

## Looking at Interviewing: From "Just Talk" to Meticulous Method

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Review Essay:

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**Abstract:** Usually presented as a conglomerate of skill-based procedures, interviewing actually has substantive significance at the heart of the enterprise of the social sciences. That may explain why this most obvious of research methods is still a perennial issue. In the essay, I look at how definitions of interviewing in some well-known manuals link up with recommendations for embedding interviews in research. Recent writing on interviewing shows increasing fragmentation. The method is described differently according to the sociological and psychological domains that use it. In the recent *Handbook of qualitative research*, interviewing is presented for the most part in relation to usage in life stories, personal experiences, oral history, and counseling, not to mention conversational analysis and discourse analysis. WENGRAF's book takes a new tack in subordinating the different themes that lend themselves to interviewing to a detailed inquiry into the depth interview as a *sui generis* experience. Aiming to enhance the technical repertoire of the interested professional and the student novice, WENGRAF provides a panoramic view of the many ways in which in-depth interviewing can be conceptualized and realized in action. And in doing so according to the norms that have become familiar in qualitative research, he demonstrates that interviewing is a way of life, that "doing" interviewing is having the privilege of making choices that promote a social dialectic. WENGRAF has produced a textbook that will be of use to many researchers for some time to come.

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## **1. Introduction**

If, as POWNEY and WATTS (1984, p.2) say, an interview is simply "a conversation between two or more people where one or more of the participants takes the responsibility for reporting the substance of what is said," (qualitative) interviewing should be the least problematic method at the command of the social scientist. For one thing, talk is the quintessential participative human experience. For another, everybody who engages in talk is at once involved in structuring and interpreting it, very much as is the interviewer. Implicitly, therefore, research textbooks that deal with interviewing take on a gargantuan responsibility. Although it is usually presented as a conglomerate of procedures based on skills that are to be practiced and internalized, interviewing actually has substantive significance at the heart of the enterprise of the social sciences. [1]

The interviewer-interviewee encounter is an example of the kinds of social contacts that are available in any given society. The interview is, in short, a model of dialectically emergent social relations. Every such encounter enfolds a living kernel that is goaded to development in the course of the procedure. By their co-presence, participants in the interview act and interact in terms of backdrops known only to each—their life-histories—and in terms of the perspective each holds of the future (KELLY, 1955). Furthermore, the interactive experience of the interview is an enhancement of each person's life-course with a distinctively keyed shared knowledge (WHITEHEAD, 1968/1947). Hence, in providing guidelines for interviewing, a researcher places herself in the position of defending a particular vision of the nature of society and also of the measures worth taking in order to reproduce a moral system (BERGMANN & LUCKMANN, 1999). [2]

It is therefore understandable why many agree, "Asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first" (FONTANA & FREY, 2000, p.361). Empirically, this statement is buttressed by the extensive literature purporting to teach how to do interviews in psychological and sociological research, both quantitative and qualitative (cf. most recently, FIELDING, 2002). A cursory glance at texts devoted to qualitative research shows, moreover, that in qualitative studies the how's and why's of interviewing are constantly discussed. Still, there is no single consensual definition of interviewing. Even if we accept the minimal definitions noted here: asking questions and getting answers, or a conversation that is to be reported, there are complicating matters. Each participant—whether or not s/he is a researcher—is likely to grasp the significance of the exchange differently. Moreover, meaningful conversation implies a lead into action. The realization depends on the purpose of the talk with its discursive structure and with the life trajectory of those who are doing the talking. When we implicate talk in a scientific endeavor, researchers' theoretical

orientations determine for them how to interpret the depth of the experience of talk and to what extent to expand or contract the treatment of interviewing as a method. In the stricter analytical sense of investigator expertise, dealing with interviewing is complicated by issues such as the perception of the need for detail and the significance of traditional scientific criteria—validity or "truth to historical fact"—and reliability. [3]

In his book, *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods*, Tom WENGRAF seems to be making an attempt to resolve these problems once and for all. Almost four hundred pages are dense evidence of how complicated it is to conceptualize what should and does go on in interviews, to explain methods of interviewing and methods of analyzing the data. The resourceful, multi-faceted approach that WENGRAF adopts toward qualitative interviewing, intimates that, by contrast with many other writers on the topic, he realizes the high seriousness of the method. He succeeds in conveying the idea that a wide variety of socially sanctioned moments can be actualized in the exploration in depth of how an-other grasps the world. Not many researchers deal with the interview with full awareness of the weight of the undertaking. [4]

