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# A Journal About Journal Writing as a Qualitative Research Technique: History, Issues, and Reflections

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*The author is writing this article as a journal to show how a journal may be used as a qualitative research technique in long-term qualitative studies. The history of journal writing within the context of the arts and humanities is described to illuminate our understanding of the tradition of this type of writing. For qualitative researchers, the act of journal writing may be incorporated into the research process to provide a data set of the researcher's reflections on the research act. Participants in qualitative studies may also use journals to refine ideas, beliefs, and their own responses to the research in progress. Finally, journal writing between participants and researcher may offer the qualitative researcher yet another opportunity for triangulation of data sets at multiple levels: first, the interdisciplinary triangulation of journal writing as a trope of literature, and second, data triangulation in terms of journal writing of the researcher, participants, and interaction between both.*

## MONDAY

I am exhausted after the American Educational Research Association (AERA), annual meeting in San Diego, April 1998. After completing a 4-hour mini-course on journal writing as well as a paper on the topic that week, I decided to take up an idea from the chair of my paper session who asked me a simple question. He asked me if I had thought about writing my paper entirely as a journal. Of course, I had and, in fact, the second half of my paper was written as a journal though it did not seem as organic as writing this paper entirely as a journal. Now with the annual meeting completed, I decided to rewrite what I had presented in San Diego, in the format of a journal for a number of reasons. First, it makes understandable one style of journal writing. Next, it reminds one of bell hooks' admonition, that whatever cannot be written clearly cannot be used to educate. Third, it personalizes the research process in terms of journal writing as a way to refine one's thoughts about qualitative research techniques. Finally, it forces me to revisit the material I wrote on this beloved topic. Today, AERA is a memory as I sit at my computer with a view of the sweltering sky of Ft. Lauderdale. I am glad to be



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avoiding the hot sun on this a 90-degree day in April. I want to reshape my ideas to teach about journal writing as a viable technique for qualitative researchers. I have been reading about journal writing, conducting training sessions on such, and reading samples of journals written throughout history for the past 10 years or so and it is a delight to recall some of the quotations on journal writing in my file. I especially enjoy this one of Wilde's, from his 1895 play, "The Importance of Being Earnest":

I never travel without my diary. One should  
always have something sensational to read  
in the train.

Now the difficult part for me begins. How can I keep writing this as a journal and not lose the impact of my original paper? Also, how can I incorporate a paper from a professional meeting into the deeply personal format of a journal? I wrote the paper to describe and explain how journal writing may be used as a qualitative research technique, in long-term qualitative studies. After all, journal writing has a long and reliable history in the arts and humanities, and qualitative researchers may learn a great deal from this activity. It is not by accident that artists, writers, musicians, dancers, therapists, physicians, poets, architects, saints, chefs, scientists, and educators use journal writing in their lives. Virtually in every field, one can find exemplars who have kept detailed and lengthy journals regarding their everyday lives and their beliefs, hopes, and dreams. I see journal writing as a powerful heuristic tool and research technique and will discuss reasons for using a journal within qualitative research projects in order to do the following:

1. refine the understanding of the role of the researcher through reflection and writing, much like an artist might do;
2. refine the understanding of the responses of participants in the study, much like a physician or health care worker might do;
3. use a journal as an interactive tool of communication between the researcher and participants in the study, as a type of interdisciplinary triangulation of data; and
4. view journal writing as a type of connoisseurship by which individuals become connoisseurs of their own thinking and reflection patterns, and indeed their own understanding of their work as qualitative researchers.

The notion of a comprehensive reflective journal to address the researcher's Self is critical in qualitative work due to the fact that the researcher is the research instrument. In reviewing the literature in this area, journal writing, although an ancient technique, is only now being used and talked about as a serious component in qualitative research projects. I have always seen

journal writing as a major source of data. It is a data set that contains the researcher's reflection on the role of the researcher, for example. It is a great vehicle for coming to terms with exactly what one is doing as the qualitative researcher. Often, qualitative researchers are criticized for not being precise about what they do. I offer journal writing as one technique to accomplish the description and explanation of the researcher's role in the project. Within the context of this piece, I will follow the tradition of Richardson (1995) who writes about narrative techniques and suggests a selected bibliography at the end of the piece. This was in order to prevent distractions while reading the existing narrative. Consequently, I will use direct references in this narrative only when absolutely required for clarity. All other references will be found at the end of this text.

