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**CONFIDENTIAL**

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Interviewer(s): Cathy

Respondent(s): Bruce Brandon

**[00:00:03] INT: There we go. So Bruce, have you always been in research and academia or have you got another life [laughs]?**

[00:00:14] RES: No, I guess I’ve been in academia to varying degrees most of my professional life, and it is the few odd years when I have worked outside of educational institutions has really been in sort of quasi academic capacities, I guess, in so far as pursuing activities that I was doing at universities, you know, research and development, I guess application.

**[00:00:50] INT: Mmm, yes, okay. So what kind of researcher are you?**

[00:00:56] RES: What’s the answer to that, fair to middling, I suppose [laughs]?

**[00:00:59] INT: [laughs]**

[00:01:01] RES: My main research area, well, my core research discipline is linguistics. That’s what I did my postgraduate, that’s what I did a masters and a PhD in, and I’ve worked fairly solidly in pretty core kind of empirical linguistics for much of my adult life, I suppose, but I have, for various reasons, moved out of linguistics departments and worked in sort of education departments and broader, what would you call them, social sciences type schools and departments. Worked in educational research and higher educational research in my kind of meandering disciplinary journey through life, combined sometimes with a need to get paid employment.

**[00:01:52] INT: Ah-**

[00:01:53] RES: So between the two fields I’ve wandered around, but I have to say, mostly, I guess, between linguistics and education, which involves a measure of sort of anthropology and sociology thrown in.

**[00:02:07] INT: So in terms of your career journey, I mean, you did say something like, ‘in order to get paid employment’. Can you say a bit more about that?**

[00:02:23] RES: There have been, I suppose, a couple of points of which my career, what do they call it, career trajectory, has come crashing down [laughs]. For a while there, in my kind of mid-career, I suppose I became a kind of academic manager, if you like. I was made sort of Head of Discipline and Head of Department and then proceeded to a few sort of Head of School and kind of, sort of Executive Dean type roles, and I think at a couple of points in that path, I kind of fell foul of universities, or probably ended up lacking in kind of commitment to the particular job I was doing.

So at a couple of those occasions, I kind of found myself with really no immediate plans and nowhere much to go, and was in a position where I needed to pay off mortgages and various things, didn’t want to wait for too long, so I applied for a few odd jobs in that process and one of those occasions was when I’d been in this Australian university for a while, and I applied to become part of researcher education at Australian University. So that was what got me into the researcher education field, which was kind of entirely new to me and highly strange to me at the time, and where I met a number of wonderful people.

**[00:04:00] INT: I suppose that’s the kind of employment angle of your career, but I suppose there’s also the intellectual journey that you’ve taken over the course of your career, and I suppose, would you like to tell me about your first forays into qualitative research and how that’s developed over your career?**

[00:04:29] RES: Okay. I find that a very interesting question really, and I was kind of thinking about this while I was riding home tonight, knowing that I was going to be talking to you about something like this. It’s kind of interesting for me because my core discipline is linguistics, as I said, and within linguistics, I work in a fairly, I guess a fairly empirical, quasi scientific side of linguistics which kind of looks at sort of data from languages and tries to analyse it, often in very structural terms, and just tries to sort of understand how language works, I guess, in the human mind, if you like. And that’s a field which by and large for many, many years, and still in its core is really very unreflective of its own paradigms, is very unaware of itself as having a qualitative edge to it, in which in many ways doesn’t kind of reflect on that aspect of its methodology and its underlying theories at all.

This doesn’t of course, apply to a lot of the people in the sort of the more applied linguistics field, but more in the what we kind of laugh and we call the pure linguists field that I’ve spent a lot of time in.

So when in the course of working in Aboriginal areas and becoming a kind of a manager of schools and faculties and stuff, as I moved away from pure linguistics into areas of education, Aboriginal studies involving anthropology and sociology, and as I worked in sort of multidisciplinary areas, and I guess managed multidisciplinary departments in schools, I really became aware of the fact that, you know, I hadn’t thought, I hadn’t really thought, along with my colleagues, at all about the nature of qualitative research, and ended up, I guess, you know, pursuing my own interests in that, and working together with number of sort of PhD students I had over the years, to really fill out my understandings of that.

So that’s how I got into qualitative research.

**[00:06:46] INT: Mmm-**

[00:06:48] RES: Yes, sorry.

**[00:06:49] INT: No, I suppose I was just thinking, were there any particular incidents or experiences that kind of started that thinking or prompted that kind of thinking, as you went along?**

[00:07:08] RES: I think there were a couple of underlying things. I’ve always been someone who’s been, I guess, interested in political issues, you know, like from the time I was in kind of high school, primary school probably, interested in politics, and I’m a kind of a, you know, I was a teenager in the late 60s, early 70s, when the whole world seemed to be opening up and you know, we were into our various sort of social theories and things, but I think it was really trying to understand more the kind of the social nature of language, and kind of really feeling sort of deep down inside me, although I didn’t articulate it for very long, that our kind of fairly scientific, individual focused approach to language, was kind of not really cutting it and was not really explaining many things. So that kind of pushed me out, even within the discipline, to sort of thinking about various kind of social theories and stuff that would be relevant, and I guess really getting involved, one of my early kind of more managerial type jobs was working in an Aboriginal Studies department and heading that up, and trying to develop that academically, to a point where it ran honours degrees and PhD programmes, and was a fully-fledged discipline in the university I was working at.

