TEN Qualitative Research Dilemmas and What to Do About Them

Gary Barkhuizen, University of Auckland, New Zealand

In this article I present TEN research dilemmas[1] that I have experienced in my life as a qualitative and narrative researcher. I have always been a qualitative researcher, not only because I am interested in exploring in depth the experiences of people's lives and the meaning they make of those experiences, but also because I have a personal affinity with the aims and methods associated with qualitative research, many of which have been discussed and illustrated in the articles in this issue.

Very simply, a dilemma is a situation when a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives. In research, dilemmas never go away—they emerge every time I am engaged in a new project. I see them also in the research of my colleagues and the graduate students I supervise. And I see them in the many articles I review for research journals; sometimes they are presented as dilemmas and the researcher explains how they were resolved during the research process, or at least an explanation is given as to why they were not, but sometimes they are swept under the carpet and not addressed at all.

The dilemmas I address in this article are those encountered during the planning stages of the study and also once the research activity gets underway, right up to the time of reporting and disseminating the research findings. I am listing only ten dilemmas here, those that have been most salient in my research life. There are many others, of course, and any particular researcher could compile their own list of ten based on their personal research experience.

It is perhaps worth noting that even before the planning of a research project begins there are two important questions that a researcher would need to consider. These questions may themselves present dilemmas for some researchers, but I have not included them in my TEN since in most cases they no longer apply to my work. First, is a qualitative research approach the most appropriate for answering the research question? To answer this, you would need to have a good idea about the aims and scope of the study, what its purpose is, and what is achievable with the time and resources available. Second, is a qualitative research approach the most suitable for you as a researcher? In other words, is it compatible with your research skills and your interests in the way research is or should be done; does it fit with how you see yourself and how you feel as a researcher? I find this second question to be hugely important. From my experience and observations there is nothing worse than being stuck in a project where you feel out of place and thus uninterested and unmotivated.

In what follows, for each of the ten dilemmas, I first describe what the dilemma is. I then provide examples from my own research to exemplify the dilemma, and finally, I suggest ways in which the dilemma can be resolved in the process of conducting qualitative and narrative research.

#1. Choosing a Topic: Passion or Need?

The first dilemma is one we all face as researchers, no matter what our research methodology. It has to do with choosing a research topic. I am currently in the process of editing a book called *Qualitative research topics in language teacher educator* (Barkhuizen, forthcoming, 2019) that includes nearly 40 chapters written by experienced researchers who suggest ways in which qualitative researchers could go about selecting their topics. Almost without exception they say that following one's interest and passion is paramount—doing so will keep the researcher interested and focused and will ensure that research activity is sustained and the project is completed. I would add that enjoying the research process makes for good quality research and a successful study. But sometimes focusing only on what interests you might be ignoring or neglecting other topics that really need to be researched. For example, if a new curriculum is being considered for a region or a new assessment regime or language policy is being implemented in a school or community, there is an obvious need for these processes to be investigated. Often researchers, then, are torn between wanting to work on topics in areas that inspire and motivate them and feeling obligated to fill some research "gap" or need in their community, or more broadly within the discipline.

I was lucky enough during my doctoral research (Barkhuizen, 1988) to be truly excited about my research topic—an ethnographic investigation of the first six weeks of the life (and career) of a high school ESL teacher in New York City. I observed numerous lessons in her classroom during that period and interviewed her after each lesson. I focused particularly on the classroom interaction in which she was involved. The aim was to discover interactional patterns in her practice that might be associated with being a first-year English teacher. I will refer more to this study below, but the point I am making here is that I was quite passionate about the topic; consulting a wide range of literature (with enthusiasm), analyzing the data with anticipation, and even enjoying the dissertation writing process.

