**REFLEXIVITY AND PRAXIS: THE REDRESS OF ‘I’ POEMS IN REVEALING STANDPOINT.**

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This chapter explores researcher reflexivity developed during an institutional ethnography (IE) (Smith 2005) of a primary school. It illustrates use of a narrative method, ‘The Listening Guide’ (Mauthner and Doucet 2008), in particular my production of an ‘I’ poem after being interviewed by research participants. This promotes an ethical approach to researcher reflexivity, enabling an explicit analysis of the researcher’s subjectivities in the use of ethnographic methods and a deeper understanding of privilege and power on the part of the researcher. The approach works to negate any researcher authority over the textual representations of the research participants and objectification of them.

Consideration is given to the tensions between the sociological basis of IE and how this is troubled by particular approaches to narrative production. The point of reflection in institutional ethnography is not to learn about the researcher per se, but to learn about the researcher’s location in the ‘relations of ruling’ (Smith 2005), that is, the researcher’s standpoint. There are particular tensions for institutional ethnographers in seeking to avoid objectification of participants through both ‘institutional capture’ and ‘privileged irresponsibility’, specifically; the imposition of researcher subjectivities in listening for, asking about and producing texts. A significant concern, for example, in this research context is the researcher’s place and privilege in the education hierarchy. I argue that it is precisely because of the troubling nature of the Listening Guide and ‘I’ poems that they can be utilised by institutional ethnographers in revealing and analysing the co-ordination of social relations.

**Keywords**: ‘I’ poems, institutional capture, (ir)responsibility, reflexivity, standpoint.

**Introduction**

This chapter is the first of two in this volume that draws on my experience in undertaking an institutional ethnography (IE) in a primary school (ages 5 – 11) in the north of England. The school, Crosstown Primary, had been judged by inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) (the school inspection and regulatory body in England) as ‘in need of improvement’. Consequently, the school received additional support from external consultants (School Improvement Partners or SIPs) and interim assessments of progress by inspectors during the twelve months post inspection. I was able to enter the school during this time.

Early in my time in the school, one of the teachers, Julie, asked me if I was ‘a spy from Ofsted?’ This was a particular moment in the actuality of the research that exposed extralocal relations and the potential to objectify. In response to Julie’s question the answer, however honest, could not simply be ‘no, I am a researcher from the university’. It required consideration of standpoint as a point d’appui, or point of entry (Smith, 2005), for explicating the disjuncture revealed by my discomfort at the question. While there are different approaches to standpoint, in IE it involves how concepts, theories and discourse are folded each into the other in the actuality of people’s everyday and everynight experience (Smith, 1997). So discussion in this chapter is on the actual doing of reflexivity to achieve understanding of standpoint and knowledge of relations of ruling. Specifically, I highlight my adoption of a narrative method - The Listening Guide (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998) and the use of ‘I’ poems - in completing the first stage of IE to reveal the problematic and coming to understand what is going on in the field. Chapter 4 develops this in discussing a conceptual and theoretical disjuncture in understanding standpoint.

Following a brief discussion of some ontological, epistemological and methodological concerns I introduce the research site and the problematic for investigation. Consideration is then given to the relational foundation of The Listening Guide. Consequently, discussion moves to theoretical concerns and the sociological basis for utilizing ‘I’ poems. I argue that they can be utilised by institutional ethnographers in revealing and analysing the co-ordination of social relations. To do this I provide examples of ‘I’ poems as data; one from a teacher, Lyn, and the second my own. I consider how ‘I’ poems can be read both to reveal the embodiment of experience and relations of ruling.