So that really pushed me to engage with lots of social theory. It pushed me, as someone who came from a very rigorous background in linguistics, where we kind of enquire into every aspect of language, and where we’re very rigorous about the nature of our evidence and what we take for- the evidence that we take for argument, and when I was first kind of leaving that discipline and engaging with colleagues and universities, and trying to work out what the logic of their arguments was, and trying to work out what the strength of their evidence was and how this got measured, you know, as one does kind of social research and looks at kind of wicked social problems and stuff, and I found that very confronting at first, and had to do a lot of reflection on what really does count as good evidence and qualitative research, and how can we be sure that what we’re saying is actually advancing our understandings, rather than just, you know, expressing our preferred philosophies and approach. Mmm. Does that answer- did I answer the question [unclear 00:09:52]?-

**[00:09:52] INT: Yes, yes, it’s really interesting, that kind of coming at it, because most people I’ve spoken to, their awareness of qualitative research, or if like myself, they’ve come from a more positivistic paradigm, they come to this kind of understanding of qualitative research, through research, doing the research, whereas it sounds like for you, that actually, it was more through your management of research projects. So it’s a very different kind of position that you were in. You weren’t right in the middle of doing the research.**

[00:10:38] RES: No that’s true, and that’s actually very interesting and a useful, insightful thing to say, because I hadn’t actually thought about that before, but that’s exactly how it happened, and of course in the process of, you know, when you’re an academic manager in these areas, you are trying to help people develop their disciplines. You get involved in all sorts of review committees, you get to sort of have a say or review on PhDs that have failed and you know, various kinds of things like that, and so you actually do get to confront the kinds of judgements that colleagues in the disciplines make about the work of other people, and yes, it was really that that got me thinking about qualitative research and how can we have kind of a theory and a metatheory, I suppose, of qualitative research, and how do we know that what we’re doing is correct? Not correct, I suppose, is the wrong- how do we know that what we’re doing kind of- correct is completely the wrong term to use of course [laughs], so wipe that off the tape [laughs], but how do we know that what we’re doing is worthwhile, you know? How do we know it’s kind of saying anything that’s useful?

**[00:12:00] INT: Yes.**

[00:12:01] I should say, one thing I didn’t actually fill in was, many years, well, five or 10 years before I really got into linguistics, I had done an arts degree, majoring in English literature and in the process of that, I did a double major and then went on to do honours in English lit, and in that process, I was absolutely aghast, I think in some kind of pre-theoretical way, but I was absolutely aghast at what kind of metrics, what kind of measures or criteria the people who were lecturing me and supervising my kind of undergrad research were, what kind of parameters were they bringing to assess a piece of literature as valuable in some ways, or not valuable in other ways. I couldn’t understand it.

It just seemed to be pure scholarship for the sake of it, most of the time, without any sense of reflecting on why it was worthwhile doing this stuff. So that’s a legacy I took with me, you know, in later years, that reaction to the kind of, I don’t know, the inexorable, unreflected subjectivity of my English lit double major.

**[00:13:28] INT: Mmm so the, I’m going to be, I think, provocative here, and-**

[00:13:34] RES: Oh that’s not like you Cathy, no.

**[00:13:37] INT: [laughs] I’m trying to, you know, unearth more about what you mean. So the scholarship for the sake of scholarship, well, what else is there in scholarship? So rather than me guessing and thinking I know what you mean by that, could you-**

[00:13:57] RES: Oh okay, yes, I’m probably using-

**[00:13:58] INT: -[unclear 00:13:58] alternatives.**

[00:14:01] RES: I’m probably using a fairly kind of jaundiced definition of scholarship, I think. I mean, I think in a double English major that I did, I was dealing with lecturers and professors and all sorts of people who would kind of, one of them, I think, was an expert in, was it Johnson or Pope or one of those people, and kind of knew everything, you know, I had a really, you know, encyclopaedic knowledge of, let’s say it was Pope, Alexander Pope’s life and correspondence and relationships and all the various you know, political and social things that were referenced in the poetry, and other kind of writings, but was kind of really never able to say succinctly or even non succinctly, I think, what was really worthwhile about studying Pope’s poetry. What kind of contribution did this make to the sum of the world’s knowledge, understandings? What kind of difference does it make? How do we know or feel something more about our lives or being human or being in this world, as a result of reading Pope’s work? I think they were the questions that I was trying to answer, maybe in a kind of a naive, late adolescent sort of way, a bit too much, but I think there are still legitimate questions that weren’t answered at all.

