assume that people had a bunch of data or they were going to get it very soon. So a lot of what we did there was sit around and argue through transcripts, field notes, and other sources. And pretty much through the 1980s at Georgia, those were the two courses we taught. I can't exactly remember when sometime in the late 1980s, we hired one of our graduates to help because the demand was just getting so high and the mistake we made was hiring a junior, untenured person for building a program. Yeah, I know they did hire me, but still it's not ideal, you know. If you want to build a program, you don't put your untenured faculty to work on it because you risk a lot. I mean, I made it, but my colleague didn't. She just, she became ill. At any rate, you know, she worked here for seven years and then when she left, we decided that we just had to get serious about hiring a more senior person. I think we might have hired her actually in 1990 or 1991 because we then brought in our second person, see I'm not even now full time in the program. I teach half time in the qualitative program but we also had to re-grow our social foundations of education program. [23]

And so I teach, well it has varied. Sometimes I taught two-thirds of my time in qualitative. Right now it's half time. We brought our second person, our third person, after the second person left, we hired, I guess, what can I say, a second person, a second full-time person, if that makes sense on half time, and that was Kathleen DeMARRAIS who came in 1999, I believe, I'm pretty sure. And shortly thereafter a third person, also full time, was added. And in addition to that, one of the things I like about our program is that although we have some people who are committed full time or half time to it, we have a lot of people who teach just one course a year, who teach the beginning course or teach the analysis course. Now we have three courses in the core curriculum. The first course is almost entirely philosophical issues, theoretical issues, and examples. And we use Michael CROTTY's (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research* as a way of grounding the philosophical theoretical work. [24]

CROTTY is an Australian scholar. He died shortly after this book came out. It is a wonderful text for beginning people. It's a challenge, my students go crazy. I mean, by the second month they're out of their minds. At the end of the course, they hate the book, and the next course they go back to the book. There are always a few that love it right away but it is pretty heavy going. Anybody who discusses HEIDEGGER is a challenge. [25]

FAUX: HEIDEGGER can be a challenge for anybody. [26]

PREISSE: So that's the first course. We have a second course that is a data collection course and the focus is on obtaining quality qualitative data; it is very much a hands on course. Everybody has to interview, everybody has to observe, and everybody has to work with documents. We continue the conceptual framing throughout that. Still do a few examples but the foreground of the course is experience getting information. And incidentally, there's always some kind of experience. And we've fooled with all kinds of things. We've done a kind of in-class role playing sort of experience. We've had people collect interviews as part of other people's research projects. We've done all kinds of things to get people in the first course engaged with some kind of data gathering. But it's not the foreground of the course. The foreground of the course is philosophical and conceptual and theoretical. And then, the third course in this sequence is a data analysis course that is much more structured than my old course was. My old course was, get some data, bring your research questions and your conceptual frame, and we'll figure it out. In this course, the students formally study inductive analysis. They do some inductive analysis but there's so much more available now that we can look, there's so much to read. [27]

So the first part of the course is pretty much devoted to the various approaches to induction including GLASER and STRAUSS and others. The second part of the course right now is pretty evenly divided amongst phenomenological analysis, narrative analysis, and ethnomethodological and conversation analysis. And, again, it's a much more structured introduction to these kinds of analyses and the students, using data that they have collected either as part of the second course or other data they try to use one of these approaches. Obviously, these are not mutually exclusive approaches by any means. Their task is to say, "Well, I'm going to use narrative analysis here, here's how I'm going to do it." And the final subsection uses representational approaches from the humanities and the arts and so the students' task is to represent patterns that they've discovered in a poem, in a short story, in one of the more imaginative forms. And again, we do sort of a formal examination of examples of these and, there's less literature of course in this area, but it, too, is growing. [28]

FAUX: I think I would like to take the course! [29]