## TUESDAY

There are other areas that may be studied through this literary technique of journal writing. Oddly enough, I am just now thinking about all this even though I began keeping a journal in my high school years. Off and on throughout my life, I have revisited my journals and learned from them. All the issues that popped up in the '70s, '80s and presently in my life and work, make me more aware of that part of my life that is research centered. Examples of problems include representation of interviews and field notes, co-construction of meaning with participants in the project who also keep a journal, and issues related to the interpretation of each other's data. Often, we qualitative researchers are positioned outside the very people and situations we write about. Journal writing personalizes representation in a way that forces the researcher to confront issues of how a story from a person's life becomes a public text, which in turn tells a story. In other words, how do the researcher and the participant or participants in the project move from a blank page to sentence after sentence of description of a given experience, the basis of qualitative work? Furthermore, how are we to make sense of this writing and understand how lived experience is represented by the writer/researcher and the participants?

## Journal Writing as an Art

Basically, the art of journal writing and subsequent interpretations of journal writing produce meaning and understanding that are shaped by genre, the narrative form used, and personal cultural and paradigmatic conventions of the writer who is either the researcher, participant, and/or coresearcher. As Proff (1992), my favorite teacher about journal writing, notes, journal writing is ultimately a way of getting feedback from ourselves, and in so

doing, it enables us to experience in a full and open-ended way, the movement of our lives as a whole and the meaning that follows from reflecting on that movement.

Issues to be considered by the qualitative researcher include moving from the field to the text to the final public research report and problems of interpretation, meaning, and representation. Interactive journal writing between researcher and participants is another way of understanding a given study, and I will refer to examples from some of my current projects to illustrate this very point. In one project, participants and researcher are keeping journals about everything that takes place in interview and observation sessions. This type of example may help to foreground the problems, possibilities, and applications of journal writing as a qualitative research technique.

### **WEDNESDAY: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF JOURNAL WRITING**

As I begin this journey of describing and explaining journal writing, it is important to realize the lengthy and significant tradition and history of journal writing. Although individuals have probably kept journals throughout recorded history for various reasons, some of the first known journals were written in Greek and Roman times. Later, St. Augustine and Pascal kept journals to chronicle moments in their own lives as they tried to find out more about how the mind works. In the 10th century, ladies of the Japanese court wrote precise and candid descriptions of everyday life and the inner workings of one's beliefs and feelings. Often, these writers hid their journals under their pillows, and so the journals became known as "pillow diaries." These documents went beyond the daily record of life. They were texts that recorded dreams, hopes, visions, fantasies, feelings, and innermost thoughts. Next, the rebirth and awakening of the Renaissance brought with it an era of almost required journal and diary writing. There was an almost understood agreement that one must chronicle the spirit of rebirth and living in personal terms case by case.

The 1660s brought us Samuel Pepys (1670), who for 9 years described exactly and in astounding detail, the people, politics, sorrows, and joys of life in London, my favorite city on Earth. His thick description of the problems of the Church of England, the monarchy, the Navy in which he served, various wars of the day, the great fire, and the plague are brilliant and illuminative records of literature and history. As luck would have it, the first published versions of his diary did not appear until 1825, followed by reissues and new editions well into the late 1890s. It was at this time that the Victorians focused on both letter writing and journals.

Likewise and prior to the Victorian era, a number of spiritual groups and even some organized religious groups kept journals. The Quakers, for

example, beginning in the 17th century, often and regularly described their spiritual journeys, doubts, questions, and beliefs. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, kept volumes recording his symbolic relationship with his version of his God. Indeed, many Puritans recorded their trust in their version of their God, which included passages about doubt, uncertainty, miseries in their lives, sins, omissions of goodness, and so on. The voyage of the Mayflower is eloquently and curiously described in journal form. For people who were embarking on new adventures, the journal became an outlet for fears and moments of deep despair on the voyage. The use of the journal from spiritual record to political record flourished as well. Remember, at these points in time, writing was a key and important means of communication. There were no telephones, pagers, computers, televisions, or news media as we know them. For example, during the French Revolution, many writers produced "journals intime." These were personal accounts of arguments regarding the revolution, which revealed deep and passionate feelings of patriotism, nationalism, and disgust for the corrupt monarchy.

Similarly, in this country, during the westward expansion movement, explorers such as Lewis and Clark chronicled their movement west describing relationships with the members of the First Nations they met, as well as encounters with other existing communities. Likewise, pioneer women not only cooked around the campfires but also took the time to record personal impressions of the westward movement. Later, these would be chronicled in the play, "Quilters" (Newman & Damashek, 1986). This play powerfully documented a history of depression, sorrow, joy, misunderstanding, and treachery. There would be no sugar coating of injustice and bigotry in these diaries. In addition, an eloquent account of the brutality of slavery in this country is chronicled in *The Classic Slave Narratives* (Gates, 1987). One cannot turn away from the writings of Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Frederick Douglass, or the *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs, by now all classics of this genre. The clarity, suffering, and degradation described in the slave narratives inform our understanding of a history of the Black Diaspora. Were it not for these detailed accounts, a critical piece of American history would certainly have been forgotten.

