Introduction

One metaphor used to describe the qualitative researcher is as a traveler who “wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with the people encountered” (Kvale, 1996, p. 4). This wandering might be a roaming freely through unfamiliar territory or it may be a deliberate search for specific sites using a method. In either case, the researcher “wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as ‘wandering together with.’”

Kvale wrote about the nature and process of the interview method. This paper describes the qualitative research interview as conversation designed to gain understanding of the world of research informants. It illustrates the potential of the qualitative research interview when the researcher is able to enter into and maintain a conversation with the research informant as an insider in the latter’s community.

The insider, using Kvale’s metaphor, is a traveler wandering into new, but at the same time, familiar territory, gathering stories to take back to the people of his or her own community. The stories “are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler’s interpretations … and are validated through their impact upon the listeners.” The traveler may well experience personal change because of this wandering such as “new ways of self-understanding” and the uncovering of “previously taken-for-granted values and customs” in his or her community. The
conversations may also effect change in the lives of those with whom the researcher engaged in conversation, giving them a cause to “reflect on previously natural-seeming matters of course in their culture” (Kvale).

In the current study, an innovative research design model that addresses the validity and reliability concerns related to this methodology is proposed. Specifically, this model develops an insider perspective of the phenomenon of study using the process of dialogical intersubjectivity. According to Kvale, this process is designed to seek understanding through a rational discourse and reciprocal critique among those identifying and interpreting a phenomenon. This may take the form of a communicative validation among researchers as well as between researchers and their subjects.” (Kvale, p. 65). The research model described below features a team approach to case study research and evaluation using collegial conversations.

The Nature of the Problem

The idea for the design model emerged from a doctoral dissertation, which investigated the information behavior of a clergy member engaged in the routine task of preparing weekly sermons. The dissertation research used Dervin’s Sense Making Methodology to understand the thoughts, feelings, and actions of a clergy member located in his individual contexts of time and space. Because the dissertation researcher is also an ordained clergy member, the data collected using semi-structured interviews led to a description of the informant’s life world with much greater detail than would otherwise have been the case had the researcher been the traditionally prescribed researcher: “disinterested scientific onlooker of the social world”. (Schutz, 1964, p. 92).

There are advantages and cautions associated with insider research. Robert Merton
(1972) defined the “insider” as “an individual who processes a priori intimate knowledge of the community and its members” (quoted in Hellawell 2006). The insider need not be a member of the participant’s organization but does have a familiarity with the world of the research subject. Hockey (1993) saw value in researching peers and familiar settings in that the researcher did not have to deal with culture shock, enjoyed enhanced rapport with the subject, was able to measure the accuracy of the responses to questions, and was seen by the respondent as empathetic, so much so that the respondent might be inclined to reveal intimate details of his or her life. Harrison (2001), while not writing about insider research in particular, suggests that in qualitative research reciprocity occurs between reviewer and subject which affects access, questions asked, rapport, and analysis. Eide and Kahn (2008) add that there is a therapeutic aspect to the qualitative interview in which both parties believe they can make meaning of a situation. Gunasekaia (2007) agrees that the research process is interactive, but cautions that the “informed perspective” of the interviewer may influence both observations and interpretations. Thus, Hellawell (2006) cautions the researcher to reflect on his or her own beliefs and values, as well as the research methodology employed.

Doing just that, the authors of this paper in reviewing Roland’s (2007) original interview transcripts observed instances of over-rapport with the dissertation informant. While over-rapport is a common criticism of insider researchers, the case could be made that the nature of religious knowledge and the roles of faith in the work of the clergy calls for sensibilities of those who are insiders in this community to gain access to and understand the thoughts, feelings, and actions of clergy informants as they perform their roles. The complexity and non-transparency of such roles requires some degree of insider status for the researcher to engage in meaningful conversation with clergy members about their work world and accurately describe the profession
to the researcher’s academic community. The advantages of such insider perspective outweigh the adverse effects of over-rapport.