PREISSE: Well, come on down! You know, we're trying to figure out how to put these courses online. But at any rate, that's our core. We've got people who really love to do the data collection course, that's their favorite. To tell you the truth, that's my least favorite. I like the conceptual philosophical "airy-fairy" stuff. And then we have people who really love that and love to teach the first course, which I teach a lot. And right now I'm teaching the data analysis course. I teach that periodically. But then, we call this the core. Then we also have a participant observation course, we have a case study course, which I'm just teaching now. It's a new course. We have an interviewing course. The interviewing course we started developing ten years ago, maybe longer. That's the sort of specialty course that's the best developed, I think. We have, let's see, participant observation, interviewing, and case study. I piloted an ethics in qualitative research last spring. Kathy ROULSTON has taught a course in ethno-

methodology and conversational analysis. We have an arts in qualitative research course. What really makes a difference for us, Robert, is that we have this faculty that has all this experience and all these skills and they're great, so that there are those of us who kind of do the central stuff but we have, I don't know, maybe another ten people in our college and then people outside the college, people in sociology, in child and family development and social work who teach analogs to the first course. So some of our students take those particularly if they have strong clinical interests or whatever it might be. It's just a very rich environment here now at UGA (University of Georgia, Athens). It wasn't when I came here. People were doing some qualitative work when I came here in 1975 but it was kind of almost in the closet. [30]

FAUX: I'm sure. [31]

PREISSLE: The people who were doing it were almost all people who were also survey researchers or experimentalists who just had this sort of hobby. And they just loved it that somebody was going to come in and kind of help them teach their students how to do this. And I must tell you that an irony of this is that the first group, outside of social studies, the first group of graduate students outside of social studies that discovered it were the people in math education. Consistently both the faculty and the graduate students have been a major source of support and interest and encouragement. [32]

FAUX: How do you explain that? [33]

PREISSLE: Well, you can't badger a mathematician into doing a statistical analysis because a mathematician understands very well what statistics can and cannot do, and so, they're the first people, well there are these questions that you can't answer by counting things and here's why. And they had the rationale for it. [34]

FAUX: They would know. [35]

PREISSLE: They would know. Isn't that neat? [36]

FAUX: So your situation in Georgia appears to be very supportive. [37]

PREISSLE: It's great here. [38]

FAUX: Do you think it is unique? [39]

PREISSLE: Well, that's a good question. Kathleen DeMARRAIS who came in actually not just to be a senior person and a full-time person but basically to direct it (the program) because when we hired her I was the chair for social foundations and we just had to have somebody to provide leadership for the qualitative program at a time when I was doing leadership elsewhere. Kathleen and I have talked a lot about that. I think so. We have a graduate certificate program here at Georgia. It is a 15 hour program that any doctoral student, I supposed a master's

student could do it but that's never come up, any graduate student in any unit so long as their committees approve it, can add to their graduate degree, and it's been popular beyond our capacity. It was approved a year ago and we've had 20 graduates already. We've got another 55 in the pipeline. So there are all these people going out from sociology, child and family development, social work, and, of course, education, the various education fields: teacher education, as well as special education and other areas, who have this certificate and who are getting jobs. As a matter of fact one of my science education people who is finishing this, or can finish if she wants to, I'll put it that way, this summer, got a job offer from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte teaching half in their qualitative program because she's going to have this certificate. And what allows us to do that, Robert, is that we have the people. Now the program is just a program, it's not a department, it's not an academic unit. But we fully intend to develop a doctoral concentration in the study of qualitative research methods. And we actually have people and right now the program is housed in educational psychology in its research measurement program. [40]

But actually, the program is now moving to the policy unit. But we have people in the doctoral program in educational psychology who are basically doing a qualitative research degree. [41]

FAUX: That is very interesting for me to hear, being an educational psychologist. For the most part, mainstream psychology is very much oriented to experimentation and quantification. [42]

PREISSLE: Basically, they do qualitative studies, they study the methods, they take the courses, and so even before we have a degree, we have people who have job offers. [43]

FAUX: That is very fascinating to me, as I mentioned previously in relation to psychology in general, with educational psychology specifically, quantification seems to be the road to the truth. [44]