**Ontological and Epistemological Concerns**

The emphasis in IE is on texts and how these are taken up in local sites of activity. As a researcher I must be conscious of the textual mediation of my work and seek to explicate how texts, through dialectical work, inform my embodied political, moral, personal and professional boundaries. This is a concern to understand my power, moral principles and epistemological relation to both the everyday experience of participants and knowledge generation. Institutional ethnographers possess standpoint (Smith, 2005) and, drawing on Marx’s dialectical conceptualization, it involves a consistent relationship between my experience and thought where each is shaped by and shapes the other (Allman, 2007). Standpoint therefore is historically, materially and dialectically shaped. Consequently, it is necessary for me to understand the historical and material conditions of my everyday experience and to explicate my dialectical work to avoid ‘institutional capture’ (Smith, 2005, pp.155-156). That is, the avoidance of the imposition of sociological positions or ideas by me on the participants’ experience, or the development of a discussion that privileges my position or knowledge.

Furthermore, this brings into focus the embodiment of standpoint. My work in being present physically - of observing, note taking, listening, audio recording, reading, and accessing texts - begins to reveal through ‘body hexis’ (Bourdieu, 1977) my standpoint as a researcher conscious of the demands of research policies, processes and concerns for quality, validity and reliability. For Bourdieu body hexis involves the body’s actions in a particular space; these actions being culturally imbued with meaning ‘in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, being bound up with a whole system of objects’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.87). This too gives rise to questions of researcher power and method.

Understanding standpoint is achieved through reflexivity involving consciousness of cognitive work and dialectical engagement with texts, that is, in their writing, reading, editing and interpretation of meaning. In this regard I drew on the work of Bourdieu (1990) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), specifically habitus as a practice to understand my intimate and embodied actual doings in the local sites of the research as I and the participant teachers went about our everyday lives. My thinking, writing and reading are a conversation with myself in the social milieu of the school; an aspect of my actual research experience and ongoing reflexive work that acknowledges writing and reading are inhibited by the past but concurrently reproduce and coordinate language and knowledge in the future (Bakthin, 1981). This is not an individualistic endeavour but an aspect of the social world involving me and the teachers and a dialogical struggle to understand relations of ruling.

In drawing on Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogic process to posit discourse as social organisation (Smith 1999, 2005) and Marx’s (1964) understanding that consciousness of the object of inquiry arises out of the subjective experience of individuals; Smith understands consciousness involving the object and subject in internal relation. As individuals come together consciousness develops a social and material relation, that is, the actual experience of individuals and groups generates ideas through the materiality of language. This acknowledges not only the internal relation between consciousness and material experience but also an internal relation between peoples’ objectivity and subjectivity, including that of the researcher (Allman, 2007, p.33). My reflexivity and understanding of the disjunctures in consciousness, of mine and the teacher’s everyday experience, was achieved through the use of a narrative method, ‘The Listening Guide’ (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998), in particular the production of ‘I’ poems from interview data, including my interviews of participants and their interview of me!

**Crosstown Primary School**

Crosstown is a small primary school in a suburb of a large city in the north of England. There are approximately 196 pupils on the roll, the number fluctuates by very small amounts as pupils move in or out of the area during the academic year, with a single intake each year. The pupils are aged between four and eleven through Reception class, Key Stage 1 (five to seven, rising eight) and Key Stage 2 (eight to eleven).

The majority of staff and pupils are of White British backgrounds with a small number from other ethnic backgrounds. The school catchment area includes a ward in the top ten percentile for social deprivation nationally. With the exception of the site manager all of the staff at Crosstown are women, consequently all of the participants in my study were women. In addition to the head teacher, there were two full time and two part-time (job share) teachers in early years / key stage one and three full time and two part time (job share) teachers in key stage two. An additional teacher was recruited during the study and she also agreed to take part. In total eleven teachers agreed to participate.

Teaching assistants are also employed across each year group to help the children and the teachers. Of the ten, two are Higher Level Teaching Assistants, that is, they have additional training and responsibilities across the school. These two also agreed to take part in the study, as did the teaching assistant who worked predominantly in year 5 and year 6, the classes where I was predominantly based. The total number of participants was fourteen.

