

## **Chapter 6:**

### **Arriving at a Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss the epistemological and ontological foundations on which the research was constructed. My aim is to provide an understanding of the forms of knowledge and belief that underpin this study. I explain my approach to interpreting the claims made by participants with regard to their knowledge and beliefs about their own experiences and about those of others. I examine how these claims interact within the Stoneleigh Project and beyond. I describe how this influenced my choice of an ethnography from a critical perspective as my research methodology.

#### **Finding a Philosophical Position**

Nicol (2003) states that it is essential for researchers working in the field of education to be clear about their philosophical position before embarking on their research designs. He argues that the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher is not always apparent and that this can lead to the choice of methodology being incongruent with the questions being asked. It can also make the interpretation of the data confusing for the writer and even more so for the reader.

This, Nicol believes, is especially important in the field of outdoor education as the ontological and epistemological positions of the 'subjects' of research are often incongruent. There is a rhetoric to practice gap also recognised by Barrett and Greenaway (1995) and Rickinson, Dillon, Teamey, Morris, Choi, Sanders and Benefield (2004). These authors are commenting on the number of claims made by outdoor education practitioners that are not substantiated or are actually refuted by research. I have already suggested in Chapter 3 that this may be, in part, because researchers may have been looking in the wrong place or in the wrong way.

A clear research position will illuminate the places where this research is looking and the ways that it goes about doing this. These epistemological and ontological foundations on which I have constructed my questions, chosen my method, and interpreted the evidence, will help the reader judge what this research is good for and what it is not.

Allison (2000) reviews the ontological and epistemological choices that he thinks are relevant to studies of outdoor education from a sociological perspective. He highlights four epistemological positions based on Guba and Lincoln (1994) in order to provide a language with which to discuss epistemological and ontological questions. These are positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism. This he interprets as a continuum from knowing things to understanding experience. Whilst this continuum roughly describes a historical trend it also represents a diversification of approaches. All positions are actively pursued in social science research and researchers will claim each has relevance in different contexts or even to different questions in the same context.

Rickinson *et al.* (2004), in arguing for more interpretative and critical research, state that much of the academic writing in the outdoor education field has, until recently, been inductive. It built theory through thinking about the field rather than developing theory from empirical evidence. This often consists of theory thoughtfully adopted from other disciplines and professions. Some of it is specific to the field and based on reasoned debate. Rickinson *et al.* claim this has enhanced the gap between the rhetoric about the field and the actual practice in the field. They believe that important actions in the field are left undescribed and therefore unvalued whilst others are interpreted by models that are less than a good fit and come attached with meanings and values inappropriate to outdoor education practice.

Whilst Barrett and Greenaway (1995) were in favour of what they called empirical, qualitative, approaches being applied to research in outdoor education they were not supportive of case study approaches expressing concern that they could not readily be generalised. Rickinson *et al.* (2004) on the other hand, felt that, in order to learn more about how and why programmes work or not, more case studies would be of value. They suggest that this approach would address a number of the concerns they appear to share

with Barrett and Greenaway (1995) about previous work. Specifically they claim it could provide:

... clearer and more fine grained descriptions of participants; greater investigation into the complexity of impacts, including the differences within (as opposed to between) groups of students...

(p. 56).

However, they do recognise the dangers of ‘broad generalisations being made from small samples’ and ‘too much description without critical analysis’ (p. 56).

The founders of the Stoneleigh Project were aware of what they perceived as a research bias and as a reaction to it the Stoneleigh Group wanted a study that set out to build an understanding of its practice collaboratively from experience. In part the Stoneleigh Project was seen by some of its members as a critique of the theories built by inductive and other approaches and applied to other outdoor education projects.

However it was also hoped that the understanding constructed from the Stoneleigh Project might provide more than petite generalisations (Stake, 1995), that is generalisations relevant to the developments of the Stoneleigh Project and projects like it. The partners were inclined to suggest grand generalisations to the wider fields of youth work and outdoor education. They also intended to publish the work in the hope that readers would make naturalistic generalisations for themselves; that is generalisations perceived by the reader and not anticipated by the author. Whilst it might be possible to make ‘grand generalisations’ about the value of this approach to understanding outdoor education projects my intention was to develop an understanding of the Stoneleigh Project itself. The process of the Stoneleigh Group developing a narrative of the Stoneleigh Project in order to disseminate and influence the wider field of youth work became a part of the Stoneleigh Group’s work that I studied for the purposes of this research.