Yet, literary and historical figures are not the only journal writers. The field of psychology has long made use of journal writing as a therapeutic aid. The cathartic function of journal writing has been widely recommended by many schools of therapy. Therapists view the journal as an attempt to bring order to one's experience and a sense of coherence to one's life. Behaviorists, cognitivists and Jungian analysts have used journals in the process of therapy. The journal is seen as a natural outgrowth of the clinical situation in which the client speaks to the Self. Most recently, Progoff (1975, 1992) has written of an intensive journal. Progoff developed a set of techniques that provide a structure for keeping a journal and a springboard for development. As a therapist himself, he has conducted workshops and trained a network of

individuals to do workshops on keeping an intensive journal for unlocking one's creativity and coming to terms with one's Self. The intensive journal method is a reflective, in-depth process of writing, speaking what is written, and in some cases sharing what is written with others. Feedback is an operative principle for the Progoff method. The individual needs to draw upon inner resources to arrive at the understanding of the whole person. The journal is a tool to reopen the possibilities of learning and living. Progoff advocates the following:

1. make regular entries in the journal in the forms of dialogue with one's Self;
2. maintain the journal as an intensive psychological workbook in order to record all encounters of one's existence; and
3. attempt some type of sharing of this growth through journal writing with others.

The method makes use of a special bound notebook, or computer file, divided into definite categories that include the following: dreams, stepping stones, dialogues with persons, events, work, and the body. The writer is asked to reflect, free associate, meditate, and imagine what relates to immediate experience. The latest version of his text (Progoff, 1992) is a definite testimonial to a solid example of techniques for keeping a journal.

Beyond the psychologists, perhaps the two most identifiable writers of journals in our memory are Anne Frank and Anais Nin. In fact, *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Goodrich, Hackett, & Frank, 1998) and the many volumes of *The Diary of Anais Nin* (Nin, 1976) are published in more than 20 languages. Anne Frank's lived experience hiding from the Nazi's not only details her feelings of growing up under these conditions but also offers a political and moral interpretation of humanity's failures. On the other side of the coin, Anais Nin describes and explains her journey to understand her self, her body, and her mind. Interestingly enough, she also studied Progoff's journal writing method before she died. Although she rejected its structure, she commented on the importance of its purpose and ultimate goal of self-actualization. Even more current, one only has to walk through the display aisles of the major bookstores such as Borders or Barnes and Noble and see the many examples of recently published journals. Recently, I found the following:

1. *Keith Haring Journals*,
2. *The Andy Warhol Journals* (this one complete with photos, drawings, and artwork),
3. *The Journal of a VietNam Veteran*, and
4. *The Journal of Someone Dying of AIDS*.

The point is that this genre is alive and well, and qualitative researchers should not be afraid of trying to keep a journal.

In fact, journal writing is so prevalent now that one only has to surf the Internet and see thousands of journal resources, examples, and personal histories on-line. For example, there is an on-line course on journal writing offered by Via Creativa, a Web site entirely devoted to Progoff's Intensive Journal Workshop; chat rooms on journal writing; exemplars of diaries and journal writing; and literally thousands of resources. In general, the common thread that unites all these resources on the Internet is the agreement that journal writing is a way of getting in touch with yourself in terms of reflection, catharsis, remembrance, creation, exploration, problem solving, problem posing, and personal growth. I see all of these as part of the research process. For qualitative researchers, journal writing offers a way to document the researcher's role, triangulate data by the journal itself entered as a data set, and a way to use the journal with participants in the study as a communicative act.

## THURSDAY

Journal writing has its seeds and tradition in the arts and humanities. As someone educated as an artist in dance and choreography, I am constantly making connections between the work of the artist and the work of the qualitative researcher. As I think about all the great dancers and choreographers throughout dance history, it is difficult to think of someone who has not kept a journal about their work in creating dances. Presently, for myself as a qualitative researcher, the options are wide and varied. I keep track of my thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, and interpretations of my role as a researcher in dialogue form or other formats. Often, I choose to write in letter format with members in a given study. Sometimes I keep interactive journals on-line through e-mail correspondence. For example, I am currently keeping on-line journal correspondence with three of my former students who are now assistant professors themselves in Illinois, Kansas, and Michigan. The substance of our writing is about the difficulty of the transition from doctoral student and fairly well-paid professional to underpaid, overworked assistant professor. All three of these former students were at the same time full-time workers in the field of education with years of experience in their respective fields. They were esteemed and rewarded with a decent paycheck as well. Now, as they become assistant professors, they have a huge drop in pay and know at every single minute of the day that they are at the bottom of the pecking order in the bureaucracy of the university. The abrupt and brutal realization of being at the lowest end of the food chain prompts all sorts of soul searching. As a mentor to these my dear friends, I encourage writing to each other on-

line so that we reflect on this together. Here are some examples from our correspondence to illustrate the validity and usefulness of journal writing. In fact, we have decided to do a book on this topic eventually.