Indeed, the obligation to represent research informants as unique individuals and in a conscientious and accurate manner to the inhabitants of the researcher’s community requires a research model that moves beyond the structured questionnaire interview. Miles and Crush (1993) call for an understanding of the interview as an interactive text of dialogue between the researcher and the informant characterized by an insider status on the part of the researcher. One advantage of the approach is achieving “a degree of depth, flexibility, richness, and vitality often lacking in conventional questionnaire-based interviews” (Miles and Crush, 1993, p. 85). Portelli asserts that such an approach facilitates the discovery of “not only what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (Portelli, 1998, p. 67).

DeShane established a strong precedent for the necessity and value of insider status in his case study of the folk theology communicated through the preaching of a clergy member in the Pentecostal tradition. “An analysis of this folk theology demands a believer’s perspective to illustrate the important nuances of meaning and understanding presented via the folk theology and shared through the esoteric terms and phrases” (DeShane, 1996, p. 97). Likewise, Robertson observes, “The collection of life stories cannot be done well without first acquiring a thorough knowledge of the culture or subculture in which one is working” and that this knowledge is best gained from being a part of the culture under study (Robertson, 1983, p. 64).

DeShane acknowledged the criticism of so-called “believers’ studies” as little more than testimony masquerading as ethnography and he correctly questioned the easy dismissal of his work based on the argument for objectivity. DeShane effectively argues that objectivity is always
a matter of personal opinion as to what is important and “worthy of study and report.” (p. 104)

Rosaldo uses “the myth of detachment” to describe the illusion that researchers can somehow become “the emotional, cognitive, and moral equivalent of a blank slate” (Rosaldo, R., 1989, p. 168).

The findings from the dissertation research revealed multiple instances of the nuances and understandings of meaning that DeShane mentions as achieved only through the insider status of the dissertation researcher. A categorization of these instances appears below as Map Points in the conversational journey of the research model.

The Purpose of the Research and its Interpretative Framework

The authors define a sermon as a knowledge product created by a clergy member to meet the perceived needs of those who attend worship services. Clergy members select and study a Scripture text, or select a topic, then prepare and deliver a sermon that interprets the Scripture in order to achieve particular goals that the clergy member has for the congregation. Sermons, therefore, are shared knowledge products. A number of people may agree with this knowledge; the sermon might be published in print or electronic format; one or more of those who hear it might test it so that the knowledge takes on the status of fact; or the sermon may become unjust law or dogma. Sermons are prevalent and influential knowledge products in society and therefore deserving of attention from the library and information science field.

The primary question that guides the research project is “What is the information seeking and use behavior of a clergy member regarding the interpretation of Scripture for preparing a weekly sermon?” The research project focuses on three particular aspects of the sermon preparation process:
1. The selection of a Biblical text from which to preach,
2. The role of the informant’s contextual situation in the decisions made regarding the interpretive contents and overall direction of the sermon, and
3. The goals that the informant hoped to accomplish with the sermon.

The Sense-Making Methodology of Brenda Dervin serves as the interpretive framework for the research project in order to discover the gaps or stops that clergy members encounter in interpreting Scripture for the sermon preparation process. These gaps include initiating the process with the decision to preach from a particular text or topic; particular decisions regarding the content of the sermons; the desired goal(s) for the sermon; and how the contextual situation of the clergy member potentially affect each Sense-Making step in the process. The researchers seek to identify and classify the behavior in which the informants engage in the creation process of religious knowledge and to explore instances in which seminary education, age, experience, denominational socialization, and doctrinal hegemony may have affected Sense-Making behavior.

Sense-Making Methodology holds that institutional and individual *a priori* instruction, socialization, and hegemony influences thinking and the potential to create ideas, but such traditions may not be enough to bridge every gap that individuals encounter in their journey through time and space. (Dervin, 1999) This premise affirms that clergy members must function and travel through life in a mode that requires drawing on individual knowledge, experience and decision making abilities, as well as a belief in things unseen and unproven, which requires faith.

