

A Qualitative Stance

Essays in honor of Steinar Kvale

Edited by

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In memory of Steinar Kvale, 1938-2008

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Steinar Kvale passed away on 12th March 2008. He had the opportunity to read through the manuscript for this book, and he highly appreciated all the contributions.

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INTRODUCING THE QUALITATIVE STANCE

Qualitative research methods are endemic to many research and practice traditions such as education, psychology, anthropology, sociology, human geography, marketing, business, and nursing science. Behind the increasing popularity of qualitative methods stands what may be characterized as a qualitative stance. From this point of departure, the world – its processes and phenomena – are (or should be) described before they are theorized, understood before they are explained, and seen as concrete qualities rather than abstract quantities. This qualitative stance does not eschew concepts or theories, but it insists that description is not the same as theory, and that in order to understand the intricate phenomena of today's world, we do well to start with precise descriptions of the concrete. This does not favor any one method a priori (participant observation, open-ended interviews etc.). What the qualitative stance opens up for is that researchers go about seeing, telling, imagining etc. what people do in order to deliver descriptions of the concrete rather than abstract qualities or quantities of the social world. A qualitative stance involves focusing on the cultural, everyday, and situated aspects of human thinking, learning, knowing, acting, and ways of understanding ourselves as persons while at the same time striving to be scientific. In the present book, all the contributors make an effort in different ways to advance such a qualitative stance to social science research.

Since this qualitative stance speaks to a multitude of meanings, it is the possession neither of a single research discipline nor of a single author, although we will mention one person in particular: Steinar Kvale. The book is written in honor of Professor Steinar Kvale. Kvale is most widely known for his book on qualitative research interviews, *InterViews: An Introduction*

to *Qualitative Research Interviewing*, (Kvale, 1996), but his interests span a much broader range of topics such as qualitative, psychological, and educational research. The present book attests to the inspiration that scholars from around the world have drawn from his writings. Kvale's work has pioneered a qualitative stance that draws from psychoanalysis when studying the therapeutic interview, from Maoism when pondering dialectics, from hermeneutics and phenomenology when understanding the nature of learning, and from history when uncovering the impact of the Church in contemporary psychology.

In Kvale's works we significantly find a critical exposition of the self-understanding and the ways of thinking that are displayed in some modern educational and psychological institutions, not least that they embrace a problematic kind of advanced and complex rationality. Most pointedly, this critique is formulated in the account of psychology as a child of modernism (Kvale, 1992). Contrary to psychology's modern self-understanding, Kvale's works emphasize that in such institutional formations, power and dominance structures are concealed and will not appear in the self-understandings of the institutions. Kvale stresses this point when he argues that the prevailing thinking of education is formulated not on the basis of pedagogical/philosophical thinking, but rather on the basis of the bureaucratic organization forms widespread in the world of industry and business (Kvale, 1976, 1977).

In several of his works, Kvale has formulated constructive alternatives to the thinking hidden in modern psychological and educational institutions. This search for alternatives is rooted in what may be termed a phenomenology of everyday life, arguing that the basis for our analyses of pedagogical and psychological issues is to be found in actual descriptions of people's ways of acting in daily life situations. Kvale has tried in particular to establish an alternative to the technologization of human relations by stressing the importance of founding educational and psychological research on the experience of what is meaningful in practical everyday life. This is displayed for instance in his works on apprenticeship, which is regarded as an alternative to technologized and subjectivized forms of educational thinking, where the contents of learning are separated from the form of learning. What has emerged from the different directions that Kvale's work has taken is a distinct qualitative stance, which implies a commitment to study people's everyday

lives, as they experience, learn, and act in the world, and opposes “technified” approaches to the study of human lives in any form.

