

## Introduction

My own first experience of work consisted of serving in a souvenir shop at a large tourist complex. Unfortunately for everyone concerned, it was a rainy summer and there was a noticeable lack of tourists. I soon found out that one of the main requirements of the job had not been specified at the job interview: from early in the morning to the final moments of those wet afternoons, I had to find ways of looking busy and productive even when there was absolutely nothing happening in the shop and not a single customer in sight! I had to learn to love my feather duster.

Nor was my introduction to my first full-time job any easier. Preparing for my first day as a teacher meant that I was also preparing for my first prolonged and serious encounter with the world of work. Compared to the demands of teaching in a chalky, cheeky classroom, the trinkety world of the souvenir shop seemed like a piece of cake.

I was also to discover that the actual work of preparing lessons and speaking to a large class was only one aspect of the challenge. Although it was true that the students overturned every assumption that I had, I found the life-style changes that were required even more difficult than inventing exciting lessons on the topic of Hadrian's Wall. The pace of life was new—its tempo and its timing—but so was the amount of work I had to do after work. I also had to keep my emotions

in check. Even when I cried after a spectacularly unsuccessful class, I had to act as if my eyes weren't really red at all.

Hence, although I have always been interested in general issues to do with work and workplaces, I am particularly interested in the transition to work, perhaps because I found each of my many different work transitions unexpectedly complex, demanding and, at times, simply overwhelming. As is true for most people, these feelings were quite surprising because I had expected to make the transition to work without much trouble. However, I was in for a great awakening. I found every aspect of my new role exhausting: the long hours, the unfamiliar people and their jokes, the endless work after work, and the Sunday evenings before the Monday mornings that always made me feel slightly sick in the stomach.

Why was it all so unsettling? After all, work is part of our lives and our everyday landscapes. Even when we are on holidays or asleep we think and dream about work. We make lasting friendships at work, we talk about work over dinner and we have a great deal of our lives invested in our work—even after a bad day, we hope that the next will be better.

After having worked for many years, the shock of those memories had faded and I had relegated my own first experiences of work to the back of my mind. However, it soon became apparent that many of the students I interviewed found work, workplaces and work colleagues very challenging which was surprising. They had to work at being workers—for many students the new role did not come easily. However, as often happens in new or difficult situations, the students utilised their existing resources and support networks in order to compensate for their own inefficiencies, inadequacies or understandable lack of expertise.

### **The students**

So, perhaps unexpectedly, this book does not introduce you to groups of students called by intriguing names such as 'The conformers' or 'The rebels'. Instead, the chapters are organised according to the resources the students called up and fell back on in their hour of need when they were tired and depressed or excited and challenged. In fact, the sheer number of times that people told me that they had accessed resources or social support was quite startling. Interestingly, though, they did not talk much about electronic resources and so

information technology in all its many forms does not loom large in this book. Surprisingly, and yet unsurprisingly, the students talked about people and indeed people through this book—principals, supervisors and human resources managers, as well as mothers who stocked the fridge or friends who provided a sympathetic ear, reference books and useful, perfectly tailored advice.

### **The placements**

While different societies have always prepared people for adult roles, including work, in a multiplicity of ways, contemporary societies use a mixed formula of study away from the workplace and controlled exposure to the workplace in which the newcomer's role is often that of a master's apprentice. A mixed bag of study and practical, work-based experience prepares people for a workplace that is constantly referred to, described and discussed in lectures and tutorials whether face-to-face or online. However, the workplaces spoken of with such authority in such contexts never quite exist. Located in the textbooks, in the lecturer's anecdotes and in the stories of family members swapped over dinner, these workplaces are always safe. They lack the risk and the realities of the office, classroom or lab that kicks into life at eight o'clock or a bit later every Monday morning.

### **The risk and the reality**

Not surprisingly then, the students that I interviewed often felt that there was a gap between their studies and the very real and the very specific demands of individual workplaces and workplace colleagues. Seemingly straightforward office protocols such as 'Always use your own coffee mug' came as a shock to the interviewees because many such unwritten rules were not made explicit until a boundary, only dimly perceived, had been crossed. The fact that most novices I interviewed for the book had worked at several quite responsible part-time jobs while completing their tertiary studies made this shock even more surprising. Some were simply not ready for the particular challenges and the ongoing demands of their new workplace or supervisor.

