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METHODOLOGY
of a qualitative study or thesis

This section reports the methodology of a qualitative study or thesis. One reason for this section is that when we report a qualitative study, such as in a journal, we are limited by space for reporting the details of the methodology. This is also a problem for those who have completed a thesis, and want to place papers based on their thesis in a journal which usually has limited space. As a result, the methodology section of a thesis is usually not turned into a journal paper. But *QRJ* is an electronic journal and space is not so limited.

We are looking for papers (up to 8,000 words and any diagrams) which describe the details of the methodology of a qualitative study or examined thesis. Please do not send in methodology sections as is, without putting in an introduction saying what the study or thesis was about. If you want the methodology paper you send in peer reviewed we will do so.

Hair braiding: Working the boundaries of methodology in globalisation research

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ABSTRACT

This paper engages the constitutive as well as the representative role of metaphor in research. Metaphors are understood to provide possibilities for representations and conceptualisations. The use of metaphorical redescription permits us to 'use familiar words in unfamiliar ways' (Rorty, 1989, p. 18) and provides new language that deters the use of repeated ways of knowing. It invites us to see things differently and to act differently. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor does more than represent: 'New metaphors have the power to construct a new reality' (p. 145). I have drawn on both these understandings of metaphor. In qualitative research, metaphorical analysis has a well-established history. Researchers analyse metaphors used by research participants and apply metaphors to participant actions and understandings (Koro-Ljungberg, 2001; Gregory & Noblit, 1998). Researchers also use metaphors to reflect or represent their methodological decision-making (Richardson, 2003; Gadamer,

1989). In this article, I have nudged the conceptual boundaries of methodology. I have argued the constructive nature of metaphor in methodological positioning and decision making. I use the writing of a doctoral thesis to argue this role of metaphor. There, the metaphor of hair braiding constructed and communicated my methodological decision-making and my researcher stance as a braider.

Stronarch and MacLure (1997) argue that to write research within the theoretical frame of 'post' involves: 'opening as *transgression* or *breaching* the boundaries that mark and protect the territories of the elite or expert knowledge…' (p. 6)

In framing the methodology of a doctoral thesis on globalisation and international higher education (Dixon, 2004) I transgressed the boundaries of thesis writing. Metaphorical analysis has an established history in qualitative research (Morgan, 1986; Bessant, 2001; Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997). In this paper, I argue the use of metaphor to construct and communicate research methodology. In this way metaphor is relocated from its place in analysis as a tool to that of a methodological (con)structuring agent.

Metaphor is used in research to represent the framework of research design. In this usage, Richardson (2003) proposes a 'metaphor' for metaphors.

> Metaphor, a literary device, is the backbone of social science writing. Like the spine it bears weight, permits movement, is buried beneath the surface, and links parts together into a functional, coherent whole. (p. 505)

Using the metaphor of the spine, Richardson suggests that metaphor is buried beneath the surface. I, however, had chosen not to have the metaphor of the research design buried beneath the surface. I did not use a metaphor for the research design to make my decisions more concrete or more literary. I used the metaphor of hair braiding to construct the research design.

In conventional use in research, metaphor is a way of writing to make meaning more accessible. It is used as a way of making the research process more visible. In qualitative research, archaeological and purification metaphors recur as researchers 'dig' to reach understanding or are involved in 'distilling essences' or 'refining meanings'. In these metaphors there is the possibility of 'found' truths or distilled theory. MacLure (2003) argues these metaphors may 'invoke a binary world of essences and appearances, depths and surfaces, in which it is the researcher's job to go beneath, behind or beyond' (2003, p. 122).