Later in my career I was living in South Africa during the time apartheid was being dismantled. Many institutions were becoming racially integrated, and therefore multilingual, including schools, universities, and the workplace in many sectors. This situation was therefore ripe for linguistic investigation, and there was an urgent need to understand what was happening in these institutions to inform policy decisions as well as communicative practices within them. One of my studies during that time (Barkhuizen, 1998a) investigated the perceptions of high school ESL students of the classroom activities they engaged in. There was a quantitative dimension to the study (a survey) but it also included focus group discussions with students, interviews with teachers, and classroom observations. I also taught in the school for three weeks while one of the regular teachers was on leave. Now, I enjoyed doing the study, was inspired by a new topic area (learner perceptions), and was interested in the findings, and so on, but this time (as opposed to my doctoral research) I was invested in working on a topic that had significance to the institutional changes taking place in South Africa at the time. My commitment to making a contribution to the understanding of changes in post-apartheid schools overrode my "passion" for working on topics that were primarily of personal interest.

One, ideal, way to resolve the *passion* versus *need* dilemma is to find a topic that achieves *both*; i.e., it is a topic you are passionate about and also fulfils some community or institutional need. This is easier said than done, of course. For novice researchers, or those undertaking graduate research, my advice would be to follow their passions, because at this stage of a research career it is important to be and remain engaged and committed and motivated. Over time research expertise will develop, and then once they become more established, they could tackle topics that have wider societal or disciplinary significance.

#2. Research Collaboration: Alone or Together?

Doing research in collaboration with another researcher or as part of a team is not an option for graduate students—for that, they are on their own! They do have an adviser or supervisor, and through that relationship start to learn about research collaboration, negotiation, and decision-making (see Kaneko, this issue). However, post-doctorate, opportunities for collaboration may arise, depending on the context in which the researcher works. There are plenty of advantages to working in a team or with a partner, such as sharing the reading required for the literature review, making research design decisions together, collecting and analyzing the data, and, best of all, the writing up of the findings. Another advantage is when collaborators have complementary skills, such as one being particularly informed theoretically and the other being an expert in the type of methods employed. Generally, partners enable more informed decision making on all aspects of the project. Partners can provide emotional support to each other when they are feeling less motivated, or encouragement when they are running behind schedule. However, there are also disadvantages. A co-researcher, for example, may not carry his or her weight, leaving one researcher to do the bulk of the work. There may also be disagreements about the research itself—sometime this can be a good thing because it stimulates productive discussion and re-focuses the direction of the project, but at other times the disagreements could be destructive and compromise the project. A common complaint made by collaborators is when one researcher lags behind the time schedule for the completion of assigned work. Finally, some researchers may simply have a personal preference for working alone.

I was involved in a study with a team of researchers who investigated the language and identity experiences of Hong Kong study abroad students sojourning in a number of mainly "English-speaking" countries (Benson, et al., 2013). This was a most rewarding experience. Team members got on well (across three countries) and shared the division of labour according to decisions made together. It was a large project with many participants and multiple data analysis and writing phases. It certainly required a team, including a research assistant, and the project was a great collaborative success. When the project was wrapped up, I continued working with one of the participants on an individual basis (see Barkhuizen, 2017a), interviewing him face-to-face and online since his return to Hong Kong post-sojourn. This was feasible since the scope of the research activity had been very much scaled down.

As you can see, a number of factors come into play when deciding whether or not to collaborate with a co-researcher. Some of these are contextual (e.g., independent study required by a graduate program), some are personal (e.g., a preference for working alone), and others relate very much to the nature of the study (e.g., its scope and the resources available—time, funding, research assistance). If collaboration is an option for a researcher, the benefits and disadvantages would need to be weighed up carefully to ensure the best outcome for both the researcher(s) and the study.

#3. Qualitative Versus Narrative Research: Story or Not?

I regularly read studies reported in published journal articles that claim to incorporate narrative aspects into the research design and processes or even claim to be full-blown narrative studies. However, to me they often appear to be straightforward qualitative studies. The question then becomes, what makes research narrative? How can it be distinguished from qualitative research? This dilemma is one I have encountered many times, either in my own research (especially in my early days as a narrative inquirer) or that of my doctoral students. Unfortunately, the question is not easy to answer, mainly because there are many definitions of what narrative is, and crucially, what story is. To me, narrative research has as its central

focus *story*: stories gathered, analyzed and interpreted, and constructed (or retold) by researchers (see Karlsson & Bradley, this issue). Without story we have qualitative research. In the introduction to my book on narrative research in applied linguistics (Barkhuizen, 2013) I present a framework of narrative analysis that covers the many possibilities for conceptualizing and actually doing narrative research. The framework consists of eight more-or-less continua, which represent narrative research characteristics that are more or less evident in a particular study.

