When research content reflects research process: Unexpected but welcomed symmetries.

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Abstract

Descriptions of research conducted within the interpretive research paradigm do not always capture its messy and unpredictable nature. The naturalistic inquiry described in this paper attempts to provide a candid account of some of the challenges encountered in such research. Interestingly, many of those challenges were consistent with the challenges associated with the process of learning to be a facilitator, which was the focus of my study. The study sought to describe the theories and practices of facilitator educators preparing facilitators to work in community organisations, training or education contexts, and business management settings. Following a brief description of the methodology and methods of the study, some of the unexpected symmetries between learning to be a facilitator and conducting interpretivist research are discussed. These included the need for self-awareness, practicing intentionality, and managing conflicting roles. The strategies I used to respond to the research challenges I describe are also discussed and I encourage others to reflect on, and share, the trials and tribulations encountered during their research.

The problem with research in the interpretivist paradigm is that it involves people. Consequently, things rarely go completely according to plan, and interpretivist researchers should expect surprises. However, despite my awareness of this I was not prepared for the challenges I encountered in a recent study using a naturalistic inquiry approach. I am not sure whether it was naiveté or arrogance that made me think my study would go more smoothly, but overcoming the challenges along the way was both humbling and educational. Upon reflection, what I found interesting was the way some the findings of the study closely paralleled my learning about the research process. This paper will provide a candid description of some of these symmetries.

Sadly, rich descriptions, or natural histories of qualitative research processes in the research journal literature are not common, although there are some obvious exceptions. As early as 1958, Becker provided a detailed account of some of the practical and technical problems he encountered in a study that used participant observation to explore the experiences of students in a medical school. Becker’s paper sought to “stimulate those who work with this and similar techniques to attempt greater formalization and systematization of the various operations they use, in order to become more a ‘scientific’ and less an ‘artistic’ kind of endeavour” (p. 660). However, I wondered if the systematic and analytical description of his participant observation belies the messy and unpredictable nature of such research. By way of contrast, Holian (1999)
and Copnell (2005) provide frank accounts of their research including the difficulties they encountered, and how they managed them.

Holian (1999) described an action research project in which she assumed the dual role of researcher and senior manager within the same organisation. Her account of mistakes made, and ethical dilemmas encountered, would be useful reading for all action researchers. She experienced significant backlash within her organization for “surfacing undiscussables” (p. 4) with her employers and ended up quitting her job. Similarly, Copnell (2005) provides a frank and refreshing account of her study exploring the construction of the knowledges underpinning change in clinical nursing practice. Her description focused on the challenges she experienced in gaining access, constructing the data, analysing transcripts, and overcoming the dilemma of (re)presentation. She encouraged neophyte researchers to accept that research rarely goes according to plan. However, Copnell reported that her honesty and frankness about these issues in her doctoral thesis were not well received by all of her examiners.

Natural histories of research seem to be more common in research texts. Bell and Encell’s (1978) classic, ‘Inside the Whale,’ challenged the myth that research reports need to be impassionate. The editors called for more reflections on research to be published to share the learning experiences of those who conduct it. More recently, in their text, ‘The Ethical Dilemmas in Qualitative Research,’ Pugsley and Welland (2002) set out to

- explore the inevitable tensions that arise in a diversity of settings and reinforce
- and serve as a testament to the fact that prescriptive templates are unhelpful and,
- in many instances, untenable in providing an adequate foreshadowing of the
- perils and pitfalls encountered when researching the social. (pp. 1-2)

Other authors, like Beattie (1995), provided a very detailed account which incorporated her findings on teacher learning and growth as well as her reflections on the research process.

In the style of these aforementioned authors, the purpose of this paper is to provide an unsanitised account of some key learnings about interpretive research from my recently completed doctoral research. In particular, I will use as a framework for the paper the unexpected, but welcomed, symmetries that emerged between my research findings and the challenges encountered in terms of the research process. Before proceeding to a description of the methodology and methods used, a brief description of the background of the study will be given to provide some context.

**Background to the study**

The main purpose of the study was to describe how facilitator educators made sense of their practice in order to foster a better understanding of the processes by which a person can learn to become a facilitator. There is considerable ambiguity surrounding the use of the terms facilitation and facilitator. Educators refer to the use of a facilitatory teaching style, people in organisations use facilitatory styles of management, yet other consultants describe themselves as professional facilitators. For the purposes of the study described in this paper, Schuman’s (2005) definition of group facilitation as ‘helping groups do better’ (p. xi) was adopted. Hence, a facilitator was defined as someone who helps groups do better. Although grossly inadequate at
capturing the diversity and complexity of the facilitator’s role, this definition provided a common understanding, albeit a simple one.