This call for research into the processes of outdoor education using alternative research methods suited to the questions being asked can be traced back to Warner (1984) and is picked up again by Humberstone (1987) and Ewert (1987). Humberstone, Brown and Richards (2003), introducing the report of what was arguably the first UK research conference for outdoor adventure, also endorse the value of new research approaches. They highlight the importance ‘... of interpretative hermeneutic research to developing greater understanding of the processes of learning where the outdoors and/or adventure are the major media for education.’ (p. 10).

For this thesis recent doctoral research in the field of outdoor education was reviewed and found similar views. Boyle (2002) in his methodology chapter for a thesis exploring children’s experiences of a school based outdoor education programme, quotes Henderson’s remark concerning recent research in Experiential Education.

Henderson ... observed that “the positivist paradigm has not always been as useful in helping to understand human behaviour”. This is especially the case when the goal of the research project is to discover, understand or communicate about people and their experiences during an intervention.

Later Greenaway (1995), who researched outdoor management development but in this instance is writing about research into outdoor experiential education generally, reports on the field’s stated need for process based research and on researchers’ comments on the limited value or inconclusive nature of their own outcome-based findings. Donnison (2000), researching outdoor management development (OMD), comments

Most researchers in the field of OMD appear to have adopted an objective, rather than subjective, stance towards the design of their studies of OMD. My impression is that this is driven by a need to answer the question ‘Does it work’ encouraged by a desire to ‘get at the truth’ and a need to provide hard, ‘objective’ facts.

Gray (1999) explored the different epistemological values of what she labelled quantitative and qualitative methods as approaches for increasing understanding of an outdoor education programme run for students from a secondary school. She is candid in describing her expectation that, coming from a sports science background, the quantitative data would be of most value. Her conclusion was that it was at best inconclusive and gave a shallow picture of events whereas the qualitative data was rich and informative. Greenaway (1995) also commented on the richness of his data and how, even using ongoing techniques to refine and narrow his line of inquiry, the possibilities kept running away with him. This he describes as both exciting and daunting. Donnison (2000), commenting on what he also terms qualitative approaches, suggests that

This approach is more likely to uncover the subjective experiences of participants involved in OMD and discover their perceptions of an OMD course and its effects. It is also more likely to focus on the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences as participants on an OMD course, and to assume that OMD has different effects, at different times, on different individuals.

Locating research into outdoor experiential education in the wider field of educational research Donnison adds:

This has parallels with the approach towards educational research introduced by Parlett and Hamilton (1972). They argued that the experimental methodologies adopted by the physical sciences were inappropriate to the study of human behaviour. Research designs which ‘incorporated a belief that students react to contrasting educational treatments as consistently as plants react to fertilisers’ were criticised (Marton, 1984). This was accompanied by the suggestion that the procedures used by social anthropologists, who observe and question people to build up a detailed understanding of their customs and beliefs, were more appropriate to research that seeks to understand educational situations from within.

The emphasis on objective approaches and the call for more interpretative studies applies not only to the experiential education field but also to education in general.

Hayllar (2000), researching OMD, comments that:

...they (quantitative studies) appear to lack the sensitivity to aid our understanding of the nature, quality or processes engaged within an experience. Their rigidity does not match the fluidity of personal experience. Given these limitations and others previously outlined, an emergent qualitative design was adopted for this inquiry.

(p. 127)

Like Hayllar, I was interested in developing my understanding of phenomena based on evidence and in an emergent design yet his use of the term 'qualitative' was an insufficient definition of my approach. However, Hayllar expands on his notion of 'qualitative design' by quoting Denzin and Lincoln (1998)

The multiple methodologies of qualitative research may be viewed as a bricolage, and the researcher as bricoleur...The bricoleur produces a bricolage, that is, a pieced together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation. 'The solution (bricolage) which is the result of the bricoleur's method is an emergent construction' (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1991) that takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques are added to the puzzle....The choice of which tools to use, which research practices to employ is not set in advance.

(p. 2)

Greenaway (1995) and Donnison (2000) use the term 'naturalistic' to describe their general research position. It soon became clear that naturalism was problematic. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) put it

Doubts have been raised about the capacity of ethnography to portray the social world in the way that naturalism claims it does. Equally, the commitment of the older kinds of ethnography to some sort of value neutrality has been questioned....