**[00:15:50] INT: So you said there, what difference does it make? Almost like, so what, you know, the iambic pentameter or whatever, so what? Yes, I-**

[00:16:01] RES: Well, yes.

**[00:16:03] INT: Yes. Thank you, I [unclear 00:16:04].**

[00:16:06] RES: Yes, I find myself kind of, you know, contradicting myself all the time about these things, because you know, because I’ve been in arts faculties and I’ve kind of presided over arts faculties to various degrees and done my own research for a long time and I kind of, on the one hand, I really value, what’s it called? Disinterested intellectual inquiry used to be the term that people used, you know, that whole idea of an arts faculty that you were researching things that were capable of research, and that this was automatically a good thing to do, and who knows if what you’re doing kind of has any relevance or connects to anything, but you never know, one day, the stuff that you’re doing may turn out to be really important to people’s understanding of where we are or how we are or one day it may not, but it’s still quite a worthwhile thing to do.

So I kind of believe that on one hand that you just, you know, people can research all sorts of things at all sorts of times, and you don’t need to put any metrics on it, but on the other hand, I do kind of think sometimes, is what we’re doing of any value at all? And I used to sometimes ask my grad students in linguistics, I used to say to them, Look, what would happen if overnight, let’s imagine we’re in one of those kind of HBO, you know, specials and stuff like that, where weird kind of things happen, and let’s imagine that overnight, all the linguistics books disappear from all the libraries in every university in the world. What have we lost or what have we gained?

So they’re the kinds of, I mean, I don’t know what the answer to that is. Sometimes I think, mmm, maybe it won’t make that much difference to anything, and then I wonder, well, what if doesn’t make any difference to anything, does it matter? So you know, there’s all these, I don’t know, these questions go round in circles, but I think like lots of people, like lots of sort of you know, baby boomers and children of the hippy era and people like me, who were out on the streets opposing the Vietnam war, opposing apartheid in South Australia- in South Africa, you know, we search for meaning and purpose, and we’re trying at some level to convince ourselves that what we’re doing is useful in some way, but in particular, we would like it to be useful for the purposes, I think, of social justice and of creating a better thinking society. And so in, you know, I said I have a meandering path, but in a meandering fashion this evening, I probably identified what really got me into qualitative theory at a kind of a later stage in my career, because I was looking to see if these sorts of, all these different questions and different principles pointing me in all sorts of different directions in my research career, if qualitative theory could kind of put those together in some way, and start shaping up some coherent answers to them, and it’s why I kind of encourage my students, even my linguistic students these days, to really think carefully about theories and frameworks and paradigms and the rigour of what we’re doing.

**[00:20:09] INT: And you can’t have rigour without a decent framework?**

[00:20:16] RES: Woah, well, I think you can have rigour. I think, mmm, that’s a very interesting question. That’s a very provocative question. No I think of course you can have rigour. You can have rigour in terms of the, I guess the logic, the flow of what you’re saying. You can have rigour in terms of how you create an interpretation, an analysis, an argument and a kind of a conclusion outcome from the research that you’re doing. You can have rigour, but I think the very point of all that work that goes into looking at qualitative research, I think it tells us that in the world of qualitative research, it’s kind of pretty tricky to know what rigour is, and sometimes your basic idea of what follows logically from one point to the next, to the next, that’s pretty complicated and pretty messed up and pretty murky in many ways, and if you have some good theoretical, analytical frameworks and paradigms, you’re probably on safer ground, much of the time, and it helps you to know you’re going in the right direction.

**[00:21:48] INT: Yes, the, changing direction slightly, I’m really kind of keen to hear, and I think the people who might be reading this, you know, whether they’re masters students or teachers of qualitative research, might be interested in any empirical work that you’ve done and your experience of work in the field.**

[00:22:16] RES: Oh, in terms of qualitative research in particular-

**[00:22:18] INT: Yes.**

[00:22:19] RES: -rather than linguistic research?

**[00:22:21] INT: Yes.**

[00:22:22] RES: Yes, I did a fair amount of research when I started working in this area of researcher education, kind of mid-career, and in many ways that was where I kind of first formally confronted the need to, well, I guess first of all, when you start doing that kind of work, as I said before, I kind of fell into that discipline because I needed a job at a particular time, and it was a lovely place to fall, because I met some wonderful people and you know, it was a great intellectual journey to go on, but you realise very quickly when you’re geared into those areas that qualitative research fits into, that one of the things you need to do when you’re publishing and presenting at conferences and stuff like that, is to declare where you stand. You need to be able to tell people what kind of paradigm you’re in or what particular sub-paradigm you’re in.

So very quickly, when I got into this qualitative research in higher education, I had to get to understand the various qualitative frameworks and to work within those, and of course, you know, I just chose, I think, what most of the text books call general qualitative inquiry, which means you basically go out interview people with what you refer to as semi-structured interviews, and you do to some degree, well, to varying degrees of kind of impressionistic takes on what are the kind of recurring or prominent themes and what interpretations you make out of those.

