
Article

Role Relationships in Research: Noticing an Elephant

Judith C. Lapadat
University of Northern British Columbia
Prince George, British Columbia, Canada

Trudy G. Mothus
University of Northern British Columbia
Prince George, British Columbia, Canada

Heather Fisher
University of Northern British Columbia
Prince George, British Columbia, Canada

© 2005 Lapadat et al. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract

Using a collaborative writing process, three researchers reflect on their role relationships as researchers engaged together in a classroom study. Researcher role relationships are revealed to be complex, multifaceted, and implicated in every choice and act on a moment-by-moment basis in the classroom and in the processes of the research. Personal dilemmas of role choices and power differentials, including how the power shifted according to what they chose to value and who could influence the classroom drama, are some of the role relationship themes that emerged. The improvisation of researcher role is theorizing situated in praxis.

Keywords: researcher role, collaboration, reflexivity, classroom research, qualitative methodology

Authors' Note: This research project was supported by British Columbia Ministry of Education Sponsored Research Grant awarded in 2001 to Judith Lapadat and Trudy Mothus. We acknowledge coresearchers working on other strands of this project, Lynda Struthers and Karin Paterson, and thank Stephanie Campbell, Katherine Lapadat-Janzen, Jennifer Little, and Elizabeth Woods for typing field notes and transcribing. A preliminary version of this article was presented in 2002 at the International Portraits of Literacy conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Introduction

Wise elders of qualitative methodologies and others who have dared to push the conceptual boundaries of the academic research enterprise have written about the importance of considering researcher role in qualitative research design, data collection, analysis, and writing across the range of approaches (Atkinson, 1990; Banks & Banks, 1998; Denzin, 1995; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Portelli, 2001; Van Maanen, 1988). The researcher is the research instrument, implicated at every stage of the study, reflexively shaping and being shaped by the research (Lapadat, 2003), but tensions inherent in any particular researcher role truly become visible to researchers only as they live out the experience of the research (Lapadat, 2004a). What we discovered, as three researchers engaged collaboratively in a classroom observation and intervention study, was that our perceptions of our own researcher roles and of our role relationships with each other as coresearchers, which had at first seemed invisible and unproblematic, transformed into an elephant.

In this article, we begin by setting the context of the classroom research project in which we were jointly engaged. We then describe the collaborative writing approach that we planned to use to write up our observations and how, through a process of interactive writing, the problematic issue of the nature of our multifaceted roles as researchers emerged as a central dynamic and structural element of the research study's methodological and analytical processes. We include here our collaborative writing verbatim—a layered sandwich of our three voices—as we explored the issue of our role relationships. In this interactive, written conversation, we describe our roles and each other's roles as we saw them, address the question of how these roles influenced the unfolding of the research, identify ways in which our role interactions challenged and illuminated each of our fundamental belief systems, and, finally, examine how the research selves that we became as we represented ourselves to each other and to the students in the classroom cut to the heart of each of our identities as persons. This is an account of that elephant we discovered.

Classroom research context

In our research project, teacher and researchers entered the classroom together and met to observe, experience, converse, and write together about a literacy-based intervention project. The aim of the intervention was to develop, improve, and evaluate a strategy instruction approach to remediating the writing skills of adolescents with language learning disabilities (LLD) (Mothus, Lapadat, Struthers, Fisher, & Paterson, 2002; Schumaker, Denton, & Deshler, 1984; Wallach & Butler, 1994). The students with LLD in this study typically are 2 years behind their peers in reading comprehension and writing ability. In Grade 8, instead of taking French, they participate in a class designed to immerse them in strategy instruction (Foundations 8), and the strategies also are integrated into their English 8 instruction (Mothus, 2001; Mothus & Lapadat, 2004). In this study, we followed a class of students with LLD for an entire semester, conducting classroom observations in both their Foundations 8 and English 8 classes, as well as conducting individual interviews, situated interventions, and formative and summative writing assessments.

The three of us, Judith, Trudy, and Heather, were involved as coresearchers in one strand of the larger study. Our purpose in this strand was to examine how writing strategy instruction is embedded within the instructional, curricular, and social contexts of the classroom. As part of this sense-making process, we searched for a metaphor to represent our focus. We began with the metaphors of landscape and portrait. The classroom seemed like a landscape, in that it is a place with physical, temporal, and curricular features through which the teacher, students, and researchers navigate. Our attempt to represent the classroom context also seemed like portrait

making, in that we aimed to express the character of the group dynamics located within that landscape. These metaphors came naturally to Judith and Trudy, as both of us are engaged in the visual arts: landscape painting and photography, respectively.

We reasoned that the process of strategy instruction does not occur in isolation but is situated and enacted within instructional, curricular, and social or motivational contexts. Teacher decision making occurs on multiple levels; teachers work between their long-range vision of curricular objectives and immediate instructional needs and goals. Enactments of strategy instruction lessons are moment-by-moment negotiations, during which teachers both direct and respond to academic, discursive, social, behavioral, and motivational events and processes that they perceive. They have a repertoire of adaptations that they draw on: classroom management strategies, discursive strategies, accumulated collections of curricular materials, and a variety of instructional activities and tasks that use multiple modalities. As we reflected on the dimension of time, our metaphors transformed, and we began to see the classroom more dynamically, for example, as theater. Teaching is a complex, dynamic, interactive improvisation that requires props on the classroom stage and the awareness of all the actors, as well as the ability to respond effectively and immediately, episode by episode, while keeping the goal of the play in mind. What remained invisible to us until we began trying collaboratively to write up our observations of the contextual embeddedness of strategy instruction were our own roles in this classroom theater and in the overall research enterprise.

Collaborative writing method

The plan was that we would begin descriptively by writing up what we had observed about the ways in which the strategy instruction was embedded in the instructional, curricular, and social contexts of the classroom. Throughout the semester of research in the classroom, we had been meeting as a research team on a regular basis to discuss the research process, and our observations and emerging interpretations. We had kept written summaries of the meetings and had audiotaped some of them. We also each had kept various other written data, including observational notes, interview transcripts, summary sheets, research memos, and a teacher's log. Our research process also was nested within many informal one-on-one conversations, ranging from terse action statements as the bell rang to long, philosophical interchanges over lunch. At this point, drawing on our accumulated data and the history of our conversations, it seemed to us that the writing up process would be straightforward.