I will now cite some definitions of interviewing and trace how different definitions link up with different recommendations for embedding interviews in research. By doing this, I will be able to provide a rough draft of a plan for ascertaining how WENGRAF's book fits in with the literature and goes beyond it to establish a model for a moral approach to research. [5]

## 2. Defining and Explaining Interviewing

In order to show something of the range of issues that inspire WENGRAF's text, I will focus on a small sample of widely accepted manuals on methodology that deal with interviewing, among them two textbooks on research in education. [6]

In their comprehensive book on social research methods, GOODE and HATT (1952) focus for the most part on procedures for good practice in quantitative methods. Still, they do devote more than twenty pages (GOODE & HATT, 1952, pp.184-208) to a discussion of the qualitative interview (albeit the references quoted at the end of the chapter are all of quantitative interview studies). While professing admiration for the range of findings that qualitative interviews have yielded to the sensitive researchers of the Chicago School (who were able to gain unique understandings of the worlds of hoboes and gangs), GOODE and HATT are, however, skeptical of the looseness of the method. They assert the general rule that "interviewing is the development of focus, reliability, and validity in [a] ... social act—conversation" (GOODE & HATT, 1952, p.184). Aspiring to reduce interviewer bias and boost reliability and validity, they not only detail aspects of what they hold to be good practice, but also itemize the specific difficulties that are to be avoided, insofar as possible, in the qualitative interview. Thus, GOODE and HATT advise the interviewer on how to encourage the interviewee to respond, how to manage rapport, how to probe responses, as well as how to

make a record of the interview and how to close it. For each issue they provide examples from actual interview situations. [7]

On the authority of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, MADGE (1967/1953, p.144) defines the interview as "a meeting of persons face to face, especially for the purpose of a formal conference on some point." Instead of presenting the qualitative interview as a single category, MADGE provides extensive instructions to the apprentice interviewer on what he considers a continuum of methods from the qualitative to the quantitative (MADGE, 1967, pp.144-252). In his view, the approach to interviews can and should be differentiated according to the status of the interviewees as well as according to the purpose of the researcher. With rank in mind as a key factor, MADGE provides the novice with differential recommendations about how to interview heads of organizations—"influencing potentates," how to interview "experts," and how to interview "people" [sic!]. In terms of design, he distinguishes between the "formative interview," the one on one interview that has several subtypes: non-directive, focused, informal, or a life history; and the "mass interview" which is his name for highly structured questionnaires. To provide specific guidance for the researcher interested in qualitative interviewing, MADGE centers on the "non-directive interview," and, including professional psychologists' tools in the repertoire, he contrasts the social scientists' relatively "focused interview" with the non-interview that prevails in psychoanalytic counseling. For each type of interview he describes, MADGE quotes examples of what he considers good practice. [8]

### 3. Specification in Terms of Theoretical Groundwork

While the textbooks noted above focus on dispensing good advice that derives from researchers' experiences, there are also textbooks that describe interviewing as an activity based on a conscious theoretical orientation. I want to mention two of them—SILVERMAN's (1985) *Qualitative methodology and sociology*, and SPRADLEY's (1979) *The ethnographic interview*. Both describe their theoretical position as stemming from symbolic interaction. SILVERMAN (1985) states his own position in order to establish the point of departure for explicating connections between various schools of sociological theory and research of different kinds. Rejecting the idea of providing a "cookbook" of methods, he locates interviewing as the appropriate empirical translation of theoretical frameworks such as symbolic interaction and ethnomethodology (SILVERMAN, 1985, p.xii). He also defends the possibility of doing research that combines qualitative and quantitative methods, because to his mind there are advantages to both constructionist and positivist approaches. To illustrate his theses, he calls on sociological theorists from DURKHEIM to FOUCAULT, and locates interviewing where appropriate, according to different aspects of each theory. [9]