The researcher is then metaphorically represented and/or constructed as engineer or technologist dealing with 'triangulations', 'balances and imbalances' and 'removing impediments' to finding the truth. A researcher may be conceived of as a scientist enabling a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1989), a 'field player' (Richardson, 1997) or a 'fiction writer' (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Spatial metaphors are used as researchers go to the 'field' for 'exploration' and 'discovery', and 'locate' themselves at a 'distance' in order to achieve objectivity (Massey, 2003, p. 71). They may go into the field 'as temporary itinerant crop pickers' (Richardson, 1997, p. 185), although this metaphor has limitations in its emphasis on intrusion and collection without attendant emphasis on reflective and analytical processes (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 281).

In a classical use of metaphor, MacLure (2003) uses the metaphor of 'fabrication' to describe how research texts, that is, accounts of truths and findings, are put together to achieve particular effects and structures (2003, p. 80). Taking metaphorical readings

as possibilities for deepening meaning and understanding, she leads us to consider the fabricated text as artful lie.

> The notion of 'fabrication' also reminds us that texts work somewhat like lies. This is not to say that there is nothing but falsehood, or that no research can be trusted. But like lies, texts are artful, and they succeed when they persuade us that some state of affairs, proposition or argument is as it appears to be (MacLure, 2003, p. 80).

It is in this artful turning that metaphor offers powerful and constructive possibilities. Richardson (1997) alludes to such possibilities when she posits the possibility of conceiving of alternate metaphors of theory: 'Consider how differently we would experience theory if the metaphor were "theory as a feather"' (p. 44). I used metaphor both as a way of revealing and as a way of constructing meaning. It is perhaps a fabrication to suggest that there is a dichotomy between metaphor as representation and as construction; in the process of appropriating the constructive role of metaphor, I question the highly contestable notion that respectable methodology uses metaphor as an analytical tool or as a representation of a framework but cannot be, or is not at the same time, constructive of research design. Morgan (1986), in his work on conceptualising organisations, argues that our very understanding of our world is constructed through a metaphorical way of thinking and seeing. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) assert: '(O)ur ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act is fundamentally metaphorical in nature' (p. 3) and these metaphorical constructions reverberate through our language and our actions. The metaphors used to describe the research process or the researcher work to construct that process and also to construct researcher identity.

COMING TO A METAPHOR OF HAIR BRAIDING

I came to the unexpected use of the metaphor of hair braiding through engaging with the complexities and demands of making methodological decisions in thesis writing. The thesis presented a qualitative framework for analysing the conversation of globalisation and international higher education as heard in the policy-making of a doctoral program. The analysis had been structured to reveal the positioning and repositioning of the international practice of institutions of higher education and to produce contingent knowledge of international higher education against the processes of globalisation.

In that work multiple analytical perspectives struggled for place. Ball (1994, p. 2) urges the critical analyst to 'take risks, use imagination, but also be reflexive'. In arguing for a combination of critical policy analysis, poststructuralism and critical ethnography, Ball found that 'at times they clash and grate against one another but the resultant friction is, I hope, purposeful and effective rather than a distraction' (1994, p. 2). I, too, had used a multiperspectival approach—drawing together elements from critical discourse analysis, from discursive psychology, from metaphorical analysis and understandings and approaches to 'difference' from feminist poststructuralists. These approaches to analysis are not markedly disparate but there are distinctions that clash and grate (or knot and tangle as in hair braiding). Following the work of Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) these choices encompassed a 'multiperspectival' methodology in which there was constructed a 'positioned opening for discussion' (p. 205) of globalisation and international higher education. They argue the authority of just such a multiperspectival approach through the researcher's use of a coherent philosophical, theoretical and methodological basis:

> Multiperspectivism requires that one weigh the approaches up against each other with respect to philosophical premises, theoretical claims, methodology and method, identifying

what kind of contingent knowledge each approach can supply and modifying approaches in the light of these considerations. (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, pp. 155-156)

As a researcher I was convinced of the value of this multiperspectivism in producing the contingent knowledge that I sought in the research. I was, however, challenged by the complexity of this approach. Further, I was unclear of the working of one approach within and against the others. I sought out and developed this metaphor of hair braiding in order to make concrete for myself the methodological decisions I had made and to develop a pathway for managing the multiple and layered arguments and positions that were a result of those decisions. As I was involved in this process I also found that the constructive nature of metaphor was at work in my own understanding. I began to understand why the methodological decisions worked together—the constructivist nature of metaphor was apparent.