Crosstown school was judged by inspectors from Ofsted as performing less well than should be expected and therefore the school required a ‘notice to improve’. School inspections are crucial components of the market discourse and performativity in teachers’ work (Ball, 2003; Jeffrey and Troman, 2012). The market discourse is one where accountability and surveillance work alongside measures of efficiency and effectiveness so that school policies, practices, artefacts and documentation, conform to the prevailing discourse and inspection requirements in order for judgements to be made of performance against prescribed standards and outcomes. This was a period of intense scrutiny of the teachers and their work with expectations of improvement within a year when a further inspection visit would occur. My study occurred during this year and involved me spending one day per week in the school with additional block weeks in the periods before school holidays.

**Ethical Dilemmas and Understanding the Problematic**

In my meeting with the head teacher to negotiate entry to Crosstown School one of the first things she said to me was, ‘we are a very caring school’. This was repeated on entry to the school and consistently reinforced by the participants, for example in Julie’s questioning of me as a ‘spy’. This was an important narrative giving rise to the potential disjuncture in their experience and understanding of ‘care’ compared to that of the inspectors. This concern of teachers for care is consistent with Nias’ (1989) study of primary teachers’ work and the moral purpose of primary education. In particular there appeared to be a tension between the purposes of education and teaching; particularly in the education of the whole child and teaching as an aspect of economic instrumentalism through contemporary regulatory, marketized and performative practices. The chaos (Dewar, 1998) arising as a result of the disjuncture between these two ways of knowing a teacher’s work, which fundamentally involves wider institutional relations of ruling and the relationship between teachers, pupils and their families, gives rises to the problematic, ‘how do teachers come to understand and experience care?’.

Yet while this concept of care was foregrounded it was on the basis of ‘othering’ that it was being vocalised, that is, the teachers understanding themselves to be other than the desired professional required by externally imposed frames of accountability. They were concerned about being ‘different’ and ‘risky’ (to the children’s education and outcomes) from the standpoint of the external observer, the Ofsted inspector. The ‘centrality of otherness’ (Tronto, 1993, p.13) in the teacher’s moral thinking in their everyday world led me to consider my own approach, particularly how I might be framing the teachers as ‘other’. The generosity of the teachers in giving their time and experiences and a direct challenge that I might be ‘a spy from Ofsted’ soon led to a decision that my original plan to utilize Carspecken’s (1996) critical ethnography was not an appropriate framework for my research.

Furthermore, the potential for me to objectify and ‘other’ the teachers also arose when reflecting on how I gained entry to the school through a personal connection with one of the teachers. This connection was crucial to organising a focus group early in my research. This convenience sample became purposive in light of the discussion during the focus group, particularly in the teachers’ talk about their recent experience of inspection and the outcome. At the time this seemed like an appropriate approach to take, although opportunistic, since one outcome would be to ‘enter women’s accounts… into the ethnographic record to document and accurately reflect the concerns which shape women’s lives and choices’ (Howell, 2004, p.325). I had not considered that the private utterances following the focus group were informal and made outside the confines of research boundaries and instead was convinced that; ‘what is first articulated in a personal voice allows private perspectives and understandings to be communicated and formulated as public knowledge, to challenge social and cultual structures’ (Haynes, 2006, p.218).

The primary gatekeeper was the head teacher who I saw as protecting the interests of the pupils, school and the teachers. It was apparent during my meeting with the head teacher that she was cautious about allowing research in the school particularly following the outcome of the inspection report and the ‘notice to improve’ outcome. She was keen to explore and to understand the purpose and focus of my research, data gathering methods and the possibility of respondent checks on data gathered. Each of these was addressed to the best of my ability. This was an important meeting however in beginning to explicate the power dynamics and potential ethical dilemmas. It also revealed a disjuncture in the teachers’ experience of inspection, particularly in relation to care. While at the time I wasn’t fully conscious of the emerging problematic I was aware that the head teacher’s concern was to explore how I would be ‘careful’ and ‘care for’ her and her staff as a researcher. I thought about how the inspection report and the actions of the inspectors were viewed as possessing institutional power through a form of ‘symbolic violence’, that is, ‘violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.167). Indeed, it was later stated by the head teacher that ‘we have to do what is necessary to get out of this’ (notice to improve). They were conscious of a wider understanding of their everyday experience than that portrayed in the inspection report but also a need to organize their practices to conform to the inspection narrative.