By contrast with SILVERMAN, who points up the recommendations that can be derived from explicit reliance on sociological theory, SPRADLEY's goal is to provide a document with the help of which budding anthropologists can learn about culture from the language of the interviewee. Teaching how to conduct

ethnographic interviews and how to analyze them, he fleshes out a technique that is pertinent to the qualitative researcher in all the social sciences. SPRADLEY (1979) sets out to teach a "way" infused with his convictions about symbolic interaction, and based on his own experience as an anthropologist who sees ethnography as the heart of social research. Having done "a kind of informal ethnography of ethnography," as he puts it, he proposes a "Developmental Research Sequence" (DRS)—a set of experiences and tasks that, if followed, will provide systematic facilitative training to the ethnographer who is, to his mind, necessarily, if implicitly, of a constructivist persuasion (SPRADLEY, 1979, p.227). To this end, SPRADLEY goes into detail about how to locate an informant, how to ask questions (in his terms: "descriptive," "structural," and "contrast" questions), how to analyze responses ("domain," "taxonomic," and "componential" analyses) and how to discover cultural themes. The DRS culminates in instructions on how to write up the ethnography. SPRADLEY expands on the importance of working through the DRS as training for ethnographic interviewing, while noting where independence and imagination are necessary. [10]

#### **4. Interviews in Educational Research**

Interviews are highlighted as well in the research literature that has grown up around schools and classrooms. Much of the writing on research in education is written for scientists who visit schools and investigate them for external academic or political purposes (see for example: LECOMPTE, MILLROY & PREISSELE, 1992). Here, I think it will be of special interest to look at two textbooks that appeal to teachers and attempt to encourage them to engage in research. One is by HITCHCOCK and HUGHES (1989) and the other by VERMA and MALLICK (1999). [11]

HITCHCOCK and HUGHES recommend that teachers develop interviews by building on the types of encounters that are an integral part of the educational situation. They devote the fourth chapter of their book on *Research and the teacher: A qualitative introduction to school-based research* to examining nine types of interactions. In their conceptualization of the method, these nine types form a continuum from the least to the most controlled types of interviews (HITCHCOCK & HUGHES, 1989, pp.79-107). In their classification, "conversations" are the loosest type of talk that can serve an interviewer. From conversations they go up the ladder, so to speak, listing the possibilities as unstructured interviews, ethnographic interviews, oral history, and life history. Still more structured are the diary interview, the counseling interview, the survey interview, and the (fully) structured interview. In guiding potential researchers, HITCHCOCK and HUGHES emphasize the context of interviewing and instruct the teacher interviewer in how to shape the situation so as to smooth the progress of eliciting information. They also provide some general guidelines about how to analyze the materials that are collected. [12]

The list explicated by HITCHCOCK and HUGHES is based on their conceptualization of the possibilities for research in schools as well as on a broad acceptance of research styles. Because the school is the center of such a medley

of life experiences, all of the types of interviews cited are in their view adaptable to school situations and available to the target audience of the volume, teachers interested in doing well thought-out research. In its particularities, furthermore, the inventory is a sweeping acceptance of interviewing as it has been developed in clinical practice and in diverse disciplines. ROGERS' (1961) reliance on the non-directive interview as a method of healing, for example, is accorded the same kind of salience as is THOMPSON's (1978) adaptation of the interview as a means of gaining insight into the human side of history. [13]

In a text that appeared a decade later for purportedly the same audience, this optimistic wide-ranging orientation to school research is in retreat. In their survey of "research tools in education," VERMA and MALLICK (1999, pp.122-129) adopt the definition of POWNEY and WATTS (see above) as the key to the method of interviewing. They then quote a schematic index of guidelines for how to carry out interviews, and proceed to a generalized overview of the intricacies of qualitative interviewing, the considerations needed in deciding on the type of interview and on planning. In dedicating a limited space to interviewing (seven pages of a chapter that also includes comments on methods of observation and the analysis of documentary evidence), they demonstrate a healthy appreciation of educational realities rather than a disregard for essential research instruments. Since their concern is with promoting the kind of research that teachers are actually likely to carry out in schools, VERMA and MALLICK intentionally downplay qualitative interviewing because it is a method that, to their minds, is, in the last analysis, likely to be too much of a burden for teachers. As they read conditions in schools, interviewing has the major liability of requiring a significant investment of resources—time and money. Realistically, most teachers in schools are probably too overburdened to adopt interviewing as a full-fledged research procedure. If a small number of teachers are captivated by the outline suggested in this relatively condensed textbook, they are referred to further readings where extensive instructions are available. [14]

