**Brandon University Women’s Research Network Brown Bag Lunch Series**

**Non-traditional Research Methods – March 25, 2014 – notes on Sheelagh Chadwick’s Presentation**

Botswana: is a country in Africa, just north of South Africa, a landlocked country. It is about the size of Texas, or France, but with a population of only 2 million, concentrated on the eastern side of the country, because desert covers the central part. In 1966 it gained independence. It went from the poorest country in Africa to one of the richest, because of diamond mining. With the help of some Canadian negotiators, the country was able to make a profitable deal with the diamond mining company (De Beers) so a good percentage of the wealth stayed in the country. The country was settled in about 1800 by British missionaries. So its development and education system has been influenced by colonial influence, traditional community-based education and the missionary influence. Botswana was not a colonial country, but Rhodesia and South Africa were, on either side, so it became a trade path. The upshot of this historical background is passive students, a hierarchical education system, and curriculum and exams developed by government consultants, with teachers having no say. There have been lots of policies for student-centred teaching but the concept has not taken hold.

Her first research project was to answer: what was music education looking like in the schools? Was it practical, hands on, not just theory? Did it include local music?

She was unhappy with what she learned and that the research process did nothing for the teachers to make the circumstances better. It was still the same for most teachers – very little influence by local teachers or with local music genres.

This led her to try some Action Research. Action Research was part of her Masters program and she took a course on it in her PhD program. It was begun in England by Lawrence Stenhouse, an educator. It follows a cyclic path of reflective examination of a situation, planning, action, and back to reflective examination.

Her approach was to ask the music teachers “what changes do you want to make?”.

The Action Research Spiral she showed on her laptop:

 Act Observe and evaluate

 Reflect

Sheelagh said “It is nice to describe what you did *after the fact*!”

1. In 2011: Sheelagh met with teachers in groups, to refresh her picture of what was happening. The focus questions were:

Where are we going?

Is it desirable?

What is to be done?

1. In 2013: Sheelagh met with individuals. Many of the teachers were new to her. She had to connect with these teachers new to her research. Ten of them thought it a good idea. She met with each once a week at their school and asked what their questions were. The process of examining one’s own teaching with the freedom to change curriculum or one’s own teaching style was new to these teachers.
2. In 2015, while on sabbatical, Sheelagh will have a longer time.

Noffke speaks of three domains in action research:

1. Personal
2. Professional
3. Political.

She sees this in Botswana. The teachers appear to be going through this sequence in their examination of their teaching: changes to their personal perspectives, looking at their professional roles, with perhaps changes politically to come, so that curriculum can be more locally controlled.

Teachers questioning practices and making changes in their own classrooms is Nontraditional teaching in Botswana.

Sheelagh’s role is:

* as prompter; bring them together if they have like problems. For example, many had difficulty teaching their students to sight read music.
* What have we learned – from the successes … and the mistakes?
* Role as creator of case studies, for other African countries.

Sheelagh senses that changes needed are:

* More Local control of the curriculum and more local music.
* Curriculum more flexible/adaptable to teacher’s day.
* Challenging research models: move past “university-based” and “teacher not the researcher”.
* What do teachers want?
* Now: the music curriculum is too Western and too theoretical.

Question/comments: Fran noted that when she has worked in community development, they used “participatory action research”. Their focus questions were: “what’s going well?” and “what assets do you have?”, and “what would you like to see different?” and “what are the facilitators and barriers to accomplishing this?” This tends to move away from the focus on “what’s not going well?”

**Non-traditional Research Methods – March 25, 2014 – Dr. Fran Racher’s notes**

Thank you for the invitation. I have always coloured outside the lines and my research is no exception. When Kathleen asked me if I would share some of my work today I was not too sure where to start.

I decided to talk a little about 1) the philosophical perspectives that underpin my research 2) how that philosophy has influenced not only the questions I ask but the strategies I use to answer those questions and 3) the non-traditional aspects of my research.

The philosophical perspectives are related to the questions…..

What is nursing knowledge?

Who are the knowers and who are the would be knowers?

What is the relationship between the knowers and would be knowers?

How do and how can we come to know?

At the same time I am wondering what strategies will be 1) most appropriate and effective in answering my research questions and 2) with a particular population of interest, as well as 3) for what purposes, goals or outcomes.

As a result I have undertaken various participatory action strategies including photovoice, and what we called focus circles (a combination of focus groups and sharing circles over time), I have interviewed couples at a time when that approach was considered taboo…..

Story re cross-sectional study with interviews of couples, qualitative health research conference in Edmonton… room full of attendees ready to tell me why I should not use the method of interviewing couples, who once they heard the presentation and saw the evidence from the transcriptions of the couple conversations were more receptive. Colleagues came to see how the conversations and field notes about the nonverbal communications demonstrated aspects of the couple relationship and problem-solving strategies that would not have been apparent if individual interviews have been used. At the end of the session, Dr. Janice Bell editor of Journal of Family Nursing approached me to submit a manuscript on the project to the journal. The article was published as a result.

I have done several studies to better understand the experiences of older couples, in living in a rural community and striving to remain in their own homes, in accessing health care as a couple… The later studies were longitudinal with several meetings with the same couples over time…. For example with 6 couples meeting every 4-6 weeks for several months…..