J: I am teaching 21 hours since I need the overload money and I am basically frantic with lack of time for myself.

V: When will you have time to write your article from your dissertation? You know the best predictor of success in the hoops of academe begins with publications from the dissertation.

J: Yes I know that—you have told me this so many times. But I am swamped with all the work and my office is shared . . . and tiny so I don't have all my books with me, and half the time I have stuff at home, then here at the office . . . plus I have 12 student teachers to observe and meet with. All are within a 50 mile radius but on heavy traffic times, it is exhausting just sitting in traffic. I visit them 4 or 5 times each . . . because I really need to give them feedback and this is my work after all.

V: Have you ever thought about slowing down? When do you have time to write?

J: I know, I am worried about that, but it (the dissertation) seems so far away, so long ago. I'm into new things now.

V: Yes of course, but why not use the dissertation interviews in a new way? Why not go back to the those two principals and re-interview them today, two years after the study and see what they have to say and write about that?

This example offers both of us as writers a chance to reflect on our practice and beliefs. In fact, it prompted me to look up an entry of mine in my on-going journal I keep about my life as an academic. This was written in January 1981, while I was an assistant professor and feeling some of the same idiosyncratic unease that comes with that unhappy role.

I am trying to fill in the blanks on my annual report which is all bureaucracy and number counting. I find it odd that the State requires only numbers and symbols removed from the experience of working as a professor. I was really naive in accepting the workload I have. I thought everyone had this workload. I teach two graduate courses, two undergraduate courses, and supervise 12 doctoral interns. The interns are placed as far away as 89 miles. It was only when I discovered that a colleague who is a full tenured professor teaches only one class per term, that I asked the department chair about this. He said—well we don't want him around here, he's such a bad teacher. Fine, why do I have to teach so many more classes? Is it so bad to have equitable workloads?

To his credit, the chair did say that he would look into this but of course I wonder if anything will come of this. Sometimes I feel as though I am invisible. Coming from the high powered context of Michigan State and working with the top researchers in the country, it is very alienating to find no one to talk to about ideas or issues. As I write my bureaucratic number counting report, devoid of any texture, nuance, narrative reporting, the loneliness and emptiness of being a professor makes me wonder what I have gotten myself into here. There is no one to talk to about my work, or any current research in our field. On the other hand, I am delighted that my paper was accepted in my favorite journal, *Curriculum Inquiry*. It's about my dissertation study and so I hope someone reads it and does not fall asleep as they do so. I recall my marvelous dance teacher, Margit Heskett, who told me to do something creative when I ever felt alienated and

separated from my work. So I have decided that I will ask my students, as extra work, to provide me with a thick written narrative about my teaching, so that I have some feedback besides the numbers. I am always touched by the standing ovations and written thank you notes for my teaching, but after seeing the way my teaching is reported in the annual report so many dots and in bureaucracy speak, I must get some real, textured, narrative. So my idea is to do something like Margit had us do at the end of dance classes. She made us write to her about every thing we learned. I will ask my students to respond to these four questions;

- a) What is the most significant idea you have come across in this class and how has it changed you?
- b) List three adjectives which capture and describe what you learned in this course.
- c) Would you recommend this course to other students? To whom and why? Explain.
- d) Describe and rate the qualities of the instructor which enabled you to learn what you did in this course.

This way, I will have some narrative feedback from my students and I want to start a portfolio just about my teaching since my life work seems to be writing about the importance and impact of teaching no matter what the subject matter.

I continue to keep a record of my teaching to this day, in addition to the dots-and-numbers business. I always have hope that teaching counts for something in academia though I have very little evidence for this after having now achieved numerous teaching awards and holding the rank of Full Professor. It is one of the great contradictions of academia, which will be the substance of a future article.

To return to the topic at hand, I exchange journals and I write in my journal and also write in participant's journals as a type of continuing conversation and communication between individuals. As I become a connoisseur of journal writing, I inevitably create a model that works for me in the particular study in progress. I can easily look to the many writers referred to earlier in this journal and other well-known diarists, such as Virginia Woolf, for solid, well-written models of journal writing, but in the end what I end up with is my own model.

### **Why Journal Writing?**

Students and colleagues have often asked me why should one invest the time in journal writing. To this I can only reply that journal writing allows one to reflect, to dig deeper if you will, into the heart of the words, beliefs, and behaviors we describe in our journals. It allows one to reflect on the tapes and interview transcripts from our research endeavors. If participants also keep a journal, it offers a way to triangulate data and pursue interpretations in a dialogical manner. It is a type of member check of one's own thinking done on paper.