The research project seeks to discover what effect faith has on information seeking and use behavior. Wicks (1999 - who made use of his insider status to gain entry, formulate a questionnaire and an interview instrument, and analyze the date he collected from clergy)
observed that when a clergy member’s theology intersects with preaching, the likely result is a closed information system. This means that the clergy tend to limit the use of information resources to those that are in line with their theological system, presumably to keep themselves strong in their faith, to shore themselves up in times of potential doubt. (p. 211)

Sense-Making Methodology holds that knowledge or information is essentially mappings of reality generated in a particular time and space and formalized by a particular power system. (Dervin, 1999) This premise speaks to Wicks’ (1999) findings of the influence of the seminary education and indoctrination that prepares clergy for becoming ordained members of a particular denomination. Yet even when clergy members are from the same denomination, speaking on the same topic and at the same point in time a certain lack of uniformity exists in the interpretation of Scripture.

The Insider-Outsider Balance in the Dissertation Research Project

In his dissertation research, the researcher, Roland, began the study by visiting a number of worship services in search of a potential informant He made an initial presentation of himself following the worship services conducted as a doctoral student in a library science program desiring to study the sermon preparation process of clergy members. A second presentation made by email articulated that the researcher was an ordained clergy member seeking a potential informant from a denomination with which he did not have prior knowledge or experience. A third presentation with the one clergy member who eventually agreed to participate in the study went into much more detail of the life history and context of the researcher in an effort to establish rapport with the potential informant.

During the third presentation, it became apparent that the researcher and the potential
informant agreed on several positions of theology and the nature of preaching. In addition, the researcher noted more than a few personal attributes that he held in common with the informant. Both the researcher and the informant shared the traits of ethnicity and gender as white males. Both were first career clergy members having progressed in linear fashion from high school, to college, to seminary, and finally to the ministry. Each had at least ten years of ministry experience. During the course of the case study, additional differences and similarities emerged.

While the researcher and the informant shared numerous attributes, it is important to note that the attributes that they did not share, such as current denominational affiliation and childhood denominational affiliation, affected the significance of the shared attributes. Even though both the researcher and the informant attended denominational colleges, earned seminary degrees, and are ordained clergy members, the denominational differences in terms of doctrine, history, and tradition significantly affected the insider-outsider balance in the relationship.

The informant’s denominational context is the Lutheran tradition of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod of his childhood and early career. The informant switched to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America early in his career. The Lutheran tradition features a strong sense of history tracing back to the Protestant Reformation and a liturgical worship style that emphasizes a more frequent celebration of sacramental ritual and emphasizes the importance of infant baptism because individuals receive eternal salvation at the time of their baptism. The dissertation researcher traces his spiritual ancestry through the Wesleyan tradition of the United Methodist and Church of the Nazarene. This tradition places less emphasis on the importance of the sacramental rituals and holds that each individual must make a decision to accept salvation.

Figure 1 represents the insider-outsider balance between the researcher and the informant for the dissertation research. A subsequent study is now underway and it is anticipated that each
case study in that research project will generate a similar, but separate diagram in order to document the insider-outsider relationships and to assist in the analysis of the data for patterns and trends.

Figure 1. Representation of the insider-outsider balance.

The methodology of the research project

The case study consisted of five interview sessions that included both unstructured and semi-structured components. The dissertation researcher attended three Sunday morning worship services led by the informant. The researcher made an audio recording of the sermon delivered at each worship service. He then transcribed the sermon recording and compared the transcription against the typewritten text of the sermon provided by the informant.
The researcher and informant met in the office of the latter on Monday of each week to conduct the interviews. The sessions began with the researcher recording the informant articulating, without interruption, as to how the sermon from the previous day had come to be. The informant provided such details as why he selected particular Scripture texts, how certain themes developed, and what he hoped to accomplish with each sermon.

During the semi-structured portion of the interviews, the researcher and informant listened to the audio recording of the sermon together. At particular points in the sermon, the researcher stopped the playback to ask prepared questions relating to particular points in the sermon. The informant’s answers usually led to additional unprepared questions. Two additional semi-structured interview sessions were necessary to follow up on particular questions that arose from the data during the course of the research project.

