

# Chapter II

## Exploring Multimedia Performance in Educational Research

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter draws on the analysis and (re)presentation of qualitative research undertaken on a UK government project known as Sure Start, an initiative based on the principle of bottom up community-based engagement dealing with social exclusion. The data from interviews, observation, and documentation arise from ethnographic immersion by the author in a local working class community over a period of two years. Based on these data the chapter explores the (re)telling of the same research tale through the lens of bounded and unbounded (re)presentational forms, and in so doing, envisions some of the challenges and opportunities for multimedia performance as a methodological approach within the academy.*

### THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

In theoretical and conceptual terms, I would like to place this chapter within the parameters of the postmodern project as elucidated by Constas (1999, pp. 36-37) providing a typology that aims to distinguish postmodern educational research and its representation from other forms of inquiry. Constas does this by offering a “three-dimensional model” that elucidates the key aspects and “unify-

ing elements” which signify “the discourses of educational inquiry as it moves towards a post modern perspective.” The three primary dimensions of the postmodern perspective are labeled political, methodological, and representational.

The *political* Constas (1999, p. 38) identifies as relating to the way in which power is treated in the research process. In particular, the move away from a “taken for granted view on the nature of power in education” to one in which power rela-

tions are problematized, and “de-centered,” for example, in relation to gender or ethnicity.

In terms of the *methodological*, it relates to the ways in which data are collected and theorized with a movement away from normative approaches and concerns with prescribed guidelines and issues such as validity and reliability to more idiosyncratic approaches which place emphasis on more individualized and stylized features and preferences, emphasizing the uniqueness of each research project, and the significance of the researcher’s relationship to the study and other individuals within it. The *representational* in Conostas’ (1999, pp. 38-39) dimension concerns the forms and ways in which data are reported and presented and a move way from “depersonalized, distanced and objective” writing styles often in the third person which he refers to as discursively “highly bounded” and exclusive to alternative “unbounded” representational styles such as performance.

In the same way, Conostas’ (1999) framework delineates educational research according to political, methodological, and representational variants, so qualitative investigations like Atkinson (1990, 1992) and Wolcott (1990) are concerned with both a research process and product. The process relating to the conducting of fieldwork and the analysis of the data, the product concerned with the way in which the data resulting from the process is (re)presented. Over the last 20 years, qualitative researchers like Atkinson and Coffey (1995) and Marcus and Fischer (1986) have, in relation to the “product” of qualitative research, become increasingly concerned with how to (re)present the cultural and social worlds under their analytical gaze. The search is for greater utilization of genres to (re)present findings which provide a closer alignment between the phenomena we study and the way we portray those phenomena, and which create disruptive spaces to celebrate the subjectivity, diversity, and difference in the readings, viewings, and interpretations they afford.

In essence, this chapter explores how as researchers we communicate information about the social world we research and the ways in which the form we choose to convey our findings impacts upon the meanings and influences attributed to it (Eisner, 1991; Finley, 1998). In recent years, qualitative researchers (see Eisner & Barone, 2006) have begun to look beyond traditional printed textual modes to embrace more artistic print and nonprint forms of representation. In literary form, these include the use of short story (Kilbourne, 1998), creative nonfiction (Angrosino, 1998), and musical lyric (Jenoure, 2002). For example, Richardson (1992, 2000) uses poetry to (re)present sociological research. She transposes the life worlds of those she has interviewed and incorporating evocative poetic devices such as rhymes, meters, and pauses, sensitively and meaningfully portrays her data as verse or ethnopoetics.

Researchers like Becker, McCall, Morris, and Meshejian (1989); Bluebond-Langer (1980); Ellis and Bochner (1992); Goldstein (2001, 2002); McCall (2000); Mieniczakowski (2001); Paget (1990); and Richardson and Lockridge (1991) have chosen to use drama and theatre to present ethnographic data as a way to immerse performers and audience in the range of meanings, emotions, and feelings associated with a research. Mieniczakowski’s (2001) ethnodramatic work encompasses a notion of praxis in which the data in dramatic form are staged in front of an audience comprised of policy makers and practitioners from the field depicted. In exposing the thoughts, experiences, and feelings of the people with whom policy makers and practitioners work, it is hoped that the research will have an impact on policy and practice.

Equally, Minh-ha (1991) uses visual textual forms through the medium of film to deprive the single analytical (male) voice and enable the participating viewer to engage with and reveal the multiple layered experiences of women’s lives. Also, in relation to life histories and educational research, Finley (2002) (re)presented data on fac-

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