I became aware of the power of story when I was interviewing participants for a study I was conducting in New Zealand in the early 2000s. I was exploring language and identity in the lives of Afrikaans-speaking (a South African language) immigrants who had settled in New Zealand. I was particularly interested in their efforts to maintain Afrikaans and to learn English and how this related to any identity changes. I conducted 28 interviews across the country. Both during the interview process and when I was transcribing them, I became aware of stories in the data, and I also realized how intimately I was involved in the co-construction of those stories. The stories the participants told captured very well their personal experiences and, more importantly, the meaning they made of those experiences. For example, it was common for the adult participants to tell me stories about the language practices of their children, including how they were using and learning more English both inside and outside the home. These stories and my analysis of them (see Barkhuizen, 2006) clearly made the study narrative.

When planning a narrative (or qualitative) study it is worth consulting the narrative analysis framework I described above (or relevant narrative literature) in order to locate the proposed study within it and thereby have a clearer idea about whether or not the study is in fact a narrative one. In reporting a study which claims to be narrative (or has some narrative aspects) I also recommend providing the audience with an explanation as to how and why it is narrative (as opposed to qualitative).

#4. Number of Participants: One, Few or Many?

In an editorial of the journal *Language Teaching Research* (Barkhuizen, 2014, p.5) I commented about this dilemma as follows. I am often asked by novice researchers how many participants they should include in their study. What is the ideal number? "Well, it depends," I always answer. What does it depend on? Top of the list is probably the purpose of the study. If, for example, a study aims to describe the language learning history of a particular learner, giving full, rich contextual details of learning over time, then obviously just that one learner would be the focus of the study (see Hooper, this issue). There are cases, however, where it is not always easy to decide what the actual number of participants should be. In ethnographic studies, for example, what difference does it make if five or eight or 12 participants are interviewed? Should three schools be investigated or just two? In a large-scale questionnaire-based study, how much difference would it make if 190 instead of 250 respondents completed the questionnaire? Sometimes answers to questions such as these depend more on practical matters, such as accessibility to participants (Does the researcher have permission to enter a school site? Does the desired site even exist?), their availability (Do participants have time to take part in the study? Do they wish to?), and who they are (teachers, learners, policy-makers).

Three studies of mine illustrate how I managed the number-of-participants dilemma. The first is my doctoral study briefly described above, which focused on the first-year classroom experiences of only one teacher. A single participant was appropriate in this case since my aim was to gain an in-depth, intensive understanding of the teacher's interactional patterns that exemplify beginning language teaching. Having more than one participant during that

same period (the first six weeks of the semester) would have diluted that goal. My data collection with Afrikaans-speaking immigrants in New Zealand ended after I had interviewed 28. At that stage I was finding that, although the personal stories were different, many of the pertinent themes were beginning to be repeated and no new themes were emerging. In other words, "saturation" was reached. A third study is one I am currently involved in. I am exploring the teacher identities of a cohort of seven experienced teachers enrolled in a doctoral program at a university in Colombia, South America. Why seven? Because quite simply that is how many students are enrolled.

My editorial commentary referred to above offers some advice with regard to this dilemma (p. 7). There is a range of factors that need to be considered when deciding on the number of participants to include in a research project. Some of these are outside the control of the researcher; e.g., the specific requirements of the research design and methods, the availability of the participants, constraints of time and human resources, and organizational structures within research sites, such as class size and timetabling. Other factors that contribute to decision-making about the number of participants are under the control of researchers. These include, determining the purposes and goals of the study, planning for and monitoring access to participants and research sites, and gauging feasibility in terms of scale of the project, time constraints, and one's own research knowledge and skills. Consulting published research literature in the same field and having discussions with collaborators and more experienced colleagues are always useful strategies when making these decisions.