### **Work and workplace training**

This book then is about work, workplaces, education and training. But most importantly, it is about the people who are getting ready for work

in demanding workplaces such as hospitals, schools and companies, both large and small.

### **The interviews**

In order to find out about people and their work-related placements, I interviewed fifty people who had volunteered to talk to me about this topic. They were not in their workplaces because they had part-time jobs in these locations, but because their university courses contained compulsory programs that were located in the workplace. For many of the people I spoke to this was the first time they had had contact with the real-world face of the professional occupation they hoped to be involved in for a large part of their lives.

The people who so generously gave me these interviews were aged between twenty and fifty years and came from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Almost half of the interviewees were ‘international’ students, that is, students who had come to Australia to undertake an accredited course at an Australian university. One woman spoke Farsi as her first language and yet was a Swedish national studying in Australia. Many of these students talked about their families and their home communities as well as the Australian workplaces and, predictably enough, more than one student talked at length about the great differences between working at home and the work environment he was experiencing in Australia.

### **Working lives**

The book will interest people who spend their lives in education and training, but it should also fascinate those who are fascinated by work, workplaces and work colleagues, by talk at work, time spent at work and changes in work practices—in other words, anything to do with the world of work.

The writing of this book depended on the cooperation of many people. People in workplaces both large and small were unexpectedly co-operative and even though I had to observe the normal ethical conventions of privacy and confidentiality, even the large companies supplied me with a room for the interviews and gave me access to all the graduates who were undertaking work there. I interviewed a great range of students including would-be engineers, nurses, teachers, and communication and information technology specialists. I also

ate my lunch in many different staff canteens and had access to work environments and work practices radically dissimilar from the schools and universities in which I have spent my own working life.

The workplaces themselves were fascinatingly diverse, ranging from a small school on the outskirts of Melbourne where the bush came up to the edges of the playground, to a large hi-tech multinational whose employees travelled internationally on a very regular basis. Very often, I interviewed the students-in-training in little rooms and sometimes I could hear the noises associated with a certain kind of human activity going on in the background as I interviewed. I always tried to keep the interview focused on work and workplaces as I had signed an ethics agreement telling my university that I would stay well within certain boundaries but, in a few cases, the students themselves added other stories to their accounts of work in order to stress a point or explain the real reason behind their seemingly novice behaviour.

### **Resources in abundance**

The students' stories have been arranged according to the key resources that they were given or that they were able to access during their workplace experience.

The first group of interviews focuses on the resources that the students were given in their workplaces. Many students made it clear that their workplaces were extremely generous with their resources, time and personnel. The second crucially important resource focused on is the student's immediate supervisor who again and again emerged from the interviews as a highly significant person. The third resource is that of the people outside the workplace—family, friends and the friends of families who rallied around the students at this taxing time to offer them extra support, encouragement, advice and other more tangible resources.

### **Lacking resources**

It will also become apparent that some students lacked resources and that, as a consequence of this, their workplace experiences were difficult, frustrating or boring. It is to be hoped that these students had further opportunities to work and practise work in other places as, at the time I interviewed them, they had had very

negative experiences and were reconsidering their career choices or seeking to shed the professional identity that they had just tried on for size.

Here then are the students, their voices and their stories. Although the students and their workplaces have been given pseudonyms, in most cases the students chose the names they are called by in this book. One student chose her mother's name, while others chose names that reflected their ethnicity or linguistic background. It is hoped that by reading this book, you will gain some insight into people as novices, workplaces and the constant need for those who are able to supply resources, especially resources in the shape of finely tuned social support, to all those who are beginning a significant venture in new times and in a new world.

### Three questions

For many years, my brother worked for a large multinational company. He often cited a little mantra that people in his office used to summarise the task of interviewing prospective employees. The questions always stuck in my mind even though he has probably long forgotten them. The questions that seemed to drive any interview were these: *Can she do it? Will she do it? Will she fit in?*

However, as soon as I began interviewing the students, I realised that the question 'Will she fit in?' did not foreshadow the radical uncertainty contained in the question, 'Will I fit in?' and had even less to do with the anxious self-assessment that accompanied the question regarding expertise, 'Can I do it?' I realised, of course, that my brother's colleagues were framing these questions from the employer's point of view, but I became more interested in the stories of the employees, in this case, novice employees and their struggles to attain an appropriate workplace 'self', a satisfactory level of competence and even some idea of whether or not this would become for them a significant and satisfying professional role.