## 5. Diversification of the Qualitative Interview

The practical attitude of VERMA and MALLICK is one way of dealing with the glut of materials on interviews. In the realm of the social sciences, the approach has taken another turn. It is perhaps a natural outcome of the extraordinary diversity in treating qualitative interviewing that the topic as a single issue all but disappears in many up-to-date texts. A good example of the many facets of interviewing can be seen in the highly successful *Handbook of qualitative research* (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2000). Informed by sensitivity to the differences that make a difference, the *Handbook* presents the niceties of interviewing in qualitative research in several different chapters. A chapter called "Interviewing: The art of science" by FONTANA and FREY does indeed open the section on methodology. In their short historical sketch of interviewing as a method, however, the authors provide what can only be called a scant outline. They trace three types of interviews—structured, unstructured and open-ended, and, despite the fact that the volume is a compendium about qualitative research, they devote considerable space to the development of quantitative methods at Columbia

University in the 1950s and the 1960s by LAZERSFELD and his colleagues. Several pages comprise recommendations to the interviewer that do little more than echo the work of GOODE and HATT (1952). They touch on "accessing the setting," "deciding on how to present oneself," "establishing rapport," and "collecting materials." They then go on to laud the feminist approach to interviewing as an open, frank, emotionally saturated conversation. Implicit is the recommendation that whatever the purpose of the research, the open conversation is the best practice. In summary, FONTANA and FREY take a stand in favor of creativity and post-modernism in interviewing. But there is no serious argument to support this position. All together, what seems to be planned as an overview of a comprehensive topic can easily be seen to be overly selective. [15]

In the 643 pages *Handbook*, the many gaps of this paper are redeemed, however, by the extended treatment of interviewing in several other chapters. Thus, different aspects of what in the traditional methodological literature was considered "the" topic of interviewing, appear in chapters as diverse as: "Biographical method" (SMITH, 2000), "Three approaches to participative inquiry" (REASON, 2000), "Clinical research" (MILLER & CRABTREE, 2000), "Personal experience methods" (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000), and "Feminisms and models of qualitative research" (OLESEN, 2000). In short, types of interviews that were formerly cited as integral to the repertoire of every interviewer have, by the 1990s, become the focus of self-sufficient streams of research, each with an expanding body of supporting theory and a library of exemplars. If I may be forgiven the liberty: according to the *Handbook of qualitative inquiry*, varieties of the interview have arrived, taking on, in KUHN's (1972) terms, all the trappings of "normal sciences." These include some special streams that are still worthy of mention. [16]

## **6. An Outgrowth of Interviewing: Focus on Language**

All the different approaches to interviewing cited in the *Handbook of qualitative research* mention the importance of "understanding the language and culture of the informants." Insistence on the importance of language as the bearer of meaning in the interview has traditionally been central to theoretical analyses of the collection and analysis of interview data. Emphasizing the need to elicit authentic self-expression of the interviewee, most schools of interviewing rely on tactics and strategies to highlight the importance of uninhibited interaction. Attention to this aspect of interviewing stems, of course, from the anthropological tradition of doing ethnographies in communities whose language is initially unknown to the researcher. In his proposals for conducting and analyzing ethnographic interviews, SPRADLEY (1979) maintains that every research field represents a culture that can be made plain only if the ethnographer gains proficiency in the natives' use of language. He illustrates the universality of the challenge with examples of his own struggle to learn the (English) language of the tramps whose culture he studied. [17]

Niceties of understanding the language in interviews are mentioned in the *Handbook of qualitative research*, but are not accorded complete chapters. There

is, however, a rich social science literature that goes beyond the stages of collecting data via interviewing. There are schools of autonomous inquiry that focus on the analysis of authentic language in social settings. Since the early work of GARFINKEL (1967) and SACKS (1972), ethnomethodology has nourished the field of conversation analysis, an intricate type of inquiry. Many researchers have elaborated highly detailed analyses of conversations and interactive structures (cf. POLLNER, 1987; ZIMMERMAN, 1988). In addition, a macro-sociological approach to language is to be found in discourse analysis where the object is to go beyond the immediate interaction. By studying "utterances in order to understand how the potential of the linguistic system can be activated when it intersects at its moment of use with a social system" (FISKE, 2000, p.195), the discourse analyst seeks out the weaknesses of the social system and the moments available for corrective change (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992; 2001). Thus, while conversation analysis generally focuses on disclosing the socially sanctioned and institutionalized structure of micro-exchanges, the field of discourse analysis, in its attempts to locate micro-events in a macro-framework is identified with schools of critical sociology (POTTER & WETHERELL, 1994). [18]