Further, the metaphor of hair braiding works in a distinctly different way from that of the mining and distillation metaphors used in some research. Mining and distillation are searches for a knowledge or knowledges that may be unearthed or brought to light; the act of hair braiding, however, is a constructive one. Research as hair braiding constructs representations where globalisation is understood as a lived experience in which macro and micro policy, identity and positioning clash and grate. Like hair braiding, it can be undone.

HAIR BRAIDING

Braiding involves three important steps: identifying the strands of hair, sectioning and plaiting. In the first step, the strands of hair are identified and combed through. In the second step, that of sectioning, the strands must be parted into sections that may be laid out in any of an almost infinite variety of patterns. Geometrical designs are used that may curve or zigzag, or form diamonds or starburst; further complexity is added with the use of crisscross patterns. The strands are then plaited according to the pattern. These plaited strands (braids) produce unique stylised geometric patterns from the linear to complex curves and spirals. The success of the braiding is reliant on the sectioning and on the tensions between the strands in each braid and between braids.

The ancient art origins of hair braiding can be traced back to 3,500 BC in Egypt. It was practised in medieval Europe and is currently practised throughout the world. Traditionally, hair braiding may have involved a whole day when girls would have their hair braided by older family members. This was a time of the transmission of cultural values, of shared stories and conversations, intimacy and friendship. Braiding between peers involved a mutual obligation. Generally, hair braiding was a woman's activity but in some areas men, too, braided their hair. Particular arrangements were used for ceremonial occasions. Currently, professional braiders are used for this time-consuming and intricate work.

Alexander (2003), in his study in a Black community in America, argues that barbershops and hair salons are cultural sites where 'social experience meets at the intersection of culture and performance, and at the confluence of reflection and remembrance' (2003, p. 105). Historically, in many West African countries, hair-braiding patterns indicated one's tribe and social position. Hair braiding was used to communicate age, religion, ethnicity and kinship. Africans taken to the New World continued their art of braiding. Byrd and Tharps (2001) argue that those whose heads were shaved upon capture were being stripped of their culture. The re-establishment of traditional hairstyles, although modified, was an act of resistance:

The slaves that worked inside the plantation houses were required to present a neat and tidy appearance … so men and women often wore tight braids, plaits, and cornrows (made by sectioning the hair and braiding it flat to the scalp). The braid patterns were commonly based on African tradition and styles. Other styles Blacks wore proved to be an amalgam of traditional African styles, European trends, and even Native American practices. (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, pp. 13–14)

White and White (1998) suggest some of the styles described in runaway slave notices posted in the 1700s were worn as acts of defiance. Jackson (2000) notes that the Afro began to appear among Black artists, intellectuals and activists in the mid-1950s. In the 1960s the Black Power movement had gained momentum and African-roots styles were more apparent. In line with hip-hop of the 1980s the 'philly' cut for men and weaves for women were gaining popular following. In the 1990s the 'new' cornrow styles with their complex geometric patterns gained popularity across America, Europe, Australia and Japan. These styles included adding extra hairpieces to gain thickness and the use of colour.

HAIR BRAIDING AND THE METHODOLOGY

The metaphor of hair braiding was applied to the methodological structure and to the way the methodology was conceptualised. Hair braiding involves sectioning of strands and plaiting these into braids that are then looped and twisted. As a braider I was confronted with a 'head of hair'—the particular texture, colour, length and thickness that I could work. I made decisions about the way the strands from the field of globalisation and international higher education (IHE) were identified and worked.

Strands

From my researcher stance, braider position, I recognised and combed out four strands from the head of hair.