PREISSLE: Well, that's the way it's been since early in the 20th century, FREUD being the exception, and PIAGET's methods being kind of overlooked. [45]

FAUX: That's true. [46]

PREISSLE: You know what we did when we brought PIAGET's ideas to the U.S.? We quantified them. You know? He didn't do that! [47]

FAUX: In fact, Piaget extensively used the clinical interview in his research. [48]

PREISSLE: But, I've got a bunch of new methods books on qualitative work in psychology on my shelf. Even in traditional psychology I think there's interest developing. You know, it's slow. [49]

FAUX: Well, I'm glad to hear that. We might have to have another discussion about that, actually. That's very interesting. It seems that from the beginning of your career you were a "qualitative person." [50]

PREISSLE: Well from the very beginning, I was interested in people's experiences of their world and I was interested in explaining social life, not just explaining, understanding social life. I guess culture was it from the day I walked into my first anthropology class and I got an inkling. I had a funky course as a high school student. It was one of those social studies courses that, I think was a combination of sociology and economics, and because it was for high school students, a lot of the sociology really drew from qualitative sociology and that really, I think, disposed me to qualitative thinking. [51]

The other thing that I think was a big factor is that my dad worked for Union Carbide and we moved around a lot. Not as much as the military. Corporation brats usually weren't uprooted as much as military brats were, but enough. So I spent most of my life never having an in-group, always being on the margin. Always trying to get used to some new group and you know you see a lot from the edges. [52]

FAUX: Being on the periphery often allows you to see much more. [53]

PREISSLE: You have a different experience of life from that position and I think that predisposed me to be a watcher and to reflect on what was going on in ways that people on the inside don't think about because they're too busy doing. [54]

FAUX: How true. Yes. [55]

PREISSLE: The other thing was, that one of the moves, we lived in North Carolina twice, once when I was preschool, and I don't remember a whole lot about that, but we moved back to North Carolina, in this case from Ohio, as I was going into eighth grade in, probably, 1956. Before that we lived a year in Ohio and before that in Vermont where I did most of my elementary school. So moving from the North to the South in the 1950s, was another profound experience. Observing the kind of formal segregation, legal segregation, socially approved and supported segregation that you would find in Eastern North Carolina, and at a time when the civil rights movement was just getting steam up, that certainly led to a focus on culture and cultural conflict. Trying to understand people that I liked and enjoyed could have such incredible attitudes, negative attitudes towards other people that seemed to me also to be perfectly fine and pleasant, wonderful people. [56]

3. Influence on the Field and Current Work

FAUX: Well, now I would like to ask you to be a little immodest and talk about what you see as your contribution to the general field of qualitative research. [57]

PREISSE: Golly. Well, I think the work that I did with Marki LECOMPTE, mostly in the 1980s, had one sort of strand of influence. Certainly, that work was cited and quoted in a lot in educational research. And a lot of what we were doing was trying to synthesize the multiple traditions in qualitative research and make it accessible to educational researchers. So I think that body of work. We were the third qualitative methods book published that had education in the title. [58]

FAUX: I can understand the importance of that kind of book for educational researchers who were introducing themselves to these methods in the context of quantification and experimentation. [59]

PREISSE: The first one was Marion DOBBART's (1982) book that she did with some, well I don't know if she did that with other people, anyhow, it had limited distribution. A lot of people have never heard of it. And the second one was BOGDAN and BICKLEN's (1982) first edition. And it was sort of like, DOBBART's came out in one year and then BOGDAN and BICKLEN and then the book that Marki and I did, explaining how to do this kind of research. So that's one impact I guess on the field. And that's probably the work in its various offshoots in journal articles and so on, that's probably the work that has had the, the most distant kind of impact. The first edition was translated into Spanish. So in terms of reaching a global audience that did. [60]