## **7. The Power of Qualitative Interviewing**

Despite the insistence on qualitative interviewing as a "powerful" form of research in its own right, the literature is still rife with arguments about the nature of its power. The differences are best noted in the debates between interpretivist and constructionist approaches. In tune with a DURKHEIMian view of the centrality of society and of social constraints, interpretivists view human action against a backdrop of a reality that pre-exists individuals and groups. As SCHWANDT (2000, p.119) puts it, "Owing in part to unresolved tensions between their rationalist and romanticist roots, interpretivists wrestle with maintaining the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity, engagement and objectification." They thus have to deal with the "paradox of how to develop an objective interpretive science of subjective human experience." In such a context, findings from interviews are tested for validity in an attempt to assess whether what people tell corresponds to an objectively verifiable reality. This theme is constantly debated in terms of psychological possibilities and social models (BHASKAR, 1978). Furthermore, although there is ample evidence that different interviewers elicit information that differs in kind and even in detail, this approach to research also implies that data should be tested in some convincing way for reliability (SCHUTZ & LUCKMANN, 1974; SILVERMAN, 2000). By contrast, like VON GLASERSFELD (1991, p.16), many researchers take the stand that "the relationship between knowledge and reality is instrumental" As he puts it, "to know is to possess ways and means of acting and thinking that allow one to attain the goals one happens to have chosen." Criteria of credibility for the data from interviews are then all to be derived from the reality constructed by what the interviewee says rather than from a hypothesized external world of which the researcher is presumed to possess more precise knowledge. [19]

## 8. Putting It All Together Again

In terms of the history of interviewing as a research instrument, the *Handbook of qualitative research* (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2000) seems to be saying the last word. Interviewing, so to speak, coats almost every kind of qualitative research—theoretically oriented, clinically oriented, and even research that starts from observation and/or from documentary evidence. In many ways, the WENGRAF text articulates resistance to the increasingly fragmented representations of interviewing and to the assumptions of specific professionalisms. With this book, WENGRAF has taken on an implicit dare—to pull all the pieces together again and to come up with an entirely new whole. The fact is that the text, *Qualitative research interviewing* is, in Robert Louis STEVENSON's words, "so full of a number of things" that "we should [indeed] all be as happy as kings." As WENGRAF (2001, p.xxiii) puts it in the introduction, "I decided to attempt a synthesis for advanced undergraduates, for postgraduates, and professional researchers that would be conceptually coherent ... ." This is a textbook on depth interviewing that proposes to lead the advanced student through the skills and arts of doing it to the culmination of presenting her findings in writing. As an enthusiastic teacher, WENGRAF seeks to demonstrate that interviewing in-depth is a *sui generis* undertaking that deserves detailed consideration for its own sake. No matter what types of information one wants to elicit, there are, as WENGRAF shows, strategies and tactics, challenges and obstacles that every interviewer has to confront. Moreover, from his standpoint, there is no need to bow to the superior credentials of any other category of interviewing. [20]

By contrast with the many books that explain principles and leave it to the student to "apply" what she has understood, WENGRAF actually gets into the fray and talks about the minutiae of working and doing. He does not recoil from specifying the nitty-gritty that authoritative texts tend to gloss over. At the same time, his book is a very personal one. By contrast with the almost smug self-assurance of the rather rigid instructions given to the novice in many textbooks, WENGRAF does not shrink from admitting that he, too, has been there, has made mistakes, has done it over. The tone of the guidelines he presents is one of suggesting ways that are likely to work because at least some of them have worked for him. So is this then the ultimate textbook for everyone interested in semi-structured methods? Yes, and no! To clarify this equivocation, I want to point out how the very advantages of the orientation may, for some readers, be drawbacks. In a word, I came across difficulties that sometimes seemed insurmountable when I went through the book sequentially. To my surprise, and partial satisfaction, however, I found that many of the hardships dissolved when I got to the end. This may be what will happen to the lucky students who succeed in working through the text. [21]

In the next section I will describe my own journey into WENGRAF's world of interviewing with its inconveniences. [22]