The clarity of writing down one's thoughts will allow for stepping into one's inner mind and reaching further into interpretations of the behaviors, beliefs, and words we write. For example, a student conducting a ministudy in a qualitative methods class wrote in her journal and described some of her inner thoughts.

I am a bit wary of this research. . . . Am I really a researcher because I am taking a class? Can I ever hope to portray what someone else believes or at least says she believes? How will I know if I am being fair? Will I be able to trust this person? Will she trust me? Why should she trust me? Am I being too critical of myself? I am waiting here and she is already 20 minutes late. I hope she gets here soon. . . . Here she comes. Now I try to capture this person's thoughts on why she is an administrator. . . . (K. S., October, 1997)

As I look at this journal entry, I see the learner/researcher in training asking questions that cause reflection on various issues about the research process. She is beginning to know more about herself and her strengths and weaknesses. She is on the road to defining her role as the research instrument.

## FRIDAY

I am trying to decide if I should write a section on describing the various uses of journal writing like keeping a journal of one's dreams, for example, or a journal in the form of a dialogue like Progoff suggests. Or should I write only about keeping a journal as a qualitative research technique because the audience will basically be researchers? I definitely have to find some examples of the work of my students, who wrote detailed and reflective journals in my qualitative research methods class. In addition, I need to find more of my own examples as the outside reviewers of this piece have urged me to do, to give a fuller picture of the power of journal writing.

## SATURDAY

In my quest to find examples I was most fortunate. Following is an example from J. D., an experienced teacher of some 15 years who teaches middle school in a metropolitan area. She writes her thoughts on the classroom, which was part of her study of students from single-family homes.

I love these kids . . . most from broken homes, most thinking I am their parent, advisor, guardian, good cop, teacher, analyst, and coach. I am trying to get them to read more . . . comic books, novels, go to the library, and then get them to write about this. I think I will go for the two page report idea again. It gives me something to reinforce their understanding of what they read and to give them some feedback. I am worried about P. He is always skipping class these days and

although I know his brother is home from prison, I wish he would come back to school. I will talk to the principal about this today if I don't forget. I also want to design a new way of evaluating my class without the letter grades we are stuck with. I am reading about the use of portfolios in classroom assessment and I think I will try it this month and get the kids to plan it with me. . . . I hope I can use the students' comments on their home situations in my (research) project. (J. D., April 1996)

## SUNDAY

Should I mention that not everyone finds it easy to keep up with the demands of journal writing? The discipline and desire involved nearly outweigh some individuals' ability and or time. On the other hand, can this not be an option for all who are interested in becoming better researchers, writers, thinkers, and scholars? How does one set time apart for journal writing? I recall the teacher who said she only had 20 minutes after school to write in her journal and that was that. Then she ultimately decided she needed to keep a journal at home as well because once she started to write, she found she was staying at school and writing for at least an hour each day. She got up an hour earlier than anyone in her house and started writing in the early morning hours, a technique advocated by many writers. It seems she had to write about her problems in the class from day to day, in order to proceed with her qualitative research project, a study of her first year as a middle school area director.

## ANOTHER MONDAY

Now, as I look through my files, I see I have quite a few good examples to share with you, the reader. Look at this one from a teacher, for a class on qualitative methods, regarding a problem in her classroom.

Once again I have to deal with M. Why is he refusing to write in class and why is he afraid to tell me what is bothering him? He has done this before but we could always talk this out before. . . . I am taking a class right now that relates to this directly. . . . None of the books or papers is helping me so I am just going ahead and going to try a home visit to talk to his Mom and see if she can help. . . . Since I started visiting parents who were unable to come to teacher conferences, I am humbled by what I am learning. . . . M's mother is working three jobs to keep the family of three children and herself together. . . . I wonder if I would have her courage at this point? She has told me that M. is getting in with the "wrong crowd" and has been involved in questionable activities which is why he is skipping school so often. Even sending someone to check on this has not yielded any positive results. She said she thought this was due to more than "being a teenager" but felt that there were no strong role models for him at home. No relatives live nearby. I brought some of M's work to show her and she felt a bit reassured

that at least he was doing something, though she added that "he could do better." I decided I would talk to him tomorrow and ask him to help me organize the class project on voting in the November elections. I felt conflicted upon leaving the house, for I feared that M's Mom needed to talk to someone about her kids and that I wasn't very much of a help at all. . . . Is this part of my role as a researcher? Should I write about this? Am I too much the social worker from my previous life? I do feel more inspired to be better at letting the kids take over more of the responsibility for class projects. Actually it was M. who taught me this month when he volunteered to lead the book circle discussion. (H. H., March, 1996)

Many writers of journals have directly or indirectly stated how journal writing can assist one in developing creativity. The focus and energy demanded of one who writes a journal can be instructive for qualitative researchers.