The term facilitator educator, is not a common term in the facilitation field, but it was used instead of facilitation trainer because it more accurately conceptualised the role of helping others to reflect on and develop their skills, knowledge and experience as a facilitator. Facilitation occurs within many contexts but the study focused specifically on facilitator educators who were preparing facilitators to work in the fields of community development, training/education, and business management. These contexts were chosen because of their predominance in the literature and because of their ability to inform my own professional practice as a facilitator educator and administrator, in an experientially-based program, at a higher education institution.

Methodology and method

The interpretive paradigm, and naturalistic inquiry approach, were chosen for the study for a number of explicit reasons. Interpretive research is traditionally concerned with finding out how people make sense of the things they do by studying them in their natural settings (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and it also allows for “multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge” (Mertens, 1998, p. 11). Naturalistic inquiry in the interpretive paradigm is bound by the values and perspectives of the researcher and rather than pursuing a facade of objectivity, he/she carefully examines his/her own values, biases, theoretical dispositions and monitors his/her thoughts and actions accordingly (Schwandt, 2001). The study sought to involve participants in developing a project of mutual interest, blurring the line between myself and the participants, and sharing control over representation (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

The study primarily collected data using interviews and participant observations with seven facilitator educators delivering programs in Australia and New Zealand in 2005 and 2006. These methods allowed me to develop substantial relationships between myself and the facilitator educators that helped me to better understand the rationales underpinning their theory and practice. The first round of semi-structured interviews with the facilitator educators was guided by a set of questions, although I allowed the questions to emerge naturally over the course of the interviews. More interviews were conducted as required throughout the study and the emerging issues in the programs being observed determined the content and focus of these follow-up interviews. The participant observations in the study allowed me to see things from the perspective of the facilitator educators and the primary foci of my observations were the strategies used by the facilitator educators to assist the emerging facilitators to develop their skills, knowledge and competence. Secondary foci included: the sequencing of the program; key elements of the facilitator education process; references to theoretical foundations; and potential omissions or processes excluded from the facilitator education process.

In the study, a form of reputational-case sampling (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000) was used and facilitator educators convening programs in Australia in 2005 were invited to participate in the study based on their profile in the field as a result of their contribution to the literature (books and/or journals), their delivery of reputable facilitation training courses, and their involvement in facilitation conferences, meetings, and list-serves. For convenience, the
sample was limited to seven facilitator educators of which four were based in Australia, two in New Zealand, and one in the USA.

To provide another perspective on the facilitator education process, and a source of triangulation, a sample of the graduates of the facilitator educators’ current and past programs (n = 104) was invited to complete a short survey with three open ended questions. The survey sought to establish which processes within the training program the graduates found most helpful with their development as a facilitator, and what improvements they suggested. The facilitator educators distributed the surveys randomly to a sample of their past graduates or current participants on my behalf, except for one organisation who invited all of their graduates (using email) to complete an online version of the same survey. Course materials and text books, where available, were also used as another source of data.

Data analysis involved a combination of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The reduction of the data recorded in field notes, interview notes, interview transcripts, and survey responses occurred continuously from the start of data collection and included writing summaries, coding, teasing out themes, making clusters, making partitions, and writing memos. The constant comparison method, conceptualised by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was used once the data was coded to identify themes, essences or patterns within research data. Data display was achieved with graphs, charts, and networks in order to see what was happening and to assist with conclusion drawing and verification. The Nvivo software package was used to assist the data analysis process.

Symmetries in research findings and learning about research processes

In the study there were some unexpected symmetries between the challenges that I discovered emerging facilitators faced and the challenges I faced as a researcher. These symmetries, which I have labeled the need for self-awareness, practicing intentionality, and managing conflicting roles, will now be discussed in more detail.

The need for self-awareness

The facilitator educators in the study encouraged emerging facilitators to understand that their role is to serve the groups they are working with, which included helping their participants to define, and work towards the achievement of, their goals. Hence, facilitation aims to be responsive to the needs of the group and what is going on in the group, which means that facilitators cannot preplan their programs or predict the challenges or surprises that may surface. As a consequence, although the facilitator educators placed a strong emphasis on helping emerging facilitators to develop skills and clarify the theoretical foundations that underpin their practice, they also emphasised the importance of self-awareness and self-management to cope with the unexpected (see Thomas, in press-a).