## 9. Getting into the Flow

Getting into the book is a mottled experience. Since this is an advanced text, one can assume that the readers will start from the beginning and that is something to consider. The "entrance" is uneven and sometimes causes actual anxiety. In what he calls the "Summary of Contents," WENGRAF provides a neat map of the preparations needed, the different ways in which one can carry out "deep" interviewing, the complexities of analysis, and the elusive challenges of "writing it all up." Overall, the material is distributed in six sections, each of which is divided into two or three sub-sections. The book opens with a section on "Concepts and approaches to depth interviewing," the only section with four sub-sections. The remaining parts have two or three sub-sections at most. Parts II, III, and IV deal with what one does "up to the interview: strategies for getting the right materials," what to do "around the interview: management—theory and practice" and strategies for working with the materials "after the interview." Part V goes on to explain further analyses explaining how to carry out "comparisons of cases: from contingencies of cases to types of typologies." Part VI explains "writing up: strategies of re/presentation." [23]

The user-friendliness of the summary disappears as soon as the details are spelled out. The fully described "Contents" takes up seven pages. For the interested reader, these seven pages look like the beginning of a daunting load. There are unfamiliar names and acronyms; the logic of the connections among the topics is not clear; and fortunately, the "big" headings do not disappear; they help the reader find her way. Following the extended contents is a list of figures that one hopes will be helpful in the long run, a short list of exercises and almost two pages of abbreviations—the very abbreviations that caused uneasiness in looking through the contents. Finally, on page xxv, there is a concise "Introduction" and one can begin to ease into the substance. [24]

The above description of the gateway into the book captures my feeling on opening it. There is so much "leading into" the material and so much that is incomprehensible and discouraging at first sight that potential readers may give up. That would be a pity because, having overcome the initial negative response, the researcher who works through the text will acquire a wealth of information, ideas and counsel that will advance her professionally. All told, WENGRAF's *Qualitative research interviewing* is, to my mind, one of the best of the textbooks on the subject that have been published to date. In order to convey something of the flavor of this comprehensive book, I will begin with WENGRAF's definition of the interviews he is dealing with and go on to highlight the salient topics in each section. Then I will summarize the many advantages of the volume, and cite what caused me discomfort. [25]

## 10. What Is In-depth Interviewing? How Is It Done?

The first section is a dense map of the experiences that await the student. From Chapter 1 the reader is warned that interviewing is far from easy and both the definition of the activity and the flood of models for "how to do it" confirm the statement. WENGRAF defines the research interview as a "type of conversational face-to-face interaction" in which the goal is to "improve" knowledge (pp.3-4). He goes on to warn that it has to be "particularly well-prepared (designed) to allow it to be semi-structured" (p.5). Thus the reader is confronted with the paradox that is at the core of the entire effort, and rightly so. In order to carry out a research interview "in depth," the interviewer has to be prepared to invest a great deal of effort from the moment s/he begins to think of the research. An entire sub-section (Chapter 2) is devoted to locating the problematic features of the interviewing. The predicaments are emphasized by the presentation of different models for analyzing interview data. Chapter 3 presents several models of overall research design, lighting on the practical model for planning on which WENGRAF will build the rest of the textbook. This leads into Chapter 4 in which the student is introduced to the form of the depth interview (lightly or heavily structured), and the difference between theory questions and interviewer-questions. [26]

The three chapters of Part II (111 pages!) deal with preparing for the interview from every possible angle. Among other things, WENGRAF discusses the orientation of the researcher, the literature review, making decisions on the type of interview and preparing questions for either a "lightly-structured" or for what he calls a "fairly-fully-structured depth interview" as the researcher deems necessary. Many examples from different types of research show the available possibilities. Part III discusses the management of the interview. While Chapter 8 in this part discusses ethics and legalities, piloting the design and locating interviewees, Chapter 9 talks about managing the session itself. This chapter is unique. It proposes that the technical management of the session requires: long-term forward planning, planning three weeks before the interview, planning 7-10 days before the interview and planning the day before. Management of the interview session includes a model of how to close the encounter. [27]

In Part IV, WENGRAF describes a series of steps for analyzing the collected data. He relates to the mechanics of preserving the materials as well as to modes of scrutinizing them for their intrinsic significance and for their meaning in answering the researcher's theoretical questions. Part V goes on to explain how to compare cases and how to achieve typologies. It is a short section, ten pages all told, which details resources and focuses on techniques for comparing materials and working from the single case, up to hypothetical universal statements. In a word, before going on to discuss writing up the report, WENGRAF tackles "the implications of comparative work for moving beyond the deep degree of particularity which depth interviewing seems to produce and for the ways in which general theorizing and understanding is implicated in such particular accounts" (p.300). [28]