Hence, the three questions seemed too light-hearted when compared to the soul searching that accompanied an individual novice's decision to take another path after an unsatisfactory workplace experience. As a result of the interviews, the questions also seemed to need re-ordering: for most of the students, the issue of 'fitting in' was the primary one and the issue of expertise came a little bit later.

Hence, one of the main chapters in this book deals with the issue of 'belonging'.

Finally, I think there is a great deal of wisdom in that old saying that there is nothing as practical as a good theory. Hence, several formidable theorists stroll through the following pages—people whose writings I always find interesting and thought-provoking even when they are talking about a topic that is very different from the one that I am addressing. Pre-eminent above these is the contemporary French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's ideas are emphasised, counterpointed or contradicted by other thinkers whose work has not been addressed as thoroughly in this space: Goffman, Foucault and Spivak and many others who I had often encountered as an undergraduate and then had a chance to meet up with again while writing this work.

Hopefully, the brief excursions into theory do not render the book 'heavy' or 'dry' nor distract from the main purpose of the book, which is to present a range of people's views on a very significant topic—that of learning to work.

Readers who want to skip straight to the students and their experiences can now turn to the opening of the next chapter. The following section of the Introduction takes up the many complex theoretical issues that arise when we base new understandings on the findings derived from transcripts. Throughout the book as a whole, however, it is emphasised that the issues pertaining to work and work placements are both significant and very current. To take just one example, a recent government report has given sustained attention to the issue of work placements in the context of pre-service teacher training in Victoria, Australia (see Parliament of Victoria, Education and Training Committee, 2005). Many of the issues taken up in the report are foreshadowed in Patricia Benner's (1984) earlier, but perennially fresh, account of the perceptions of novices and experts. Both the Victorian report and Benner's major work offer paths into this vitally interesting and multi-faceted topic.

### **Introducing the students' accounts and the 'lighthouse' narratives**

This book is based on a series of fifty interviews conducted with university students during, or immediately after, their work placements. During the interviews, the students were encouraged to tell stories as

well as to answer questions, make comments and reflect on their experiences in a variety of ways.

When the interviews had been recorded and transcribed, it seemed that some stories were more important than others, both within a single interview transcript and across the whole series of fifty interviews. The role of the most important stories can be usefully associated with the word 'epiphany', a word used by James Joyce (1922/1968) in various writings. Denzin (1995) has drawn attention to this word in his writings on interpretive interactionism, defining the 'epiphanic moment' as one that 'leaves a mark on a person's life' (p. 83) and is most often experienced in moments of crisis. It is possible that Denzin has based his image of epiphanies on the earlier sociological idea of 'turning points'. Both the idea of the turning point and the epiphanic moment are significant in sociological theory because each provides a vehicle for showing the ways in which individual biographies intersect with the 'larger historical, institutional, and cultural arenas' (p. 83) that also require analysis.

In his writing, Denzin (1995) argues that there are four kinds of epiphanic 'moment'—the 'major upheaval' and the 'cumulative', 'illuminative' and 'relived' moments (p. 83). Each meaning centres on the 'problematic' (p. 83) nature of the experience. However, Ellman (1968), a writer whose books have centred on Joyce's life and works, defines the word epiphany rather differently. In contrast to that of Denzin (1995), his definition focuses on the ordinary moment rather than on a crisis or turning point. Ellman writes that, in Joyce's work, 'epiphanies' can be understood as 'sudden, unlooked for turns in experience—which could prove the more momentous for being modest' (p. 708).

The narratives told by the students often involved new or special experiences. However, the significance of these incidents for the student who recounted them could not have been predicted by their subject matter. To draw on Ellman's (1968) definition once again, the incidents recounted were often 'modest' (p. 708). With Woolf's (1927/1969) novel *To the lighthouse* in mind, it was decided to term these narratives 'lighthouse' stories. Often, however, the subject matter of the stories was 'modest' (Ellman, 1968, p. 708).

The salience of the lighthouse narratives can be accounted for in several different ways. Firstly, certain narratives had been given

special prominence by the speaker in the course of the interview. For example, Keiko's initial narrative about her supervisor's absence was referred to several times in the interview.