#5. Engagement in Construction of the Data: More or Less?

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to narrative inquirers being "in the midst" during the processes of collecting their data (what they call "field texts"). What they mean is that the researcher is fully engaged in the lived experiences (the lived stories) of the participants—they are part of the narrative action. In qualitative research we see this type of engagement in, for example, (a) participant observation, where the researcher doesn't just observe from a distance so as not to "influence" the natural action being observed, but actually becomes involved in the performance of that action, and (b) in interviews, where the researcher is not merely someone who asks questions and records the answers, but an active participant in the co-construction of the discourse. The dilemma is, how involved or engaged or participatory or in the midst should we be—in observations, interviews, video-recordings, Facebook posts? Often the argument against (or fear of) significant engagement is that objectivity would be compromised. Qualitative and narrative researchers can't and don't try to achieve objectivity—it is not what they are supposed to do.

When I observed the first-year teacher during my doctoral research I sat at the back of the classroom with an audio-recorder placed on the desk next to me and intentionally remained out of the action as much as possible. As a non-participant observer I did not want to "disturb" the ongoing action in the classroom. If I could do the study again, I would do things quite differently—I would immerse myself far more in the classroom activity because this, I believe, would enable me to gain a more thorough insider's view of "what is going on" (a classic ethnographer's question). In almost all of my recent research I conduct narrative interviews (see Barkhuizen, 2016), as opposed to semi-structured interviews more typical of qualitative research. Narrative interviews invite participants to "tell me about" their experiences; that is, to invite meaningful stories rather than answers to sociological questions (Chase, 2003), and then to participate as a co-constructor of those stories when the narrative begins.

The dilemma exists, nonetheless, and decisions have to be made constantly about how much researcher engagement in the construction of data is advisable and desirable. My pref-

erence in qualitative research is for judicial engagement, and by this I mean at each point of the data gathering process (e.g., planning to collect data, actually collecting data) the researcher should weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of more and less engagement (see O'Leary, this issue), and at all times relate any decisions made to the particular research questions and the aims and purposes of the study more broadly.

#6. Member Checking: To Check or Not to Check?

Member checking means going back to the original research participants to get their opinions on various aspects of the study. For instance, they could check the accuracy of the data (e.g., interview transcripts), volunteer additional relevant information, confirm the researcher's interpretations, or challenge those interpretations (which could mean re-thinking and increasing the trustworthiness of the original interpretations). Another advantage is that checking is ethically appropriate—returning data and interpretations to participants informs them of progress with their contribution and allows them to retain some form of ownership of the project. The dilemma arises, however, when there is limited or no time to do member checking, and its benefits are then lost. As they would be if participants choose not to member check. Furthermore, member checking can be a "risky business". What if the participant totally disagrees with your interpretations, or denies having said something, or demands that you delete some data, or withdraws altogether from the study because of what they see? Despite these real possibilities, which could derail your project to some extent, ethical guidelines have to be complied with, and the participants' wishes granted. Finally, some qualitative researchers are sceptical of member checking arguing that it assumes a verifiable truth; that experience can be reduced to a set of facts, which are proved to be or not to be the case in the process of member checking.

I have been involved in two projects in which I approached member checking in quite different ways. One is my doctoral study of the in-classroom interactions of the first-year high school ESL teacher in New York. I spent six full weeks with her—observing her teaching and interviewing her after each lesson. I also interviewed her before the data collection began to obtain information about her personal background and teacher education. I then had a final interview with her after the data collection period, a couple of weeks after my last observation. Between the pre- and post-interview I did not inform her about what I was finding in the data; my (tentative) interpretations or the themes and categories my data analysis was generating. My reason being that I did not want to "influence" her teaching based on my findings.