The book’s chapters illustrate and advance this qualitative stance in different ways. Three distinct themes stand out as pivotal points in the book. The first theme centers around qualitative studies on learning. In the respective chapters, learning is studied as a social ontological phenomenon concerning human change in changing social practices. The second theme concerns critiques of current educational practices and the postmodern consumer society. This critique is arrived at through careful descriptions of subjectivity and contemporary social relations. The third theme is about the development of new ways of thinking about qualitative inquiry. Within these respective themes, many chapters address the relations between qualitative social research and the ethical and political presuppositions and implications for knowledge, identity, and learning. In what follows, we give a brief overview of the chapters that make up this book.

I. Understanding Learning

JEAN LAVE & MARTIN PACKER set the stage with a chapter outlining a social ontology of learning. The chapter explores the concept of “the everyday”, which is popular in a variety of theoretical arenas at the present time, but remains mostly unanalyzed. Lave & Packer propose that a view of the everyday is implicit in all theories of learning. However, they argue for the need for an explicit conception of the everyday social character of the politics and epistemology of learning: that learning is ubiquitous in ongoing social activity.

KLAUS NIELSEN differentiates in his chapter between a narrow perspective and an expanded perspective on learning. In pursuing the expanded perspective, Nielsen applies the metaphor of a learning landscape, which was originally developed together with Steinar Kvale. The metaphor of a learning landscape emphasizes the learning resources of everyday practice. The chapter illustrates the expanded perspective on learning through two studies on the concrete everyday practices involved in the process of becoming either a pianist or a baker.

PETER MUSAEUS focuses on learning and identity, a great concern in contemporary educational research as well as the classical Bildungsroman, being interrelated with space and time. The essay explores the extent to which Bakhtin's concept of chronotope can serve as an analytical tool to analyze dialogic notions of identity. The chapter is a case study of an eminent guitar luthier and it explores the significance of the chance encounter, the threshold and the road to identity formation in being an informal apprentice and a journeyman seeking out the influence of foreign guitar luthier masters.

In his chapter, CLAUS ELMHOLDT explores how identity dilemmas of belonging and becoming may become barriers to learning. The chapter takes its point of departure in a case study of an ethnic migrant girl's negotiation of identity across the cultural communities of home and school/work. According to Elmholdt, the girl's participation across contexts enacts an identity dilemma of learning to be a good girl (adopting the traditional religious lifestyle as recommended by her parents), or learning to be a learner (adopting the modern urban individualized reflexive lifestyle as required by school and workplaces). Elmholdt argue that the described identity dilemma of belonging and becoming is also a dilemma of learning in fundamental ways.

OLE DREIER investigates situated learning and persons moving around in social practice in the pursuit of learning. On the surface, the article looks at institutionally arranged ways that affect the opportunities and nature of learning processes; but at a deeper level, the article challenges psychology to develop a conception of structures of social practice. The article uses illustrations from empirical research on studying changes and learning taking place in people when they attend therapy sessions as a secluded part of their everyday lives in structures of social practice.

The central theme in TONE SAUGSTAD's chapter about the knowledge society is the clash between scholastic versus non-scholastic learning that stems from a poor understanding of the field of practice and a one-dimensional understanding of knowledge. Using Aristotle's categorization of knowledge, the paper concludes that some forms of knowledge are acquired in practical

life, while other knowledge forms are acquired in school through the use of analytical and systematic principles of learning.

HUBERT & STUART DREYFUS present their five stages for the acquisition of professional skills from novice to expert. In this paper, the conditions for a sixth stage denoting the step from expertise to mastery is introduced. Generally the advancement from one step to the next is characterized by a decreasing dependence on instruction and context-free rules and features, and an increasing experience-based awareness of subtle contextual features crucial to the task at hand. A core notion in identifying progress in professional skills is “intuitive expertise”, signifying a capacity to encompass multiple aspects of a given situation. What finally distinguishes a master from an expert is the capacity, the courage, and the willingness to enlarge the repertoire of perspectives and the accompanying actions. The precondition for this development is, it is argued, an exceptional motivation and dedication to the profession.