A second reason for the prominence of some stories seemed to lie in the clarity of an evaluation that was made in relation to the experience recounted. These narratives were linked to judgements that were made about the person or the incident described or the placement experience as a whole. Such evaluations made it possible to link narratives that had very different topics. Hence, a very positive evaluation of the supervision provided linked several stories.

Thirdly, certain stories caught my attention during the interviews and so were accorded greater significance than others. Several of the lighthouse stories raised questions that were difficult to answer and remained in my mind long after other interviews had been conducted. Hence, Mark's interview prompted the question: *Why did Mark talk so much about his tie?* Questions such as these made it possible to see that the lighthouse stories had a crucial function in the research in that they encouraged me to focus on data that had less arresting subject matter as well as the data that seemed to take up striking issues. Mark's focus on his tie made it possible for me to see that all the students who talked about the initial phase of the placement were also talking about their struggles to cope with, forge, or resist a new workplace-based identity. The lighthouse story about the tie identified the issue and illuminated it simultaneously, while offering a way of setting up a network of connections between the groups of stories without making these mere examples that illustrated a single theme in a repetitive manner.

The lighthouse narratives were given a special emphasis and were seen to function in much the same way as vignettes, which, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), may be given a 'representative, typical, or emblematic' (p. 81) place in an enquiry.

### **Other stories, comments and observations**

While it seemed legitimate, given the interpretive basis of the research, to give certain key stories special prominence, it did not seem appropriate to overlook other accounts that had created a less immediate or complex response. Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestions regarding matrices were used to draw up grids so that the data could

be re-processed and checked over for pieces that had been overlooked or accorded little attention in the initial, more open-ended, readings. This strategy meant that the lighthouse narratives retained their significant roles, but ensured that other stories were also given due weight.

Several different matrices based on Miles and Huberman's (1994) 'Table 5.3' headed 'Effects Matrix ...' (p. 96) were used to analyse the data after an initial account of a lighthouse narrative had been arrived at. This method was found to be an effective way of showing alternative ways in which various narratives could be compared. Often it was found that an exhaustive attempt to put all the data on a grid revealed that some examples of certain phenomena had been missed. Diagrams were also used to explore and refine emergent concepts.

Although the investigation did not draw on the grounded theories of Strauss and Corbin (1990) exclusively, their ideas on how to deal with qualitative data without imposing conceptual tools drawn from sociological writings or 'common sense' greatly influenced the way in which the interpretations were conducted. By writing memos and using these to compare 'data with data' (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 162), it was possible to derive analytical categories from the transcripts and to name these in ways that were not confined to the concepts that sprang to mind from writers such as Goffman (1959, 1961).

### **Reaching interpretive understanding**

One of the most critical tasks facing any writer is that of drawing conclusions but this can be very difficult if the conclusions are to be based on interpretations of textual material. The work of Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992a) made it possible to pose one of the main interpretive problems in the form of a question: How is it possible to circumnavigate various '*pre-constructed*' (p. 235) categories and yet achieve readings of the students' narratives that do more than achieve a 'doubling of text' (Derrida, 1996, p. 85) or 'traditional doubling commentary' (p. 86)?

As has been indicated, ideas from two opposing strands of thought were found to be very interesting and thought provoking. Hence, Bourdieu's (1992) belief that it is possible, albeit difficult, to

find out about the world was entertained alongside Derrida's (1996) radical claim that there is nothing outside the text— '*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*' (p. 82). While the interpretations relied to a large extent on the emerging specificity of certain 'issues', I had been influenced by works such as Belsey (2002), and was therefore sympathetic to ideas that stressed that all texts were open to many interpretations and indeed invited multiple readings and reading positions. In many ways, all steps involved taking up and resolving (at least, for the time being) the opposing paradigms of interpretation offered by Belsey (2002) and Ricoeur (1991b), the first arguing that texts are open, the second that any text 'seeks to place us in its meaning' (p. 121) and is, therefore, not open to an unlimited number of interpretations.

Hence, while the decision to focus on narrative approaches was easy to make, other decisions regarding the ways in which the narratives were to be interpreted were difficult. An awareness that there are many significant, but contradictory, approaches to narrative analysis meant that the task of making choices between the various ways of dealing with the transcripts was the most difficult one faced. Once the choices regarding certain 'methods of narrative analysis' (Boje, 2002, p. 11) had been made, these seemed to identify my position with even greater clarity than had any epistemological decisions.