One of the facilitator educators, Glen Ochre from the Groupwork Institute of Australia, was very clear that facilitation processes, skills, and tools are built on a firm foundation of self-awareness and her maxim was “facilitate first thyself” (field notes, day #1, 11/4/05). She explained that emerging facilitators must have “an understanding of what pushes our buttons” (field notes, day #1, 11/4/05). For Glen, this especially applied to more difficult facilitation
contexts where high levels of interpersonal conflict are common, and in these situations she taught “if we can manage ourselves - we can manage the group” (field notes, day #1, 11/4/05). Glen encouraged the emerging facilitators in her program to do the “innerwork” (field notes, day #3, 19/4/05) necessary to process our reactions to things when they are learning to facilitate Shirli Kirschner, from Resolve Advisors, described the need for facilitators to be able to “hold the space” and recognise the role of the “self-as-instrument” when facilitating (field notes, day #2, 1/9/06). Dale Hunter, from Zenergy, encouraged facilitators (2007) in her course text to maximise what she called ‘free attention,’ which she defined as “the part of your awareness not caught up with thoughts, feelings (emotions), and body sensations” (p. 51).

Although emerging facilitators frequently shared their frustration and disappointment with not facilitating as well as they believed they could or should, the facilitator educators in this study encouraged them to be real or authentic with their groups. Hamish Brown, also from Zenergy, explained to me, “I am trying to help them develop a way of being that is effective but also co-operative. And one of the things about that is being kind of real” (transcribed interview #1, 16/6/2005). Glen taught her emerging facilitators that the “key to good facilitation is about being real, being yourself” (interview notes, 16/6/05). Bob Dick, from Interchange, explained that “when people experience others as people that is all it takes” (field notes, day #1, 28/11/05) suggesting that good facilitation is not about activities, but rather it is more about helping participants to make real contact with each other.

Many facilitators are not aware of the pressure they place on themselves when they expect to facilitate perfectly. The facilitator educators suggested that such unrealistic expectations hinders rather than helps a facilitator’s ability to function effectively. Authenticity as a facilitator includes the ability to deal with his or her own imperfections. In fact, the need for openness and acceptance of one’s fallibility has been listed as a prerequisite to facilitate effectively by the facilitator educators in the study, and in sections of the facilitation literature (for example, see Ghais, 2005; Jenkins & Jenkins, 2006). So, whilst it is not clear where the mythical quest for facilitation perfection originated, the facilitator educators in the study discredited the value and reality of this pursuit.

There were times in my study when as a researcher I needed to practice high levels of self-awareness to better understand some of the anxiety I was experiencing. I understood that within the interpretive tradition researchers do not operate at a distance from their subjects and the relationship between researchers and their participants is often described as a dialogue (Angrosino & Mayes de Pérez, 2003). I liked the way Behar (1996) did not consider the interviewer, writer, and participant as distinct entities, and the way she maintained that the researcher and participant are intertwined deeply. Consequently, I suspected that the quality of the relationship I developed with the facilitator educators would influence the degree to which each facilitator educator would allow me into ‘their world.’ This awareness not only influenced my interviews but also the participant observations as demonstrated in the following excerpt from my field notes.

In the session this morning I became aware of how my participation in the group is influenced by my concerns about my relationship with Hamish as a researcher. I want to be seen as a credible researcher because it may help my ability to connect with Hamish and gather data. So my perception is, my effectiveness as a
researcher is tied to the quality of my rapport with Hamish, and my rapport with Hamish is tied to my competence as a facilitator and participant in the program. (Hamish, Field notes, day two, 16/8/05)

I felt similar pressures to ‘perform well’ as a participant with other facilitator educators as well and this often took the form of trying to give what I thought were good answers, giving advice to other emerging facilitators, and generally just ‘trying too hard.’ These experiences highlighted the need for high levels of self-awareness as a researcher because if my mind was filled with these distractions my level of free attention (Hunter, 2007) to make and record observations was diminished. Similarly, performance anxiety stemming from trying to be the ‘perfect researcher’ in order to collect the best data, was debilitating and had a negative impact on my focus. I think I misunderstood that being real, including making mistakes, is all part of being the research instrument. Over time I developed the self-awareness and confidence required to discuss some of my anxieties about the research with the facilitator educators. Such discussions always proved to be positive. When I shared with Hamish the anxiety I was feeling (in the previous excerpt), this led to a very open and positive discussion where he indicated,