We met and developed an outline for the article. We decided to start the write-up by briefly identifying who we were as the researchers: what roles we had and what beliefs and theoretical stances we brought to the research project. Similarly, from our interview data, we wanted to provide a portrait of the students and what they brought to the classroom. We then planned to move quickly into what we saw as the main topics: the curriculum and curricular texts and subtexts; issues of social context; the evaluative, cognitive, and motivational aspects of the instructional context; and communicative (discursive) patterns in the classroom. With respect to the writing process, as we each spent most of our working time in different areas of the city and all were busy people with little time to meet, we decided that we would accomplish the collaborative writing electronically. Judith volunteered to draft the first contribution about our respective research roles and role relationships and then to forward the document electronically to Trudy and Heather, so that they could add their contributions. Similarly, Trudy volunteered to draft the first contribution on curriculum and put it forward for the others to elaborate. In this way, we planned to flesh out each topic from our outline. Once again, this writing process seemed straightforward, so we spent little time working out the details of the process. In fact, in the end,

we devoted the entire article in front of you to just the first topic of role relationships. As it turned out, neither our role relationships nor the collaborative writing process were straightforward.

We understood from the outset that it was important to describe ourselves as participants in the classroom and in the research—to paint our lives individually and collectively into our observations of the classroom. We agreed that we all held social constructivist viewpoints about how individuals understand and make meaning from the classroom processes in which they observe or engage. We believed that representing our observations by using a collaborative writing process would provide the potential to present multiple points of view and polyvocal reasoning about classroom teaching and learning (Fottland & Matre, 2004). Our roles seemed clear enough: Judith was a university professor and researcher, Trudy was a lecturer at the university as well as the classroom teacher of the Grade 8 class in the study and thus was both teacher and researcher, and Heather was a research assistant hired for the project. We had spent many hours meeting and talking about the research, as well as many hours in Trudy's classroom. Researcher role had not arisen as an issue. It had barely been touched on. It was a small procedural detail, so when we began to write about our perceptions of our roles as researchers in the project and discovered an elephant blocking the way forward, insisting on being recognized, crowding out every other conversation, we were surprised, but we let the elephant have its way. We discovered that our roles were complex, intertwined, and co-constructed. Talking about our roles felt risky. How we each perceived our own role, how we perceived the others' roles, and how we believed they perceived our roles saturated every other decision, interpretation, and act in the classroom and in the research. We became aware that our role relationships were methodologically fundamental to the enactment of the study.

This article deals specifically with this issue of researcher role relationships, and we struggled with the writing of it. We began with the expectation that we would write a traditional academic research paper but quickly realized that written genre did not reflect our voices as we had developed them in our conversations together throughout the semester. We, therefore, chose to write as we had talked (albeit more formally), much as Patterson and Brogden (2004) have described. Each of our individual voices is heard in this conversation. Judith would write, and Trudy and Heather would read and respond with their views. Alternatively, Trudy would begin, and Judith and Heather would respond. This written conversation was not linear in the sense of following each other in a chronological sequence. Rather, at times, one of us would jump into the middle of someone's contributed chunk to address a particular point. Thus the organization is topical and emergent rather than strictly sequential. In the conversation that follows, we represent each voice, Judith's, Trudy's and Heather's, in a different font, and use the headings that each of us initially employed. We have not edited the content or sequence after the fact but offer it verbatim.

Reflections about researcher role relationships

JUDITH: My perceptions of my role

I saw myself as primarily responsible for managing the research side of the project. This included: design of study, hiring of research assistants and explaining their roles, organizing and monitoring data collection, conducting research interviews, conducting research observations, retaining and organizing data, selecting analysis strategies, doing and coordinating analyses, interpreting findings, presenting and writing up the research. Many of these tasks were done/are being done in collaboration with other members of the team. Especially, every step has been discussed with Trudy and we have come to joint agreement about how to proceed; yet, I see the primary overall responsibility for leadership in these tasks as lying with me.

Trudy and I met frequently to discuss the class sessions I observed and to plan next steps in the research. Lynda and I met regularly to discuss the collection of the writing samples and questionnaire data, and to plan, conduct, and compare analyses. We also met as a whole team six times over the data collection phase with all or most of the five researchers present, as well as having many informal and one-on-one meetings and research conversations.

With respect to my classroom persona, actually, I think I had multiple personae. During whole class instruction and during collection of the writing samples, I was trying to be the invisible "fly on the wall"—observing "everything" and writing detailed descriptive field notes. During mid-semester observation sessions (small group activities and essay writing), I circulated among students, observing individuals, fielding their questions, and discussing their writing with them, and supporting Trudy's behavioral rules. During the individual interviews, I was the "interested listener" as well as the "questionnaire administrator."

TRUDY: My perceptions of my role as a teacher/researcher

I saw myself as the person whose main tasks included teaching my students the paraphrasing and writing strategy interventions and making the process of teaching and my reasoning about teaching as transparent as possible. I took responsibility for management items such as ensuring the ethics letters and parent consent letters were written and then disseminated to the various ethical recipients and the parents. We obtained approval from almost every parent due to the fact I spent a weekend phoning them all to introduce myself after not being able to attend a scheduled parent/teacher interview and to highlight the procedures of the Foundations 8 and English 8 classes.

I continuously attempted to keep the three goals of research in mind while I taught: 1) to make apparent to the research team the structures and supports I delivered and how and when students could assume the strategies themselves; 2) to allow students to make obvious the barriers they perceived themselves to experience throughout instruction in the strategies; 3) to attempt to allow students to self-regulate the strategy instruction and to allow them to learn through cooperative learning processes and to produce product through computer use.

