

4 Jackie Transcript Summary

0.06 Would you like to tell me a little bit about your professional background?

Jackie qualified as a social worker and worked in probation before qualifying as a teacher. There were not many jobs as she qualified as a primary school teacher so through a vacancies pool she ended up teaching at a secondary school. It was as a teacher attended the workshops at the university and got that she was involved in a research project which eventually led to the offer of a studentship for an MPhil. She says she was ignorant and didn't realise that there were such things as secondments so she left her job to do a full-time 2 year MPhil. Neither of her supervisors had doctorates, and her female supervisor, who became a friend says that she still feels guilty that she did not advise Jackie to upgrade; she herself knew so little about the system.

She went back to teaching and the probation service while her children were pre-school. Once they were at school, she got a full-time research job and that was became the next 20 plus years.

04.08 Was research just one of a number of things you could have done?

She didn't want to teach or stay in the probation service. She had loved it but you had to rotate posts and too much had changed for her to contemplate becoming a field officer again. A friend alerted her to the research post and she had loved doing the MPhil so much so went for it and didn't look back. Although it was a bumpy ride, always being on fixed or short-term contracts.

Recording restarted 1.14 Do you want to say just a little bit about that? The bumpiness of your career?

The longest contract was 2 years and the shortest a month. So, you are constantly thinking about finding the next before you've finished. The sense of insecurity is psychologically taxing. Having a young family tied her geographically. Constantly working on new projects meant new teams, new bosses and new institutions. Field work involved a lot of travel, and in the days before SatNav you had to just find places.

Finally, there was a policy change where we both worked and she was made permanent, but there was a get-out clause that the researcher had to bring in money, so she left after four years for her first every permanent research post, but the downside is that you work on whatever project comes in, and you never get first author on anything. The culture and organisation of research is challenging for researchers in a way that different to lecturing staff; they've got different challenges. Jackie describes her experience as 'particular' and now uncommon.

The problem with that model is that potentially hugely exploitative and despite the mass of experience, there is no repository. The methodology is less important to report on than the findings for the funders. She has written a paper on this, *Research Identities*.

10.18 (2 Type) What kind of researcher are you?

A sociologist and always qualitative, often funded as social policy and often education and higher education focused. Jackie says they mostly had an applied focus but when she was writing single-authored papers they were more theoretical, with a gender component.

12.00 (7,8 Teaching) I want to touch on qualitative teaching that you may or may not have done.

A short appointment as SL where she was appointed for her expertise as a researcher with RAE-able outputs didn't last as the University didn't enter the RAE and she never taught any research methods.

14.05 (23 You changed) I just wondered about your own sense of how your identity has changed since you first started research.

Jackie's background in probation meant she had good transferable skills, especially around talk and being able to listening and develop rapport quickly, but she was conscious of role boundaries. Researchers encourage people to open up but don't have to pick up the pieces. Also there was no training. She learned as she went along from methods books and from practice; operationalising research questions.

She mentions that sensitive topics leap out and ambush you even when the topic is not labelled as sensitive.

18.12 (4 First qual)

Her first project was exploring teacher-parent relationships. Working out whether they were interested in learning or schooling was just one question that affected the research design. Questions affect design, affect data, affect analysis. The research became about recognising that learning takes place in home and school; with the premise being that regardless of parental background, parental involvement enhances learning.

21.51 (5 Learnt) I comment that although it was a long time ago, the memory seems quite vivid.

Jackie has worked on a lot of styles of project (participatory, ethnography, live interaction) but interviews in particular are intimate, and unusual for the participant. She carries certain interviewees with her, still. And in passing locations she can conjure up the people, and the living room.

24.38 (27 Advice) I wondered if you had any advice for students, or advice that you would have given your younger self, when you were a social worker, about going into people's homes.

Jackie was always conscious that research interviewees were giving her something and being generous. Even if there is an incentive payment it does not match the scale of the gift. It is a privilege to be invited into someone's home to suck it all in. She thinks that all interviewing is a kind of ethnography as you are collecting data from the moment you make contact, even if it doesn't often find its way into the research report.

One needs to be polite, but she has never found it intimidating. It's worth reminding anyone who may find it so that they are probably more nervous of you, a stranger in their home, than you are.

The greater challenge for new researchers, on top of being polite, is managing the interview guide, the time and being as naturalistic and conversational as possible, especially when solo. She says it's perfectly acceptable to ask to pause so you can look over the guide, or compose yourself.

She also advises to take notes even if you have a recording, because people take off in all directions and you may want to come back to something.

31:33 (22 Things changed, Researching) I refer to a note I made about her saying that all the information is data. I wondered about the status of different types of data, and how you handled it, and where you put it, and has that changed over the years?

It would not have had status in the past, but now we recognise that experience is situated and contextual and we need to pay a bit more attention to context. But it's still hard for policy makers to take the learning and translate into policy. She gives an example from a project on problematic debt, where the partner-dynamic sabotaged efforts to get out of debt. It was nothing to do with the original research intention, which had focused on individuals getting out of debt. During fieldwork, partners wanted to participate and it was through that those things emerged that otherwise would not have. She doesn't know how the policy makers dealt with that finding, but that was not her role. Perhaps they thought it was irrelevant, but there is a shift towards valuing personal experience more. She was teased even as an MPhil student that qualitative research is journalism.

39:30 (27 Advice, Research) Going back to that- the debt project, I want to illuminate for newer researchers that you're there with one kind of particular purpose- And you have this growing awareness that there's something happening in front of you which could be really quite significant. What do you do with that data? For the student who's never done it before. Are you writing it down? Are you going back and making notes later? Is it through the analytic process that you're getting marginal notes that then start to become a fuller part of the analysis? Can you remember?

Her notes were a back-up in case of technological failure as well as a prompt, but anything fascinating and potentially significant was also explored and expanded in in the interview. That's one of the major strengths of qualitative research. The exploratory nature of qualitative research can be problematic for potential funders to evaluate. You know you're going to get outputs, you just don't know what they'll be. Good PIs appreciate it when you can come back to them with something interesting that has emerged.

Jackie challenges my use of the term analytic phase. She simultaneously conducts analysis and asks questions, and gives examples of analytic questions. There's a lot of emphasis in text books on the data gathering and far less on analysis.

45:45 22 (Things changed) I was keen to introduce that notion of the analysis. Where it happens, and what are you doing when you are analysing?

Jackie claims to have made it up as she went along in the early days. The Grounded Theory became popular, followed by thematic analysis, and longitudinal qualitative, and they're all great. Then Nudist came along and wonderful software packages that can now do framework analysis. She feels thankful that most of her data-sets were small enough to handle manually, but she still had massive charts and post-its over every wall. She says she never conquered software packages and thinks that

people only use them as data organisers as that's what they really are. The researcher must interpret the findings.

48.43 (28 Voice) I wanted to ask you if there was anything in particular that you wanted to say or have heard through this piece of work?

She loves qualitative research and finds it endlessly fascinating.

50.04 27 Advice

Jackie urges younger researchers and her young self to resist the pressure in some quarters to talk about big numbers and to adopt quasi-quantitative paradigms. She specifically mentions a presentation on qualitative health research to medics who wanted to know why they hadn't done a RCT.

A small n is seen as acceptable for doctorate.

54.25 (25 Process favourite) What's your favourite thing about qualitative research?

Her first is the interaction in the interview, but she also loves the writing and shaping something into a story to make it accessible.