Creating and enriching interviews in qualitative online research

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Abstract

One of the exciting possibilities of qualitative online research is the construction of asynchronous interviews. By drawing on two research studies that used email for this, this paper explores how such interviews become enriched as participants actively and iteratively engage in their narrative constructions as the interview develops and unfolds, creating a reflexive interview These reflexive interviews are distinguished from focus or guided types of interviews that ask participants to comment on events in their social world. The paper explores how the processes of email interviewing can facilitate this 'enrichment' by researchers constructing an online site where through the displacement of time and space, collaboration and empowerment, and identity and agency, participants (are encouraged to) take increasing control of the research agenda in their narrative construction. Through this discussion, the paper argues that the modification of the research relationship helps participants to develop narrative texts that are shaped more closely to their perspectives, and the meanings they construct for their lives. This leads to stronger claims for reflexivity than had the researchers remained wholly in control. The paper concludes that the asynchronous quality of email interviews seems to offer an important element in facilitating the construction of more collaborative approaches to research by making space for participants to reflect in their own time and not merely to the researcher's agenda. This diminishes the impact of the asymmetrical power relationships between participant and researcher that so often pervade qualitative research interviews.

Introduction

The use of qualitative interviews in both social and educational research, has led to a broad range of discussions not only about how such interviews are designed and conducted as a method of data collection, but how they are epistemologically and methodologically located. This has created an 'interview society' (Atkinson and Silverman 1997) in which there has been, particularly in the US, 'a commitment to and reliance on the interview to produce narrative experience…' (Fontana and Frey

2003, 63). Denzin (2001) argues that the interview has different meanings depending upon the historical moment in which qualitative research is located. These can crudely be defined as the traditional and modernist era (1900 – 1970), during which the focus was on different structures for interviews; the critical and post-modern eras (1986-1995), which focused on authenticating participants' voices; and, since then, the growing concern to construct moral discourses. However, these eras are far from discrete and concerns with labelling the structural types of interviews still abound in the early 21st century alongside concerns for authenticating participants' voices and (re)presenting them faithfully and ethically. As researchers we need to be sensitive to the socio-political contexts in which individuals' live out their lives, as members of overlapping communities as well as of a particular community or institution, and how it is not always possible to create 'critically empowering texts' (Denzin 2001:24).

It is within this 'historical moment' that we locate our discussion of how the Internet, and in particular email as a site for online qualitative research has exciting possibilities for providing the space to conduct and present interviews in which participants can tell and retell their stories, and represent themselves to others, when it is not possible to conduct interviews at the site of the research, and face-to-face as participants. We have come to see the virtual space of online communications as an opportunity to develop 'enriched' qualitative research interviews that act as a narrative device in which individuals are able to make sense of their lives, and the contexts in which they live through telling and hearing/reading stories (Sikes 2002). We argue that the space has the potential to open up a deeper view of life that is derived from real events, feelings and conversations as well as exposing those experiences, which might otherwise not be heard or read. It is of particular value both as a means and arena (Foucault (1977) talks about social meeting places as conduits and /or sites) of exercising power through which people construct or can be helped to construct explications for their views and actions. Such interviews have especial application as part of a process of constructing work-related development of thinking about practice and as a process of enquiry that, none the less, will have an impact on practice and thinking whether or not that was intended (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

Drawing on two research studies that we conducted using email interviewing, this paper explores how such interviews become enriched as participants actively and iteratively engage in their narrative constructions, as the interview develops and unfolds, and participants revisit the record of their previous comments, reflect on earlier aspects of their discussions and develop deeper and less inequitable relationships with the researcher. It is argued that this process leads to the creation of an 'enriched' reflexive interview as opposed to a focus or guided interview that merely present participants with events from their social world and ask them to comment on them.

The paper explores how the processes of email interviewing can facilitate this 'enrichment' by researchers constructing an online site where through the displacement of time and space and the construction of collaboration and empowerment to develop identity and agency, participants (are encouraged to) take increasing control of the research agenda in their narrative construction. Through this discussion, the paper argues that the modification of the research relationship helps participants to develop narrative texts that are shaped more closely to their perspectives, and the meanings they construct for their lives. This allows participants to gain greater ownership of research conversations, through modifying the agenda initially constructed by researchers to construct their narratives in their own ways. It also helps participants to develop more reflexive

narratives that are shaped more closely to their perspectives and the meanings they construct in their understandings of those perspectives. The paper concludes that asynchronous quality email interviewing seems to offer an important element in facilitating the construction of more collaborative approaches to research by making space for participants to reflect in their own time and not merely to the researcher's agenda. This diminishes the impact of the asymmetrical power relationships between participant and researcher that so often pervade qualitative research interviews.