(p. 11)

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) describe how early ethnographers responded to the shift from a positivist to a subjective paradigm with an approach called naturalism. This replaced experiment and statistical analysis with a different approach also based on an originally scientific method that underpinned natural history. This was the observation of the world in its natural setting over a period of time. Hammersley and Atkinson point out that early practitioners of naturalism still believed, like positivists, that their observations were neutral and that ethnography has diversified considerably from these early qualitative approaches.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) define the epistemological position of constructivism as 'transactional/subjectivist; created findings. Findings are read as significant when individuals' accounts of their reality converge'.

This definition did not describe completely how I thought I understood the participants' knowledge of their experiences, conversations, and actions. I did understand peoples' accounts of their experiences as interpretations and not as realities. However, as well as being interested in the social construction of meaning, I also considered the personal interpretations of experiences by each individual participant as relevant. It was the relationship between experiential knowledge and socially constructed knowledge that was the focus of one of my questions. Although I appreciated that any interpretation takes place in the context of language and culture I thought that it would be helpful to consider accounts of experience arrived at individually as well as those negotiated by the individual with others. I wanted to pay attention to the distinction between the phenomenology of the experience and the hermeneutics. I thought this might be present in the accounts of the participants. I was also interested in the various ways knowledge about an event might be expressed and for what purposes it was expressed in a certain way. I thought it might be possible to consider the ways in which power and control worked in the development of

the participant's voice and narrative. Perhaps because of my interest in the process of experiential learning and the construction of meaning I was taking a more critical look at the nature and context of interpretation.

The challenge was to find a philosophical position that accepts the constructivist view of the way social knowledge is developed whilst at the same time accepting other viewpoints that would enable me to consider the personal knowledge of the participants in the research. This would allow me to work with the participants in this research in the construction of a rationale for the Stoneleigh Project. At the same time it would allow me to look critically at how experiential knowledge was facilitated and meaning developed as part of the pedagogic process. It would also be possible to set this in its wider context of informal education, youth and society.

### **The Contribution of Narrative**

The plurality of views was a central ethical conviction of the facilitators as well. For them it was important that individual voices were respected and not lost in the collective understanding of events. Rather, the collective exploration of the meaning of experiences would help to give voice to individual interpretations and that respect for these individual accounts was part of the process of development being fostered by the Stoneleigh Group. As their intention was to use experiences and conversations to influence the personal construction of meaning and for this to affect individual's narratives and trajectories I considered how a narrative position might inform the study.

Reissman (1993) explores the representation of experience in narrative forms. She states

Investigators do not have access to another's experience. We deal with ambiguous representations of it ... It is not possible to be neutral and objective, to merely represent (as opposed to interpret) the world.

(p. 8)

For Reissman experience is interpreted at least five times in the research process. Her first stage of interpretation, 'The Representation of Experience', compared with my own thoughts about the first steps in an experiential learning process.

If we adopt the starting point of phenomenology and the lived world of immediate everyday experience, the world of this inhabited beach is “ ‘already there’ before reflection begins – as an inalienable presence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1989). Walking at dawn, I encounter it at a prelinguistic realm of experience – images, plays of colors and lights, noises, and fleeting sensations – in the stream of consciousness. I am one with the world and make no distinction at this point between my bodily perceptions and the objects I am conscious of that comprise the beach. Like all social actors, I experience this world from the ‘natural attitude’ taking it for granted, not thinking about and analysing it (Husserl, 1973; Schutz, 1967).

(p. 9)

This placed my own philosophical position with regard to the experiential aspects of the Stoneleigh Project close to that of phenomenology. Going on to describe the second stage, 'Attending to Experience', she continues

Then I attend to and make discrete certain features in the stream of consciousness – reflecting, remembering, recollecting them into observations..... By attending I make certain phenomena meaningful....

(p. 9)

Reissman's third stage, 'Telling about Experience', acknowledges the interpretation that results from describing an experience to others. 'By talking and listening, we produce a narrative together' (p. 11). She describes her views on the relationship between experience and narrative by quoting Merleau-Ponty (1989).

Our linguistic ability enables us to descend into the realm of our primary perceptual and emotional experience, to find there a reality susceptible to verbal understanding, and to bring forth a meaningful interpretation of this primary level of our existence.... By finding meaning in experience and then expressing this meaning in words, the speaker enables the community to think about experience and not just live it (Polkinghorne, 1988).