Many years later I used a very different approach in a longitudinal narrative inquiry of the identity changes of an English teacher in New Zealand. I conducted narrative interviews with her (and analyzed her student teacher journal) while she was a pre-service teacher at university to explore how she imagined herself (her identity) as a teacher in the future. Then eight years later I interviewed her again to see how things had turned out. During the latter interview I told her exactly what I was looking for and how I had interpreted her earlier interviews. And when it came to writing up the findings, I sent her my analysis, section by section, for her to comment on. I then included her actual comments in the article that was published (Barkhuizen, 2016). This was a very rewarding experience for me as a researcher, and I believe the close collaboration and information sharing with the participant enriched the quality of the study.

I feel qualitative researchers should strive to include member checking at every opportunity available, taking into account the pros and cons briefly described above. Chief among the pros is the confidence generated in the credibility of the study, for both researcher and consumers

of the research report. The biggest constraint is probably lack of time. I also think, none-theless, it is a good idea to have a frank conversation with research participants to explain to them what member checking means and to discern their willingness and commitment to doing the checking in a thorough and timely manner.

#7. Implications: High or Low Impact?

Implications connect a study to a broader context, claiming relevance for theory, research methodology, the topic area being investigated, or practice. They show that the study has made some difference – it has contributed to the field in some way. In designing a study and preparing to write the report of the findings, researchers draw on this same field. In a way, then, implications represent a "giving back" to the field—extending it and making it richer. Without implications, readers might find themselves asking questions such as: What next? So what? Who cares? So despite the study itself being a good one, well designed and with inter-esting findings, it may lack impact. The dilemma for researchers then is how to present the study and its findings in such a way that it *does* have impact. The strength of the impact—the difference the study makes—will vary depending on, for example, the scope of the study (small-scale vs. large-scale) and where it is published (regional vs. international). Small-scale, exploratory or descriptive studies will typically have low-impact implications and will rarely be published in international journals. My point here is, nevertheless, that all research should have clearly stated implications so that readers of the report (or audience at a confer-ence presentation) will know how the study affects them and their work.

I will never forget a seminar I presented (my first) as a young lecturer at the university where I was working at the time. The seminar was based on a small-scale sociolinguistic study I car-ried out as part of my pre-doctoral graduate studies (Barkhuizen, 1982), which aimed to dis-cover any differences in the way men and women purchased a movie ticket at the local movie house. My focus was on politeness and I wanted to see if different levels of politeness were reflected in the linguistic forms used in this simple transaction—buying a movie ticket. During question time at the end of the seminar presentation one of the participants asked me what the implications of the study were. I had absolutely no idea! I hadn't even considered that there might be. That experience certainly taught me a lesson. Since then I have always diligently considered potential implications, even during the planning phase of the study. It is not some-thing I simply tag onto the end of an article after the findings section.

To have implications or not is hardly a dilemma, therefore; a study should *always* have clearly stated implications (especially qualitative research, which typically avoids making generalizations). Their statement should be given very careful thought. When planning the study, for example, it is useful to talk to other researchers who have investigated a similar topic and to ask them their opinions about the need for further study in this area. Is there po-tential impact? At the planning stage implications would only be tentative, of course. But once analysis begins and especially during the writing of the report, any implications should be clearly related to the actual findings of the study (see, for example, Moriya, this issue). Need-less to say, they can't simply be made up as something you think readers might like to hear!

#8. Presenting the Findings: Description or More?

Gao (2016) reflects on criticism he received from reviewers of an early qualitative research article he submitted for publication to a journal: "I just presented the findings by listing major themes with data extracts and made limited efforts to theorize the themes identified from the analysis. … In their detailed reports, the reviewers largely challenged me for being too descriptive and simplistic in the presentation of the findings" (p. 227). This is often one

of the main criticisms directed at qualitative research generally. The dilemma is reflected in the following question: How do you go beyond mere description in the presentation of qualitative findings? It is all too easy to present extracts of data and let them speak for themselves, or to offer our interpretations of what we think is going on in that data. But, as Gao points out, readers of the report may be tempted to ask "so what?" This does not relate only to the implications of the study (see dilemma #7 above), but also to how your findings relate and contribute to theory and other research in the field. Why are the findings significant? What do they add to our understanding of the topic of the research? How do they relate to what others have said about it? How does the study advance theory development in the field? In narrative research, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) distinguish between *field* texts, the data collected, and *research* texts, the research reports we write about that data. Research texts move beyond mere data presentation and make connections to the discipline by referring to theory and other research within a particular topic area.