Significantly, the concern for the teachers in their relationship with me and the research became apparent when a number sought reassurance over anonymity and confidentiality, which was given. In particular, Julie, Charlie and Lyn, the three teachers who I spent most time with as a volunteer were concerned about representational practices and initially acknowledged some reticence to share. As Fraser and Puwar (2008, p.10) argue:

We take what are often intense private moments of exchange into the public realm in the name of a scholarly ‘good’. The dissemination of primary data to a wider public can be plagued with a sense of betrayal and disloyalty.

My recourse was to continue to be aware of the nature of the interaction between me and the teachers and to offer respondent checks of the data and analysis. However, they also voiced a need to ‘know more about’ me and, as a consequence I offered myself for interview by them, Julie and Charlie accepted. The only proviso was that if I chose not to answer a question I would reflect on the reason why. I recorded the interview, transcribed the data and analysed it utilizing The Listening Guide.

**The Listening Guide**

Ethnography usually involves the researcher being in the field over an extended period and utilising multiple methods, for example observation and interviews, in the generation of rich and diverse forms of data to give high status to the accounts of participants’ perspectives and understandings (Troman, Gordon, Jeffrey & Walford 2006, p.1). This was an important consideration in approach since questions of standpoint arise in other ways, for example, as I had no prior experience of working in schools and as an outsider there is a danger that I could misunderstand the material conditions of teachers’ work including their texts, particular use of language and processes. Indeed, the assumptions I made about my approach at the outset are indicative of this. However, the potential of IE is in the researcher having a standpoint outside the intimate ruling relations of the local site particularly since it aims to develop knowledge for people and not for ruling (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Consequently, the institutional ethnographer enters a site with an open mind and ‘only step by step can they discover whom they need to interview and what texts or discourses they need to examine’ (DeVault & McCoy 2002, p.755). The Listening Guide offers the institutional ethnographer an approach to data generation, analysis and dissemination that evolves over time.

Smith argues it is possible for the ethnographer to objectify the women teachers and their experiences and thus to conceal positions of power. In response, the aim of IE ‘is to *reorganize the social relations of knowledge of the social* so that people can take that knowledge up as an extension of our ordinary knowledge of the local actualities of our lives’ (Smith, 2005, p.29. Original emphasis). For Smith, ethnography is critical when it begins ‘in the actualities of the lives of some of those involved in the institutional process and focus on how those actualities were embedded in social relations, both those of ruling and those of the economy’ (Smith, 2005, p.31). This necessarily includes the researcher’s ‘idiosyncratic biography’ (Smith, 1999) and standpoint as significant relational factors.

The Listening Guide offers a framework for explicating and understanding standpoint and relations of ruling. The foundations of the guide are in the Voice Centred Relational (VCR) model (Brown and Gilligan 1992; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch, 2003) based in the interpretive and hermeneutic traditions and relational theory (Gilligan, 1982). The troubling nature of VCR for IE includes the positing of an essentialist and parochial gendered binary in which one voice is feminine and care orientated, and the other male and justice orientated. Any individualising of care as within women, an aspect of their innate development, is contrary to IE’s argument that the actuality of people’s social lives, their doing and experience of the everyday and everynight, is crucial to understanding the world.