While Judith assumed many of the responsibilities and steps to organize the research project I managed the interplay between research and research objectives. Teaching, as best I could, was my primary responsibility: research was interwoven, like a tapestry, into the teaching process. I kept in mind the notion that research should support instruction. So I thought about the motivational needs of my students first, then about curricular and instructional techniques I needed to use, then about wishes and suggestions of the research team.

Another aspect of my roles as teacher/researcher included making those adaptations to my own instructional methods to allow the research team entry to my classroom. I needed to ensure the research team was aware of my curricular direction throughout the semester. So, there were many times where I had to be flexible in what I taught when, to allow the needs of all facets of this study to play out. I would delay lessons or move lessons ahead to allow the research team to participate. This might include split-timed decisions to accommodate those research needs. People became sick or unavailable in the instant. I generally had a number of lessons and procedures in mind on any day to allow for this flexibility. This is actually a part of my instructional methods. I stew about what I have observed in a class and about my next steps all day long after I have finished a class and I often decide, as I walk into the school the next day, what I will do next. This is possible because of the massive amounts of teaching materials and

teaching strategies I have collected and developed over the years and that are ready to hand in my classroom.

There were times when an observer would make a suggestion for changes to my teaching procedures and materials. I would think about their suggestions and I would attempt to integrate that suggestion, or decide it didn't fit my style of instruction or the needs of the students. For example one of the observers suggested I pair the students to complete a writing task and time them for 60 seconds. The students were much too noisy, disruptive, and off-task for my liking. I tried not to feel defensive although I admit there were times when I did. However, I tried to continuously remind myself everything was worth a try and grist for the research mill and evaluation afterwards.

My role included ensuring students were able to learn in whatever situation they were placed into by maintaining a requisite discipline. Like many teachers I believe control of the class is my first priority based on the notion that without disciplined behaviour, little instruction and learning is possible. That is true for both teacher-directed instruction as well as cooperative learning. Discipline comes first, then dynamic teaching, then curriculum, then research.

JUDITH: My perceptions of Trudy's role

I saw Trudy as primarily responsible for teaching and all that teaching entails (especially, the curriculum, social dynamics, instructional approaches, and in-class and in-school communication); for designing, conducting, and adapting the strategy intervention, as well as teaching the strategy intervention approach to the rest of the team; and for coordinating the flow of researchers in the classrooms (assigning them roles and/or accommodating to their roles). Trudy's input to the research design and processes ensured their relevance to the classroom context.

TRUDY: My perceptions of Judith's role

I saw Judith as the person who would pull together all the factors entailed in collecting research information. That included organization of observations and data collection. She supplied tape recorders and I taped my lessons—more than 40! I saw Judith as a person who would quietly fit into my classroom and students would just accept her presence because she could fit in with what I was doing and how I was doing it. They accepted her right to observe and question them. They probably thought of her as another teacher aide, a part of the crowd who enter and leave classrooms regularly. I saw her as a person who would be able to give me feedback on what she observed about the impact of my instruction, and the effects of the strategy curriculum, on student learning: a different lens. As a teacher in the throes of classroom interactions there are many things I don't see clearly: An observer can see more than the teacher will.

I also hoped that if I chose not to use her suggestions she would not feel hurt and that I would be able to explain soundly why I elected not to use them. I wanted her to see my perspectives and to help me be able to integrate practical useful strategies and techniques into the classroom. I wanted from her ideas that would take into account the pragmatic classroom context—not just theory: the students' personalities, curricular goals, my need for classroom management, and my limitations as a human being regarding time and energy. I also wanted her to like what she saw me doing but know that is not how we learn to change and adapt. So I saw a part of her role to be a person who could carefully enlighten me about weaknesses in my teaching philosophy and methods. We talked at length about some of our observations over lunch and I appreciated being able to see through her eyes some things I hadn't seen.

We disagreed over our analysis of some students' LLD difficulties. I think I analyze situations from the perspective of myself, with my students, within the confines of the classroom. I feel defensive about theorists and researchers who say things should be possible but who don't experience the classroom with me on a day in day out basis. There are many things and events I don't have the power to control or change. Within the rapid-fire exchange of talk and events in the classroom, there are too many things I don't see. When I am facing one group of students doing a group activity I can't see who kicked whom first behind me. This limits my desire to do group activities. Furthermore, sometimes I don't really want to know about what I can't impact within my teaching assignment, curricular goals, and contextual situation: 20 students with LLD, behaviour problems many of which originate in the home, social skills deficits learned at home and in the neighbourhood, learning difficulties whose origins are debatable, limited resources, limited administrative help. Sometimes there are too many problems over which I have little control.

JUDITH: My perceptions of Heather's role

I was seldom present on the same occasions as Heather. Initially, I pictured her role as similar to the role I took on classroom observation days: 1) "fly on the wall" observing the class holistically and keeping detailed field notes (running records) along with "first pass" interpretive comments; and 2) interacting with students individually to get an elaborated sense of them as individuals and to describe their motives, their personal approach to writing, their implementation of the writing strategies taught, and so forth. However, I think that Heather added a component of acting as instructional assistant to Trudy, and also was more cognizant of student-to-student relationships than I was. Perhaps her observations focused more specifically on what the students did/said/understood (rather than holistically on the multiple contextual layers as mine did) and on evaluating instructional effectiveness on the spot and suggesting how to modify the strategy instruction (whereas mine focused on description and interpretation). Heather theorized about what she saw verbally in post-session meetings with Trudy (and occasionally with me and other team members), rather than keeping exhaustive descriptive notes. Thus, as observers, we each did somewhat different things in the classroom.

TRUDY: My perceptions of Heather's role

I saw Heather as a co-observer of students struggling to learn and, perhaps, having fun learning in my classroom. I'm not sure Heather observed a lot of fun in the Foundations 8 classroom. Having taught in similar classrooms herself, she was a co-conspirator in the attempt to understand what was going on within my classroom: a sounding board for interpretation of student motive and effect of instruction. We didn't always agree on what we saw either.