Personally, I have no problem with research that might be described as "descriptive". I believe there is a place for it in language teaching and learning research. Much teacher research and action research would fit into this category, and often provides rich detail of learners' and teachers' lives, which we can learn from. But, it is unlikely that such research reports will be published in major international journals. As some would argue, it is too localized, too parochial. My research in the late 1990s focused on learner perceptions of the classroom activities they engaged in and how their perceptions compared to the aims and objectives of their teachers (Barkhuizen, 1998a, 1998b, 2001). Looking back at those research reports, I now find them quite descriptive, minimally couched in conceptualizations of learner perceptions and individual differences (e.g., attitudes) and more related to practice-oriented discourses about teaching methods (e.g., communicative language teaching). I do believe they served a useful purpose, nevertheless—they changed the focus from what teachers do to what learners think about what teachers do. I still find this area of research relevant and interesting.

Moving beyond description, for those researchers who want to tackle this dilemma, would require familiarity with relevant *theoretical* literature to frame the design of the study and the interpretation of the data, and *other research* that has been done and published on the topic under investigation so that the current project can be related to it and possibly advance knowledge in that area. Then in writing up and discussing the findings, interpretations of the data should be closely linked to that literature. And then clear implications for those in the same and related research area and in other contexts should be stated. A final comment—this dilemma may not even be one for those researchers who are quite happy to make a contribution by producing descriptive reports relevant to their own work or to those working in the same (or similar) local context.

#9. Reporting Conventions: Follow or Not?

The organization of a qualitative research report refers to the sequence and arrangement of the parts that make it up, including: the sections and sub-sections (with suitable headings); excerpts of illustrative data; tables and figures; visual data such as drawings, photographs and screenshots; and any accompanying material, such as appendices and internet links. The organization of these various parts follows conventions that are typically quite strictly adhered to, evident in guidelines for dissertations and journal articles, for example. Some narrative researchers (e.g., Ely, 2007) have urged researchers to present their reports in ways more consistent with narrative epistemology and methodology; these include, giving the report a temporal dimension, making more explicit the voice of the researcher, experimenting with genres like poetry and drama, and utilizing developments in electronic and multimod-

al media. Despite these excellent suggestions, researchers constantly face a dilemma when trying to overcome the traditions and conventions of qualitative research reporting, many of which are upheld by gatekeepers such as dissertation examiners, journal editors, and research funders.

I have always been somewhat conservative in my approach to research report writing, perhaps influenced by the powerful conventions encountered in my training and early communications with editors. A few years ago, however, I submitted a research report with a colleague (Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2008) based on an interesting study in which we adhered to a fixed time schedule to explore conceptualizations and the practice of narrative inquiry by actually doing a narrative inquiry; so, a narrative inquiry on narrative inquiry. The research questions emerged from our research work about half way through the study rather than being stated up front. As such, in the report of the study we included the questions as part of the *findings* section. This did not go down well—reviewer after reviewer wanted them placed earlier in the article, typically after the literature review. We resisted this, which unfortunately resulted in the paper being rejected—time and time again. We finally got it published—when we moved the questions to its "appropriate" place, according to convention. A second article, focusing on the identities of English tutors who work one-on-one with learners (Barkhuizen, 2017b), also received criticism from reviewers when I decided to include some interview data in the *introduction* (rather than the findings section) to illustrate some of the themes I would be addressing in the rest of the article. In response I argued my rationale to the editors, who were fortunately happy to accept the article without a change.