However, in positing the guide, Mauthner and Doucet have attempted to move away from a purely dispositional, individualistic focus to account for people’s everyday and everynight activities in relation. In particular, The Listening Guide enables consideration of individual’s narrative accounts in terms of their relationships to themselves, their relationships to the people around them, and their relationships to ‘the broader social, structural and cultural contexts within which they live’ (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, p.9). The guide requires up to four ‘readings’ of the data to explicate the everyday actuality of experience:

1. Reading One – Reading for Relations of Ruling. The data is analysed for the overall plot, the story being told, the main texts and their mediating power.
2. Reading Two – Reading for Reflexivity. This reading is the focus of this chapter. It involves a reading for ‘the voice of ‘I’’, both for the researcher and each participant. The purpose is to achieve understanding of the standpoint of each participant, to explore the experience of each. It is an attempt to hear the person and their experience by focusing on use of personal pronouns and to use the first person pronoun to construct ‘I’ Poems. ‘I’ Poems select ‘I’ phrases and maintain them in the sequence of the text in the form of a poem to explore experience.
3. Reading Three – Reading for Textually Mediated Relationships. This reading focuses on the networks of social relations in order to explicate socially mediated understandings of responsibility and to understand, reveal and track moral actors and concomitant texts, to explore ruling relations beyond the local site.
4. Reading Four – Placing people within cultural contexts and social structures. This reading develops further the focus on the networks of social relations in order to explicate socially mediated understandings of responsibility. If reading three involves the work of conceptualizing the social relations of the field, this reading explicates the ‘linkages that are lived, brought into existence in time and space by actual people doing actual things (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, 98).

Nonetheless, Mauthner and Doucet have been less clear about the sociological theory informing the guide and their move from VCR to a critical approach. In forming IE Smith was informed by the work of Foucault when considering the nature of narrative, texts, power, discourse and governance. However, there is a significant difference in Smith’s and Foucault’s (1984) understanding. Where Foucault’s notion of discourse designates a kind of large-scale conversation in and through texts, discourse for Smith involves a field of relations that includes texts, how they are read and taken up and deployed (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, 2006)

In drawing on VCR there is a danger that ‘I’ poems are appropriated as poems from a Foucauldian or postmodernist tradition that views discourse as the governing of people by powerful ideas and constructs that exist outside the actuality of their embodied experience. That is, they are a form of ethnographic poem, constructed by drawing on particular rules and traditions of hermeneutics and poetics so that narrative and form possess power that reflects the researcher’s interests and concepts. The alternative is a form of poem ethnography so that the poems, the actuality of their development, reading and analysis are constituent of reflexive practice aimed at explicating the intertextual relation between the researcher and the materiality of the poem. In this approach the poems are a form of map with the aim to reveal the intimate and embodied relation between the researcher, the participants and knowledge generation. The analytical structure of The Listening Guide may have been forged by cognitive-developmental psychology but the analysis of data is not predetermined by any overarching theory or normative concern. Data analysis and the explication of the mediating power of texts are iterative (Walby, 2013).

**Reading Lyn’s ‘I’ Poem**

I would have liked acknowledging

I wouldn’t have half killed myself

I had thought

I partly did it

I know we did it for the kids

I wouldn’t have worked every bank holiday and up till 2 o’clock in the morning

I wouldn’t have worked every day

I won’t next year

I’ll do as much as I can

I won’t kill myself doing it

I think you just get bitter and twisted

I was crapping myself as usual

I was really quite scared

I think the first observation

I just thought, “Oh my god” …

I just thought “thank god for that”

I can’t do any more than I am doing

I can’t give any more

I can’t possibly

I haven’t got the time

I can’t think of any more

I could do

I have not done things with my kids

I should have really

I have had a lot of problems

I don’t know how

I have managed to keep it together

I have been really, really stressed

I said, I am sure I said

I have got so much work to do

I am not that kind of person

I can’t leave it

I just can’t leave it.

I am a bit

I tend to think “I have got to do it”.

