OBSERVATION 1 – WRITEUP AND REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

PART 1: WRITEUP

It's the second-to-last week of Purdue's classes on a Thursday afternoon in April – time for the Engineering Education department seminar, at which I'm presenting my ideas on "radically transparent research" (http://radicallytransparentresearch.org/manifesto – what would happen if we treated qualitative research like an open project?) to the usual-sized crowd. Perhaps 30 of the 100 seats in the lecture hall are filled; my classmates and professors who are present are largely munching on the snacks provided (by a classmate whose turn it is to feed the hordes; we have a snack rotation). Others can't make it and have asked for notes, so my talk's one of the few seminar lectures to be recorded as a podcast. I plan to blog the transcript later on, and have already shared the link to my slides with the audience.

I'm still looking at how people react to live-transcription during qualitative research data collection. In fact, I'm about to give a live demo of exactly that to the audience – but I need a volunteer, and haven't planned for it, mostly because I know I can be spontaneous about asking for volunteers from this particular crowd. I spot Jake, a classmate a few years older than I am, with wavy red hair and a bit of a beard, wired with nervous energy. I know Jake thinks fast on his feet and has recently been engrossed by a book by Sarasvathy I pointed him towards (he researches entrepreneurship education for engineers). He says yes, so at the appropriate time during my presentation, I call Jake up. "We're just going to do an informal quick mini interview," I explain to the audience. "I asked him about this 10 minutes ago so there's been no prep."

Jake and I are standing in front of two large projection screens suspended over our heads; one screen displays my slides, and the other displays the live transcript of the talk, which a stenographer is typing from the corner. We therefore cannot see the screens as we stand and face each other and converse. I'm trying to ignore the audience, and from his body orientation (towards me) and eye contact (constant), I get the impression that Jake is taking the cue to do the same. We

are both talking and gesturing a little faster than we usually do; perhaps we are both nervous. However, we don't stop our conversation; we keep it flowing.

Jake is confirming my hypothesis that live-transcription, while it might be strange and new to people, is actually not such a big deal once it's happening; we focus on the conversation partner right in front of us and more or less forget that someone's typing. This is a different setup from my first observation in the classroom; aside from me being the interviewer (as opposed to observing someone else's interview), Jake and I can't easily see the transcript as we speak. We'd have to turn almost completely around and then crane our heads to read a screen set at an awkward angle to our eyes. In contrast, my first interview observation had the transcript scrolling out on a laptop screen right next to both participants. However, we know it's being transcribed, and that our audience can read the live transcription as it's going.

Since the live transcript is also a world-editable document, one of our audience members begins inserting commentary into it as we speak, although Jake and I don't know that, since we're positioned so we cannot see the screen. As Jake talks about the commonalities he's found between Sarasvathy's entrepreneurship research and the sociological writings of Herbert Simon, the (anonymous) audience member types: *Pointing to what stands out – connection – connecting one body of work to another – exciting to see connections*

Their typed commentary immediately becomes part of our transcript, given the same typographic weight as the verbal conversation Jake and I are having. I see it as a way to give interviews more affordances for multivocality, and later hear from others in the room that they had been inspired to shake up their own research after seeing the live transcription, commentary, and editing, and that at least one professor had turned to an administrator and asked if they could use the technique during committee meetings to help committees be more reflective *during* those meetings.

I do not know any of these things right now; Jake and I are wrapping up our conversation. I take a few minutes to assign the transcript copyright to Jake, which will allow him to release it under an open license – both steps in the "radically transparent research" procedures I've developed

(and am demoing today). Such actions allow me to do my data analysis in a fishbowl that the general public can both see and contribute to. But first Jake has to approve his transcript, which he may not want to do without editing it a little. So we walk over to the computer at the podium, and I tell him: "I'd like you to look over it a bit and see if there's anything you would like to take out or correct."

"I mean, do you want me to go through this and do it?" Jake asks. I say yes, so he corrects some typos, noting that "there's no way that our transcriber would guess the spelling of the name [Saraswathy] from me saying it," but soon arriving at the conclusion that "there's nothing in here that I'm against having shared, if that's where we're going." I ask him if he sees any patterns in his talk – basically, asking him to quickly analyze his own data – and he echoes something very similar to what our audience member had typed earlier:

"The big theme is that is connection, you know, trying to find, and I guess that's a big theme of what I'm trying to do anyway is connect this body of stuff to this body of stuff and get them together. I guess the part that excites me about the things I'm reading is when it is helping to draw those connections that I'm trying to find."

I thank Jeff, and he returns to his audience seat. We've just demonstrated a few things, including *grounded indigenous coding*, which is analyzing the conversation you're participating in (indigenous coding) based on an artifact (grounded) that captures that conversation in high resolution. Our comment-typing audience member has raised the question of who "counts" as a participant. Issues of researcher/subject power dynamics also come up; although Jake has the legal power due to our copyright transfer, he still looks to me for direction in our interactions.

PART 2: REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

This observation took place after multiple failed attempts to schedule another observation of a live-transcribed interview between two other people. In one case, the transcriber failed to show up. In another case, the interviewer (who was doing the interview for the qualitative research class they were taking) kept postponing scheduling of the interview, including subject recruitment, for over a month despite repeated reminders and offers to arrange the interview logistics myself. In the third case, the interviewer decided 48 hours before the planned interview that they actually didn't need that interview to do their research, and abruptly cancelled. Since realtime transcription is a professional service costing anywhere from $50-100 per hour and requiring scheduling over a week in advance, this represented a substantial amount of lost time on my part.

At this point, it was April – so I figured I would need to take matters into my own hands, even if it meant I'd be the interviewer myself. I was already scheduled to present at my department seminar two weeks out, and the demonstration of a live-transcribed interview had already been written into my presentation, and the service arranged for. Voila: participant observation.

I would have liked to spend a longer time conversing with Jake; there's an artificiality to our conversation because of the constraints of short notice, limited time, and being very obviously a performance in front of an audience. I wasn't really trying to *have* an interview with Jake; I was trying to *demonstrate* an interview with Jake. I cared about our conversation and paid attention to it, and so did he – but it was all for the sake of having something to show our audience. You could almost call it a "dummy" interview, although it was also a real interview (a real dummy interview, perhaps).

The title of "dummy" forgives a lot of sins. We were so time-constrained as to be unable to say anything other than a quick braindump and a hurried "I just need to think of *something*!" analysis, so the data is "terrible" and the analysis is "shallow" according to the standards many qualitative researchers apply to determine what counts as "good research." If we'd tried to pass it off as a "good interview," we would have been laughed at. But we didn't. It was obviously a sketch, a

draft, a prototype – and our audience members had enough experience with qualitative methods themselves to know that (or at least I trusted that they did, and haven't seen evidence to the contrary yet). I was gambling that our audience would be able to see our quick run, *know* it was a quick run, and mentally extrapolate the radical transparency techniques to longer, richer, more deliberate interviews for "real" research projects (for some value of "real").