Fitness for purpose: Why choose email interviews?

As researchers, we both shared similar epistemological approaches to creating an online interview that captured and reflected narrative accounts of our participants' experiences, as well as provoking their in-depth reflection of their understandings of their developing professional experiences and identities (Busher 2001, James 2003). We opted for email as a method of interviewing then for both methodological and practical reasons. Duranti (1997) and Cazden (2000) suggest that people with different social, cultural and organizational experiences respond differently to questions about their professional life stories. Email then offered an asynchronous mode of interviewing (Mann and Stewart 2000) participants individually, building one-to-one relationships necessary for exploring their discrete views of their developing professional identities and life histories in a variety of different macro and organisational cultures. Given this, synchronous group interviews did not seem a relevant research tool for us.

Our participants were also located at a distance from us within and outside the UK, and also in different time zones, so to some extent difficult to reach offline. All our participants had ready access to email and were familiar with using it in their professional lives. We realised that the nature of the research relationship would be altered in the online environment. For example, as our email interviews were devoid of the normal social frameworks of face-to-face conversations and encounters, in which both researchers and participants interpret the social characteristics of the other, either verbally or non-verbally through gesture, tone of voice and facial expressions, it raised questions about whether in the online context: '...careful dialectical reflection on authentic and evocative written accounts of an experience can reveal some of the fundamental structures of that experience' (Weber 1993:75). It led us to wonder whether email interviewing could be used as a medium for a critical ethnography of our participants' lives that would generate narratives of their experiences in their voices to'...live out their lives, find and maintain connections and seek to represent themselves to others' (Hardey 2004:12).

As both researchers were novices in the use of online interviewing, our research design drew on conventional approaches to interview-based qualitative research to guide conversations between a researcher and other participants in a study. We both adopted a semi-structured interview schedule and sent out our questions one at a time to form a platform from which each participant could start to write their online narratives about how they saw themselves. In creating a personal relationship with each of our participants, we supplemented our questions by probes to explore and gain a deeper understanding of issues. These approaches were further enhanced by an iterative process in which participants explored and revisited their insights into their developing professional identities by writing their narratives, reflecting, redrafting and further reflecting on what they wanted to write.

One of the studies used email to interview nine academics, and how they saw themselves in terms of work, professional identity and practice. Email interviewing emphasised the experiential and was intended to explore the developing professional stories that became the basis for their professional identities, as well as exploring their understandings of their experiences as lived and told stories (Connelly and Clandinin 1986). They were invited to comment on: the images they used to construct professional identity and shape professional practice; the way in which professional identity was managed within the communities in which they lived and worked; the values and knowledge-base of their work as teachers; and how fundamental these communities were to their teacher professionalism.

The other study involved semi-structured interviews being conducted with ten adult educators who were doctoral students and their views on coming to terms with being part-time students following an extended campus programme of study of an English university. The study was interested in how they experienced the process of becoming students and learning the discourses of successful practice through their expectations of their own cultural milieux, which they experienced in their everyday lives, and those of the university they attended, albeit as part-time students; on their relationships with their tutors as mediators of university custom and practice and gatekeepers to the academy; and on their developing identities as doctoral level students.

Enriching interviews online

We see the email interview as providing an enriched source of dialogue or text about individuals' lives that produce narratives that can also become part of an ongoing narrative record in which participants make sense of their experience as lived and told stories (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). The interview, then, is placed within a narrative framework which allows participants, to write or tell stories about themselves which, in turn, are shared with the researcher. In other words, the researcher and participant collaborate in constructing these narratives, discussing the topics and emergent themes, and considering the 'voice' to be used in presenting them to the wider world (Agostinho 2005:7).