(p. 11)

Although this described the character of some of the interpretations I listened to, it felt idealistic to believe this was always the form a narrative took. It did not address concerns I was developing about other narratives, such as rhetorics, which had a purpose other than thinking about an experience. Reissman acknowledges that 'In telling about an experience, I am also creating a self – how I want to be known... My narrative is inevitably a self-representation.' (Reissman, 1993). However, Bernstein (1971) would argue that narratives are also an expression of how others want to know a person. Language also gives the participants and others the facility to provide meanings or attempt to define the experience of others in their terms. This approach also ignores the historical effects of family, school, work place, and community that also provide understandings of experiences and of selves. As one of the central concepts of the Stoneleigh Group was that the programme, and the retreat especially, provided opportunities to transcend these understandings it would be important to adopt an approach that would enable me to recognise these distinctions if they were present.

Manson (2002) addresses the question of different forms of narrative in her study. She accompanied the participant she was researching over a sustained period of time in her normal life at school. She describes how the girl she studied would move from one style of narrative to another. As examples she describes deciding when the subject was speaking for her, the researcher's, benefit, using the researcher's presence for her own benefit, or sometimes seeming to disregard her presence. She concluded that she could usefully discriminate between these styles. She also concluded that, rather than giving one a higher value of meaning over another, each had a value in its own context and should be considered within that context. Further, that her presence, whilst creating an unusual

dynamic in the girl's world, also created a different opportunity to collect data and that this data should not be discounted simply because it arose from interactions with the observer. What mattered was that Manson could ascribe to the data a certain kind of understanding that was attached to the context in which it was generated.

### **Reflexivity**

Reissman's (1993) fourth and fifth stages are 'Transcribing', the process of the researcher describing what they have heard, and 'Reading', the interpretation of the reader of the research. Like Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) she acknowledges the lack of 'value neutrality' in the researcher and the reader.

Hammersley and Atkinson suggest that, for this to be possible with some rigour it requires a reflexive position on the part of the researcher. Reflexivity acknowledges that 'social researchers are part of the social world they study' and that they are aware of and make explicit 'the particular biography of the researcher', understand 'that the production of knowledge by researchers has consequences' and that 'the consequences of research (are not) neutral or necessarily desirable' (p. 16-17). With these understandings in place they claim it is possible to progress whilst accepting the essentially interpretative nature of ethnography.

### **An Ethnographic Approach**

Brewer (2000) defines ethnography, or more accurately, 'little ethnography' (p. 10), by which he means 'field research' (p. 10), as

...the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also in the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally.

(p. 10)

In order to address the questions developed for this research, and to do so in such a way as would further the understanding of the experience, an approach that would involve me in participant observation of the Stoneleigh Group and its interactions with the wider community of youth and youth work was attractive. The ‘naturally occurring settings’ would be the developing, providing, evaluating, and disseminating of a youth work project. The ‘field’ could include the meetings, forums, conferences, work and volunteer settings, retreats, and everyday lives of all the participants. I could observe this ‘field’ as it interacted with others. I could participate as evaluator as well as holding a research role. I could influence the Stoneleigh Project whilst in these roles. I could take an interpretative approach to the evidence that I could gather in a ‘bricolage’ of methods both planned and spontaneous.

One aspect of an ethnographic inquiry into experiential learning that I noticed was what I took to be a similarity of approach to be found between an ethnographic approach to research and some approaches to personal development including the approach of the Stoneleigh Group. I imagined the task of the adults in the Stoneleigh Project as helping the young people to become inquirers into the meaning of their own experiences. The intentions claimed for outdoor experiential learning are to help young people build identity and social relations. In the Stoneleigh Project the intention was to do this in a way that fostered a critical awareness of themselves and the social worlds in which they lived. At the same time it was also the intention that the youth workers could be supported in developing a critical understanding of their practice. In the light of the concerns recounted above about a lack of congruence between the research questions being asked and the methods of asking them this apparent congruence could be understood as beneficial. Greenaway (1995) comments that he came to a similar view:

My subject, ‘development training’, and ‘soft research’ seemed to share the same paradigm. It seemed, for example, that many phrases in ‘The New Paradigm Research Manifesto’ (Reason and Rowan, 1981) could be readily applied to development training:

We know that people have the capacity for self-awareness and for autonomous self-directed action within their world, that they may develop the power to change their world. The whole thrust ... is to produce the kind of active knowing which will preserve and enhance this capacity and this power. Thus the knowing acquired ... is helpful to the flourishing of people and to the politics of self-determination.

We see human inquiry not only as a systematic coming-to-know process but also as learning through risk-taking in living...