### **Defining the options**

In order to choose between the many rich ideas concerning narrative, significant streams of thought were identified and summarised. The process of linking such ideas had two main stages. Firstly, an important theoretical perspective was defined. Then, the discussion of the relevant theories was followed by a brief mention of the work of a recent writer (or writers) who had used the perspective to offer interpretations of narrative texts, either spoken or written. The choices have been written up in a conditional form as though the decisions were still to be made.

- Hermeneutic ideas on text and interpretation, elucidated in Ricoeur (1991a), could be drawn upon and Moloney's (1995) study of ageing women used as a model on which to base interpretive readings oriented towards capturing the texts as wholes.

Moloney's (1995) study was based on interviews with older women. The study shows the ways in which research-related texts can be treated as wholes so that the 'gestalt' of each narrative is made the focal concern. In her writing, Moloney describes the ways in which the transcripts were read many times both alone and with others. She also describes the themes that 'emerged' from the interview transcripts including those of survival, strength in the midst of hardship and making a home in difficult circumstances. The study has a second attraction in that it highlights gender-related issues. However, these are not dealt with in a didactic manner. The exact nature of the themes elicited could not have been predicted, nor would the older women's emphasis on 'making a home' been able to emerge if a narrowly defined feminist agenda had been the focus.

- Barthes's (1975) 'codes' and his commitment to a 'step-by-step' reading could be used to structure the interpretations of the students' narratives. Both the work of Barthes and that of Boje (2002) could be drawn upon.

Barthes (1975) has demonstrated how to achieve such readings in his own work on literary texts. In his account of Barthes's ideas, Moriarty (1991) summarises Barthes's reaction against thematic and generic categories. According to Moriarty, Barthes's contribution to narrative theory lies in his belief that it is necessary to 'keep the text open, plural' (p. 121) and that a 'step-by-step reading is therefore preferable to a synthetic overview that freezes the text in order to extract a theme or structure' (p. 121). Meanings that are found in a text can be related to other meanings. Meaning is made possible because various 'codes' (p. 121) that have been used before in other writings are recognised by the reader. Hence, all works, even the most seemingly 'original', can be seen as an assemblage of quotations. More recently, Boje (2002), a writer who has used narrative theory extensively in his studies of organisational life, has offered guidance on how to make the ideas of Barthes (1975) and Derrida (1994) directly relevant to narrative-based research.

- Fairclough's (1992) critical discourse analysis could be used to focus on the power driven relationships within the text and the

work of Barker and Galasinski (2001) as a source for further ideas on how to carry out critical discourse analysis.

Fairclough's work is based on Foucauldian insights about the way in which language as 'discourse' is always constituted by, and constituting of, subjectivities, power relations and systems of hierarchy and subordination. The work of Barker and Galasinski (2001) offers a number of examples of the ways in which critical discourse analysis might be undertaken. Although Fairclough's analytical strategies were thought to be rather rigid, his discussion of 'discourse representation' and 'speech reportage' (p. 118) was noted. This brief discussion underlined the significance of the many reported conversations that appeared in the transcripts.

- The ideas of Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997) and Hymes (1996) could be drawn on in order to offer readings of narrative 'patterning' (Hymes, 1996, p. 137) and significant aspects of individual texts. Several examples offered in these works, and also in an important collection of responses to the original article by Labov and Waletzky (see the *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 1997), could be modified.

The above perspectives were supplemented by several single works all of which offered detailed ideas on various ways of undertaking textual interpretation. Although the social construction of gender was not probed in any detail, some of the most useful studies that incorporated critical perspectives without imposing preordinate categories on the texts, were studies that had been carried out by scholars dedicated to the exploration of feminist issues. Works included those by Rich (1979), Kristeva (1986), Butler (1993) and hooks (1996). The research study on women's conceptions of 'knowing' by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) was also very useful in that it offered research procedures related to the concept of 'voice'. This concept provided the interviews and their interpretation with its 'critical' focus.

On the basis of much reading and thinking, several decisions regarding interpretive strategies were made. The distinctions made by Fairclough (1992, p. 73) between understanding, interpretation

and analysis were rejected. Such distinctions were thought to imply that there was a radical difference between each category when it can be argued that, as textually oriented activities, all face the same 'problem of fallibility' (Latour and Woolgar, 1986, p. 283) which undermines all 'description and analysis' (p. 283). In the account of the research procedures, 'interpretive understanding' was used frequently to describe my goal. When necessary, 'interpretation' and 'reading' were deployed as synonyms. The word 'analysis' was used with caution lest it be thought that positivist knowledge claims were being made, or that it was possible to gain access to the 'real truth' (p. 282).