So I did quite a lot of that, mostly working with graduate students at universities or other academics, and particularly within the academics, working with research supervisors to try and understand the processes of doctoral education in particular. Yes, so that’s what I did.

**[00:24:50] INT: Mhmm. So do you teach qualitative research methodology, or did you?**

[00:25:00] RES: I did teach it for a number of years, for many years, actually. I taught it in the context of initially, master of education programmes and then there’s optional coursework inside education PhD programmes, and then that became offered to a wider audience within the arts faculty. So including students from all sorts of, you know, language areas, anthropology and a range of other places.

**[00:25:39] INT: Were there particular aspects that you taught?**

[00:25:46] RES: So were there particular aspects that I taught? Sorry, was-

**[00:25:49] INT: Yes.**

[00:25:50] RES: Yes, yes. I guess the main approach that I took to that, and it’s not an uncommon approach, was because I was working with people who by and large were already engaged in their own research projects. So I was working, be it at a kind of masters level, sometimes an honours level, often at a PhD level, so I was working with a lot of people who had come through in their various disciplines to get to their graduate studies, but for one reason or another hadn’t really done any kind of wider reflection on the various qualitative research paradigms and frameworks, had basically taken the kind of received qualitative research methods and approaches of the discipline in a particular university they’re working in-

**[00:26:51] INT: Right.**

[00:26:52] RES: So really, the way in which I taught qualitative research was to try and open up the field to those people, and to sort of give them a chance to explore and to play with various other kinds of theories, and to enable them to better, I guess, to better identify and to hopefully, think more about the rigour of the particular framework that they needed, they were declared, they were employing, and I guess in the experience that I had, there were mostly, if the people weren’t that kind of nameless vague general qualitative inquiry, which was quite a few of them, then there were a number of people who were, of course, very attracted to grounded theory and its various developments, and there were a range of people who were really into, what we classify more as phenomenological research, but I suppose the bulk of the people that I was dealing with were more into critical theory and action research, in that most of them being kind of good sort of education graduate students, they were actually exploring their various topics with a clear agenda, often with a clear social justice or social change agenda, and with a real eye to being able to apply the outcome of their kind of theoretical, if you like, or interpretive research, being able to apply that to better education systems or better education programmes or whatever. So that’s-

**[00:28:49] INT: So, oh, sorry.**

[00:28:51] RES: That’s kind of, sorry, go on, yes.

**[00:28:53] INT: The frameworks, sorry, or the, what would I call them, common theory areas of you know, grounded theories, phenomenology, action research etc., were they the things that the students themselves came to, or were they the things came to you with? You used the word received knowledge, received theories and frameworks from their disciplines. So I’m interested in that kind of, what did they come with and what did they then kind of- sometimes it’s hard to know when you’re teaching, what people then lead out to, but have you got any sense of that?-**

[00:29:41] RES: Yes. I think it was a very diverse group in that respect, because I guess mostly, as I was saying, people came with the kind of the received framework, that was the framework of their, if not of their discipline, I suppose some disciplines have received framework, and of their particular set of supervisors or of the department in their particular institution.

**[00:30:08] INT: Mhmm.**

[00:30:10] RES: And I think while, you know, a number of people came through who would say they were kind of doing a grounded theory approach or taking a kind of Habermas-type approach or something like that, but most of them coming through had really taken, if they had a name for the approach that they had taken, they kind of taken that as an assumed kind of framework that they were going to adopt, and hadn’t really explored in any detail, what that meant sometimes, in terms of their data collection and their methods of analysis and stuff, but hadn’t really thought about whether there were alternative sort of frameworks or paradigms that their research might be seen through, and whether there were kind of equal insights available from adopting other frameworks and other approaches, and I think by and large, they found that a useful exercise, just to explore other paradigms with an open mind and to see what they might deliver, or if not, what they might deliver for their own research, to understand if they might be somehow complementary or tell a separate story that has its own validity in its own framework, but may not be exactly what they’re looking for.

**[00:31:52] INT: Mmm, I often find that students come on my generic courses with a, ‘I think I’m doing grounded theory or ethnography’, and they’re coming for an assurance that they’re doing it ‘right’.**

[00:32:12] RES: Yes, yes, and do you find that assurance is a little bit hard to give? Well, I mean, my experience, well, we all know, don’t we, that you can teach qualitative research methods and you compartmentalise all these different approaches, you know, you kind of separate them out, but you kind of know in practice that most people are doing a bit of this and a bit of that and they’re kind of mixing stuff up, they’re kind of drawing from these different frameworks and they’re kind of working. It’s good, you know, but kind of the question of identifying to something that’s in the standard text books is also interesting. I don’t know what I’m saying here, but yes, it’s a bit of a mess, because on the one hand you want to make people clearly aware of the kind of paradigms that they’re in and the frameworks of sort of, you know, what constitutes rigour or what constitutes a good argument and evidence and the various, I don’t know, I suppose we’re talking about ontologies and epistemologies of the various frameworks, in so far as they can be separated, and you know that that's kind of in the ideal theoretical world but in practice, how do you kind of deal with people who are picking at one and picking at the other and doing it very successfully?