... we seek knowledge which can be used in living, and regard knowledge separated from action as in need of special justification.

The extent of the connections between the philosophy and practice of development training and that of New Paradigm Research initially led me to believe that New Paradigm Research would automatically provide the most suitable methodology.

(p. 3)

I then considered approaches to conducting the research and evaluation that could build on this congruence.

### **Entering the Field Co-operatively and Critically**

Reason (1994) worked closely with John Heron in developing the methodology he called co-operative inquiry. It is not surprising that the forms of knowledge he recognises as centrally important in this kind of research parallel the phases of Heron's (1999) model of manifold learning, a model of experiential learning based on relational principles. In this model Heron recognises four ways of working with knowledge as a learner. The first he calls 'experiential learning' and involves the sensual, non-conscious, embodied sense-making of an event. Next Heron claims the mind seeks to interpret the event in what he calls 'imaginal learning'. Third is 'conceptual learning' in which Heron believes language is used internally and externally to define the event's meaning. This is the first stage at

which a constructivist approach is relevant as the meaning of an event in the present moment is negotiated with past understandings held in mind and with the current emerging understandings held by others present. Lastly, Heron believes there is ‘applied learning’ in which action and intention are involved and which may also be an expression of a constructed outcome.

These four forms of knowledge Reason and Heron (1999) call an extended epistemology:

Co-operative inquiry involves at least four different kinds of ways of knowing. We call this an “extended epistemology”-*epistemology* meaning a theory of how you know, and *extended* because it reaches beyond the primarily theoretical knowledge of academia. Experiential knowing is through direct face-to-face encounter with person, place or thing; it is knowing through empathy and resonance, and is almost impossible to put into words. Presentational knowing emerges from experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expression by drawing on expressive forms of imagery through story, drawing, sculpture, movement, dance and so on. Propositional knowing “about” something, is knowing through ideas and theories, expressed in informative statements. Practical knowing is knowing “how to” do something and is expressed in a skill, knack or competence.

By using a co-operative inquiry approach for the evaluation work (also described in this thesis as a participative inquiry as this was the phrase adopted by the participants) I had established a way of working that was exploring knowledge forms in a way that was sensitive to my interests in personal and social knowledge and their interplay. At the same time the approach seeks to value all voices at the same time as exploring collective understandings. This suited my interest in exploring the different positions held by individuals and groups concerning their knowledge. It also worked well from an ethical standpoint enabling the voices of the co-researchers/participants to remain congruent and so supporting the pedagogic as well as the research purposes.

Co-operative inquiry was attractive as a method for data collection for several other reasons. It draws on the work of Heron (1992) and his psycho-spiritual model of the self; a model I came to view as congruent with the values of some of the participants, especially the facilitators, of the Stoneleigh Project. I thought this congruence might add to the weight of the data collected. Reason's approach recognises the engagement of the researcher in the subject of the research and allows for an overtly active participation in the inquiry. It encourages all the participants to become their own researchers into their experiences, an approach the participants in the Stoneleigh Project thought to be sympathetic with their approach to learning and suited to the kind of data they wished to collect. This approach also recognised that the outcome of the research should have value to the participants as well as the researchers, one criterion that Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) recommends as a measure of academic rigour for ethnographic inquiry. In addition it allowed for an involvement with the social consequences of the research as discussed above.

However, I found that it did have problems for some of the questions I wished to ask. It adopts what Reason (1994) calls an appreciative position. Once the researcher has interpreted, fed back, and confirmed the understanding of the data, it is accepted unconditionally as having the meaning the participants place upon their research findings. This would not allow for a critical position in relation to my interpretations of the data in a wider context. In order to develop my understanding of the Stoneleigh Group and how it is situated as a social phenomenon I found that I needed to do just that.

### **Criticality**

Richards, Peel, Smith and Owen (2001), in their study of adventure therapy and eating disorders, discuss how they take a critical feminist position. They say

The basic aims of feminist research are to place the social construction of gender central to its agenda and to ensure that patterns of discrimination are challenged throughout all stages of research.

(p. 15)

In their view

The research process should not reproduce the oppression of women. Instead the empowerment of all women ... should become the focus of the research process. This requires the researcher to remain critical of the consequences of research upon women's lives. ... Research needs to ensure, therefore, that social change is facilitated ...