Because Heather was not in a position of authority as I was, she could relate differently to the students and ask curious questions of them about their thinking. She could be more personal with them since they did not choose to be angry with her about the imposition of schoolwork related demands. (I suppose I could have too if so many other things hadn't been going on.) She could sit behind a group of students and just listen and write down what she heard as they were involved in group process tasks or working on computers composing essays. I could never leave the face of the students, even to go to the back of the room to do my attendance via email on the computer (located at the back of the classroom) without major disruptions occurring. My attendance usually had to be completed at the end of the period when the students were leaving. I saw her as able to tap the cognitive and meta-cognitive thought processes of the students which I didn't have time

for because I had to stay front and center to prevent chaos. She could then appease my curiosity by sharing what she had heard. That led to changes in teaching and instructional approaches.

HEATHER: My perceptions of my role

My role as research assistant was designed and assigned by Judith and Trudy. I was to carefully observe the class and take detailed notes of the overall class and specific students (and their interactions with text and each other). From my observations I was to delicately put forth any suggestions regarding Trudy's implementation of the strategy intervention.

Before I began my classroom observations, I felt confident that I could perform this role. I have taught Learning Assistance at the high school level for three years with a similar type of student. I have been quite involved with colleague mentoring and teacher study groups that have led to the development of the skills of detailed observation for behaviour and teaching patterns and recording these observations in a global style running record. I have felt comfortable being externally assigned a role that involved various degrees of objective and neutral observation.

Within the first two weeks of classroom observation, I realized that I was not fulfilling my role in spite of my determined efforts. I could not seem to remain an objective observer within this classroom. I didn't "see" and "interact" as Trudy and Judith (and I!) had planned and even my observation notes reflected this. The notes were disjointed and fragmented, full of incomplete ideas and thoughts about student interactions that I didn't know how to "translate" later in any kind of "accurate" or "objective" manner without significantly changing what I saw. From the first class observation, I had to fight to remain "research-focused" rather than "student-focused" and this tension never was resolved for me. Although I gave careful thought to resigning four times in the first 6 weeks, I did not because I felt that I could eventually adjust into the necessary role. It is noteworthy that I never could or did fulfill my intended role.

HEATHER: Dynamics that shaped my role in the classroom

Member of the community

I live in the same 3 block neighbourhood area as 70% of the students. They see me play with my children in the playground at least three times a week and I have seen a number of them in somewhat shady looking situations with their friends in the neighbourhood. Almost all of them acknowledge me with a nod, a wave, or a short chat. They believe that I hear the neighbourhood gossip about them and credit me with a knowledge of their life that I simply don't have or even want. This belief has led some students to curry my favour or approval within the classroom setting. Among other things, this leads me to believe that these particular eight students do not see me as "research assistant" but as a community member. My husband once remarked that it was a good thing that these students liked me or our children and our home would be targeted for violence.

Viewed by students primarily as a teacher

During the second classroom observation, a group of students chose to test my approach to inappropriate behaviour by deliberately swearing and making suggestive comments and then waiting for my response. When I made it clear that this was not acceptable, one student questioned my authority. At that point, I told them that I had worked as a high

school Learning Assistance and English 8 teacher and certainly had the authority to correct them in class. The upshot of this conversation was that two students checked to confirm my story with their friends which led to the student expectation that I would help them in their work. Subsequently, the students continually drew me in for specific assistance that was not cogent with the frame of reference Trudy had set for the class. Over a one week period in early November, I attempted to explain and define my role and the assistance I could offer within it to each student individually. However, most of the students continued to define me as an interactive teacher rather than research assistant in spite of the verbal and non-verbal cues I gave them.

My need to teach and relate to them

As I have reflected about my approach to my research assistant role, I have come to realize that my need to meaningfully teach in English and communicate interactively with people shaped my initial performance of my role. I had only been back in Canada for 6 weeks (after two fascinating and frustrating years of teaching English in Korea) when I became involved in this research project. I had a hunger to interact with students beyond a very superficial language and culture level. I also had the corresponding need to be valued for myself and not treated as a disposable commodity. The students perceptively picked up the signals that I was unaware of giving off and engaged me in teaching ways I had not anticipated.

At the same time, my teaching style and approach had adapted to the Korean "way of being" as a teacher. The students initially interpreted my approach as extraordinarily "mothering," "compassionate" and "protective." Many students equated this with being a pushover who would either nag them or wouldn't hold them accountable for their behaviour. Interestingly, three of the students became deeply angry and rejected me harshly when I did not conform to this perception and consistently chose to follow Trudy's "way of being" in the classroom. Ironically, when five other students jumped to my defense, my role as teacher—not researcher—became even more firmly cemented.

Professional commitment to Trudy

Given the student behaviours and learning difficulties that swamped this classroom, I felt compelled to act as a junior partner in a team teaching situation. Although Trudy did not actively encourage this facet of our research relationship, I felt that she constructively used this motivation whenever appropriate. I perceived that acting in the role of a teacher would support this fluid, complicated and multi-layered research project. Frankly, I felt at times that she needed consistent collegial support and encouragement to survive this class!

Relationship with Trudy in the classroom

Because I only entered the classroom at Trudy's request for specific purposes on specific days, Trudy and I sometimes fell into a "nice teacher/strict teacher" pattern of interaction. Although I thought this might be a useful partnership pattern, this quickly became constricting and I found that it hindered the recording of field notes. I also became frustrated with the continuous flow of provocative student remarks regarding Trudy's ability as a teacher. For example, in a two week period with 6 observation times, I noted 31 challenges to Trudy's authority and competence directed to me. Although I consistently reaffirmed and defended Trudy's competence while making it clear that the question was not appropriate, many of the students did not choose to stop. I felt that if I responded by

ignoring the question or provocation, I would be perceived as not actively supporting Trudy which in turn would negatively affect Trudy.

Conclusions about my role

All of these factors changed my role in the classroom, because, as desirable as it would have been, I could not be an anonymous observer. Neutrality was not an option. My interactions with the students and my interpretations were influenced by the fact that I saw and interacted with them in other contexts. This led to the ongoing dilemma that as I became so entwined in the lives of the students, I could not look upon them or their progress objectively. I worried that because I so intensely wanted them to succeed, I would fulfill my own expectations, thus violating one of the key directives of any research study. I clearly remember one observation in early December where I thought I observed some metacognitive language in three students. I took copious notes of the student interactions and reviewed them the following day, feeling so pleased that these students were developing these skills. However, when I typed them up three days later, I saw (with great disappointment) that it wasn't really meta-cognition but cognition.