**[00:33:40] INT: [unclear] often the question is, okay so you think you’re doing ethnography, and is that really what is best for what question you want to answer, and if you want to call it ethnography, what kinds of things should you be doing or you know, what approach should you take in order to kind of meet any absolutist criteria that there are out there for defining things, but actually, is that really what you want to do? Is that the best for your research? In which case, you need to have a coherent epistemological framework that makes sense for what you do, and whether that’s partly IPA or partly action research, doesn’t matter, it’s then the coherence of that-**

[00:34:38] RES: Yes, yes.

**[00:34:39] INT: -kind of the argument, I suppose, is as you said earlier.**

[00:34:45] RES: Yes and in many ways that’s what it comes down to, isn’t it, being able to make the- being able to you know, marshal and organise your data, and analyse it and interpret it, in a way which is sort of rigorous in that things flow from each other, and you can be satisfied that that flow kind of makes sense and has its own logic and motivation and stuff. Yes.

**[00:35:21] INT: So do you use any stories or examples or particular cases that you use over the years to illustrate points for your students, whether that be elements of theory or practice?**

[00:35:45] RES: Erm, I think the answer is yes, and I’m just trying to think of some examples of the sorts of things that I do. I’m tempted to jump to another thing altogether, which might actually answer the question.

**[00:36:14] INT: Yes, please.**

[00:36:15] RES: [laughs] Well, I don’t know if it will answer the question. I’m trying to avoid the question, probably.

**[00:36:20] INT: You jump where you want to go.**

[00:36:22] RES: [laughs] Yes, I’ll jump. I am, you know, how many thousand miles away from you, I can jump wherever I like.

One of my early semesters of teaching qualitative research in masters of education was way back, a long- about 10 years or so ago now, about 2011 or so, there had been a number of riots in various urban centres in the UK. I don’t know- you probably remember this in more detail than I do. A lot of sort of you know, burning and looting-

**[00:37:02] INT: [unclear 00:37:02] in my memory, yes. It was 2011.**

[00:37:06] RES: Yes, yes, yes and in urban areas that we could be described- I don’t know if you would describe them as, not ghettoised areas, they’re not the adjective you use there, I think, but low socio-economic areas, areas of high racial diversity, I suppose, if we want to use that term, and so I had, to start off this qualitative research course that I was teaching as a full semester master’s unit, I had, I think, about two minutes’ footage that I had assembled from the various news sites, from UK news feeds that I had gotten off YouTube, of things being burnt and people fighting with police, shops being looted, ambulances everywhere, very august people wearing suits, pronouncing on the undesirability of this and how you know, uncivilised the rioters were and stuff, and over the top of that, I turned down the volume at one stage, and over the top of this, I dubbed in of all things, the Sex Pistols, Anarchy In The UK

**[00:38:30] INT: Right.**

[00:38:31] RES: It’s one of our favourite songs, of course Cathy, you know, I think it will live forever. So I kind of just put this over the top and I just sort of gave it to the students and said, Well, what do you think of that? What’s your response to that? What’s going on here? And we had a discussion about that, and that kind of set the scene for me to unfold to them, to reveal to them in my magic way, no, but to start taking to them about, well, if you were involved in something like this, if this is the particular society or scenario, or whatever that the incidents, the series of incidents that you’re studying, there are various ways to get into that, and their qualitative theory gives us lots of different kind of perspectives we can take on that, and those perspectives are often related to the particular sort of data that we get on that, and those theories are often related to how we move from the data through to an analysis and conclusion.

And so, by way of kind of vaguely not answering your question, but pretending that I was, I think that’s the kind of method that I preferred in my qualitative teaching, which is to basically try and give people something, some kind of topic, you know, some pseudo kind of topic of study that they can imagine themselves being involved in, and seeing how qualitative research can carve out different kind of aspects of that for different purposes and with different kinds of subjects and target data, if you like, in mind and with different outcomes, in terms of what might be said and what might be insightful for our understanding of how humans work. So I think that’s probably to answering your question about personal narratives-

**[00:40:38] INT: But it’s answered the question in terms of, as I said at the beginning, you want this to kind of help you neophyte researchers, perhaps at the beginning of their career, trying to get into qualitative research, in the same way that you just said, you want to give them something that they can imagine doing the research. I suppose this project is in a meta way, trying to help people understand or get a little insight into a research journey that, sorry a researcher journey that they might themselves have.**

[00:41:22] RES: Yes.