Some of what we did was really, I think, grossly, from my point of view, misinterpreted by other folks. What we were trying to do was to write a descriptive methods book. Not here's how you have to do things or ought to do things but here's how ethnographers and qualitative researchers do things and here's what we think are strengths and limitations by various criteria. And here's how their work compares with that of other researchers. To the extent that that material, especially those two books, are prescriptive, that was almost kind of pressed on us by the editors and the reviewers: "well tell us how you ought to do things." Well, that didn't interest me. I am interested in building a course in ethics and so I am interested in "oughts" of course, but in this case, my interest was more in synthesizing what people do to solve their research problems and the creative ways in which they do it rather than to say this is how you ought to do things. I would really contrast that text with the MARSHALL and ROSSMAN (1989) handbooks. And there's a market for that and some of my students need that and so I use those. But Marki and I were doing a piece that actually was marketed not just as a textbook but as a text reference. [61]

It's really not pitched to beginners. And I think that's why it's still in print. They let it go out of print last year and then they brought it back, because it is an analysis in synthesis rather than a prescriptive kind of approach. So I'd say that's sort of one category, there's an impact on the literature and the impact has been

primarily trying to synthesize and analyze and write a study of, it's a methodology rather than a methods. There are methods in it, but what we were after was trying to study the methods other people use to figure out, you know, look for patterns and themes. So that's kind of a category. I think a second category is the local impact which isn't just local anymore because our students have gone on all over the country and elsewhere and that's the programmatic impact. You were asking earlier if this was unique. There are places around the country that have a qualitative course. There are places around the country that even have a sequence of courses. We know of no place that has either a certificate program or a degree program as yet. And we think it's because either there's not a critical mass, there are people at places. There's Yvonna LINCOLN at Texas A&M. There have been people at Illinois, but it's usually one person, two people. And if there was a critical mass, the conditions were not such that you had somebody to provide leadership and administrative support for that leadership. So I think in that sense, we are unique. I just don't know. I mean we're looking. We keep searching the web. I mean even Alberta, which has a center and a journal and all that, is basically one person. I mean they have a lot of people who visit but it's a one person shop. And their focus of course is health professions. So that's a little different. So that's kind of a second area. And I don't know how to categorize a third area, but since 1991, I've run a qualitative list serve, that people, you know, they get on, they get off. I have a few people, David MORGAN in focus groups, and Michael PATTON who have been there forever, and Gary SHANK. [62]

Many people don't often participate until people get themselves into real difficulties and then David and Michael and Gary kind of come striding in and say "no, there's no rule that you can't count when you're doing qualitative research." So then I had that and then this past year I've picked up Judy NORRIS' QualPage. This is a web site that was developed at Alberta but there just wasn't anybody who could continue. Judy retired and so we picked it up here. [QualPage was founded on 29 January 1995; <http://www.qualitativeresearch.uga.edu/QualPage>] So I think that venue, the Internet venue, has been a third area of contribution. I don't know how to characterize it. But because of QUALRS-L, the listserv, and because now of QualPage which has taken me a while to, it's still not in great shape because I'm just learning Dreamweaver. [63]

I think that that's where we're going. I think that providing accessibility and a venue and a place for people who, you know, are at the University of whatever, outer Brazil, and they're the first qualitative person and they just need a community. Maybe community building, Internet community building among the qualitative folks, maybe that's the third area that I'm trying to articulate here. [64]

So those are kinds of different kinds of contributions. Probably conceptually, what characterizes what I've done is that although my work is very rooted in a social service discipline, it is a social science that is most humanistic, I think, anthropology, and consequently, I don't know how much work, I don't know how familiar you are with anthropology, but U.S. anthropology is characterized by people always talking about the four-field approach. Anthropology is social

culture, which mostly I do, linguistics, physical, and archeological. And somehow or another, I took courses in most of those areas as I was trained and so I think that that really frames a lot of my methodological work. I am not as abrupt, I don't just dismiss biological factors in explaining human behavior the way some of my colleagues in education and sociology do because I've studied biological anthropology and I know that a lot of what we do is a function of the kind of animals we are. Whether you like it or not, I'm not terribly very deterministic in how I apply that but, bipedal intelligent mammals are just going to look at the world differently than quadrupedal intelligent animals or aquatic intelligent animals, and that's that! That physical biological quality is just going to be there. And I think that part of that, Robert, is that background makes me, orients me to looking at facets of everything including research methods. [65]