On the other hand, because they saw me as a teacher without authority who lived in their community, there was a personal interconnection woven into our classroom interactions. They would ask me about my son being sick, and tell me that their mother was sick. What happened was there was a construction of a social network, which had a positive effect with certain students—they would actually talk to me. There was an openness that allowed me to see into their thinking as well as their lives. Although this role hindered me in some ways, I tried to use this personal connection to strengthen some of the students' cognitive and meta-cognitive processes as I worked with them. Perhaps in the end, many students saw me as a neutral yet enthusiastic supporter but I could not achieve the objectivity that would have been most useful within the context of the research project.

JUDITH: Contextual embeddedness

During the classroom observations, I was constantly struck by the multiple complex layers of the classroom context unfolding, and how Trudy moved through and interacted on all those levels (roles, beliefs/theories, curriculum, social dynamics, instruction, and communication). I tried to record examples that revealed the interplay between her instructional goals and her adaptive decision-making (both on-the-spot and day-by-day). I often use a visual metaphor of "seeing" a "landscape" to talk about perceptions. But now, looking back, I also see that the research and teaching operated as a "dance" between teaching and research objectives; between theory and practice; between individuals of the research team and their evolving role development and interactions, and between teacher-researcher, researcher-observers, and students. Each tried to impress her (or his) aims on the unfolding interactions, stepping forward to lead the dance, then stepping back as another leader took over.

TRUDY: Contextual embeddedness

I can see the dance Judith mentions playing out. It involves a constant awareness and observation of all the players in the classroom (students, observers, administrators, ministry of education personnel, me) while also maintaining direction in terms of curriculum, instruction, discipline, and my own theories of human motivation (first), philosophy of learning (second), and instructional theory (third).

I see the LD classroom as a shifting tension-filled drama that cannot endure disruption from an audience if it is to sustain its direction and purpose. What I hate most is disruption: I tell administrators to walk softly into my classroom without knocking. I tell them not to use the public address system because it creates disruption. I tell observers not to come into the classroom with clompy shoes and loud announce-themselves voices. Some people take up a great deal of noisy non-verbal space: I ask them to move quietly and smoothly and "containedly" (credit to Montessori). I teach my students to do the same to master their bodies. Verbal interactions between myself and students and visitors occur at a whisper and I often have to ask teacher aides to speak less loudly or to leave the room with the student they are helping if they can't speak softly. Only certain people get invited into the play and only with the rules and expectation understood.

HEATHER: Contextual embeddedness

Trudy clearly valued people who could "walk softly," both literally and metaphorically, in the classroom. Although she didn't usually show it, she felt frustrated by adults who took up noisy non-verbal space. However, she had vast amounts of patience for the students who all took up noisy non-verbal space. Trudy gently and firmly corrected the students if they unintentionally or intentionally generated unnecessary noise.

To my relief, I found myself able to "walk softly," which is quite a different "way of being" for me. Why? Because I had learned to walk softly when my newborn child spent three months in a neo-natal special care nursery. Although part of me abhors the medical model and analogy for LLD students, that is one of my metaphors for the environment Trudy created for the classroom. In a hospital's special care nursery, there is a well-thought-out environment designed to maximize the health and psychological comfort of the babies. The atmosphere is purposeful and respectful and stimulating. Emergencies are expected and handled with equanimity.

The fact that each of the students' "public face" and behaviour changed quite radically from day to day added many more layers of contextual embeddedness to the classroom. As a result, each member of the research team had to respond to an unknown and therefore unpredictable audience each and every day.

JUDITH: More about Trudy's role

Trudy interacted with each member of the research team on the days they observed in her classroom. Communication among the research team and coordination of the data collection went through Trudy. As the classroom teacher, and as the person who adapted and designed the writing strategy curriculum, and as the co-principal researcher, Trudy was at the nexus of the study. She was at the center of the dance as choreographer and principal dancer. Or, to change metaphors again (it must be World Cup year!), she was both the soccer team's center midfielder, who set up the plays, and the game referee, who called the fouls. By contrast, the rest of us had bit parts. For the rest of the research team, our primary responsibility was to the research, but as the classroom teacher, Trudy's primary responsibility was to the students.

More about my own role and contributions

I think that one of the contributions I was able to make was to analyze individual students' learning and motivational strengths and needs, and provide feedback to Trudy which she could then use to make instructional decisions. The one-on-one interviews with the students gave me

insights into their thinking about their learning. Also, in the classroom, I had the luxury of time to move from student to student, observing how they approached activities, and to interact with them. (I call this a "luxury" because I am aware that this is time that Trudy did not have, as she was responsible for coordinating, or orchestrating, all aspects of the instruction and managing the social dynamics.) Through the holistic whole-class observation sessions, I was able to "see the big picture" of the classroom context and how instruction was embedded within this wider context. Then in the one-on-one work with students, I was able to "zoom in" to get an idea about the individuals in the classroom, and what each of them brought into the social dynamics.

One other contribution that I made is that of helping members of the research team to connect daily events of the classroom to the body of research knowledge and our research aims for this study. Although all members of the research team are experienced as both practitioners and researchers, I think that the other team members might reason first through their practitioner eyes, and then through their researcher eyes. In contrast, my first step was to lay out the landscape of the research within the context of the body of knowledge about language learning disabilities (LLD), and to then understand and interpret praxis within that research framework. So, I observed, analyzed, and interpreted, sharing these perceptions in an ongoing way with Trudy and the other researchers, and I think that through our conversations, the emerging interpretations shaped others' perceptions, as well as the enactment of the instruction. One concrete example of this is the way that Trudy began to introduce terminology into her teaching that made visible elements of her strategy instruction in expository writing, such as "text structure," and "cohesion." Also, as the semester progressed, she more often cued students to the expectation that they should self regulate their writing processes by instructing them to "think about transition words," "reread," "check to see how it flows," and so forth.