Table 1: Thesis strands

STRAND 1 Discourses of globalisation and IHE	Here elements of globalisation, which are apparent across economic, political and social discourses, are drawn out. The links between globalisation and IHE are made in the literature.
STRAND 2 Context of this IHE program	This strand involves moving across educational contexts in Thailand and Australia. Considerable attention is paid to the unfamiliar Thai educational context. Traces of Thai–Australian educational relationships are glimpsed, then focus is turned to the establishment of the program in 1999.
STRAND 3 Participants' understandings of an IHE program	The understandings come from policy documents, and policy participants, the policymakers, lecturers and candidates. Data has been produced from interviews with n = 23 participants carried out in the first six months of 2001 and from relevant Thai and Australian policy documents.
STRAND 4 Participants' understandings of globalisation, realistic and metaphorical	These understandings come from within the stories of involvement in the IHE program and in response to requests by the researcher for definitions and metaphors of globalisation.

From my braider position, I recognised and named the thickness and the texture of these strands.

Sectioning

Hair braiding involves more than a synthesis of the strands. Sectioning of these strands involves parting them at the scalp in particular geometrical patterns that zigzag, crisscross, and form diamonds or starbursts (Figure 1). This communicates identity and social position. As a tool for the researcher, sectioning constructs an authority that derives from a particular stance and position; through the design, the research is positioned as a political and cultural act. As the braider of the thesis, I used the sectioning to construct and convey the qualitative methodological stance. The sectioning or parting was done to communicate the place of the approaches to policy analysis and difference and to communicate the place of power, discourse, social constructionism, and positioning. In Figure 2, I show the ways these form a geometrical pattern that underpinned the research.

Figure 1: Sectioning the hair at the scalp

Figure 2: Methodological sectioning, parting the strands to communicate identity and social positions

Figure 3: Plaiting requires a strand over strand action

Plaiting

Once the hair had been sectioned or parted then the plaiting began. Plaiting of the strands from these sections involved a strand over strand action (Figure 3).

The plaiting involved tools to work the various thicknesses of the strands. To do the plaiting, I had chosen three tools: positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999; Harré & Slocum, 2003), interdiscursivity and intertextuality from critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992, 1995) and analysis of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), These tools were chosen for the knowledge they could produce, the braiding acts they could perform.

The process of plaiting using these braiding tools worked the strands in particular ways to produce particular knowledges and positions. The braiding tools plaited, lifted and looped the hair to convey identity and positioning within IHE. The tool of positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999, Harré & Slocum, 2003) worked the 'data stories' (Lather & Smithies, 1997) to communicate positionings in story-lines. The tools of intertextuality and interdiscursivity from critical discourse analysis worked the tensions between the texts in the data and the larger societal discourses. The tool of metaphor was used here to pull up and out, and to accentuate positions and story-lines. It was used more forcefully to braid the plaits and lift and loop the understandings of globalisation. These movements were created mindfully and in relation to the plaits of positioning story-lines (Harré & Slocum, 2003).

Braiding interweaved the strands in the analysis. Interweaving requires holding several tools and working in a fluid motion as I used the right index finger to grab a strand from the left hand and bring it under another strand and over yet another and then used the left index finger to carry over the last strand simultaneously grabbing hair from the row of hair underneath (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Assigning the braiding tools of positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999; Harré & Slocum, 2003), intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 1992, 1995) and metaphorical analysis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)

Although positioning theory and analysis of metaphor may be seen as principal tools that could stand alone, they were used at times together. The use of analysis of metaphors brought thickness to the understandings of the story-lines in the positioning analysis (Harré & Slocum, 2003). Similarly, the use of positioning theory applied within analysis of globalisation metaphors added another layer to the plaiting of the story-lines. Story-lines from positioning theory became the central focus for much of the analysis. They were worked with and against intertextual and interdiscursivity analysis (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). The use of braiding involved a repeated action on the part of the researcher. It required the researcher to move the tools and the data and the spaces between the strands. The spaces—the silences, the disconjunctions—were not filled or smoothed out but were structurally worked.