The semi-structured interviews proved to be the most valuable for data collection and affirmed Wurman’s observation that a conversation is more complex than writing because a conversation reflects how we think (1989). By listening together to a recording of the sermon as presented from a written text during the worship service, the researcher and informant were able to stop the recording at various points in order to have a conversation about the sermon text. In this manner, the researcher asked questions that facilitated the informant sharing his tacit knowledge of the sermon situation that could not be presented in the written text of the sermon. The similarity and differences of religious upbringing and ministerial experience informed the questions asked by the researcher and enabled the informant to share the rich details of his life story. As described below, many of these questions, particularly the follow up questions would not have been asked by a researcher who did not share religious upbringing and ministerial experiences with the informant. Only a researcher with an understanding of the subtleties and
facets of theological issues, doctrinal positions, and denominational and congregational
dynamics could achieve the depth of the conversations conducted during the dissertation
research.

Map Points in the Conversational Journey

Analysis of the research interview transcripts revealed a number of key situations in the
conversational journey of the case study. Some of these situations, or Map Points, describe
situations when the conversational journey came to a fork in the road and either the researcher or
the informant took the lead in guiding the journey in a particular direction. The
research steered the journey to particular paths or followed the lead of the informant based on his
knowledge of the subject area due to his insider status. Such decisions resulted in a greater depth
and richness of the research findings than would otherwise have been the case with a researcher
from outside the clergy profession. Other Map Points describe situations when the researcher
allowed the conversational journey to go in a particular direction but failed to question or follow
up on a particular statement made by the informant and thus missed particular opportunities for
additional insights. Still other Map Points describe situations in which the informant took the
lead in such a way as to guide the journey in a particular direction. A sampling of the roles
played by the research and informant are illustrated below. The researchers anticipate that more
roles will emerge as the research project continues.

Map Points: The Researcher as Learner and the Informant as Expert

As befitting the primary goal of any research project, the most common and frequently
occurring of the Map Points were those of the researcher as learner and the informant as expert.
These situations related both to personal matters in the life of the informant and to practical matters of his career. Many of the researcher’s questions allowed the informant to tell his life story, to be the expert of his world, and facilitated the development of good rapport that kept the conversation amiable throughout its course.

Because the researcher had very limited knowledge of and prior experience with the church denomination of the dissertation informant there were many situations in the conversational journey in which the researcher sought to learn the finer details of denominational history, doctrine, and tradition. The questions of the researcher put the informant in the situation of “Expert” on topics such as denominational doctrine, theology, policy, and structure, and in the area of Biblical languages and church history.

In one sermon, the informant spoke on the power of music and that people need to pay attention to the influence that the music they listen to has in their lives. Near the end of the sermon, he noted:

“I am not saying only to listen to Christian music or classical music. I am not saying that all. I am not saying that it is not possible to glorify God with any popular forms of music such as rap or hip-hop, whether it is soft rock or hard rock or the music that happened to be popular back in the days when I grew up.”

The statement intrigued the researcher because it went against the doctrine of the conservative denomination of his own upbringing. The researcher assumed that the conservative denomination of the informant’s childhood might also have taken a negative position regarding rock music.

During the interview, the researcher asked the informant:

“I know that growing up in the conservative denomination of my youth that making a statement to the effect that it is possible to glorify God with all genres of music including
hard rock would have drawn a rather negative response. So I am wondering about your statement in light of your growing up in a conservative denomination and whether there was any conflict with your love of music and church teaching?"

The informant answered that the basic Lutheran attitude is that all things have the potential to glorify God and there is nothing inherently evil about particular forms of music. He informed the researcher that the early Lutheran movement used the melodies of popular tavern songs, but changed the lyrics in order to educate illiterate people on “the basic principles of salvation by the grace of God.” The songs were effective because at that time of the Lutheran reformation, church music “had been taken away from the people and isolated into choirs of monks and was no longer the property of the people.”

This particular interchange happened because of the researcher’s inside position of conservative religious upbringing and yet it did not result in a compromise of the data collection. Rather, it resulted in a deeper quality of data that dispelled an assumption made by the researcher and it positioned the informant to educate the researcher. Additional benefits included early indications of two themes that would become more prominent throughout the research project: the informant’s use of church history as an information resource for sermon preparation and his passion for social justice. These themes were apparent to the researcher, in part, due to his insider status as a clergy member.