Well the interesting thing is, what I have got going on is exactly that in reverse. Like what do you know, and what are you making of what I am doing, that’s exactly the same process. I have got a mirror process going on. (Hamish, Transcribed interview notes, 16/8/05)

One of the biggest challenges I encountered in my study occurred when trying to negotiate access with the facilitator educators to agree to participate in the study. This provided a quick and sobering reality check for me, but the reasons for their hesitation were understandable. The primary cause for the cool responses was concern over the potential impact that my presence as a researcher could have on the successful delivery of their programs. I had underestimated the importance of the group process in each of the facilitator educators’ programs. Undoubtedly, I was asking the facilitator educators to take a risk by allowing a participant-observer in their programs, as my presence could have negatively impacted the learning the other emerging facilitators experienced. Securing agreement from the facilitator educators to participate in the research required careful negotiations in each case.

Most of my negotiations with the facilitator educators focused on how I would fulfill my role as a participant-observer. These discussions occurred in personal meetings, discussions on the phone, and/or discussions via email. The ‘screening interviews,’ used by the facilitator educators to ‘check me out,’ were not as stressful as they could have been because I felt comfortable that by sharing the principles and philosophy of the interpretivist paradigm I could address their concerns. One facilitator educator likened this ‘checking out process’ to that of ‘two dogs circling each other sniffing each other’s arses’ (interview notes, 16/6/05).

In some cases, negotiations with the facilitator educators were more complex, creating some ethical dilemmas for me. One facilitator educator requested my assistance in promoting her program through some of ‘my facilitation networks.’ I agreed with the request but was uneasy about doing so because some of the other facilitator educators in my study were part of my facilitation networks and I felt awkward publicising another facilitator educator’s course. My
self-awareness was most tested, when one of the facilitator educators only agreed to participate in my research if the whole group of emerging facilitators consented to my presence. The facilitator educator encouraged the emerging facilitators to ask me questions about what my role would involve and then allowed plenty of time for any of the emerging facilitators to object to my presence. It was with some panic that I sat there, for what seemed like an eternity, waiting for my future involvement with this facilitator educator to be decided. Fortunately, after answering some of their questions, which clarified that my focus was the facilitator educators and not them as emerging facilitators, the group agreed to allow me to stay.

*Practicing intentionality*

The facilitator educators in the study encouraged the emerging facilitators to be intentional in the sense that they be conscious of the reasons behind their actions when facilitating (see Thomas, in press-b). Facilitators need to understand the theories, principles, and values that underpin their practice. Schwarz (2002) explained in his course text that learning to facilitate is “not simply a matter of learning new strategies, tools, or techniques. Your ineffectiveness results from the core values and assumptions you hold … and changing what you say and how you say it is not sufficient to significantly change the unintended consequences you get” (pp. 66, 93).

As an example of the facilitator educators’ intentionality, all of them valued the role of a supportive group environment to enhance learning about facilitation. Glen described groups as having ‘magic in their potential for transformation - far beyond any other mode’ (field notes, day #3, 19/4/05). From her perspective, groups unleash power by providing the safety to disagree and the ability to embrace conflict when we encounter others who think differently. Similarly, Hamish indicated to me that he was very interested in the quality of authentic community people experience … If the program moves into authentic community early then the quality of the learning after this point is very potent and deep. These programs seem to have the most powerful impact on the participants. (member check³ email, 25/8/05)