FAUX: Okay, that's very interesting. [66]

PREISSLE: I don't say, well there's quantitative and there's qualitative. I don't see that division. Egon GUBA told me once that I was schizophrenic and well ... to him I am. He felt that he had this thing about epistemologies and paradigms and you could only have one paradigm and that's what a paradigm was. That's a very prescriptive way at looking at the world. I don't think that's the lived experience of most researchers. [67]

FAUX: However, do you think that that perspective is common, at least among academics and researchers, that very prescriptive and rigid way of looking at things? [68]

PREISSLE: Yeah. More than I would like. I think prescriptions turn too quickly into ideology and then you're not doing what I think of as inquiry scholarship science anymore. You're doing religion. [69]

FAUX: Well put. [70]

PREISSLE: I got a year off to study philosophy a couple years ago which is what got me deeply into issues of ethics, research ethics and other kinds of ethics. And it's also helping me, that year really helped me think about epistemology and foundational philosophical issues in ways that I'd been kind of longing for. It's given me language. It's given me a framework. I feel much more confident now. I can kind of stand up and say "that's only a way of conceptualizing the world. It's not a description of reality." If there is a description of reality. But I find it ironic that people who consider themselves to be anti-realists will insist that there's only one way, the correct way, to conceptualize research methods. I mean, what is that? Now, that's frustrating and it frustrates my students. I have students who want the truth. They don't believe in the truth, but they want the truth. And I mean, you've encountered this too and you know, sometimes you can introduce them to other ways of thinking and sometimes they're very resistant and they're just not going to see it. So you know, you do the best you can and maybe in five years they'll think back and be able to draw from something that you interacted about. [71]

FAUX: Well, I've always thought that the allure of quantification is that it makes things concrete. You have your numbers, so you must have the truth. [72]

PREISSLE: If we can count it, it must be there. [73]

FAUX: Precisely. [74]

PREISSLE: And sometimes it is! [75]

FAUX: Sometimes it is, right. [76]

PREISSLE: I tell my students that regardless of the positions I take in our philosophical discussions, when I get on a plane, you better believe I'm a realist! I do not, I am not interested in interpretive pilots. No, no, no. [77]

FAUX: Yes, getting on a plane makes us all realists, I think. [78]

PREISSLE: But I have to say that I enjoy this, and I enjoy all this, I call it "airy-fairness." I enjoy the conceptualization and the theorizing about our endeavors. What do I get the most passionate about, is that even though I always have lots more questions about it than I have solutions. I like to teach qualitative research as this is where the state of the art in science is right now and you guys are "gonna" take it somewhere else. I mean, when I started, nobody I was talking to used the word "post-modernism." And I think one of the things that I've seen over the years is that a whole bunch of people that couldn't deal with the challenges of the critical theorists and then later the challenges of the post-modernists and post-structuralists, and this is not just in this area, this is everywhere. You know, they've just sort of gone off and in their own little corners talking to themselves. And I think that's too bad. I think that's what happened in the 1930s and 1940s and 1950s, people went into corners and they only talked to other people who were using the same frameworks. I think that's dangerous. [79]

FAUX: Definitely, yes. There are psychology departments where the clinicians don't talk with the experimentalists. [80]

PREISSLE: I try to maintain a healthy skepticism about any framework I'm using, even though I love reading FOUCAULT and I find his insights—well, first of all, he's very historically oriented. [81]

FAUX: True. [82]

PREISSLE: And his insights into the patterns that are affecting people, the social patterns, the cultural patterns, are just marvelous. I think he himself was skeptical about what he was doing at least from what I've read in that he of all people was reluctant to be prescriptive. Even at his most prescriptive, he was still ambivalent about prescribing. [83]

4. Challenges

FAUX: Well, I would like to ask, we just, you know described the situation in Georgia as being very nurturing. I was just wondering what challenges you had to face, overcome, in doing what you're doing? [84]