KENNETH & MARY GERGEN extend the implications of one of Kvale’s catalytic proposals, namely that “the conversation may be conceived of as a basic mode of knowing”. They do so in order to broaden our conceptions of educational practice from being seen as a means of enhancing individual competence to being increasingly collaborative. In the view of Gergen and Gergen, educational practices for the future develop skills in effective dialogue and link scholarly understanding to broader contexts of practice. It is proposed in the chapter that educational programs for the future develop curricula that recognize multiple constructions of the world, that confront important conflicts in value, and that cultivate appreciation for ambiguity over certainty.

LENE TANGGAARD pays attention to the looping effects of the post-modern and very popular concept of life-long learning. She does so inspired by Steinar Kvale’s idea of the ideological function of learning theories. Looping effects occur when people actively take upon themselves the ideologies implied in what they read or hear. In the chapter, the possible looping effects involved in the present shift in our assumptions about learning, in the change from modernity and to postmodernity, are analyzed. The chapter addresses some

of the effects this may have on our self-understanding in post-modernity when learning is said to be a process happening everywhere, or at least as being a process out of the teachers' control.

II. Critiquing Theory

AMEDEO GIORGI sets his focus on the prevailing experimental and objectivistic trend in mainstream (American) psychology. This trend, he argues, still dominates psychological research even though scholars have tried for half a century to pose the question of its methodological presuppositions and its consequences. The problematic effect of this attitude is that a crucial part of psychology's subject-matter is neglected or strictly devalued, namely subjective experience. Giorgi questions the usefulness of experimental procedures when it comes to understanding research findings. A precondition for understanding the meaning of data is the inclusion of experiential categories in research. His aim is a clarification of the question of what it means for subjective phenomena to be objective.

In his chapter, IAN PARKER highlights a connection in the discipline of psychology between qualitative research and psychoanalysis. According to Parker, this connection consists of dialectical materialism as laid out by Chairman Mao. Parker argues that the dialectical materialist conception of contradiction and change can energize and politicize both qualitative research and psychoanalysis by showing how and why they must confront a common enemy, namely mainstream "metaphysical" psychology.

SVEND BRINKMANN takes a classic paper by Kvale and Grenness from 1967 (on B.F. Skinner and J.-P. Sartre) as the starting point for a critique of the current psychologized image of man in the social sciences. By drawing on the classical positivism of Auguste Comte, as well as the "literary sociology" of Michel Houellebecq, Brinkmann further develops an analysis of human life in postmodern consumer societies, which demonstrates a productive role for literary works in qualitative social science discussions.

III. Challenging Qualitative Research

DONALD POLKINGHORNE addresses the ethics of interviewing and presents the thoughts of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas as an alternative frame of reference for ethical thinking in qualitative interviewing. Levinas holds that the place of the ethical is located in the face-to-face encounter with another person. His ideas of the Face, the Said and Saying, and Desire are explored. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of Levinas' ethics for qualitative interviewers.

JULIANNE CHEEK focuses on qualitative research and inquiry in particular and the wider political context in which qualitative research is conducted and in which qualitative researchers are embedded. The chapter develops a notion of both inter-view and inter-viewing as craft, thus highlighting the need to consider the interconnectedness of theory and method, the inter-view as a metaphor for the relationship between research context and research method/design and the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

In his chapter, NORMAN DENZIN criticizes the ethical standards of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) as being based on a bio-medical, ethical model resulting in disciplining qualitative research. Consequently, qualitative researchers are in danger of being marginalized both in relation to public forums and in relation to defining the field of scientific research. Alternatively, Denzin suggests viewing ethics as pedagogies of practice, grounding qualitative inquiries in research communities where ethical and scientific values are integrated into daily practices fostering an integrated ethical qualitative behavior.

CARSTEN ØSTERLUND lets Steinar Kvale have the final word by reporting an interview with Steinar Kvale about advising, and, in particular, the advising of qualitative research projects carried out by graduate students. In the interview, Østerlund explores how Kvale's own work on evaluation, dialogue, qualitative interviews, and apprenticeship influences his advising practices. Furthermore, the interview pursues issues such as the selection of PhD students, navigating institutional requirements, helping students build and conduct qualitative research, the advising dialogue and power dynamics.

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