

## INTERVIEW 1 – WRITEUP AND REFLECTION

### PART 1: WRITEUP

T is a PhD student in Social Psychology, young and eager, on the brink of graduation. My interview with T came about at the end of a long chain of reasoning on my part. I wanted to see how people reacted to realtime transcription during interviews, *and* I wanted those interviews to be close to my dissertation topic of “how faculty make sense of curriculum revisions” *and* my dissertation methodology of having interview subjects respond to each others stories rather than my prompts, and so in order to set up an interview with a faculty member about *their* curriculum change story, I needed to have someone *else's* curricular change story to turn into a prompt for them. (The prompt is a “onepager” shown in this collection, right before the raw transcript it's been excerpted from.) At some point in all this, T (a quantitative researcher) asked me how qualitative research was done, and I seized my chance by offering to demonstrate.

So we sat down, and I figured T had probably not experienced a curricular *revision*, but had certainly needed to revise some aspects of a *course*, so I pulled out my laptop and said ok, tell me the story. The following writeup/analysis focuses on the content of T's interview rather than any response to realtime transcription, since the “transcription” was actually me trying to type as fast as possible, and we did not conduct any debriefs or member-checks of the data or the interview experience afterwards.

We heard the story of T's first teaching job, an introductory social psychology writing course for undergraduates that had a slew of sections and an army of teaching assistants (“TAs,” T's role). “When you become a new TA [for this class] they'd give you a CD of previous things past TAs had done, previous paper prompts they'd used, all the way down to here are the lecture slides,” T said. The CD was unofficial, passed from TA to TA; for the new-to-teaching T, it was a security blanket, “very comforting. You're expected to be a subject matter expert and you're just a 2nd-year grad student!”

As a new teacher, T started out granting legitimacy to artifacts because of the credentials of

their authors. “[In the beginning] I'd use things from the people with good credentials, like did they win a teaching award, ok, I'll use their stuff.” Over time, T developed confidence and began engaging with the material itself, rather than the reputations of those who had created them. “combine their materials, look at a couple slide decks and sort of synthesize my own slides from that.” Eventually, T created original materials, but there was a limit to how much those materials got reworked and refined that still hints at an underlying lack of confidence: “I think that once I have a good idea I should stop and just use that because my next ideas would not be as good.”

It was a cognitive apprenticeship of sorts, in that T was able to see the work of many people and thus intuit that there were many different ways to teach. T did not say this specifically, but I would guess that the insight into the existence of “different teaching styles” was accompanied by the realization that no one style was unambiguously best under all circumstances. However, unlike most cognitive apprenticeships, it's unclear how much T engaged with the actual *people* behind the materials. “It was comforting knowing there were mentors and peers around,” said T – with no indication that those mentors and peers were ever consulted; it's possible they served as an insurance policy of sorts, a reassurance that if something went completely haywire, help would be there. There were, however, no reports of things going haywire.

T seemed conscious that the performance was a growth story, ending on an optimistic note that it was “not a big deal” now, and “now I know that I've done it and could do it again.” Despite never mentioning past mistakes or their resolutions, T expressed the ability to recover from future mistakes. I found myself wondering how much of that was motivated by the desire to find a happy ending, the broader contextual need for T (who was actively job-hunting) to present an identity as a competent teacher, or other factors beyond either of our perceptions or control.

## PART 2: REFLECTION

In case you've not noticed by now, I've chosen not to share the genders of my interview participants in their transcripts or in my initial writeup. This was deliberate; I wanted to see what other people would make of their personalities in the absence of as many categories of labeling as possible. (The reactions of others are shown in my document analysis.) It made writing a little awkward, but not too badly so; still, there's nothing like trying to not use pronouns that makes you realize just how much you usually do.

Conducting this interview was my first hint that I should probably focus on a less “meta” project than “how do people react to method X in study Y?” In order to do that, I needed to invent a “study Y” *and* manage the logistics for it in *addition* to the study on method X. It seems far more logistically sane to do study Y, which *happens* (by deliberate design) to use method X, then loop back and ask “so what did method X do, as opposed to other methods that you could have picked?” Ah well. Live and learn.

I found myself far more engaged in this interview than in my first observation, possibly because of the interview topic's closeness to my dissertation topic. My interview with T felt a lot more “real” than the practice interviews in the classroom I'd observed; it was longer (30 minutes rather than 5) and more private (just the two of us in T's living room, rather than the two of us talking while being observed by 28 other human beings), so I got a richer story.

I could have gone farther, probed more – but it would have had to be another interview session, because I'd told T at the start that it would be a 30-minute interview, and sure enough – close to the 30-minute mark, T's story magically started winding up (with that super-optimistic, “the future is promising” ending).

I wonder what T would have made of the comments of others on our conversation. At this point, T has graduated and is no longer geographically accessible. I could email and ask, I suppose, but the benefits of learning that don't seem to outweigh the work it would involve, so I'm letting this be. (Besides, I *have* seen the reactions of the other interviewee to the comments on their transcript.)