Map Points: The Researcher as Skeptic and the Informant as Believer

The researcher asked the informant to describe his normal routine for sermon preparation. The informant related an ideal process of particular tasks on certain days of the week, but noted that his weekly schedule is seldom ideal and that the main factor of sermon preparation is “how
the Holy Spirit happens to be speaking to you at that particular week.” He proclaimed his belief that “the Holy Spirit is involved in sermon writing and that the Holy Spirit does not always work in the same way.” This introduction of the concept of the Holy Spirit allowed the researcher as skeptic to ask how the informant knew it was the Holy Spirit speaking to him.

The informant’s response to the question speaks to the importance of the researcher’s insider status in the case study. Rather than interpreting the question as an attack on his beliefs and becoming defensive, the informant chuckled, and acknowledged that this was a tricky question. He then alluded to the nature of the researcher-informant relationship by prefacing his answer with “We know” or, in other words, “You and I know” or “those of us in the church, your self included, know” and then proceeded to refer to historical problems around the question. There was an implicit assumption on the part of the informant that the researcher had previously dealt with this question himself and was aware of the different facets to the question. He did not feel a need to ask for clarification as to what the researcher meant by the question.

The informant then articulated a process that combines research methods learned in seminary and a discipline of reflective contemplation by which he ascertains the leading of the Holy Spirit. The process begins with using the Scripture readings provided by a three-year liturgical calendar. The informant researches the selected readings in the original Biblical languages and previous interpretations found in the Lutheran Book of Concord.

A period of contemplation follows the research and asks, “What is this saying?” Certain principles guide the contemplation such as “Scripture interprets Scripture” and “the Holy Spirit will never allow you to run away from love of neighbor.” What this meant for the informant is that the responsible clergy person will not take an isolated Scripture text and “run with it” without first checking it against the rest of Scripture. For example, the Gospel text to turn the
other cheek has greater authority than the Old Testament text that allows an eye for an eye and a
tooth for a tooth. Therefore, for the informant, any clergy member of the Christian faith who
advocates that vengeance is acceptable according to the Old Testament text is not following the
leading of the Holy Spirit.

*Map Points: The Researcher as Confessor and the Informant as Seeker*

A significant amount of the dissertation interviews were devoted to the issue of
homosexuality and the possible ordination of homosexual clergy members. The informant raised
the issue and described himself as terribly divided and at odds with himself on this issue. He
spoke about a “terrible waffling back and forth” in his search for an answer. Of “being torn”
between his feelings and his intellect, of discovering within himself a “most uncomfortable kind
of split personality” in which he knew that Christ died for all people, but he did not believe he
could accept having a pastor who was a practicing homosexual.

As the conversation proceeded with an exploration of how the informant attempted to
make sense of the issue through Scripture and denominational resources, the discussion turned to
theology and the question of original sin. The Researcher as Confessor urged the Informant as
Seeker to explain how homosexuality is different from any other human
conditions that the
church has come to tolerate as acceptable of its members, such as being divorced. The informant
proceeded to speak to the belief that all people are “broken” in one way or another and he
confessed, “I am broken because I make judgments on other people.” The researcher would
argue that the informant would probably never have shared the depth and intensity of this
conversation with a researcher who was not also a clergy person and who had undoubtedly
struggled with the same feelings of self-doubt and seeming hypocrisy.
In the final interview of the case study, the researcher raised the homosexuality issue again, but this time in the role of the Researcher as Inquisitor who sought to learn if the informant was struggling with this issue to the same degree as the leadership of his denomination. The researcher referred to two documents he had obtained from the denominational website. The first was a task force report on the homosexuality issue, which stopped short of recommending a change in denominational doctrine, but advocated for a voluntary suspension of disciplinary action against clergy members who chose to violate denominational doctrine. The second document was a letter from a consortium of denominational theologians and seminary faculty members condemning the task force report. The researcher also noted and the informant confirmed that the denomination is scheduled to address the issue at its national convention in the summer of 2009.