Language and words were important to Dorothy Smith in developing IE and she drew on Wittgenstein (1953) to bring words back from any ‘metaphysical’ meaning to the actuality of their use by people in their everyday doings (Smith, 1999). However, it is also important to maintain the presence of the person in this data, which is possible in reading it aloud to get a sense of Lyn’s presence in her everyday experience. This reading (reading two) begins to provide insight into Lyn’s standpoint which is further explicated by drawing on the other readings. For example, in thinking about what the story being told is (reading one) there is acknowledgement of her bifurcated consciousness of her work as teacher and also as mother. Indeed readings one and two enable consideration of Lyn’s work and are wholly relevant to stage one of IE taking the form of a preliminary analysis. In IE, ‘the notion of work directs us to its anchorage in material conditions and means that it is done in “real time” – all of which are consequential for how the individual can proceed’ (Smith, 1987, p.165). My attention is drawn to everyday and everynight work being shaped by ‘it’! Lyn is an individual, embodied subject in a particular physical social world that is, itself, part of a wider social milieu (McCoy, 2006). ‘It’ needs to be done and can’t be left undone (*I have got to do it)*, Lyn’s work is therefore being organized into meeting the demands of ‘it’. There is an institutional context, explicated in the second stage of IE, which can revealed by asking further questions of who and what, through what means, are involved with ‘it’ (reading three) and where and how, to what end, are they involved (reading four).

The poem also situates Lyn as a person in the data. There is a pressure and emotional response associated with processes of inspection and observation and, despite a successful outcome for her personally and her Key Stage, further feelings of guilt and worry at what peers who weren’t so successful might think. Moreover, involvement in the process is so exhausting that she has nothing else to give, emotionally, physically or intellectually. As such, she cannot seek validation from her peers, nor can they enter a dialogue of equals in which respective expressed needs are explored. Consequently, her capacity as a care giver to her colleagues is diminished, as it is at home; *I have not done things with my kids / I should have really.* Her consciousness as a care receiver, as a professional and as a mother /partner, is constrained both by the performative demands placed upon her, and disequilibrium in her material experience of inferred and expressed needs. The silencing of her (un)expressed needs ultimately manifests in stress.

Of course, this is only a brief explication of Lyn’s poem but it reveals that The Listening Guide and ‘I’ poems are helpful in generating, analysing and disseminating data. In particular, they firstly develop an understanding of the subject’s embodied experience; what has happened to Lyn, what she does and what this feels like. Secondly, they bring into consciousness the institutional field and the connections of relations of ruling in which Lyn is located. Thirdly and importantly, the ‘I’ poems offer an empirical point d’appui for exploring researcher subjectivities and standpoint. In this research this was achieved when my own ‘I’ poem was generated as data. This work was important in helping me to understand the materiality of my research experience and the disjunctures that arise in consciousness of being reader (of the participants’ data) and writer of the object of analysis.

McCoy (2006) reminds us that a particular concern for the institutional ethnographer is not what and how data is generated but also how data is read. This is to acknowledge governmentality and that the work of the researcher is potentially hindered by normalising discursive practices (Smith, 2005). There was therefore a need for me to avoid ‘a form of analytic drift that occurs when the focus on work veers into a classificatory interest’ (McCoy, 2006, p.114) rather than on the institutional. An intertextual conversation (Smith, 2005) in my writing and reading the poem reveals knowledge of ruling relations. In the actuality of reading and listening to the poem I developed an alternative way of knowing, that is, I was aware of the poem as an object that sought to organise my thoughts, feelings and being. From my standpoint, there was simultaneously awareness of the embodied actuality of my reading and the social and conceptual relations of ruling; how my everyday experience was coordinated with the reading of the poem by others beyond the intimate place and context of that reading (Smith, 2005). This was further revealed in the writing and reading of my own poem.

**MY ‘I’ POEM**

I appreciate… fairness, respect and honesty

I am more than interested

I bring to the field

I am attracted to a field

I am certainly interested

I identify with that profession

I have to demonstrate my compliance

I acknowledge the time and commitment

I believe this is the ethical thing to do

I am the only male

I inevitably record

I am drawn into conversations

I am asked a question

I answer honestly

I might have given

I think this is an appropriate approach

I am compelled to work

I made her think

I have come to appreciate

I, as an observer.