As in most textbooks, the final part, here Part VI, is devoted to writing. Chapter 15, the first of the three chapters that make up this part, discusses different approaches to writing that lead to different modes of representation. By contrast with many authoritarian texts, WENGRAF presents examples for each approach that make the author's analytical differentiation clear. Chapter 16 expands on the challenges of "theorizing and narrating." WENGRAF drives home his position that in the final written report, the presentation has to demonstrate the case, its structure, the context with its specific qualities, and the theoretical implications of the data. A concise four-page chapter of "suggestions" ends the section. Here WENGRAF points out that data can be analyzed from different theoretical angles of vision. To illustrate the idea, he discusses a life-story interview that was analyzed for purposes of one publication from a sociological point of view and, for purposes of another publication, from a psychological—narrational point of view. [29]

## 11. Advantages of the Book

As the above survey demonstrates, this book has many good points. WENGRAF takes on all the issues—a personal approach; a theoretical basis; concrete guidelines; alternative approaches; how to look at validity and reliability; and what to do with all this. We can appreciate his courage from several aspects. Every chapter is rich with two kinds of examples. One type comprises quotations from the (undoubtedly real life) work of students—many illustrating the kinds of mistakes most novices, and even experienced interviewers, are likely to make. The second type is made up of lengthy quotations from published materials, most of them including models that illustrate the thrust of the author's argument. Although WENGRAF leans heavily on the type of biographical narrative interviewing developed by ROSENTHAL (1995) and expanded by her students, notably BRECKNER (1998), he invariably presents more than one model. Thus, he often suggests alternative approaches to solving problems likely to arise in the course of research. The examples are many and the effect on the reader is that of being invited to think through what kinds of solutions are suitable to each of us according to how we understand research. What is perhaps most important in this connection is the fact that all the examples—published work and illustrations from his own work and from the work of students—are subjected to searching critiques. This means that even though the number of formal exercises is small, the student is actually doing exercises all the time—analyzing examples, making corrections and at times imitating exemplars. By giving full credit to all his sources, WENGRAF exemplifies academic ethics as well as sensitive pedagogical practice. In his presentation, therefore, WENGRAF models ethical behavior, while he models the process of building a science. [30]

Most of all, I liked the fact that the book does not gloss over the elements of research that recurrently provoke problems. From the first, as noted, WENGRAF announces that interviewing is difficult; his choices of topics reinforce this perception and his insistence on trying to help alleviate the inevitable obstructions to "sailing through" is invaluable. Not only does he not skip troublesome details, he shares his own experience of difficulty as if he were talking in a seminar class. The style of writing is consistent with face-to-face teaching. WENGRAF does not

hide behind third person passive formulations—the kinds of constructions that are vilified in qualitative research. He is present in every chapter in the first person singular and this openness turned me into a discussant at every stage. In the sections on writing, this is perhaps most palpable. At the end of Chapter 15, in which WENGRAF presents quotations from published materials, he sums up by recommending a kind of writing that is based on "theory-data differentiation, [with] interplay [between them]" and states openly that this is "*My preferred model.*" By refusing to pretend to neutrality, he invites the researcher to reread the examples and check her own preferences. Thus there is no manipulative summary at the very end, but again an invitation to further debate. [31]

## 12. Disadvantages of the Book

Indeed there are elements of the book that should, I think, be debated. For all its strengths, *Qualitative research interviewing* has some weaknesses that hopefully will be repaired in future editions. After all, "the priorities, vocabulary and organisation of material that help us make sense of our world are not always what is best suited to bring our chosen audience to the same understanding" (OLLMAN, 2001, p.297). WENGRAF's command of the highly varied and interesting materials to which he is introducing advanced students and his enthusiasm for them is estimable. But without his physical presence (and a book is not a person), his demonstrations sometime spill over into affectation, and that is a pity. [32]