The most recent study was again phenomenological with a goal of gaining understanding about the experiences of couples in living with Alzheimer’s Disease …. Again longitudinal…. In this study, we recognized a need for declaring research as intervention and sharing what we were knew about managing Alzheimer’s Disease and what we were learning from couples as we continued to meet with them.

We quickly realized that the very conversations were intervention as interviewers built relationships with the couples and gained their trust. Questions arose, when we learned from some couples and then found other couples could benefit from the knowledge we had gathered.

Sometimes the knowledge came from other couples, For example …. Ipad…. One elderly caregiver used the Ipad with family pictures to engage his wife in our conversations… with words like …Look here mother, here is our daughter Alice, you remember this picture of you and her at her last birthday, she is 40 now… The pictures were important cues and were used effectively to orientate and remind the partner with dementia. We were happy to share such information with other couples and document that we had.

Sometimes the knowledge was nursing knowledge that would benefit the couple….Strategies related to eating, managing environmental issues, coping with the activities of daily living…Example… a fried egg on a white plate is not visible compared to a fried egg on a coloured plate…. We documented the problem, the intervention, and the outcome or change. Then we shared our findings with families and caregivers at a workshop provided for them by the Alzheimer Society. The findings were now at several levels for several different audiences….We asked ourselves, who needs to know what we have learned?

We decided that it was unethical not to help, not to share knowledge, not to be of support, or not to inform about resources…. We determined that our research was indeed intervention and we would declare it as such and document carefully information we shared and look to any influence of that information …. We would share information and record the conversation on tape as part of the interview to be transcribed, include perceptions in field notes, and note any knowledge gained through our interventions in the analysis…. We made a decision to intervene when and where needs arose and to document these interventions as part of the study…

Our actions were part of a natural progression of the philosophy we held about knowers, would be knowers and the relationship between them. In nursing in general and in psychiatric nursing in particular the clients have unique problems and situations and we need to find creative ways to come to understand what they have to teach us and to gather information from them in ways that help them to have a voice and us to understand the knowledge they have to share….

After a psychiatric nursing student worked with me on a photovoice project some years ago in Leaf Rapids… some of you may have seen the slide show of the photos…. She turned to me and said I wonder how photovoice could be used to understand what it is like for a person to live with schizophrenia….. for what is more important than the pictures is the story behind the picture or photographer’s interpretation of the picture. The taking of and sharing of the pictures can give a medium for conversation, for sharing, for connecting….

To conclude

My message is “Dare to create a method or adapt a method that will help you to answer your research questions…. A method that will fit for the population and the circumstance that you seek study…..that you seek to understand!” Be prepared to document your work, substantiate your decisions, as well as share the outcomes and your reflection on them. Dare to colour outside the lines. Do it with purpose, as a result of your reflective practice as a researcher and practitioner.

**Discussion:**

Question: “Is action research for any discipline?” It was noted that Sheelagh has used it in Education. Fran has applied it in health care research in communities, in nursing. Both were acknowledging marginalized populations.

Question: Could music education be used for social justice?

It was noted that one a music student for his project has begun a program where music students go into personal care homes and sing to/with the residents. They got one particular gentleman singing, which amazed the caregivers, because he hadn’t spoken in years. In Corey’s research, they ask the nurses to monitor the residents and ask the families to note any changes to behaviours after their music visits.

Comment: One researcher is taking an action research course at University of Calgary

* There have been concerns expressed about application for ethics approval.
* The research grows organically – goals and actions changing as the project proceeds.
* When applying for Ethics Approval, one must give the overall plan and activities but say that the direction may shift.

Question: Do you ask for ethics at different stages? Yes. During survey construction – there may be ethics. Then the research itself will involve ethics. And as the research changes, it will require communication with BUREC to see if still approved. If change, just let them know, can even do in a letter to BUREC, perhaps.

Comment: The ethics part of research has been an issue in some areas. Researchers were feeling that it was getting in the way of research, particularly in research with Aboriginal methodology and populations. This seems to be improving considerably.

* BUREC asks – do you respect “subjects”? Are they at risk? How will you approach subjects? If change plan, BUREC needs to be told.
* Wants researchers to THINK about their method and risks to participants. So they minimize risk potential and prepare for how to help participants if they need it (counseling, etc).

Comment from a researcher in ADES, who does research into community recovery after disasters, which always has high risk for emotional trauma with participants. It IS hard for her to talk to them. She is aware of the difficulty for her and the persons interviewed. She has information on counseling services available. Play the devil’s advocate on your own research – what risk might there be to participants? How do you prepare for helping them?

Question for Sheelagh: What caused the Botswana teachers’ shift?

Response: She was working with a pair of teachers, one who was a former student of hers. She asked what areas in teaching they would like to explore. They wanted to know why students did differently on music sight reading? How could they learn? How could they bridge the gaps? Could it be that it wasn’t the African cultural way to use sheet music to play? What do you observe? They said: “we could ask the students”. This was an amazing shift! Empowerment of the teachers, and the students! They asked Sheelagh to demonstrate a sample lesson.

What now? Following the syllabus is NOT teaching. They developed new ideas of “teaching” and what control they DO have. So … ASK QUESTIONS and let them DISCOVER and be the facilitator … “how could you solve this problem?” Sheelagh tries NOT to offer quick fixes (that don’t work in their context in the long run). She has to work at undermining her own authority. Her education, background, culture is different and even her appearance implies she is the authority. She must work at being on a level with them.

March 27, 2014