### ANOTHER TUESDAY

When did I first hear about Ira Progoff? It was 1980 something and he was giving a talk at the University of Alberta in Edmonton on qualitative research methods. In the audience was a former high school teacher of mine who happened to be working on her doctorate there and she mentioned it to me in passing. Since that day I have tried to put into practice much of what Progoff describes. His intensive journal workshop teaches us to be reflective and aware of our unconscious self. He advocates writing a journal as a dialogue with oneself. He began his journal workshops in 1966 and has been refining them ever since. He talks about keeping a daily log. Yes, there is no getting around it—you need to write in this journal every day. No resting. There is only movement forward. He suggests keeping dialogues with key persons in our lives, with our body, with our works, with our roads not taken, with events that were critical in our lives with society, and with our dreams. In other words, we write our journals in dialogue form, which prompts us to think in new ways. For qualitative researchers, a dialogue with the Self may assist in refining the description of the researcher's role. Even if dialogues are not the preferred method of writing, a reflective personal narrative form can be helpful as in this example:

As I interview the people in my study, I am constantly unnerved by the issue of my race. As an African American woman, will this influence the responses from my participants? Most of them are either African American or recent immigrants from Caribbean nations. I am not sure it will help me and in fact I wonder what they will think of me as a researcher. (R. H., February 1997)

Another example from a person grappling with emotions in fieldwork is instructive:

I am already disgusted with what I found out today at the office I am studying. The person I interviewed actually told me he had to lie to people on a regular basis regarding their ability to get a loan for a mortgage. I am going to include this in my report in any event. I am also very tired from this lengthy interview and may have new ideas about it tomorrow. (J. D., January 1997)

These researchers provide a way of re-viewing how one thinks about work in the field. Both are on the road to being sharper as they delineate their own roles in the research project. In fact, many of the insights from my students' journals teach me something in terms of reflecting on my own work.

## ANOTHER WEDNESDAY

Progoff got me thinking about all the books on journal writing that have been useful to me and my students. One of my next favorites after Progoff is Mallon's (1995) text, *A Book of One's Own: People and Their Diaries*. In his overview of diarists and journal writers, he categorizes the writers as follows:

- **Chroniclers:** People who keep their diaries every single day as if recording the news.
- **Travelers:** People who keep a written record during a special time such as a vacation or a trip.
- **Pilgrims:** People who want to discover who they really are.
- **Creators:** People who write to sketch out ideas and inventions in art or science.
- **Apologists:** People who write to justify something they have done to plead their case before all who read the journal.
- **Confessors:** People who conduct ritual unburdenings, conducted with the promise of secrecy or anonymity.
- **Prisoners:** People who must live their lives in prisons or who may be invalids, and as a result must live their lives through keeping a journal.

Of course, any writer might be a combination of any of these categories, but this might be useful as a tool to understand different approaches to keeping a journal. He gives numerous examples of individuals who fall into these categories to illustrate the importance of keeping a journal. In fact, he got interested in writing his book because he himself has kept a journal for more than 30 years. I share that interest with him.

Currently, there are so many wonderful resources on journal writing in popular culture and specifically accessible through the Internet. Recently, in a search on the World Wide Web, by entering the words "journal writing," I saw more than three million entries. In fact, in addition to the journal writing course on the Web, there are many Web sites on the Progoff method, journal writing as a tool for creativity, therapy, and spiritual growth.

## ANOTHER THURSDAY

Last night I couldn't sleep as I thought about all the examples of journal writing in popular culture. First I recalled "Doogie Howser." The television show of a few years ago chronicled a youthful doctor who was a sort of Leonardo DiCaprio type. Younger than his peers in the medical profession, Doogie opened and closed each show writing in his journal, which he kept on his laptop computer. His struggles as a gifted teenager among cynical colleagues and his struggle to know himself were the focus of the journal writing moments in the show. Then I remembered Bob Packwood's diaries. The senator actually wrote about his extra-curricular activities away from home and family, which ultimately was used to force his resignation from the U.S. Senate due to his sexual harassment of young office workers. Then, who can forget the O. J. Simpson trial? The mass media circus that surrounded this bizarre case was highlighted for me by the fact that the murdered woman's diary was not allowed as evidence even though it described in great detail circumstances directly related to the case. All this makes me wonder what would be most helpful to the reader of this journal. Because the audience is an audience of educational researchers or researchers in training, I think I need to mention one more resource about journal writing. It is Rainer's (1978) text, *The New Diary*. Rainer cotaught with Nin a course on journal writing to students at a Los Angeles college. She wrote this book, which contains superb examples of journal writing. I agree with her use of the terms *journal* and *diary* interchangeably. She describes seven techniques for journal writing, some very similar to Proffitt's technique. Her list is one that qualitative researchers may recognize as those regularly used in the arts and humanities.

