

# **Researching with Academic Colleagues: Some Dilemmas**

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## **Focus of workshop/discussion:**

In this workshop I want to explore some of the dilemmas that have arisen when I have undertaken research that implicates academic colleagues in departments. In particular I will draw on two cases: one in which the colleague was a co-researcher and another in which the colleagues were research subjects/participants. I will also explore how the dilemmas I identify are exacerbated when researching from within a critical or post-critical paradigm, rather than an interpretive one. These other paradigms are characterised by a distrustful stance towards the 'truth' of subjective accounts of experience or understanding, such that researcher interpretations of data may be at odds with those of their colleague-subjects. Such dilemmas point to the need for care in setting up research projects, in recruiting subjects, and in dealing with the data analysis phase. While codes of ethics (and research ethics approval processes within institutions) can provide some support in dealing with these dilemmas, the unpredictable trajectory of research means that more may be sometimes required, as I have found. In this session I would like to share ideas about what this 'more' might be.

## **Context and significance of focus:**

Like all university academic advisors, my field of research is higher education and within that field I am interested in researching various aspects of academic practice. I want my research to contribute to a better understanding of academic practice as a cultural construct as well as contributing to imagining – inspiring even – better modes of practice. To achieve my goals I depend on good relationships with my academic colleagues in departments as potential research subjects. Doing research that balances my commitment to a critical stance in relation to academic practice alongside my commitment to respecting my research participants – and maintaining working relationships with them beyond the research – is challenging. Other writers (eg Clegg 2005) are grappling with these sorts of dilemmas too, although from the slightly different angle of the implications of acquiring 'guilty knowledge'.

## **Outline of process:**

This workshop will have a structured but conversational style. I will begin by describing two experiences of researching with academic colleagues within a post-critical research paradigm. I will give a preliminary analysis of the issues that arose and I will connect my reflections to themes in the existing literature. Then I will invite those who are attending to share stories of their experience and to engage critically with the themes I have identified. Some of the questions we will explore are: what are the limits of researching on/with colleagues? What boundaries need to be maintained in order to protect the ongoing working relationship? A possible outcome of this workshop will be a sole or joint-authored Research Note to be submitted to IJAD.

**References:**

Clegg, Sue. 'Criticality and Ethical Practice in Institutional Research'. Paper presented at the HERDSA Conference, *Higher Education in a Changing World*, Sydney, July 03-06, 2005.