Reflexivity involves the researcher in taking steps through an appropriate approach to avoid institutional capture (Smith, 2005) and privileged irresponsibility (Tronto, 1993). Not to avoid the grounding of knowledge and understanding in preordained institutional language and concepts and therefore to take for granted the power of the predominant ideas or group is to objectify and maintain a position of power. Importantly the focus on the narrated self, intrinsic in the ‘I’ Poems, can be used as a reflexive tool by the researcher to provide insight into institutional processes and their coordinating power at any stage of this sequence. Indeed, this excerpt reveals an initial preoccupation with concepts that had the power to objectify. An aspect of reading one, reading for the story being told, is the potential for me to maintain a position of power in relation to the participants, one in which institutional capture is a feature since I work to rationalise my place in an educational hierarchy and am potentially actively ignorant of my privileged irresponsibility (*I have to demonstrate my compliance* – as does Lyn hers!).

Questions of positionality also arise, for example, since I had no prior experience of working in schools and as an outsider there is a danger that I could misunderstand the material conditions of teachers’ work including their texts, particular use of language and processes. At the beginning of the research my thoughts were on undertaking a critical policy analysis (Carspecken, 1996) and of maintaining epistemic privilege that was apart from the participants in terms of knowledge. To foreground my epistemic privilege and to conduct the research through a different approach would have potentially led to consideration of a different literature; that literature being identified by me as relevant to my aims and not necessarily arising from the actuality of the teachers’ everyday experiences.

Significantly, the poem stands in contrast to Lyn’s. In writing and reading the poem I am aware of the difference in focus of each. In the context of a problematic focused on experience and understanding of care, mine speaks to masculinist judicial-theoretical concern in which *I am compelled to work* through particular institutional processes and narratives that I see as *ethical.* Lyn’s poem, in contrast, speaks with a different moral voice; this is not focused on care as a set of essentialist, parochial, individualist acts but as a set of relations of ruling, in which ‘it’ needs doing through an institutional process of care (Tronto, 1993).

Consequently, a significant outcome in utilizing The Listening Guide as a reflexive tool was I had to recognise and ‘unlearn’ what I thought it might be to do research on teachers to think about and learn what it means to do research with teachers. I acknowledged my standpoint and began to understand theirs. Of course, this does not completely resolve questions of my research relations with literature and data, and my research relations with the teachers. However, the potential of IE arises in its theory and design, particularly in acknowledging and accounting for existing power relations and developing an analysis that wholly arises from the everyday experience of those for whom knowledge is produced. In this regard IE does not seek to control or direct the relations between researcher and participants, instead the research produces an analysis that includes the interests of all knowers (Smith, 2005).

There is an interest therefore in my idiosyncratic biography (Smith, 1999) and what I bring of own understanding, history and experiences. This includes my previous experience as a social worker and social work manager who had been subject to Ofsted inspection process. I was aware of the power and potential of Ofsted to disrupt everyday experience and to mediate work. There was a consequent danger, particularly when participants are also familiar with the institutional discourse of regulation, that both the researcher and participants are ‘captured’ by the institutional discourse which displaces descriptions arising in the actuality of everyday experience.

It would be easy to take from the poems a sort of organisational rationale for both Lyn’s and my experience, that is, our responsibility to work unproblematically within certain expectations and boundaries and to be open to scrutiny. However the purpose of IE is to move away from description of the organisational rationale to include our doings in the actuality of our work. The interest is not just in data being presented but how we come to understand the need for ‘it’, in what form, at what time, through what means, through what talk and texts, in what space? The job of the institutional ethnographer is therefore to get behind the data being presented to what is actually done and is actually doing in presenting particular data. So while it is important to understand institutional processes it is also important to explicate how these are enacted and embodied, and how embodiment is relationally ruled.