Ricoeur's (1991a; 1991b) work also clarified some of the central issues. In his own struggle to reconcile explanation (based on the natural sciences), and interpretation (based on hermeneutic understanding), Ricoeur argues that 'structural analysis' can be seen as a 'stage' between a 'naive' and a 'critical' (1991b, p. 121) interpretation. Hence, in accordance with Ricoeur's advice, the interpretations of the transcripts proceeded in 'stages' and various aspects of the choices regarding narrative approaches and analytical methods referred to above were incorporated into the analysis at several points. However, while Ricoeur was able to bring explanation and understanding together in his 'overall conception of reading as the recovery of meaning' (p. 121), his confidence that the 'intention of the text' (p. 121) could be recovered was juggled with Barthes's (1994) equally confident assertion that 'a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space ... a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture' (p. 168).

### **Theorising each interpretive step**

With Barthes's (1994) postmodern scepticism and Ricoeur's (1991b) hermeneutical methods in mind, it was decided to divide the interpretive strategies into two basic categories. These categories reflected Ricoeur's division between 'guessing' and 'validating' (p. 158). The first interpretive moves, that is, the first readings of the transcripts, defined each text as a 'cumulative, holistic process' (p. 159), emphasised the whole text, and were based on the perception that if the text were seen as a whole, it was necessarily 'open to several readings and several constructions' (p. 159). Subsequent readings broke larger texts

into 'details' (p. 158) and reassembled a reading from these elements. Although the first strategy was consistent with my own view of text, it seemed to be more open to the danger that the reader would bring to the text the inevitably 'preconstructed' (p. 235) concepts that Bourdieu (1992) had warned against, but would have no way of perceiving, much less resisting, Ricoeur's (1991b) 'naive' (p. 121) interpretations.

In her study of ageing women, Moloney (1995) emphasised that it is necessary to gain a detailed knowledge of each transcript as a first step in trying to understand an interviewee's experiences. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) work also suggested that many careful readings of interview material have to be undertaken. Focused on inductive theorising and the delineation of appropriate procedures and techniques for achieving such 'grounded' theory, Strauss and Corbin's work answered the need for an interpretive model that sought to *discover* categories and ideas rather than imposing on the transcripts frameworks and etic categories that had already been articulated.

Comparison is at the heart of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) methods of reaching a new theory. Each of the narratives was compared with other narratives on the basis of the ostensible topic of the narrative or the evaluation made before, throughout or at the end of its telling. This method of analysis was also suggested by Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997) whose influential work on narratives has been both used and developed by many different writers. Agar (1980), too, argues that comparisons underpin the research process. According to Agar, once certain pieces of data have been compared, recurring categories can be constructed. Then it is possible to 'apply the next analytical device—the scissors—and cut up a copy of the transcripts according to the new topic-oriented code' (p. 104).

Strauss and Corbin's (1990) detailed accounts of the research studies they had either initiated or participated in provided useful models and analytical tools. Their description of the ways in which an individual woman's experience of pain and pain relief had been coded (see pp. 77–81) was read many times. A deep understanding of this one example encouraged me to find new ways of describing the students' experiences by registering the students' accounts as categories or codes and writing these directly on to each transcript. A different, but complementary, method involved using the 'Find' command on the computer to look at the number of times certain

words appeared in the students' accounts. This strategy made it possible to see that the most common word used in accounts of the initial stage of the placement was not 'shock' or 'surprise' as had been anticipated, but 'different'.

Grounded theory, then, was used to great advantage to arrive at conceptual categories without taking for granted the strength of pre-existing 'classificatory notions' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 235). Strauss and Corbin (1990) comment on the importance of memos, stressing their role in the enterprise of theory-building as categories are developed. As the interviews were read and reflected upon many times, memos were elaborated as groups of narratives were considered. These memos were similar to Smith's (1984) 'interpretive asides' (p. 174) and were used to record 'a short comment to oneself about some hunch, bright idea or insight' (p. 150) noted 'along the way' (p. 174).