Deviating from conventions by changing the organizational arrangements of a qualitative or narrative research report or using alternative forms such as poetry, stories and drama allows for the communication of meanings and emphases in ways more suitable to conveying the lived experiences of people, and may be more engaging and accessible for a wider audience. Although this may be so, reporting in these ways no doubt presents some challenges. For instance, not all audiences will appreciate deviations from anticipated, traditional forms (often those associated with positivistic, quantitative research), such as examiners of research dissertations or reviewers of manuscripts submitted to research journals. Some may perceive these alternative forms as confusing, or trivial and lighthearted, and thus not serious "scientific" work. One solution to this dilemma is to consider constructing multiple reports, with various forms constructed to suit different audiences. "Taking risks" (Casanave, 2010) with alternative reporting procedures should probably be left to more experienced researchers, who might have the necessary authority to argue their case more convincingly with editors, or to graduate researchers who have sympathetic supervisors!

#10. Disseminating Research Findings: Going Big or Small?

When it is time to think about disseminating the research findings, the question, and potential dilemma, becomes: Where do I publish the report? Nowadays, with the many journals available in the field of language teaching and learning and because of advances in technology and the speed with which papers can be submitted, this is not an easy question to answer. There are many factors that can be considered, such as: the stage of the researcher's career; the most appropriate audience for the article; the scope of the study reported in the article; and the urgency with which the research needs to be published. However, one dilemma I have often faced has to do with the "size" and status of the journal. Should we aim big or should we aim small? By "big" I mean international journals with large readerships that therefore require articles to be relevant to a wider range of scholars. These journals typically have high impact factors, accept fewer submissions, have stricter quality standards, and take longer to

get accepted articles out into the public domain (either online in advance access or in a particular issue). By "small" I mean regional or local journals and those published by (national) professional associations. These journals are usually quicker to accept submissions, the scope of the reported study can be more limited, and the content more relevant to a local audience. The turnaround from submission to publication is also usually much quicker. This dilemma might be particularly applicable to post-doctoral students looking to publish their first articles; typically articles based on their doctoral research. (A related dilemma for doctoral students is whether to publish while still a student or to wait until the doctorate has been completed; but I won't be going into that here.)

In my own research I have regularly tried to go both big and small when it comes to disseminating the research findings of any particular project. Publishing in international journals means my work is distributed to a larger audience, but more importantly, it engages with and contributes to important discussions and debates at a global level. At a regional level the research has immediate contextual relevance for readers, and may have an impact, for example, on policy decisions, curriculum development and classroom practice that relate very specifically to the topic on the published work. The research I did on the perceptions of English learners in multilingual schools in South Africa, for example, made sense, and was potentially useful, for South African researchers and practitioners because it had direct relevance to their contexts (see also Gallagher, this issue). On the international stage it contributed to theorizing about the role of the learner in teacher learning and classroom practice (Barkhuizen, 1998, has been cited over 300 times and continues to be cited today).

I often advise doctoral students and novice researchers who are just beginning their publishing careers to aim small, focusing on regional and national journals, professional association newsletters and magazines (mostly they don't listen to me!). My reason for suggesting this strategy is that their work will then get into the public domain more quickly (which is useful if they need to apply for an academic job). It will also more likely be seen and read. How many articles make it into an international journal and then sit there hardly seen with minimal downloads? Being read in a regional journal means the researcher's work will become known and his or her research networks can therefore start to be established (e.g., when meeting colleagues who now know your work at a regional conference), which consequently might result in research collaborations, invitations to present talks and seminars at other institutions or conferences of affiliated professional associations, and so on. *At the same time* as publishing regionally/nationally, I advise early career researchers to attempt to publish in one international journal. The advantage of this dual approach is that if the international publication does not eventuate then at least the successful publications at regional level will keep the outputs rolling along. I have seen unfortunate cases where post-doctoral students put all their eggs in one basket and submit one article to a major international journal. When this is not accepted (many months later), they start looking for another place to publish the same article, and if that is rejected (many more months later), they give up, and at the end of it all have no publications. I have also seen cases, however, where targeting only a major journal has been successful, and post-doctoral researchers get their very first article published in the top journal in their field. Note, I have only commented on journal articles in this section—there exist many other channels for dissemination, of course, including regional and international conferences, book chapters, and various online forums.