In describing the entrance into the textbook, I have already pointed out impediments to accepting the invitation to study and learn. This contributes to a general discomfort with several aspects of the pedagogical approach. WENGRAF introduces the text by saying that he was looking for a systematic way of teaching interviewing, something that would satisfy him as a teacher. It seems to me that he does not always come to pedagogically sound conclusions about what is most important and what are the side issues. The entire Part I with its surfeit of (working) models and bare hints of a philosophical background is, to my mind, both intimidating and not very helpful. In this section, WENGRAF presents several models of practice in anticipation of every stage in the promised unfolding saga of depth interviewing. This thoroughness has an internal logic but the crowded succession of alternative schemes—all well built—paradoxically verges on providing a chaotic overture for the uninitiated. [33]

As to the conceptual background, the remarks in Chapter I about deductive and inductive approaches to research provide little information and demonstrate a superficial orientation to the philosophy of science. This is not because the author has nothing interesting to say about the conceptual framework of depth interviewing. In note 1 on page 4, for example, WENGRAF tucks away this remark: "*Strategically* I work with the axiom that there is a historically occurring reality out there; *tactically*, methodologically, we should always suspect that our most recent account is a fiction requiring further rectification." The acceptance of an empirical tension between realism and constructivism is of immediate interest to every researcher and an extended discussion would have helped to clarify

important background. "Buried" in a note, a cardinal issue in qualitative research is hidden from close attention of the student. Similarly, WENGRAF's judgment about what should be highlighted in the text is not impeccable. On page 37, he discloses his concern that the practices of interviewing have not been adequately researched (by contrast with the development of guidelines) to the extent that he thinks it deserves. This gap in the research literature may have some interest and could profitably be cited in a note for the self-confident professional. But the idea of researching a method one is acquiring is at best a negligible issue even for the advanced student. [34]

A more general problem, to my mind, is the extensive reliance on quasi-formulas. In this book, WENGRAF seems to think that unless ideas can be represented by acronyms, they are not doing their work, so to speak. A long list of abbreviations serves him in every chapter. Although some of them do turn out to be helpful, and it is understandable that they are held to be an essential element in the development of the course, many of them seem to be idiosyncratic and do not bear up well at all. CRQ for "central research question," like TQ for "theoretical question" and IQ for "interview question," do take on meaning in the course of the unraveling of the techniques and the considerations. But acronyms such as SQUIN-B for "Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative of a Biographical nature" are no less unwieldy than the source. I would also cast doubt on the idea that BNIM for "Biographical-Narrative-Interpretive-Method" is helpful. Even less helpful are translations of "lightly structured depth interview" and "fairly fully structured depth interview" as LSDI and FFSDI! I would argue that the abbreviations should be relegated to summaries at the end of chapters, to charts with explanations. If classes are exposed to them over and over, they may eventually help jar memory. As things stand, the perpetual encounter with acronyms in the explanatory sections of several of the key chapters makes for frustrating reading. At some points it seems that WENGRAF was aware of the grimness of the terms. He occasionally recommends looking ahead in order to understand them better. In a textbook vaunted as systematic, this suggestion turns into an additional disturbing factor rather than a recommendation that can be acted on for aid. [35]

Finally, there are several typos that turn out to be a source of confusion. Ironically, some of the acronyms are occasionally misspelled (see p.71). In Note 2 on page 4, the mix-up between the "interviewer" and the "interviewee" beclouds an important issue. The author wants to note that in the interview situation the interviewee is drawing conclusions, making hypotheses, interpreting the interviewer's body language, and so on. The typos turn the sentence into a repetitious commonplace. On page 306, readers are referred to SPRADLEY's model of six levels of writing in a research report. The typo hides the fact that the model appears on page 318 as Figure 15.2, rather than as noted. [36]

### 13. Conclusions

The weaknesses of *Qualitative research interviewing* are undoubtedly stumbling blocks. Still, when all is said and done, I would venture that WENGRAF has produced a textbook that will be of use to many researchers for some time to come. This is a book that not only enhances the technical repertoire of the interested professional and the student novice, but also vindicates qualitative interviewing in a unique way. WENGRAF provides a panoramic view of the many ways in which in-depth interviewing can be conceptualized and realized in action. Interestingly enough, by ostensibly concentrating on a particular type of interview, he succeeds in showing the kinship among projects designed to uncover biographies, oral histories, clinical matters, personal experiences, and so on. And in doing so according to the norms that have become familiar in qualitative research, he demonstrates that interviewing is a way of life, and that "doing" interviewing is having the privilege of making choices that promote a social dialectic. [37]

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