The Researcher as Inquisitor asked the informant what his reaction would be if the denomination decided to ordain practicing homosexuals as clergy members. His response indicated a high level of discomfort with the question as it was prefaced with a long and ponderous “okaaaaay” and “sometimes you don’t know until you are actually confronted with the situation.” He then proceeded to articulate that the authority of Scripture would carry more weight with him than would a denominational decision. The Researcher as Inquisitor reminded the Informant that he had previously indicated that Scripture did not provide him with a definitive answer to the issue.

The Informant as Defender then relied on a denominational perspective of Scripture not as a static document, but rather as the living Word of God, that God still speaks, and that God
has yet to give a definitive answer on this issue. The informant went on to articulate that humans in general and Americans in particular are impatient and that it may take hundreds of years before God gives an answer, but that does not matter because the ordination of practicing homosexuals as clergy members is only a penultimate issue and not an ultimate issue. The researcher realized that he had pushed as far as the informant was willing to go on the issue and he brought the interview to a close.

**Map Points: The Researcher as Sympathizer and the Informant as Evangelist**

The informant occasionally articulated frustration with clergy members he categorized as “American evangelicals” for their particular interpretations of Scripture. The root of the informant’s frustration is his perception that the word “evangelical” has been “hijacked” by a “legalistic” segment of Christianity whose theology is “judgmental,” tends to “energize Christian pathos,” and is based more on fear than the good news of salvation. The informant holds that the word “evangelical” properly belongs to his tradition, as the historical use of the word was to distinguish those persons who identified with the Protestant Reformation versus the Roman Catholic Church.

The researcher’s childhood and adolescence was deeply rooted in the evangelical tradition. While the researcher left the evangelical tradition of his childhood nearly 30 years ago, he is not so removed emotionally and intellectually that he could have used his insider knowledge of evangelicalism to push the informant to analyze and explore the extent of this seeming generalization. The situation presented an opportunity to get a measure of the informant’s awareness of the subtle differences within the evangelical tradition, which is far from a coherent and unified movement within Christianity, but the researcher lapsed into
identifying and agreeing with the informant’s frustration in an example of over-rapport. The researcher contends that the over-rapport did not nullify the research project and articulates his reasoning below. However, the situation led to a failure to push the informant on these views.

In one sermon, the informant referred to one of the Scripture lessons for that particular Sunday, which was from the Book of Revelation. He mentioned that many preachers consider this particular portion of the Bible problematic and that it “best be left on the sidelines.” He noted, “There isn’t much question that a lot of mischief has been caused in the Church by some interpretations of this rather enigmatic writing.” However, the informant proclaimed that a lot could be learned from the Book of Revelation if it is used as God intended and “not to try to force weird interpretations on it or use it like a crystal ball to look into the future.” The informant went on to tie this particular Scripture text to the sermon theme by speaking to how it is like a book of hymns intended for worship services.

Because of his New Testament studies in seminary, the researcher is familiar with the controversy within the clergy profession regarding the Book of Revelation. He mentioned to the informant that his New Testament professor in seminary would not lecture on the Book of Revelation and that he never preached from that Bible book in eleven years of ministry. The researcher commented that it sounded like the informant had given the Book of Revelation “a lot of thought and study.”

The informant responded with an emergent and recurring theme throughout the research project: a frustration with clergy members who, in his opinion, misinterpret Scripture. This frustration with “so many preachers and television evangelists who seem to tremendously misuse the Book of Revelation or any of the apocalyptic literature” enabled a line of inquiry that began in the second interview in which the informant articulated in significant detail the process by
which he interprets Scripture.

From birth through his college years, the researcher grew up in a denomination that would fall within the informant’s categorization of those who occasionally misuse the apocalyptic literature. Consequently, early in the research project the researcher found himself in a delicate situation of needing to maintain objectivity while dealing with negative emotions generated by childhood memories. The design of the research project intended to avoid such a situation by selecting an informant from a denomination other than one the researcher had experienced in his past. However, the design failed to account for the possibility that the issues the informant had with this particular category of clergy members would emerge as a major theme of the research project. The situation provided an unanticipated benefit in that it gave the researcher the opportunity to ask the informant to explain how his interpretation of Scripture is different from those he considers to be misinterpreting Scripture.