### Rainer's Seven Techniques

*Lists.* This technique allows for a person to write lists of activities such as things to do, things that upset a person, things that are problematic, and so forth. It allows a writer to capture the pace of one's activities, and can be a good beginning for a journal writer who may go back and fill in the story in narrative form regarding all the entries on the list.

*Portraits.* This allows the writer to describe a person or any number of persons. The portrait is never really finished for the qualitative researcher. It evolves and takes on a life of its own throughout the project, and the writer may add to and subtract from it as the work takes shape.

*Maps of consciousness.* This technique is borrowed from the arts, and it involves actually drawing a map of what one is thinking. She advocates using

stick figures, lines, or shapeless blobs. It is a way to free up one's thoughts and put them to paper in another format.

*Guided imagery.* This technique is borrowed from the psychologist who advises that daydreaming images allow for an individual to start writing about any given topic.

*Altered point of view.* In this technique, the writer takes a different perspective on any given activity. For the qualitative researcher, for example, one might write about something in an observation or interview from another person's viewpoint, not the researcher's viewpoint. Many beginning researchers find it hard to write in the first person, and they talk about their projects in a third-person voice. It is a way of looking at something from the outside. For Rainer, looking from the outside might aid in getting to the inside of a topic.

*Unsent letters.* Obviously this is about writing a letter to someone and without any intention of showing it to that person. In a research situation, the researcher may write to one of the participants in the study, for example.

*Dialogues.* This is the technique Progoff suggests and many writers use this effectively.

The dialogues come from Gestalt therapies and, of course, Jungian therapy. In Rainier's text (1978, pp. 104-111), she offers examples of dialogues with the self, the body, and works. These examples are fine models for anyone attempting a dialogue. She highlights a Progoff idea, "dialogues with the body," which suggest conversations with the body as a whole. Following is a portion of that example:

ME: Well body, how do you feel?

BODY: Weak, shaky, a bit hurt. I feel open and vulnerable. I can't trust my environment yet.

ME: But you'll mend?

BODY: Yes, I'll mend. I don't know how soon . . .

ME: Maybe when you are feeling better, it won't sound so awful.

BODY: Maybe . . . I'm strong, and I can take it.

Obviously, something like this helps the journal writer relate to the body's messages. In this particular case, the writer was a person who felt disengaged from her body. I recall how many of my students who keep a journal in class resonate with this dialogue technique. As qualitative researchers, this technique, writing in dialogue format, often helps to sharpen writing skills. As I have said many times to my students, writing is a form of permanent insurrection, and qualitative researchers one way or another are usually involved in permanent insurrection.

## ANOTHER FRIDAY

I am trying to think about the best way to summarize all the ideas of this paper so far. The reader who is a qualitative researcher may be interested in an example from a researcher who kept a journal to reflect on her research practice while she was studying an athletic department:

while I was in the office, staff members came in and were talking about . . . the drawing the staff had the previous day. It was a lottery for a trip to a post season tournament. One of the winners came in and talked about this. I was able to hear his perspective. The most interesting thing to me was that I saw this as a ritual in the department . . . yet, in our interview, this was never mentioned even though I asked the question to uncover this. This teaches me the limitations of a structured interview format, when trying to uncover a construct like organizational culture.

If questions about the symbols of culture can cause respondents to frame their answers in terms of what they think the interviewer wants to know, how much more would this be true, when trying to uncover the basic values of the culture (under study). (B. E., March 1996)

This entry offers an example of a person trying to come to terms with a technique in the study and its value, as well as the role of the researcher as it changes and evolves throughout the study. Following is an example of a different sort, from a participant in a study and her thoughts on her classroom:

I looked over my journal from this year and I see a pattern in it. All my complaints and big headaches seem to come from situations where I have no power. Usually, no—make that, ALL the critical incidents I describe in my journal are about the principal, the state regulations, the characters who have some power. But then I see I am playing their game too—I am avoiding confrontations, I am running away from letting myself take control and be Empowered. I have been a wimp. And somehow, I have to deal with my principal. I usually go around him altogether. I also feel like I may need to find a better place to work at this my beloved music. (K.L.L., May 1996)

The example goes on at length with this soul-searching and although at this point it is not resolved, the writer certainly is thinking through major issues about teaching and learning, her own position at the school, and this later led to her connecting this to the study at large.

I keep going back to showing examples, and so I must include an interactive example. I began interviewing teachers who were thinking of leaving teaching 4 years ago and have kept contact with a number of the participants in the study. Since I have relocated to Florida, we have been using e-mail in our journal writing. This excerpt may be illustrative of how we write back and forth.