As the visitor from the university, I was the "face of the research." On the other hand (and Trudy and I have talked about this a number of times), I actively resisted being cast as another teacher or teacher's assistant. I guess this was part of the way that we negotiated roles. None of us could "write" our roles in isolation; we improvised within the affordances of the classroom context (and what we each perceive classrooms to be), our role responsibilities (and what we understand "researchers" and "teachers" to be), and others' perceptions (What did Trudy expect of me? What did Heather expect? The students?). Probably as we negotiated our roles and shared our perceptions, we were each trying to teach the others something. For example, as university researcher, I was comfortable managing multiple facets of the research process and mentoring others in their roles as researchers. I also drew on my experiences as a speech-language pathologist (SLP) in assessing the writing processes of the individual students and observing and suggesting modifications to the intervention. My "teaching" of my team colleagues came from the familiar points-of-view of these two roles. I tried to communicate my perspectives in ways that the others would find acceptable, just as I tried to hear and understand what Trudy was teaching me (for example, about the nature of teaching, the aims and structure of the writing strategy intervention, and the range of roles and expectations in her classroom).

TRUDY: My persona

Since Judith has brought up the notion of persona I admit I struggle with my personae as both a teacher and a private person. I suspect I have a split personality: I am not in my private life who I am as a teacher. I have had discussions with friends entering the teaching profession who state they want, first, to be friends with their students. I argue that this role is not possible until much later in the student/teacher relationship when I am no longer the teacher of the student. I fill the role of benevolent dictator, like a mother, whose responsibility includes maintaining discipline and authority over children who are not yet capable of always making responsible decisions or of

behaving responsibly. In that role I can be friendly, but not friends, which presumes a relationship based on equality. I maintain a certain personal distance from my Foundations 8 students since I must also direct behaviour and, in the end, maintain a certain authority over inappropriate behaviour. In fact, I shared much more personal information about myself and my family life with my regular English 8 students, with whom I encountered far fewer behavioural problems, than I ever dared with my Foundations 8 students. I experience the same discontinuity in my role as school counsellor and classroom teacher. I behave differently in each role and am expected to behave differently with students I encounter in each context.

I like having people in my classroom who can be friends with the students. Students will confide in them. Heather filled that kind of role and I also hoped Judith would. I don't mind when they perceive these other classroom participants to be kinder and less bossy than I am. Being an effective mother/teacher, or even God, does not mean giving the child everything he wants but that is what makes mother/teacher nice in the eyes of the child. So effective mothers provide "aunties" who will listen to the child complain and help them find solutions to problems and different perspectives on mother. That is what I want assistants in my classroom to do.

TRUDY: Conflicting aims

As teachers, one of our first concerns centers around the needs of the students rather than the needs of research. So, I could see Heather struggling to be the distant observer, Judith's "fly on the wall" and the students pulling her into interaction with them around their needs to have things explained to them in a different voice and to be part of their lives. Sometimes she could re-explain instructions that were not clear or had not been attended to due to other interactions in the classroom. To me these interactions are more important than the needs of research. Students are first people who have stuff going on in their lives that may impact whatever conclusions researchers may draw about the behaviour of the students they observe. My students had parents who had a row that morning and were "discussing" divorce; a student whose mother had just found out she has cancer; a student whose brother committed suicide; a student who read a story that stimulated thoughts about a pet horse dying. In trying to maintain control of the students I have little in-class time to sit for 15 minutes or half an hour to talk to my students about these issues. And then the bell goes and they are off to another class where their emotional needs are ignored due to the system's drive to instill academics. Heather did have time for some of this kind of talk while I continued the patrol duty. And because she was a visible part of the neighbourhood the students may have thought they understood her and she understood them. I wish I had more time for this kind of interaction with my students.

JUDITH: Conflicting aims

Like Trudy and Heather, I was aware of and struggled with the conflicting aims of the research and the instructional or student needs. As part of another strand of this research, we conducted a number of individual interviews with the students. In all, students who were not absent participated in five interviews each, and I conducted half of them. Therefore, (unlike Trudy) I had considerable one-on-one time with each of the students over the semester. In most of these interviews, I found the students very willing to talk about themselves, their self perceptions as writers, their aspirations, what they wrote about, and their opinions about the class. My rapport with most of the students was quite close in this interview situation, and we often had long conversations. In fact, I found the difference in attitude shown by the students in the one-to-one sessions as compared to the classroom often quite striking; students who, in class, disrupted others, behaved rudely, or refused to work, would sit in the back room with me and confide about their mother's illness, their hope to become a writer of children's stories or an actor, a fishing

trip with an uncle, or a conviction that they were incapable of learning a particular academic skill. I wondered about whether anyone had ever sat down with them as individuals before and asked their opinions and been willing to listen. I worried about these students and whether their needs could be met in the busyness of the classroom, where managing the class dynamics and the instructional sequence necessarily took precedence. During class time, there simply was not much time for each individual, and yet so many of the students were so needy, and if their individual needs were not being addressed, I wondered how Matthew, Bashir, Cassie [all names are pseudonyms], and so on would fare with respect to academic aims.

Knowing that Trudy simply did not have the time for these in-depth individual conversations, I saw my role as listener as something I could give to these students. Then I tried to reflect back to Trudy the key issues that students had discussed. We had many after-class conversations in which we shared perceptions and sounded out problem-solving strategies. Again and again, plans of action would get stuck on the issues of lack of time, lack of resources, and lack of systemic support.

I also struggled between my conflicting roles in this study. For example, in the one-on-one interviews, I saw my primary purpose as listening to what the students had to say, and probing to get them to elaborate so I could understand their meanings at a deeper rather than superficial level. But along with that, we had formulated a number of structured questions that were part of the interview, so that we could compare their points of view at the beginning of the intervention with their points of view at the end. I often felt that the pre-planned questions impeded the conversational flow of the interviews.