While the strategies of memo-writing and comparison were used frequently, such processes are not problem-free. One of the most obvious issues facing any reader of interviews is that by aligning extracts from different transcripts according to their 'recurrent topics' (Agar, 1980, p. 104) or named 'conceptual labels ... [i.e.] categories' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 108), other features of the text have to be suppressed. Secondly, the activity of making detailed, line-by-line codes, which Strauss and Corbin see as an essential step to the writing of memos, means that the narratives can lose some of the unity they had been given by the students' initial topic or subsequent evaluation. In order to emphasise the 'wholeness' of the narratives, each one was given a title. The title consisted of a phrase that had appeared in the story and crystallised something of the 'essence' (Gibbins & Thomson, 2001, p. 310) of the student's experience.

Thus, various procedures and techniques were drawn from Strauss and Corbin's (1990) work. As has been outlined, the first involved the labelling of each student's recounted experiences in such a way that the categories captured the texture of the experiences. The process of combining the categories allowed a broader concept to emerge from the data. In this part of the analytical process, the section of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) book that describes a study of the experiences of pregnant mothers who were also chronically ill, was found to be both memorable and enlightening. The final construct that 'emerged' from the study described by Strauss and

Corbin—the concept of ‘protective governing’ (p. 142)—seemed to capture with sympathy and precision the careful choices the mothers in the study had made in order to manage their own chronic illnesses without endangering their unborn children.

The insights offered by the grounded theory methods of Strauss and Corbin (1990) were given a critical edge when the metaphor of ‘voice’ was used to discover whether or not the students had acquired some degree of agency during their placements. Following on the work of Hymes on narrative and voice (1996), Belenky et al. (1986, p. 16) on empowerment and voice, and feminist writers such as McNay (2000) on the issue of agency, it was decided to make ‘voice’ one of the key evaluative concepts and to use this as a basis for important ‘critical’ insights. Although Lather (2001) has questioned the usefulness of the concepts of empathy, voice and authenticity, voice has been seen as a useful metaphor for various concepts indicated by the words ‘power’ and ‘empowerment’. Hence, in order to ‘move beyond intelligent description’ (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 255), three questions regarding voice were asked after each key story had been read several times. The questions, which were based on the ideas of Belenky and her colleagues (1986, pp. 16–20), have been reproduced below:

- Did the student want to speak?
- Was he/she able to speak?
- What prevented him/her from speaking or gave him/her the ability to speak?

In this way, the ‘stance’ of the interpreter was made explicit and the ideas were given a ‘critical’ perspective that was congruent with an interpretivist approach. At the same time, the analytical framework used side-stepped the clusters of assumptions that have accrued around such words as gender, class and race. This was in keeping with Weedon’s (1999) insight to the effect that,

we can use categories such as ‘gender’, ‘race’ and ‘class’ in social and cultural analysis but on the assumption that their meaning is plural, historically and socially specific. The effects of using such categories will depend on how

they are defined and on the social context in which they are used. (p. 130)

Although Weedon (1999) identifies such a position with post-modern feminism, the adoption of such a perspective made it possible to articulate and define some of the 'preconstructed' categories that had been regarded as unproblematic before the first interview was recorded. A reading of Said (1995) made an important contribution to such reflexive 'unlearning' (Lather, 1993, p. 680).

### **Towards an 'emic' view**

It is now felt that the constructs that come closest to the kind of sympathetic, insider, emic view that were modelled in Strauss and Corbin's (1990) reporting of the ways in which the idea of 'protective governing' (p. 142) was reached have been recorded in Chapter 3 of this book. In this chapter, the concepts of 'committed presence', 'trusting space', 'trusting revelation', 'trusting dialogue' and 'strategic silence' as well as the enfolding categories of 'committed presence' and 'enabling trust' emerged. Whether taken separately or grouped together, the constructs were able to offer insights into the ways in which the students' experiences of their workplaces were structured by their interactions with their supervisors, mentors or managers. The concepts also included understandings clustered around the idea of voice, silence and speaking forth.

The constructs that emerged from the transcripts highlighted certain issues in the students' experiences and made it possible to interpret these in a slightly more abstract way. A second level of interpretive understanding was offered by the work of Bourdieu (1992, 2001). Each of the following chapters includes commentaries that explore specific concepts elaborated by Bourdieu. These have special relevance to the students' situations and recounted experiences.