Natasha: I just looked over the interview transcript you sent and I wanted to add emphasis to one of the comments I made about feeling useless and chewed up when ever I entered the classroom. I think I outgrew teaching. . . . Don't get me

wrong . . . I love the kids I teach, I feel like they are my kids . . . but I felt I was getting invisible.

Me: Yes, I found that theme later in the second interview we did . . . anyway, can you help me out here and clarify what you mean by "Outgrowing" teaching in your case? Also, I am really interested in your idea about feeling invisible. . . .

There are many of these e-mail-type conversations and I will eventually use them as part of the data set to triangulate types of data collected.

## ANOTHER SATURDAY

As I try to conclude this piece on journal writing, the major ideas I want to punctuate have to do with journal writing, as a technique used in the arts and humanities, resonating with the qualitative researcher. Writing down what we think and feel helps in the journey to improve our research practice, for example. Some of the personal examples used in the body of this text may serve to illustrate the individual writer's thinking processes and the willingness to analyze, rethink, and go deeper into a critical stance about one's life and work. Proffoff calls this the scope of personal renewal. Others call it reflection. Still others see journal writing, myself included, as a tangible way to evaluate our experience, improve and clarify one's thinking, and finally become a better writer and scholar, if you will. In my own experience of journal writing, and as I see what my students write, I find that we are writing to chronicle our research practice as educators.

We are talking about examining our own thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. Many will say that that helps only the writer. Still, if that were the only outcome of writing a journal, I would say that in itself may help to ensure the continuing self-reflection each of us claims as a first step to modeling this for our students. Journal writing is a powerful research technique for the researcher and the participants in a given study. The definitions of the roles of the researcher and participants in a study are clarified through the reflection and the writing process involved in journal writing. Because the researcher is the research instrument, keeping a journal is a check and balance in the entire course of a qualitative research project. Likewise, keeping a journal during the course of a research project is a way to practice interdisciplinary triangulation. Because journal writing is part of the history of the arts and humanities, and part of various psychological studies, human services researchers benefit from this type of triangulation. I often use the metaphor of journal writing as sculpting. Ages ago, when I took a sculpting class working with clay, one of the techniques sculptors use is whittling away at portions of this part of the piece or that part and every day as you sculpt, the piece takes a new form. In a very like manner, the journal writer is also doing this. The written text of the journal evolves, is reshaped, and for the purposes of the researcher, becomes a way to clarify, reinterpret, and define much of our work. Given

that readers of this journal are interested in qualitative research techniques to some extent, this technique, journal writing, may offer a way to illuminate what the researcher is studying in a highly disciplined and deeply personal way.

Following is an example, to illustrate this point, from my own journal about what it means to be a teacher and a writer. It is difficult for me to separate the two roles for no matter what the subject matter I am teaching, I teach about writing and reflection to deepen knowledge of the subject matter at hand. This entry is part of an on-line response interacting with a former doctoral student who is now trying to decide whether to leave teaching and start a new career as a freelance writer. She sent me a message with the question, "What's the point of teaching if no one cares about all the time and effort you put into teaching?"

I think one's students most often care about teaching, you care about teaching. I surely care about teaching. I want to give you an example of just how powerful a teacher really is . . . in terms of affecting one's outlook on life. As you know I have been taking French cooking classes from an outstanding chef and teacher here in Ft. Lauderdale. When I think about all I have learned since August, I am amazed, humbled, grateful, and astounded. These cooking classes are like a very bright light at the end of a dark tunnel. I am revitalized and inspired by the passion, dedication, humor, and commitment of a superb teacher and unbelievable chef. Any teacher has lasting effects on students. Jean-Pierre (Brehier) teaches the subject matter of French/Floribbean cooking, but also teaches by his example: dedication, persistence, aspiring to excellence, and patience, all qualities of a great teacher. As a result of taking these classes, I have become a better cook, but more importantly a better teacher, a better writer, and a better person. So the reality seems transformative to me. As Henry Adams said long ago, a teacher affects eternity. You can never tell where the influence stops. (December 1998)

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In speculating on the future of this useful technique of journal writing, I think that researchers in training may benefit from the practice of journal writing as a qualitative research technique for the following reasons:

1. Journal writing allows the writer to be more reflective.
2. Journal writing offers the writer an opportunity to write uninterrupted, and totally focused on the point at hand.
3. Journal writing is a technique well used in the arts and humanities, and may offer social science researchers an opportunity to cross borders so to speak.
4. Journal writing allows for deepening knowledge of whatever subject matter the researcher takes part in.
5. Journal writing allows participants in a research project an active voice.

6. Journal writing may allow researchers and participants the opportunity to write cooperatively, and interactively as needed.
7. Journal writing provides an additional data set to outline, describe, and explain the exact role of the researcher in any given project.

## APPENDIX

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