This style of interviewing allows for non-directive and/or reflexive qualitative information gathering in which all parties are taking an active part interactionally and interpretatively whatever the power relationships between the participants (Holstein and Gubrium 2004:140). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) prefer the terms of 'non-directive' and 'reflexive' to that of 'unstructured' or 'semi-structured' as they argue that all interviews are structured by their participants but some are more heavily directed by the researcher, while others more closely follow the agenda of the informant. In this style of interviewing, (which we adopted ourselves) although researchers may have a checklist of topics they wish to cover, how that is achieved may well depend on the journey participants choose to take, the researchers following carefully in their wake, prompting them from time to time to help the construction of their narratives.

This places emphasis on the voices of the informants in educational research and the need for individuals to reflect about their experiences in their own words. This approach helps researchers to explore with participants their views on particular social situations and to reflect on their own practices whether or not that is to further the informants' own professional development in the way that Schon (1983) suggested it can. It enhances reflection on practice as communication and understandings of participants experiences are shared between researcher and participants as a

collaborative process. Further, the ongoing process of participants' actively and critically examining and refining their practice takes place as part of the reflection process that is rooted in their personal lives (Knowles and Cole 1994, Clandinin and Connelly 2000). This also requires participants to engage in an 'enriched' reflexive interview. Such interviews occur where knowledge and identity are socially constructed by individuals in particular contexts through their interactions and asymmetrical power relationships with the dominant and other social discourses that surround them in their everyday but multiple lives (Silverman, 2004: 36). They do not assume that researcher-participant symmetry is necessary for qualitative research to be of any worth as this overlooks aspects, contradictions and disruptions that can relate to, for example class, age, gender, race and occupation which influence 'not only the individual identities of both researcher and respondent, but also their relationship with each other' (Vincent and Warren 2001:43).

Enriched interviews offer participants the opportunity to develop and explicate their thinking, feelings and opinions in these complex contexts by excavating more deeply the meanings that lie behind the words they have previously used to express their views (Kearney, 2003). In this process they may be helped by other people, be they 'critical friends' (Golby and Appleby, 1995), mentors (Moyles et al, 1998) or, as happened in our case, researchers, asking them questions of explication. Participants may also do so on their own by returning to texts that they have previously written in order to develop more complex conceptual frameworks for and from them in the contexts in which they were written. For example, Ryan (1995) discusses how she used diaries with her trainee teachers to encourage them to think more clearly about their more and less successful practice and how their less successful practice might be improved. One of the authors of this paper, in the early 1990s, regularly used video evidence from trainee teachers' lessons to help each reflect on and develop her / his own pedagogical practice and thinking. This, then, offers a crude typology of assisted and autonomous reflection on professional identity and practice that might be seen as parallel to a similar classification of approaches to life history studies. Enriched interviews form part of the former category.

Such interviews can be distinguished from other types of non-directive interviews. One is the engagement of informants (participants other than the researchers) in the construction of a text on which they are then asked to reflect to develop more complex understandings of the meanings embedded in that text – text being taken here to encompass a wide range of artefacts in various media – perhaps through the medium of a non-directive or relatively unstructured interview. The other is their being or becoming empowered intentionally by the powerful others, such as researchers or mentors, involved in the conversations that form part of the process of reflection to take increasing control of the agenda of the discussion and its outcomes.

In focus and guided interviews informants are asked to reflect on material they have not constructed but might have witnessed or viewed. A focus interview, called by some authors a guided interview (for example Flick, 2006) to help researchers explore a particular topic, or texts of their own actions, is used to try to explore participants' past cognitive processes (stimulated recall interviews). Examples of the former are when students might be asked to look at particular pictures to help them reflect and comment on, for example, the layout of an art gallery or the action in a classroom (Riley and Rustique-Forrester, 2002), whether these are still or moving pictures. Informants could equally be asked to consider a piece of written text or an artefact before commenting on all of it or aspects of it. Stimulated recall interviews are used in various introspective research procedures to try to

explore the cognitive processes of informants at the time of their previous actions by helping them to reflect on practice that they have previously undertaken (Lyle, 2003). Sceptics question whether the reflection that emerges is a genuine recall of previous thinking or merely a commentary on the text that the informants are currently viewing (often a video of previous action, according to Lyle, 2003: 862) and analysing.

Enriched interviews do not attempt to explore the previous cognitive processes of participants although, like stimulated recall interviews, they may use video evidence to remind informants of previous events (Flick, 2006) or offer participants iterative opportunities to review texts of their previous conversations in order take forward their thinking on their professional practice and identity. Further, they do not assume that researcher-participant symmetry is necessary for qualitative research to be of any worth as this overlooks socio-economic and cultural aspects, contradictions and disruptions.