(p. 15–16)

Richards *et al.* were working directly with women with eating disorders and so a feminist position seemed to them to be entirely appropriate to their methodology. For my study I found the critical aspect of their approach of relevance to my methodology. Their approach made me aware that I needed to explore the consequences of the actions of my research on whatever and whoever lay at the centre of my study. However, I was unsure whether this exploration would necessarily conclude that my purpose should always be to empower the focus of my study through the research process in the sense of this feminist position. I needed a broader concept of a critical approach.

The Stoneleigh Group set out to support young people in their transition from youth to adult in the context of their social and working lives. They held an intention to encourage these young people to be agents of change in their own and other people's lives. A critical position would allow me to consider the social context in which the young people, the Stoneleigh Group partners, and the Stoneleigh Project were embedded. Issues of power and control in the development of the meaning of the experiences could be explored in a way that respected the meanings offered by the participants but interpreted them in a wider context. It would also allow me to respect understandings that participants felt were empowering for them whilst holding a critical view that they might actually be the opposite.

## **A Grounded Approach**

The discipline of the consultancy put me in the field early in the life of the research. This was a great help. Up until that moment my thinking was rich in imagining and theorising about what might be found. Once in the field the context of the Stoneleigh Project took over and ideas and questions began to emerge from the ground. Glaser and Strauss (1967) first described this approach calling it grounded theory. They advocated jumping in to the field of inquiry without a theoretical approach already formed. They thought that, as the data suggested lines of inquiry and areas of concern, that theory could either be developed from this empirical source or identified from elsewhere, as in my case.

As outlined in Chapter 8 I utilise the theories made available by Bernstein (1996) and Joas (2000). These theoretical frameworks provide a structure with which to develop a critical reflection of the case study as an example of power and control working within an informal outdoor education project. This provided the means by which I could answer my questions about the actual rather than stated purposes of the Stoneleigh Group and its partners and consider the outcomes of the Stoneleigh Project for the young people and how they were achieved.

## **Adopting Critical, Interpretative, Hermeneutic and Ethnographic Approaches to the Case Study**

Whilst other qualitative methodologies less demanding on resources and emphasising questionnaire and interview techniques would have identified some characteristics of the programme and certain details of the trajectories of the young people, the knowledge this would have provided would not have allowed the depth of analysis necessary to critique effectively the pedagogic practices or the trajectories of the young people in the context of larger social and cultural contexts. Nor would it have identified the pedagogic struggle within and beyond the Stoneleigh Group. An action research approach, whilst appealing for the potential practical benefits it could offer to the Stoneleigh Group and its partners, would have duplicated much of the work of the evaluative study and would not have enabled me to approach the more critical questions that concerned me. Likewise, a purely co-operative inquiry approach, whilst addressing my ethical concerns to represent the

voices of all participants in this research, would mean that the questions concerning power and knowledge could only be illuminated but not addressed analytically in a wider context.

I was interested in the politics of the construction of meaning and identity within the Stoneleigh Project and the construction of the pedagogic and curriculum practices of its organisers and partners. The advice of methodology specialists, commentators on outdoor education research, and post-graduate researchers was to adopt a methodology that was congruent with the questions I wanted to explore. Further, they all encouraged an inquiry that would seek to understand the events from the point of view of each individual participant and encouraged an interpretative approach to achieve this. I decided to operate as an active participant observer throughout the life of the Stoneleigh Project. I was fortunate in that such an ethnographic approach sat well with the organisers of the Stoneleigh Project and would also allow me to evaluate it for them as well as conduct my own research.

I decided to combine a co-operative inquiry methodology to enhance the congruence between the research approach and the educational process as well as to optimise the potential for gathering evidence from as many people and events as possible. I was able to combine this, for the purposes of this research, with a critical approach to the pedagogic processes and curriculum content. This enabled me to explore the issues of power and control within the wider context of the lives of the young people and the work of the voluntary organisations.

In the development of the methodology of my study my research position has emerged. I have moved into an ethnographic research paradigm in order to explore the areas of interest as they have developed. The study of the social world on which I have focussed is well suited to a constructivist ontology and epistemology that understands each step in the making of meaning as an interpretation and each different meaning that emerges to be of value. This has worked best as it has been applied to the co-operative inquiries of the case study. The implications of this field data to the wider questions I have concerning outdoor education and youth work have benefited from a critical stance. As a consequence of a collaborative relationship with the case studies and a critical stance in relation to the wider

applications to outdoor education and youth work my engagement has been beyond description and interpretation and has entered the realm of action and advocacy.