The observer and participant aspects of my roles also conflicted, especially when I was in the classroom. A classroom is a seductive setting—it draws all of the people in it into interacting in the moment. For research, a certain amount of this is good and necessary. Heather talks about trying to be the distant, objective observer, and how frustrated she felt when she tried to take on that role. I believe that a person cannot really understand the interactions in a classroom merely by being an onlooker. One has to become a participant-observer. The challenge is to find ways to slide between participating and observing/recording. Interacting in the moment yields insights that are contextual and dynamic; however, even intensely felt experiences are fleeting, leaving scant traces unless recorded. One interchange overlays another. Tuesday's class overlays Monday's, and then there's Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and finally only a blur of remarks, impressions, and decisions. The sequential trace is quickly lost; the rationale for decisions embroidered; and the complex multiple layers of meanings fall away to single stark conclusions.

Of all the members of the team, I think I especially felt the pressure to record the enactment of the intervention. It seemed to me to be my obligation, to take this complexity of knowledge developed by Trudy as praxis over many years and now generously shared, and to record, as completely as possible, the strategy intervention and how it played out in the real context of a classroom full of specific individuals. When I look back at my field notes, I see that on the days that I took on a primarily participant role in the classroom, my notes are scanty and indecipherable. However satisfying my interactions with the students were on those days, the record is absent, and I can no longer reconstruct what we said and did or how I interpreted it. And yet the observer-recorder role required withdrawing to the side, creating a distance that felt awkward and cold. I think of Lorri Neilsen's words, where she describes herself as "enacting the master narrative of Rosaldo's *Lone Ethnographer*: I was the literate recorder of utterances, the gatherer of artifacts" (1998, p. 102). Neilsen goes on to say, "My dilemma as a researcher was that I perceived myself as Other, believed my obligation as a scholar—indeed my very success—was dependent on my ability to maintain that separation, although the emancipatory work I was able to foster, in some small way,

depended upon my being able to identify with them as women" (p. 104). These words resonate with me, reflecting some of the role tensions I felt in this study.

Finally, I was interested to read about how Heather struggled with the researcher role in the classroom. At the outset of the study, it seemed to me that we had suggested a quite open-ended set of possibilities to Heather—mentioning goals, but leaving the means of achieving those goals and type of role she took up to her. However, I now see that none of us wrote our roles in isolation. Although we spoke of ourselves as a "research team" and ourselves as "researchers," Trudy and I were the grant holders, and Heather's title on the university contract was "research assistant." Although we have written a great deal about roles here, we have skirted the matters of authority and hierarchy, and the implications for our interactions as a team. It is curious that, during the in-classroom phase of the study, although we talked a lot about seemingly every topic pertaining to the study, we never talked about our perceptions of our roles. Now, as we reflect on the research experience, each of us seems to have a pressing need to express those perceptions. This aspect of research, usually treated as invisible, implicit, or as a digression was, in fact, fundamental to how the process played out.

TRUDY: Last word—Respectful talking and listening

I thought I had my role defined in this research project: teacher. But I was also a producer and director of this play. Dare I say we were each producers, directors, and teachers? How can any of us—teacher, observers, students—interact with each other and not teach each other something? I see Judith, Heather, and myself acting from a very feminist theoretical approach to participation and decision-making (Kaschak, 1992). We attempted to reduce the notion of authority and hierarchy by being careful to share decision making based on our understanding of the goals of this study and our individual understanding of how best to carry them out. We talked and listened to each other before making decisions. We acted as women, wives, and mothers, concerned with relationship with each other and with my students. These same ways of being are also reflected in our theoretical stances where we tried to be careful about our responses to our differing opinions about LD causality and scope.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we leave our voices to speak for themselves about our role relationships, as crafted in the conversation above. In doing so, we resist the urge to provide a neat summary or final interpretation. This is partly by necessity, as the tensions of our differing experiences and aims remain unresolved, and many of our perspectives continue to be unaligned, but also, we see this lack of resolution as a strength of polyvocality. Our multiple perspectives, unfolding through our interactions over time and explored further through our subsequent written reflections, are a source of richness and depth in this portrait of our researcher roles. By honoring each other's voices and our allowing multiple points of view to stand, we avoid reductionism and imposed consensus. In the remainder of this section, we talk about what we learned by examining our researcher roles and why such explicit discussion might be of value to other researchers. We also comment further on the collaborative writing approach, and offer some insights about researcher role and identity construction.

The topic of our role relationships as coresearchers in this study had remained unspoken and submerged until we gave space to it. Previously so invisible, once we moved beyond the lip service of the value of collaboration to a meta level of shared reflection upon the nature of that collaboration, the need to discuss our perceptions about our respective roles was compelling. We discovered that our researcher role relationships were complex, multifaceted, and implicated in

every choice and act on a moment-by-moment basis in the classroom, and in the processes of the research. How we perceived our roles and the obligations of those roles were enacted in the research and instructional planning, in the classroom events and interactions, and in the interpretations that each of us drew from our experiences, which, in turn, affected subsequent planning, actions, and interactions.

An apparently innocent intention to write ourselves into the picture, to contextualize the work we were doing for presentation to others, created permission to speak among ourselves about roles. Inequities in power, and how the power shifted according to what we chose to value, who could speak and be listened to, and who could influence the classroom drama, were some of the role relationship themes that emerged. When we spoke of the internal conflicts we felt about the classroom's demands and the research demands, and which should take precedence, we were talking about values and, moreover, how these values influenced our expectations of how we and the others should play out their classroom and research roles. Woven into this were status differences but also the context of our wider roles and how we related to each other as people. Thus, we each had a multiplicity of roles that went beyond the temporary nominal roles we had taken up for this research: professor, teacher-researcher, and research assistant. In these other roles, we were mothers, friends, colleagues, mentors, feminists, women in academe, researchers, and educators. The role relationships that we perceived and constructed over the semester were situated not only in the classroom context and the research aims but also within this social network. Underlying the role tensions was a fundamental sense of mutual respect and support. In fact, without that respect, we would not have risked a collaborative discussion of roles; they would have remained unarticulated.