How can interviews be enriched in the online environment?

The interview texts that emerged in our studies were fascinatingly reflexive. This appeared to depend on participants actively and iteratively engaging in their narrative constructions of their professional lives as the email interviews developed and unfolded, creating a reflexive narrative interview. The enrichment of discussion was facilitated by the researchers constructing an online site where through the displacement of time and space, collaboration and empowerment, and identity and agency, participants (were encouraged to) take increasing control of the research agenda.

Time for reflection

Within the virtual reality of the Internet, asynchronous email interviewing can be established as a space in which participants can explore their changing self perceptions. As participants begin to understand how the space will be used, and the ways it can position them, an asynchronous email exchange can take place that encourages participants to explore and revisit their insights into their developing professional identities, allowing them to move back and forth through their narratives, thinking about their responses, drafting and redrafting what they want to write (Henson et al 2000, Mann and Stewart 2000). In our studies we established the online space in which the interviews took place through sending them a rubric of how the interviews would be carried out (see Busher 2001, James 2003). Within this space the participants began to write and reflect on their narratives. Part of this process was the fact that they were unconstrained by time, replying as and when they were ready to, rather than following the schedule set by the researchers. The delays in responses - sometimes up to weeks, which we had naively not expected in our research design, became the normal if unexpected pace of this email based research process. We eventually came to discover, like Russell and Bullock (1999), that an exciting element of the process was that we never quite knew when we were going to get a response from whom. Prompt replies, we discovered, were not actually necessary, particularly when slower ones gave opportunity for more powerful reflection on the main focus of the studies. In other words 'asynchronicity' turned out to be an attractive feature of email interviewing (Selwyn and Robson 1997), in which our participants took the time to reflect more deeply and learn from their stories of experience (Seymour 2001), enriching the narrative, through more thoughtful answers and insights on the construction of their professional identities, as commented by one of our participants.

'I didn't email you straight back, because I was thinking about my answer. So my responses were more carefully thought through and probably longer than if I'd tackled the whole thing in a face-to-face interview…again other ideas would probably not have come out because of the time pressure. This is what's good about the email process because…it allows time to consider the questions and frame an appropriate response.'

The asynchronous nature of the email interview allowed participants to present and re-present their stories, to elaborate their own thinking, unhindered by the presence of the researchers, about those aspects of professional identity that were important to them, emphasising the potential for increasingly selective interest during research interviews (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000). Although there was a risk that important points might not be fully discussed or poorly developed, as the routes the conversations became ones we had not originally anticipated, this created a 'narrative collage' (Denzin 2001:29) in which participants moved back and forth through their narrative texts, reflecting on a key moment in their lives, before moving on to the next, as is evident in this participant's narrative:

'About my professional identity. Not a phrase I find it very easy to relate to- being part of a professional community- of people who 'do' psychology, look at the world in psychological - and empirical terms, although we do psychology in very different ways, different values and ideas about how to go about our business.

Academic psychologist- is about teach and relating to students- and has provided space in which I think about my professional identity. But I think I share many of my ideas with other academics who are not psychologists - especially those I meet in sociology, cultural and women's studies- some of whom started life as psychologists. Psychology has more permeable boundaries for me than for some psychologists, I think.

My professional identity is also linked to other identities which are important to me- as a woman, older women, white woman, as committed to environmental issues. (Good piece in APA monitor on psychology and being green- first time I've seen those being talked about together at length). And to my research interests and theoretical commitment to identities as complex, multiple, situated etc.

And to other non-psychological identities. I spend a lot of time with people who are not psychologists- and its sometimes there that I feel most like a psychologist. The contrast effect perhaps. Back to my interest in boundaries and policing them as issues around identity. I tackle issues and think about things in ways which I realise are 'psychological'. Had a good example a week ago in which I'm trying to think about how we can work with someone who isn't easy to work with- and I see myself thinking about how to support someone who is upset, but expressing the ideas we all wanted to express, how we can get to talk about what we want to do rather than staying around the issues that get to us, how to present a case in a way which is most likely to allow us to do what we want etc. But its hard to distinguish between me who is a psychologist and me who organised and listens to students/ academic.'