A BRAIDED THESIS

The success of the braiding is reliant on the sectioning and the tensions between the strands in each braid and between braids. The final work requires the braider to stand back and assess the overall shape that has been produced. This means checking the tensions and the unique patterns from the linear to complex curves and spirals. No new strands are added here to the unique stylised geometric patterns of this study. But the braiding is viewed for what it constructs and communicates in regard to identity, position and in my research constructions of globalisation and IHE.

Braiding work is complex. It is justified in the context of that globalisation research through the fruitfulness of the access to the understandings of the research participants. This produced knowledge that links the discursive practice of participants to broader social practices. The knowledge revealed the ways in which discursive practices conceal and strengthen constructions of globalisation and the unequal power relations within it.

Hair braiding in the thesis worked to construct and communicate the identity I claim as a researcher and the positions I hold in regard to truth and subjectivity. As hair

braiding can be an act of resistance so were my methodological decisions an act of resistance. I resisted using a found and linear path in the methodology, one that may have led to a found knowledge of globalisation and IHE. Instead, I constructed or braided a methodology which disrupted the macro approach to policy analysis and the acceptance of meta-discourses and which attempted the 'disappointing' cultural work of 'difference' (Jones, 1999, p. 315).

The braided thesis constructed and communicated the repositioning of the international practice of institutions of higher education and produced contingent knowledge of globalisation as it is linked to IHE. Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000) acknowledge the way researchers are enticed by the use of metaphor but caution its use.

> (H)aving a favourite metaphor is both natural, desirable and inevitable … Metaphors should be chosen so as to stimulate reflection and movement between levels of interpretation. (p. 284)

The metaphor of hair braiding had been used to construct and communicate the research practice. The historical purposes and acts of hair braiding provided strong links to globalisation. Like hair braiding, globalisation constructs and communicates identity, status, kinship, ethnicity and cultural values and involves resistance and power. In the braiding of the 21st century, patterns from over 5,000 years and from around the world are compressed. Globalisation, too, is identified through time–space compressions (Usher, 2002). The patterns of globalisation are complex. They criss-cross borders; national and individual, economic, political and social. Globalisation has strands of nation states (Desai, 2001; Green, 1997), technology (Castells, 1999), and economies and supranationals (Sklair, 1999, 2001) of various widths that are sectioned in complex arrays and geometrical progressions. These patterns construct and are constructed by power and identity. Globalisation strands are plaited through fluid motions, raised, twisted, spiralled and dislocated into dualities of North and South, rich and poor, relevant and irrelevant, local and global. This metaphorical understanding of globalisation was glimpsed throughout the thesis. Globalisation, as hair braiding, is not complete in this metaphor. Globalisation entails more than hair braiding. It gains through the metaphor the understanding of the constructive nature of globalisation and its links to power and identity. Further, as I worked the analysis of globalisation through metaphors, hair braiding has become a metaphor available for generalising understanding of globalised identity. In globalised spaces:

> In these regular sessions, [in the Black barber shop] it is clear to me that we are indexing time. Not only on my head but also collecting, categorising, and comparing experiences, which is at the core a common cultural performance—a mirroring and reflecting of membership. My locks are slowly getting longer, but more important, through an intricate coiling of hair, it has formed knotted digits that enumerate my time in this space: digits that can neither be untangled nor delineated from the whole of the experience. Stories have been twisted into my hair, my natural hair. These stories like my 'brother locks', are not exotic. And although they signal an ancient history, a performative resistance of culture—like the salon itself—it is in the localisation of experience, an organic unity, that they find their meaningfulness (Alexander, 2003, p. 122).

Scott and Usher (1999) argue that most research: '… tends to manifest a refusal to question how researchers create their own texts …' (p. 16). In seeking out a metaphor to construct the methodological workings of a research project, I have questioned the role of metaphor in research. The metaphor has been a constructive and representative device of the research process and my researcher identity.

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