Lyn did ‘it’ – took up the texts of inspectors, school improvement partner’s and regulatory boss texts - in order ‘to get out of’ notice to improve. My poem also revealed a commitment to ruling texts. Moreover, I utilised this reading to recognise the power of institutional capture as a matter of ‘un-caring’. Power is also inherent in the symbolic production of masculine domination (*I made her think*). This realisation was significant in understanding my starting point and in making the move to IE. Indeed, my ‘I’ poem enabled be to return to my entwined material and subjective world. In reading the poems as data I was at once conscious of the historical and material conditions that organise privileged irresponsibility and male domination (*profession, compliance, time and commitment, record, conversations, appropriate approach, compelled*) but also of their opposite. This enabled me to develop new understanding and to move away from particular forms of normative and objectifying researcher activity and power (*I have come to appreciate; I, as an observer*).

Importantly therefore, the work of writing the poem and subsequently reading the poem and its concepts aloud, including to the participants, worked to reveal the unspoken and unthought, and made visible the contextual actuality and local particularity of experience. In the writing of the poem, the explication of its concepts, the reading and reader, and participants, is where discourse happened and reality constituted (Smith, 2005). The ‘I’ poem had an emancipatory power since I came to recognise my own power in constructing experience. The commitment to writing and to developing poems as part of an iterative process generated an experience in which the past was brought into being as an exchange of what was remembered and my interest as a researcher. Experience is therefore both embodied, in my own words, and in the act and commitment to writing and reading (the ‘I’ poem) for a purpose. Consequently, although ‘I’ reads for myself in the text, being mindful of ‘privileged irresponsibility’ (Tronto, 1993; 2013) and ‘institutional capture’ (Smith, 2005), it is not an exercise in individualistic, narcissistic reflection but an acknowledgement of plural relations beyond. As such the reflexive analysis arising from the poems provides a point of entry to the ruling relations beyond the local site and to explication of the material and empirical. The analysis avoids the fetishizing of the local to reveal wider, global organising power in a context of normative and objectifying standards, regulation, and power (Carpenter, 2011).

**Conclusion**

As a researcher I have a physical and intellectual presence, a way of being and moving in the research space, a manner and mannerisms but I, as reader, am aware of texts beyond that speak to oppression, a fear of powerlessness and objectification. Reflexivity therefore is important in becoming immersed in the experiences of other people and works as a buffer to the potential for institutional capture and the qualitative realism that could otherwise result throughout the research (Walby, 2013). I argue that The Listening Guide and ‘I’ poems can be utilised in revealing and analysing the co-ordination of social relations, and in developing an ethical and moral methodology. There is no need for ‘I’ poems to conform to a particular notion of objectified form. Instead, in the development of ‘I’ poems the institutional ethnographer is aware of the need to understand the materiality of the poem and the disjunctures that arise in consciousness of being reader (of the participants’ data) and writer of the object of analysis. Consequently, there is a commitment to praxis and reflexivity.

Reading for reflexivity is important in moving from stage one of IE, understanding the complexity of experience, to stage two, exposing wider relations of ruling. Reflexivity is also crucial in understanding the disjuncture between two ways of knowing; first of discourse, and second, people’s experience and the conceptual, social fields of their daily lives, and their consciousness of the work that they do. ‘I’ poems enabled me to explore my lived, textually mediated experience and my epistemological relation to knowledge creation in the actuality of the research experience, what is being objectified and why. So, in my reading of my ‘I’ poemI am conscious of historical and material practices but I am not hindered in my consciousness by normalising discursive pressures. I am simultaneously aware of the material object of the poem, its narrative and my consciousness as a reader and researcher. But I am also conscious of wider subjectivities; of my taking up of my age, interests, nationality, *et cetera*. This is the understanding that is taken up in the reading of ‘I’ poems. My writing, reading and analysis of the ‘I’ poem interweaves both thought and the sensuous, material experience of my local conditions (Allman, 1999). Standpoint in IE is one of empirical privilege rather than epistemic privilege since it denotes an embodied social location in a local place where institutional discourse happens (Bisaillon & Rankin, 2012). The consequence of understanding of my privilege of producing and reading the poem is consequently an acknowledgement of and access to the plural standpoint of participants.

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