What emerged here was the way in which space and time became compressed in this narrative collage that was enriched through the participant's voice in which points of views switched back and forth (Denzin (2001:29). In other narratives too, this involved a reflexive process in which was

enriched through our participants' engagement with the interview process, in which they recaptured and re-evaluated their experiences.

The researcher and participant relationship: collaboration and empowerment

Although we had prior knowledge of our participants offline, either in a professional context or as a tutor of the participants' studies, we needed to build the online relationship to acquire an '…understanding of the participants' perspective through open and honest dialogue…' (Anderson and Kanuka 2003: 88). Part of this process involved mutual self-disclosure where both participants and researchers were interested in the processes and outcomes of this research as we were all involved in education in various ways. This process mirrors in many ways the processes of mentoring to which Moyles et al (1998) refer, where more experienced practitioners, if that is what we researchers were, at least in processes of educational research, engaged with less experienced practitioners in this field in order to explore how practice might be developed and what their reflections on that process of developing professional practice.

The 'act of identification,' encouraged participants to collaborate and share their experiences with the researchers (see also Lebesco 2004). In doing this it was not possible to 'ignore the potential obstacles that anonymity and disembodiement pose in order to arrive at a relationship with other people on line (Orgaad 2005:55). But we hoped, that investing in a collaborative relationship with the participants that involved mutuality and reciprocity (Oakley 1984) would lead to more enriched narratives. The participants' lack of inhibition and frankness (Holge-Hazelton 2002) enriched the interviews as they wrote about how their identities were socially constructed and multifaceted. They all seemed to want to reflect upon, and transmit their experiences faithfully, including aspects of both their professional and personal lives. Perhaps this was also because '…the positive effects of the researcher's prior knowledge of the participants led to a more reflexive commentary' (Wicksteed 2000:477). Two participants in one of our studies offered the following commentary on the research process:

'It is very important the interviewer/interviewee relationship is existing and positive. Establishing a good rapport and background generally is as in every interview essential - especially in case of sensitive questions. (For the time being we are flooded with questionnaires from ministries, research institutes, consulting companies etc. and have to select or we could use the whole day for this purpose - we are fed up with it right now! That's the reason why I stress the relationship). When good conditions are at hand it IS possible to have a conversation over time and to collect material for scientific purposes'.

'Clearly it helped me to know who was on the other end of the line- I'm not sure what 'persuasion' one can use if one were to try this approach 'cold'. Perhaps it's a supplementary approach to use after initial contact has been made- unless you want to tap into those people who chat for hours on line but then you have other problems with that, too'.

It is in these reflexive moments that the control of the processes can fruitfully slip from the grasp of the researchers. As the process of interviewing became more naturalistic (Robson 1993), so, perhaps unsurprisingly, the richness of the narratives increased. Because our participants controlled the time when they replied to our questions, they began to challenge the traditional asymmetrical researcher / participant power relations that often emerge in researcher driven semi-structured interviews, by

taking greater ownership of the processes of narrative construction, and responding to our questions in unexpected ways and directions. It seems that some of our participants were empowered, as a collaborative research process with us developed and our expectations of the participants shifted. This dynamic process (Angrosino and Perez 2003), through our participants responding and reflecting further on particular points during the interviews, left us merely to respond to the new directions of their narratives by asking further questions about their texts rather than sticking to our original interview schedules (James and Busher 2006). This approach allowed our participants to elaborate their own thinking about those aspects of professional identity that were important to them. It benefited them to take time to reflect, and in turn we reciprocated by being responsive to the participants' needs for using that time, to enrich their reflections, allowing them to express their views and experiences. In this way, the interview became enriched through the dispersal of research relationships and the research process.

Drawing on agency and constructing identity in online narratives

The participants' narratives were enriched by drawing on their own personal agency, in which their sense of selves influenced how and for what purposes they engaged with discussion, and negotiated their sense of selves accordingly. This was also enhanced by researchers encouraging (allowing) participants the social space to assert themselves. For some of our participants, it was the opportunity to explore aspects of their identities and experiences which was lacking in the press of their busy lives (James 2007 forthcoming). Comments from some participants provided evidence that for them, this was a critical element of the research process:

' …this process has made me wonder where it [my identity] came from originally…and surprised me how much my identity…as a psychologist/researcher influences the way I conduct my current professional duties……My involvement therefore has been a reflexive one, especially in the times I have been answering your questions and I was able to answer them once I'd given thought to what I wanted to say – there is not much time to reflect otherwise'.