Our offhand decision to use a collaborative writing process, which involved each of us making independent contributions to a shared electronic document, also was important in this examination of researcher roles. Through this approach, each of our voices had a place. Perhaps each one of us sometimes was surprised or discomfited to read some of the things the others wrote, and yet, without having established prior rules about it, each of us was scrupulous about not editing the others' contributions. It was a matter of respect, of trying to really hear what each of us was trying to say about our perceptions, purposes, and expectations as we lived out the experience of doing research together. We came to this collaborative approach to writing easily, as it seemed merely an extension of the electronic forms of writing we have become accustomed to using daily in e-mail, through online conferences, or, in Judith's case, involvement in collaborative self-publishing cooperatives (see Transken, 2005), yet this is a new way of thinking and of doing research together, and it rests in the shift to a global information society and an emerging conception of text as multimodal (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Lapadat (2004b) has written about the potential of interactive writing for enhancing conceptual development and facilitating the social construction of meaning. The benefit of this collaborative writing process to the present study is that polyvocality was preserved. This experience also reminded us that the process of writing up research is not formulaic or transparent, but itself is part of the interpretive process (Atkinson, 1990; Lapadat, 2003; Richardson, 2000; Van Maanen, 1988).

Beyond this study and the personal learning that we three experienced as researchers, why do the role relationships among researchers matter? Simply this: Our roles as researchers are socially constructed, as they are enacted in a particular situation with particular affordances. They are grounded in meanings, aims, and values that are shared or inferred, and also within personally held values, aims, and theories that are implicit, and not shared or only partly shared. The improvisation of researcher role is theorizing situated in praxis. Role perceptions and enactments saturate every other decision, interpretation, and act in the classroom and in the research. They are methodologically fundamental; without the players of roles, there is no play.

For these reasons, we need to pursue further inquiry into researcher role relationships. The researcher is the researcher instrument, and in collaborative research work, the coresearchers co-construct their researcher roles interactively and dynamically. The stories that coresearchers tell themselves about their roles impact the participants, each other, and the research process (Finlay, 2002). Recently, researchers like Tiller (2003) and Rager (2005) have examined how research interactions and the stories heard affect not only participants but also researchers and other individuals engaged in the research. Therefore, it is becoming apparent that the import of interpersonal interactions in research goes beyond the immediate study and research purpose. Through qualitative research interactions, coresearchers engage with participants and with each other in narrative construction of identity. Sfard and Prusak (2005) have defined identity as "a set of reifying, significant, endorsable stories about a person" (p. 14) and point out that this storytelling is a collective process. Transken (2005) put it this way: "We are untidy texts being read by others while we read the texts around us" (p. 149). As researchers, we tell ourselves stories about who we are, what we are doing, and why. These stories not only affect the research but go to the heart of who we are, what we think, and how we act. It is time to bring these stories out and share them with each other.

References

- Atkinson, P. (1990). *The ethnographic imagination: Textual constructions of reality*. London: Routledge.
- Banks, A., & Banks, S. (Eds.). (1998). *Fiction & social research: By ice or fire*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
- Denzin, N. K. (1995). *The cinematic society: The voyeur's gaze*. London: Sage.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (Eds.). (1996). *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
- Finlay, L. (2002). "Outing" the researcher: The provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12, 531-545.
- Fottland, H., & Matre, S. (2004). Exploring researchers in dialogue: Linguistic and educational perspectives in observational data from a sixth grade classroom. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(3). Article 4. Retrieved November 3, 2004, from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_3/pdf/fottland.pdf
- Jewitt, C., & Kress, G. (Eds.). (2003). *Multimodal literacy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Kaschak, E. (1992). *Engendered lives: A new psychology of women's experience*. New York: HarperCollins
- Lapadat, J. C. (2003, May). *Coming out as a (qualitative) writer: Reflexivity, role negotiation, and voice*. Paper presented at the Fourth International Advances in Qualitative Methods conference, Banff, Canada.
- Lapadat, J. C. (2004a). Autobiographical memories of early language and literacy development. *Narrative Inquiry*, 14(1), 113-140.

- Lapadat, J. (2004b). Online teaching: Creating text-based environments for collaborative thinking. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 50, 236-251.
- Mothus, T. G. (2001, February). *Writing successfully: Writing strategies for high school students with writing disabilities*. Paper presented at the Ministry of Education Sponsored Education Research Symposium, Vancouver, Canada.
- Mothus, T. G., & Lapadat, J. C. (2004). *A strategy to increase the reading comprehension of junior high school students with reading disabilities*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Mothus, T. G., Lapadat, J. C., Struthers, L., Fisher, H., & Paterson, K. (2002). *Strategic interventions to improve the writing of adolescents with language-based learning disabilities*. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED443346; 30 pp.).
- Neilsen, L. (1998). *Knowing her place: Research literacies and feminist occasions*. Great Tancook Island, Canada: Backalong.
- patterson, d., & Brogden, L. M. (2004). Living spaces for talk with/in the academy. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(3). Article 2. Retrieved November 3, 2004, from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_3/pdf/pattersonbrogden.pdf
- Portelli, A. (2001). *The death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories: Form and meaning in oral history*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Rager, K. B. (2005). Self-care and the qualitative researcher: When collecting data can break your heart. *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), 23-27.
- Richardson, L. (2000). Writing as a method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 923-948). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schumaker, J. B., Denton, P. H., & Deshler, D. D. (1984). *The learning strategies curriculum: The paraphrasing strategy*. Lawrence: The University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities.
- Sfard, A., & Prusak, A. (2005). Telling identities: In search of an analytic tool for investigating learning as a culturally shaped activity. *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), 14-22.
- Tiller, S. A. (2003). Challenging research practices: Turning a critical lens on the work of transcription. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9, 750-773.
- Transken, S. (2005). Creativity, cultural studies, and potentially fun ways to design and produce autobiographical material from subalterns' locations. In J. Rak (Ed.), *Auto/biography in Canada: Critical directions* (pp. 145-171). Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier Press.
- Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wallach, G. P., & Butler, K. G. (Eds.). (1994). *Language learning disabilities in school-age children and adolescents: Some principles and applications*. New York: Macmillan.