PREISSLE: Well, the environment here is nurturing. It is also demanding of faculty members individually. So, succeeding academically here is one challenge. Well, we've really had to educate the larger community on the kinds of expectations you might have with somebody who does something other than experimental, quasi-experimental, and survey research. You are not going to typically publish as many separate pieces. You're going to do work and publish work that is going to look different. Generally it's been a supportive environment, it's still a demanding environment. So I think that's a challenge. We face the same challenge that everybody does around the country on the vast shift in research management. When I started out, when I wanted to study something, I just went and studied it. And if I did anything bad, well, maybe my peers would fuss at me but I'm not sure that peer control is any more effective among researchers than it is among doctors and lawyers. So we've had this tremendous influence of federal regulation. I won't say of the ethics of research because although it is intended to promote more ethical treatment and more ethical interaction, it's really, it puts it in a bureaucratic framework and that has problems of its own. But it certainly is control. And I've been on our university IRB (Institutional Review Board), I don't know, twelve years. That has been a challenge. But that would be a challenge anywhere, so that's not just Georgia. But I think that at Georgia, just like anywhere else, we've been coming to grips on how you get pre-approval for research but you don't know how it's going to turn out, so that's been a struggle for us here, but that's a struggle everywhere. [85]

Maybe something unique to Georgia is that we're doing what we're doing using people from many, many, many units across the university and definitely all around the college. And, Robert, anything we do is put together with safety pins. I mean it looks really great from the outside but we've had a lot of administrative change and new administrators come in and they want their agenda and so we're still challenged with the task of institutionalizing this work, this program. [86]

FAUX: And that would not be unique to Georgia, do you think? [87]

PREISSLE: I suspect that that's an issue everywhere and it's partly a function of, I think if you do this well it's got to be cross disciplinary, interdisciplinary. And, you know, that's hard to do. The literature in interdisciplinarity is tiny. You can actually read everything's that's out there. Probably not for long, but ... [88]

FAUX: But for the moment. [89]

PREISSLE: So that, when you're working in a knowledge industry, if I can use that term, in a knowledge industry that has built its success on specialization and you are, and your success comes out of generalization, not specialization, but

generalization and making connections across areas and when some of your best exemplars of success are people are working in new areas, they are senior people who are going to new areas and there are people brand new. Institutionally, that's a challenge. And that's going to be a challenge anywhere. [90]

5. The Future

FAUX: What do you see lying in the future? [91]

PREISSLE: Well, I wrote an article on that. It was in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(6), 1999, "Coming of Age as an Educational Ethnographer." Well, I think I did a trinitarian thing there, well maybe there were four, but technology is just profoundly, profoundly affecting what we're doing. You've got a machine that's recording our conversation, you're not having to write notes. We're very close, well, we're somewhat close, I guess, to a machine that's going to transcribe this. Actually, we have the machine to transcribe it, but I'm not going to train it. You know, we're going to have transcription machines pretty soon. We have all kinds of marvelous equipment for recording observations and we have access to documents that we don't have to travel miles to view. So our work is changing. For one thing, however much data we thought was plentiful thirty years ago, we're now basically buried in data because of our technology and so, synthesizing and selection and analysis are going to become more and more crucial. I think that if we're going to make any sense of all this, we're going to depend more and more on human judgment with all of this plenitude of data, of information. And as part of that sort of growing accessibility of everyone to everyone else that technology provides, probably my biggest question is that whether in fifty years we'll have any need for professional researchers because anybody who has a question is going to have access to the means of addressing that question. So my second, I don't know, it's not a prediction so much but I think more and more people are going to have the leisure and means to inquire and that may mean eventually that professional inquirers have to find some other way to support themselves. I mean this is certainly, when you look just in a practitioner area like education or the health professions, what are we doing? We're training all the practitioners to study themselves. So what the hell do they need us for? [92]

Undoubtedly the third thing is conceptual and that's the way we think things are going to change. I don't know if this is going to happen but I think interdisciplinarity is going to be it. [93]