As we have argued, the asynchronous online interview that is unconstrained by time and space enabled our participants to reflect more deeply and learn from their stories of experience. This was aided by the researchers' prior knowledge of the participants in an offline context. However, we would also argue that their narratives were grounded in their life experiences. So whilst some writers have argued that online identities can become detached from the embodied self and that users experiment with the disembodied self and their identities in cyberspace (Chen and Hinton 1999), we would argue that our participants' experiences were part of their real lives, whether they took place on or offline, in which there existed an interconnection between virtual communication and everyday life (Mackay 2005). As Jones (1999) argues, it is the embodied participant who interacts online and individuals can never escape from lived experiences.

For us, these processes of identity construction and the presentation of self as they occurred in the online context created an enriched reflexive interview in which participants constructed new meanings of self and situations in collaboration with the research. In one study, the academics' online narratives involved varying presentations of self-identity as teacher, researcher, manager, mother and psychologist. This presentation of multiple identities does not just occur online, however. They are inextricably linked with who we are, our commitments and values, and are integral and continuous (Kendal 1999:61) to the social contexts we happen to be inhabiting at any

one point in time, although that is not to argue that a person does not have a core to her/his being, merely that how he /she presents that varies from site to site. As Mann and Stewart (2000:210) remark, 'for this reason it is seen to be difficult to sustain a persona which is quite divorced from the 'real' self.'

What became evident in our studies was the way in which our participants were able to use the virtual space to reflect on their professional identities, something which may not happen in the press of our everyday lives. At the very least, email interviewing created narratives that were enriched by the very fact that they represented participants' constructed lives, thinking and reflections of their experiences as well as giving 'meaning to their lives and captur[ing] these meanings in written, narrative…forms' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:10). We contend that their narratives gave a better understanding of the self-images they constructed as a result of us using email (Henson et al (2000: 180) as a medium for those narratives, than had we carried out conventional face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The freedom offered by email in terms of time and space aided this process as the participants engage in critical dialogues about how they see themselves. This seems to provoke a richness of reflection among the participants beyond what we would have expected had we not allowed them to develop their own narratives in ways that were meaningful to them.

Conclusion

In our email interviews the voice of the participants became meaningful through text and performance – a reflexive process. This created in effect a form of enriched interview in which participants began to explore how they saw themselves through social interactions that enhanced their narratives. The development of these reflexive discourses improved serendipitously as the nature of questions and responses were displaced in time and space, facilitating the exploration of their experiences in the midst of their experiences.

Where participants are familiar with the Internet and using it fits into their professional and personal lives, email has the potential to increase the reflexivity of research interviews since this medium gives participants the time and space to consider, reflect and evaluate their professional experiences. It can allow research participants the opportunity to explore those aspects of their experiences and identities that might otherwise remain invisible and unspoken. To achieve this though, the interview has to be facilitated in such a way that 'dialogic relationships' (Denzin 2001:43) are created in which participants feel able to take control of the research agenda. In turn, this relationship empowers them in their narrative construction. This diminishes the impact of the asymmetrical power relationships between participant and researcher that so often pervade qualitative research interviews. By adopting this approach, it is possible to establish an online space in which participants can use the displacement of time to construct narratives of experience; in other words they can become active in creating enriched, reflexive texts.

None the less researchers have an influence on the field in which they are working, whether or not they intend to do so (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). In this, ethnographic and interpretative research has similarities to critical research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000), although it is only at the point of a researcher choosing to influence in the research setting in which he/she is working that the research might be said to shift into a critical paradigm. This leads us to the view that the 'objectivity' claimed by positivists for rigorous research is not achievable, especially in research in which people are engaged to the core of the being through conversations or interviews. None the

less, for any research to be worthwhile it is essential that a study establishes its trustworthiness if it is to be of value to its consumers and not to be an unethical waste of time for its participants (ESRC, 2005). As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Flick (2006) have pointed out, qualitative researchers need to be as vigilant as positivist researchers in ensuring the validity and reliability, or the qualitative equivalent (credibility and authenticity), of their studies.

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