Conclusion

The articles in this issue are all excellent examples of qualitative research in language learning and teaching. Reflecting on them, and the numerous research projects of my own I have

referred to in this somewhat self-indulgent overview of qualitative research dilemmas, I am reminded of this definition of qualitative research by Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 8):

> Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning.

To me, this description of qualitative research emphasizes its dynamic nature, where things change and challenge us to be vigilant of the social and material spaces we explore, of the multiple meanings attached to our participants' lives, and of the ethical work we do as researchers. Because of this, qualitative researchers constantly struggle with ambiguities, at all stages of any research project. Some of these ambiguities are captured in the TEN dilemmas I have described in this article. I hope that by highlighting these and giving readers the opportunity to reflect on them in relation to their own work, they will be better equipped to do something about them.

Notes

1. This article is based on a presentation given at *Developing as a TESOL Researcher: International Doctoral Summer School*, 17-20 July, 2018, University of Malta, Malta.

References

Barkhuizen, G.P. (1982). Two please? Speech differences between men and women in a simple service encounter. *English Usage in Southern Africa*, *13*, 3554.

Barkhuizen, G.P. (1988). *A constitutive ethnographic description of the procedures that accomplish the lived social reality of a first-year, high school teacher*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, New York.

Barkhuizen, G.P. (1998a). Discovering learners' perceptions of ESL classroom teaching/learning activities in a South African context. *TESOL Quarterly*, *32*(1), 85-108.

Barkhuizen, G.P. (1998b). English learners' perceptions of classroom oral activities. *Journal for Language Teaching*, *32*(4), 249-255.

Barkhuizen, G.P. (2001). Xhosa L1 learners' perceptions of language classes: Mechanical mysteries. *South African Journal of African Languages*, *21*(4), 333-347.

Barkhuizen, G. (2006). Immigrant parents' perceptions of their children's language practices: Afrikaans speakers living in New Zealand. *Language Awareness*, *15*(2), 63-79.

Barkhuizen, G. (Ed.) (2013). *Narrative research in applied linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barkhuizen, G. (2014). Editorial: Number of participants. *Language Teaching Research*, *18*(1), 5-7.

Barkhuizen, G. (2016). A short story approach to analyzing teacher (imagined) identities over time. *TESOL Quarterly*, *50*(3), 655-683.

Barkhuizen, G. (2017a). Investigating multilingual identity in study abroad contexts: A short story analysis approach. *System*, *71*, 102-112.

Barkhuizen, G. (2017b). Investigating language tutor social inclusion identities. *The Modern Language Journal*, *101*(S1), 61-75.

Barkhuizen, G. (Ed.) (forthcoming, 2019). *Qualitative research topics in language teacher education*. New York; Routledge.

Barkhuizen, G., & Hacker, P. (2008). Inquiring into learning about narrative inquiry in language teacher education. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics*, *14*(1), 36–52.

Benson, P., Barkhuizen, G., Bodycott, P., & Brown, J. (2013). *Second language identity in narratives of study abroad*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Casanave, C.P. (2010). Taking risks?: A case study of three doctoral students writing qualitative dissertations at an American university in Japan. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *19*, 1-16.

Chase, S.E. (2003). Taking narrative seriously: Consequences for method and theory in interview studies. In Y.S. Lincoln & N.K. Denzin (Eds.), *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* (pp. 273-296). Oxford: Altimira Press.

Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2011). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th edition) (pp. 1-19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ely, M. (2007). In-forming re-presentations. In D.J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (pp. 567-98). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Gao, X. (2016). Dealing with criticism when publishing qualitative research. In J. McKinley & H. Rose (Eds.), *Doing research in applied linguistics: Realities, dilemmas, and solutions* (pp. 225-234). London: Routledge.

Author Bio

Gary Barkhuizen is professor of applied linguistics at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. His teaching and research interests are in the areas of language teacher education, teacher and learner identity, study abroad, and narrative inquiry. He has published widely in these fields. His latest book is *Reflections on Language Teacher Identity Research* (Routledge, 2017).