My observations of the facilitator educators’ practice, and in ensuing discussions with them, it became apparent that they all demonstrated a consistent, positive belief in the value and ability of their emerging facilitators. I was initially skeptical and considered this too good to be true. I suspected that the facilitator educators were saying and doing ‘all the right things’ because they were being observed, but their consistent demonstration of this Rogerian-like unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1983, 1989), over extended periods in some cases, indicated the authenticity of these espoused values. For example, in her course text Dale encouraged facilitators to “Always approach group members as capable, aware and fully functioning people who are committed to the group purpose” (Hunter, 2007, p. 37). She explained to me, “Yeah, I think I have had great belief in people, and what can happen…. I think that was something I was brought up with really” (Dale, transcribed interview #1, 20/8/2005). Roger Schwarz, from Roger Schwarz and Associates, explained he adopts a “basic assumption of competence” (field notes, 25/10/05) when working with groups and he took the view that organisations are “mysteries to be unravelled - not problems to be solved” (field notes, 25/10/05).
In my study I was fortunate to have a supervisor who demanded a similar level of intentionality as a researcher. The time spent clarifying my values, theoretical paradigm, was extremely helpful when I encountered challenges and surprises in my study. I was particularly impressed with the notion of feminist interviewing, which seeks to be “more reflexive and interactive, aiming to take a non-hierarchical approach which avoids objectifying the participant” (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p. 140). In my study interviews were not considered to be “neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 62). Rather, the findings were a product of the social dynamic between the facilitator educators and I. Ellis, Kiesinger, and Tillmann-Healy (1997) used the term interactive interviewing to describe a similar approach to interviewing, where the “distinction between ‘researcher’ and ‘subject’ gets blurred” (p. 121).

Gergen and Gergen (2003) challenged researchers to consider whether they empower their research participants or whether they get used for personal or institutional gain. They encouraged researchers to not see research as the accumulation of products but rather as a communicative process, in which the chief aim is to establish productive forms of relationship. The interpretive paradigm appealed to me as a researcher because I could design and implement a study that practiced the principle of co-creation, which saw the facilitator educators and I working together to explore meanings and develop understandings. My attempts to address the issues of representation in my study were also congruent with Flinder’s (1992, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994) concept of relational ethics, which emphasised caring, and respect more than agreements and rules.

The issue of control was also important in the study and I intentionally encouraged the facilitator educators to take an active role in the research process by nominating questions of interest, discussing emergent theories, participating in member checking, and sharing the findings. For example, two of the facilitator educators participated in a conference presentation of some early findings (Thomas, 2005) and all of them participated in the development of two papers (see Thomas, in press-a, in press-b) that identified them enabling appropriate recognition of their contributions to the developing body of knowledge.

Managing conflicting roles

The facilitator educators espoused the need for emerging facilitators to be clear and explicit about their role as facilitators with groups. In his course text, Roger (Schwarz, 2002) identified five common facilitation roles: facilitator; facilitative consultant; facilitative coach; facilitative trainer; and facilitative leader. In her course text, Dale (Hunter, 2007) also highlighted the difference between a facilitator and someone who is facilitative. She distinguished the role of facilitators from that of facilitative mediators, teachers, coaches, managers, group therapists, and leaders. The facilitator educators encouraged their emerging facilitators to recognise how attempting to fulfill these different roles with the same group can potentially cause tension or confusion.

The differences between the roles are small but significant. Roger (Schwarz, 2002) argued that a facilitator needs to be a substantively neutral third party to minimise the likelihood of becoming involved in content or decision-making. A facilitative trainer differs from a facilitator in that he/she has knowledge and expertise to share with the participants. Dale
(Hunter, 2007) suggested “it is unfortunate that trainers are often called facilitators, as this muddies the waters for facilitators who work with group process only” (p. 33). The facilitative leader is described by Roger (Schwarz, 2005) as the hardest facilitator role “because this person needs to use his [sic] facilitative skills at the same time that he has views – sometimes strong views – about the issue being discussed” (p. 31). Several of the facilitator educators maintained that facilitators can move seamlessly between the different facilitative roles, as long as they do so transparently, which means openly discussing these role changes with the group.

In the study there were also similar concerns as I attempted to fulfill the numerous roles associated with my role as a participant observer. The observational roles described in qualitative research typically vary along a continuum from complete participant, participant observer, observer participant, to complete observer (Patton, 1980). In my study, I had initially hoped to operate primarily as an observer participant but this role was not acceptable to any of the facilitator educators in this study. All of the facilitator educators commented that the observer-participant role would have differentiated my role from the other course participants and my presence would become a potential source of distraction. Upon reflection, it was beneficial to participate fully in the programs and it helped me to experience and understand the facilitator educators’ approaches. My experience aligned with Patton (1980) who explained “the challenge is to combine participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the program as an insider while describing the program for outsiders” (p. 128).