The Research Design

The success of a research agenda based on this project depends upon the willingness of a diverse group of participants to share personal beliefs and doubts, struggles and victories, joys and fears, trusting that their perspective will receive due respect and tolerance from the researcher and other research participants. The desired result is a number of qualitative data sets, which explore in depth and detail the unique perspectives of a small group of clergy members selected to represent a cross-section of the profession by denominational affiliation, theology, education, age, gender, and experience. The anticipated richness of the data will reflect the diversity of the research team and the study group. Bartunek and Louis (1996) note that “Parties to a study come with unique experience histories, including their education,
socialization, career paths, and previous involvement in the specific setting under study. The more diverse the experience histories of the individuals composing a research team, especially in terms of their relationship to the setting, the more diverse should be their perspectives on and potential interpretations of any particular observed event there.” (1996, p. 17-18)

The research team is composed of two faculty members in the field of library and information science who are also ordained clergy. One of the clergy team members remains active in local church work and self-identifies as evangelical in doctrine and a believer. The other clergy member is minimally involved in local church work and self-identifies as a secular humanist. Both members of the team are trained researchers in library and information science who bring insider status to the project because of their past and current identification with church ministries, while maintaining some differences in theological or spiritual perspective. This combination of personnel will contribute to validity and to dialogical intersubjectivity through rational discourse and reciprocal critique of each other’s research interviews and interpretations of the data. Discourse and critique will occur in conversations between researchers and in collaborative written reports of research findings. The research informants will have the opportunity to participate in the discourse and critique by responding the written reports of research findings.

The research project aims to conduct 10 to 12 case studies per year for three years. The team members anticipate that the case studies will consist of a broad representation across the clergy profession. The selection of potential case study informants will consider such variables as age, education, gender, denominational affiliation, and theological doctrine. Both researchers will conduct the case study interviews and each will interview a cross section of the informant
pool.

The research project will create a detailed profile of the researcher-informant balance with a graphical representation similar to Figure 1 for each case study. In some instances, the researcher-informant balance will reflect a high degree of insider status for the researcher and in other instances, it will not. The research project seeks to develop a wide variety of researcher-informant balance profiles for detailed analysis of the effect of insider status on the research process and interpretations of the data.

Included in the conversation between the researchers conducting the case studies will be the selection of potential informants in an ongoing process designed to create a diverse pool of informants. The researchers will approach potential informants as a team with the invitation to participate in the research project. Once a potential informant agrees to participate, the researchers will develop a researcher-informant profile and decide which researcher will conduct the case study according to the data collection needs of the research project. Each researcher will conduct exit interviews with each other’s informants.

Conclusion

In conclusion, concerns within the academic community regarding the objectivity of a researcher with insider status are valid. However, the potential gain in the depth and breadth of understanding the informant’s world far outweighs the concern for objectivity, especially when the design of the research project addresses the concern in a systematic manner. The authors have proposed a testable design model for qualitative research that addresses potential concerns regarding possible bias with the subject matter and over-rapport with case study informants so as to establish and maintain research project credibility. Indeed, the dissertation research project,
which effectively served as a test case for the design model explored the subject matter to a depth of detail and obtained a richer data set than a researcher of outsider status could have accomplished.
References


ABSTRACT

This paper describes the qualitative research interview as conversation designed to gain understanding of the world of research informants. It illustrates the potential of the qualitative research interview when the researcher is able to enter into and maintain a conversation with the research informant as an insider in the latter’s community. The paper draws from lessons learned in a case study of a clergy-person’s preparation of his Sunday sermon and proposes an innovative research design model that addresses the validity and reliability concerns related to the methodology. Specifically, this model develops an insider perspective of the phenomenon of study using the process of dialogical intersubjectivity.

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