Not that specialization isn't important and won't continue to be important but because of the changing technology and the way we set up our communities has changed, we don't just have to sit in the corner and look at one thing. We can always, we're better able to immediately connect to people who are looking at that one thing and all the different ways it can be looked at including its relationship to other things. And so I think that's going to profoundly affect our conceptualization. We're not going to be thinking in competing ideologies. We're not going to think that there's only one way to understand something and I think that's going to significantly deepen our conceptual theoretical understanding. I

came of age at a time when SKINNER and ROGERS used to have these debates about behaviorism versus, I don't know, humanistic psychology, and you know, like there was just one way. And what were we thinking? Those men were brilliant men. Those men were brilliant and whatever led them to think that they only needed one way to understand things. And I fear that although thinking eclectically and thinking in connections is something that we see a lot in the academy, it just seems like politically we've retreated from that, you know with this whole notion of the Congress commissioning the National Research Council to define scientific education. I think one of the things that is so ironic about that is that some of the most offended people are my quantitative friends. They're not that enamored of clinical trials. So that's another area of change. It's we're already in the middle of it, we're caught up in it. We've got the old fogies over there in the corner who aren't going to post anything but they're all retiring off and then we've got the current crop of complex thinkers, it seems to be they're complex anyhow. And I think that what's going to happen is that there's going to be some synthesis and coalescing in ways that I can't anticipate. My students are going to have to, they're the ones that are probably going to do that. [94]

FAUX: So the future looks bright? [95]

PREISSLE: The future ... well, not if every man, every woman, everyone becomes a researcher. We're out of work! [96]

FAUX: True enough. [97]

PREISSLE: If our vision is to educate people to conduct their own inquiries, the future is bright indeed because they will be able to do it, they'll have the technological skills and resources to do it. So I think one of our futures is bright. If we're going to start legislating science and scholarship, I take that to be about as dismal a picture as you can get. I mean, the last nation I'm aware of that did this was the Soviets when they basically shut down genetics in the Soviet Union by fiat; they couldn't deal with MENDEL. [98]

FAUX: Right, right, yes. [99]

PREISSLE: You know? And I think that's a danger. So that alternative future could be dim indeed, could be dark. [100]

FAUX: Yes. [101]

PREISSLE: In the discussion of the refinancing of the Higher Education Act that's going on in Congress now, I understand, I read this on e-mail and I didn't save it so I can't substantiate it, but I read that one member of Congress was proposing that all universities in the United States be required to have a balance of conservative to liberal thinkers, because the present academic community is regarded as sort of the last bastion of liberal thinking. Maybe it is. But I haven't read anything more about it, so. [102]

FAUX: Well, this has been a joy and an honor for me to be able to sit and finally chat with you. This has been very, very enlightening. Do you see yourself as being a, oh, I don't want to use the word pioneer, but do you see yourself as someone who is clearing away the brush in a way in terms of this different way of doing research, of thinking about research? [103]

PREISSE: Well, my grandmother considered herself a pioneer and she told me repeatedly right up until months before she died that I was a pioneer like her. I'm not sure what she understood by that, but that's what she would tell me. A part of it is this is a woman with a second grade education who lived to see one of, more than one of her grandchildren get a doctorate. Well, maybe she died before anybody else did, I was the first one. So being a pioneer has always appealed to me, pioneering stuff. And so, but I don't think I set out to pioneer this field. I mean, I'm an accidental pioneer. I fell into it. And I got opportunities. So I had, I mean if I had taken any one of a number of other jobs that year, I don't know where I'd be now. I don't know what my scholarship would look like. It wasn't, I never set out to be a qualitative research methodologist, because there weren't any. So I guess I am a pioneer. [104]

FAUX: It sounds as though you are! [105]

PREISSE: And I enjoy it. And now I enjoy being the curmudgeonly, I don't know, fading generation who remembers what it was like when you had to learn this either by yourself or from a professor who had some time to devote to you. And I think there are some specific things that I have contributed to that I feel really good about, and we talked about what those were. [106]

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