**[00:41:23] INT: So you have answered my question [laughs].**

[00:41:27] RES: Okay, good, yes, yes. Yes absolutely, and I think by giving them scenarios like that, you know, it was kind of, it was reasonable easy if you kind of carve out something like that to say, well, you know, if you’re interested in- if you call yourself an ethnographer, this might be how you see that situation, or this might be the way of exploring ethnographic research in that situation. These are the things you’re going to pay attention to, you’re going to look out for. If you’re a phenomenologist, you’re going to do something else. If you’re into grounded theory, well, that may not carve out your particular topic or perspective, but it’s going to say something about the kinds of analytic methods you're going to pursue. Yes.

**[00:42:23] INT: Mmm, I like that. I might have to steal that idea as at some point [laughs].**

[00:42:27] RES: Oh right [laughs].

**[00:42:29] INT: ‘Adopt and adapt’.**

[00:42:31] RES: The thing that I really loved about this, because you know, I don’t know, I like kind of provoking or provoking students quite a lot. I think it’s good, educationally, to provoke students.

**[00:42:44] INT: Yes, do you think?**

[00:42:46] RES: When I used to play, I used to get them into the room, the very first class in qualitative methods, and I’d put this video on and the background sound was kind of muted for a while. I’d kind of do a post-production edit on the video file and mute all the news feeds and the sounds of sirens and things burning, and then the first few lines of this Sex Pistols song would come on and I would crank up the volume to kind of maximum.

So the idea would be they would be sitting in the chairs with this kind of muted video going and then the Sex Pistols would come on like full bore 00:43:23] you know, a few of them would kind of jump and fall out of their chairs and write complains to the executive dean and things like that, but yes, I just had fun [s/l with it, you know 00:43:34]-

**[00:43:35] INT: That kind of draws a nice contrast to the other kinds of tales that I’ve sought, which have been more along the lines of students like top tips, that kind of, if I’m going out into the field, what should I avoid? Or you know, if you can’t tell me what I should do, can you give me an idea of what, you know, are there any cautionary tales that you might share in the manner of, instead of- provoking them to think more along the practical side of research?**

[00:44:15] RES: Oh yes, yes. I haven’t talked about that, but that, of course, having worked as a linguist and having worked as, most of my work in the linguistic fieldwork has been in Aboriginal Australia, and so that was at various times, because you know, it has to be said that various aspects of Aboriginal society have not worked for those Aboriginal communities for many years, and you know, there are some fairly broken down societies that are affected by all sorts of problems to do with domestic violence and substance abuse and stuff, and when you’re out there as a researcher, be it a qualitative researcher or a linguistic researcher, and aware of qualitative methods, there are clearly things that you can do and things that you shouldn’t do, and I think those kind of tips that you provide students are absolutely, not only invaluable, they’re absolutely essential and they’re part of our ethical obligation, as supervisors and experienced academics, to warn students about.

So yes, in terms of the sorts of things that I would teach in qualitative methods courses, they would come up as a high priority. I suppose it’s interesting you know, in terms of you asking me about qualitative methods and then setting qualitative methods, I guess, is the theme for this discussion. I just kind of forgotten those. I’d put those to one side. I hadn’t forgotten them, I’d put them to one side. I kind of see them, the reasons are probably not very valid, I see those as kind of separate from the theoretical framework sort of concerns, but I think you’ve probably provoked my conscience there. I may need to change my attitudes about that.

And certainly, you know, those things are very important, and I think you know, all of us find students who come into qualitative methods courses who want to go out and do semi-structured interviews and, or you know, any kind of interviews and work with real people in the world, who really need to develop their understandings of how people out there in the real world talk and think, and how easily you can offend people, and how easily you can seem to be brash or to be too inquisitive about personal information, and how easily you can forget that a whole lot of people aren’t really interested in academic jargon and won’t engage with you on that. So there are a lot of fairly basic tips as well as the more nuanced ones to pass onto the students, and I think-

**[00:47:27] INT: Can you give any example?**

[00:47:30] RES: Well, I think part of a good, part of a sufficient qualitative methods course involves working students through, you know, an in class and sometimes out of class practice in interviewing type techniques. How do you actually work with people in say, semi-structured interview situations and make it possible for them to get comfortable enough to tell a natural story that’s going to be sort of rich and insightful for the researcher? That’s really important, and lots of people who have never done it before just make all sorts of terrible mistakes.

**[00:48:25] INT: I suppose that’s- I think people come on some of my courses because they know that there are sensitivities and they know that ethically, they want to do the right thing. They don’t want to do harm, but they’re a little uncertain about, not just the more specific things within their context. They’re often very aware of the specifics of their context. They’re less aware of just the general niceties of doing research.**

**So I wonder if you’ve got any kind of illuminating comments on practice, the niceties of qualitative research, whether that is qualitative method or methodology, it’s the practice of doing it?**

[00:49:23] RES: Yes, that’s an interesting question, isn’t it and I do- I’m trying to work out if I have a specific answer to that, and I’m thinking of quite a lot of the time that I work with students on the nature of- Well, I guess there’s two things. There’s the nature of interviewing, the nature of observing and being kind of present in societies as an observer, with varying capacities to be sort of a participant while observing.