The participant observer role, which the facilitator educators were happy for me to assume, allowed me to discreetly record field notes in a notebook. I was not unlike the other emerging facilitators who took notes, although the quantity and focus of my notes may have been different. What made the participant observer role challenging was that at times being a participant compromised my ability to fully observe. Similarly, and on more than one occasion my fellow emerging facilitators expressed disappointment that my role as an observer compromised my ability to fully participate. The high emphasis on group focus, and the need to be truly present (Hunter, 2007), meant that at times I necessarily became so immersed in the group process that I would lose focus on my observer role. At other times, especially during sessions where the emerging facilitators were encouraged to personally share their experiences it was inappropriate to take notes. Pugsley (2002) described similar role conflicts in her educational research in ten Welsh schools when she would be drawn into the careers counselor role instead of her research role. She explained, “good practice can temporarily become tempered by self-interest and we need to be alert to the dangers inherent in such actions” (p. 22).

My research role was further complicated with some of the facilitator educators as our relationships grew stronger based on mutual respect and understanding. Several of the facilitator educators enjoyed having an interested listener capable of making observations and asking intelligent questions about their practice. This prompted them to reflect on the theories and values underpinning their practice, and there appeared to be satisfaction in making the implicit explicit. This is apparently not uncommon, and White (2002) explained that researchers often provide their participants with a “welcome opportunity and stimulus for those involved as participants to reflect on their own experiences” (p. 40). My difficulty came when my interactions with the facilitator educators moved to discussions on how the program was progressing, and how some of my fellow emerging facilitators were developing. This created
some tension, and an ethical dilemma for me. I wrestled with the delight of feeling like an insider and confidante with the facilitator educator yet I felt guilty that I was accessing privileged information, which potentially betrayed my role as a participant even though such discussions took place in private. In the end, I resolved this tension by acknowledging to myself that I was not a participant like everyone else and that the discussions, handled confidentially, provided important insights into the facilitator educators’ thinking.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

Perhaps through some hangover from the positivistic paradigm, in my study I certainly felt pressure to perform my research role perfectly, and sharing my imperfections in this paper may undermine the reader’s perception of my competence as a researcher. However, I have found honest accounts of the difficulties and dilemmas of doing research, like that provided by Copnell (2005), Ellis et al. (1997), and Holian (1999) to be a great source of encouragement. The accounts of their struggles help to create a more complete and accurate perception of what it is like to do research using qualitative methods. Sanitised research accounts potentially misrepresent the dynamic, subjective, and personal nature of qualitative research methods.

Naturalistic inquiry is messy and yet many research texts and journal articles don’t warn neophyte researchers of the likelihood that unanticipated challenges will occur during their research. My study presented numerous challenges, some of which have been described in this paper. As a more experienced researcher now, with greater self-awareness and confidence, I certainly feel that I could be more open and honest with my research participants in the future.

The importance of preparation was one of the primary learning outcomes for me from this study, and although preparation won’t prevent surprises it certainly can help a research to respond more effectively. All researchers are guided by abstract principles, which combine beliefs about ontology, epistemology, and methodology, and which shape the way the researcher sees the world and acts in it. It is the combination of these ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises that constitute a paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Cohen et al., (2000) argued, “highly reflexive researchers will be acutely aware of the ways in which their selectivity, perception, background, and inductive processes and paradigms shape the research” (p. 141). According to Mertens (1998), “a researcher’s theoretical orientation has implications for every decision made in the research process” (pp. 3-4). If researchers have clarified their research paradigms, and are able to practice self-awareness, decisions about how to deal with the inevitable surprises in qualitative research become easier.

Finally, in closing this paper, I need to clarify that I am not arguing for less academic rigour in the conduct of naturalistic inquiry. However, from my experience I am not sure that the process is always as systematic and analytical as suggested so long ago by Becker (1958). Like facilitation, many qualitative research methods collect data in real time, and researchers will not always enjoy the luxury of time and space to develop eloquent responses or tidy solutions to the problems they encounter. It is in these times, like the facilitator managing a difficult group, the researcher must be able to manage themselves by maintaining high levels of self-awareness and practice intentionally by drawing on the theories and values that they have made explicit and which underpin their practice.
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Footnotes

1. The term *emerging facilitators* was used to describe the participants in facilitator education processes.
2. All of the facilitator educators agreed to be identified in this paper. This decision was based on informed consent, and is an attempt to provide appropriate recognition for their expertise.
3. The facilitator educators in the study were invited to participate in ‘member checks,’ which encouraged them to provide feedback on the accuracy of my field notes, interview transcripts, or interpretations of the data. In most cases, this member checking was completed electronically using emails.