**[00:50:04] INT: Yes.**

[00:50:06] RES: And it’s kind of hard, isn’t it, because you kind of rely on people being successful at that, by having a kind of a degree of interpersonal, I don’t know, insight or understanding, or by people having a degree of being able to kind of sit back a little bit unselfconsciously, and kind of just relate to other people, and I actually don’t know where I’m going with this.

**[00:50:44] INT: Yes.**

[00:50:45] RES: I don’t have a clear answer to-.

**[00:50:46] INT: Yes. I’ll have one last go at it then, Bruce, that sense of, can you think of a time when you did something in the field to ensure that your presence wasn’t as intrusive as it might have been otherwise?**

[00:51:14] RES: I think I’ve done a few things over the years, by virtue of the linguistic research, to try and make my presence non-intrusive and I think most- well, most of the things I’ve done over the years relate, really, to making sure that my role in the societies that I’ve been in, is not just 100%, is not there by virtue, just of being a researcher, but is there, you know, I’m there because I’m a person who is kind of a visitor or a guest in that society, but wants to be seen as a contributing guest. Someone who maybe has some kind of role in that society as a human being, that’s not just because of the research, and most of my experience in this area has been in Aboriginal Australia, and I guess there’s a bit of a kind of circular argument here because you know, everyone who’s worked in Aboriginal Australia knows that you- you basically can’t do good linguistic or anthropological research unless you develop- unless you’re part of the relationship system of the society. Unless you can kind of connect and relate to people, and you understand what kind of kinship type categories you’re in with someone. That determines how you kind of work with them, how you relate to them.

So I think by virtue of being minimally intrusive, I have sought, in those societies, to have other kinds of roles and other kinds of relationships and behaviours that aren’t entirely dependent on or predicated by the research relationship that’s going on. So in some of the aboriginal societies that I’ve worked in, I’ve kind of helped with the task of, the sort of tasks of hunting and gathering, if you like, to use-

**[00:53:37] INT: Aha [unclear 00:53:39]-**

[00:53:43] RES: Yes, in terms of helping out with the women in Aboriginal society and a lot of the gathering, the men in terms of the hunting and fishing and various things like that, and I suppose that’s the main thing in my experience that I’ve done, yes.

**[00:54:04] INT: Thank you. I think that helps.**

[00:54:07] RES: Oh, right.

**[00:54:08] INT: It is making me think about answers that other people have given around that area.**

[00:54:14] RES: Right, okay. Yes.

**[00:54:17] INT: So I’ve got a few questions around kind of just things that you enjoy in the research process, some bits that you find easier than others? Have you got a favourite bit of the kind of- I know it’s an iterative process, but are there any bits that you look forward to more than others?**

[00:54:38] RES: Oh, I guess there are. That’s an interesting question and I think one that I’ve never actually really thought about at any length, very much. I might have undermined my own credibility by admitting that.

I, you know, the process of doing really, you know, quality qualitative research is a really gruelling, tedious process, in many ways, and I come from, you know, a line of, I’m sort of too old to be a digital native or anything by any means, and my background, really, much of the research I’ve done has been by kind of writing notes in notebooks as fast as possible and then spending nights, often in kind of sweaty mosquito ridden tents, going through notebooks and trying to get generalisations, and get data out of there and it is, you know, I think you have to recognise that it’s a fairly tedious kind of process, and you just kind of labour at getting all this stuff written up and worked out.

One thing, I think I’m kind betraying my kind of Freudian philosophies, if you like, but you know, we kind of spend a lot of time in qualitative research, looking for repetitive, you know repetitive theme, well, for themes and recurrences of things, and we kind of, you know, take a lot of interpretive value out of that, but I also do kind of really, I love the joy of finding in my notes or audio records or whatever, you know, the occasional situation where one of the people you’re researching with, actually comes out and says something right out of left-field, that kind of doesn’t fit at all, that if you’re a good kind of researcher looking at, you know, statistical frequency of themes and things, you might kind of throw out, but as you think about it, as you look at it, you just kind of realise, yes, this is actually giving me, or this could be argued to give me some kind of insight into the, you know, the whole basis of what this person is saying.

I love those, kind of those odd moments. They often happen, well, they happen, you know, with kind of varying frequency, in semi-structured interview and things, where people kind of, they just break out of the situation or they reach another kind of level of awareness or meta awareness or something, and they tell you a few things which are real gems, but they’re often isolated things that they don’t repeat at all, and you know, and you can spend a lot of time as an interpreter, you know, as an analyst, trying to work out whether these things are actually capturing everything, or whether they’re just accidental sort of noise that don’t mean anything, and I think one of the things that I found out with a common friend of ours, Cathy, that I did some research with, with whom, you know, she’s just a fabulous, insightful researcher who understands people and understands methods and is fantastic, and I kind of marvel at the number of times I would find one of these kind of gem-revealing moments that I thought were revealing, and I would say to her, Oh, you know, look at this particular part of the transcript. This is really kind of giving us a," you know, a basic kind of understanding of how everything works, and she would say, Oh no, they were just getting carried away, or you know, They didn’t really mean that, that was a bit of a mistake, which is kind of interesting, you know, and that’s in many ways, that goes down to the very nature of qualitative research, doesn’t it? How do you work out the significance of this kind of thing.

**[00:58:52] INT: Yes.**

[00:58:53] RES: Yes, so you know, it’s an interesting, a difficult journey.

**[00:58:58] INT: I suppose that for me, that kind of makes me think, you know, the nature of the data and the value of spending time with the data, which includes the audio recording sometimes, students often ask me, oh, my supervisor isn’t letting me use a professional transcriber and they want me to do it myself, and I always think, well there’s your chance that you might not get ever again, to spend time learning about the difference between the actual meeting and the transcript.**

[00:59:38] RES: Yes, yes.

**[00:59:41] INT: And, yes.**

[00:59:43] RES: Yes, and I think myself, being kind of one of the old people, one of the old school people, you know, it’s all very well to have professional transcribers, it’s all very well to have kind of artificial intelligence transcription and things like that, but there is actually nothing like going through all the tapes yourself and transcribing them yourself. There is nothing like that, to actually give you a really, really good sense of the data, and you know, really kind of first-hand filtered experience of what people actually said in the context in which they said it. That’s probably not quite what you were saying, but yes-

**[01:00:37] INT: No, no, I think it is-**

[01:00:38] RES: Going through the data, it’s a fantastic thing to do, yes. It’s tedious, it’s boring, it takes a long, long time to lock down, but gee, it’s actually worth it, I think.

**[01:00:49] INT: Yes, it is one of those kind of nightmarish things. So just to be clear, was that, the question was about the things that you enjoy or find easier than others, or things that you don’t like doing, but I heard you saying, I love spending time with the data.**

[01:01:11] RES: Oh yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, absolutely, yes.

**[01:01:14] INT: Cool.**

[01:01:15] RES: Particularly, you know, tedious as it can be, you know, yes, it’s a long labour of love, but yes, it is a fantastic, engaging experience, yes.

**[01:01:31] INT: Cool.**

[01:01:32] RES: Yes, yes, I love it.

**[01:01:34] INT: Good. I suppose- two more things. One, is there anything in particular that you perhaps thought, ‘I really want to say this, through this piece of work that Cathy’s doing, I really want to have this thing heard’.**

[01:01:51] RES: Oh, I think probably all my favourite hobby horses, I’ve kind of probably whipped them around the track several times tonight.

**[01:02:01] INT: [Laughs]**

[01:02:03] RES: So probably nothing extra, except really, I think, for all kind of researchers in this qualitative area, the real importance of, you know, engaging with your methodology, engaging with your theory, engaging with the paradigm or framework, whatever you want to call it, that you identify with, and getting to understand, you know, how rigorous can you be. How reliable, what kind of level of veracity do you have? Or asking the question as to whether you can have veracity or reliability, or whatever, you know? Engage and reflect on the worth and the rigour of what you’re doing. I think it’s really important.

**[01:02:59] INT: Cool. Now that might be the answer to the question that I’m about to trot out glibly now [laughs], but it might be a bit harder than that. It’s, if you were to give your younger self a piece of advice, what would that be?**

[01:03:18] RES: Oh, it would, if I was giving my younger self a piece of advice, what would it be? I think my younger self wanted to leap to kind of groovy innovative generalisations too quickly. I think I would have given my younger self some advice, it would be, as well as, you know, pour over the data carefully and pour over the data again, it would be maybe to understand that the first conclusions you come to are probably fairly valid at some level, but to keep kind of revising those and revising those, and I guess to understand that in qualitative research, the levels of complexity and murkiness just get kind of deeper and deeper and more intricate and more wonderful as you progress.

**[01:04:28] INT: Quite hard on the self, that murkiness and-**

[01:04:35] RES: Yes, yes.

**[01:04:37] INT: It’s an uncomfortable place to be sometimes.**

[01:04:40] RES: Yes, it is an uncomfortable place to be, and I think as kind of qualitative researchers, we have to, we just have to learn to live and to love a little bit of discomfort, you know, kind of like, what’s that old cliché, we have to kind of enjoy the journey but know that we will probably never arrive at the final destination. Something clichéd like that.

**[01:05:07] INT: Yes. We could end on a cliché, given that-**

[01:05:13] RES: Yes, end on a- I love ending on a cliché [laughs].

**[01:05:16] INT: [laughs]**

[01:05:17] RES: Of all the things my students have said about me in the course evaluations, they haven’t said anything like that, but I think they should have [laughs].

**[01:05:23] INT: [laughs] Oh, I like it. I like it.**

**[Audio ends: 01:05:28]**