Learning to use discourse analysis on a professional psychology training programme:
Accounts of supervisees and a supervisor

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Abstract

Qualitative research methods have become more prominent in professional

psychology training over recent years, yet there are relatively few published accounts

of how students learn to use these methods. In this article we describe the experiences

of British trainee clinical psychologists as they learn to use one qualitative method,

Discourse Analysis, for their major research project. Based on these experiences, we

discuss key aspects of the research process (e.g. supervision) and delineate dilemmas,

theoretical questions, suggestions and practical advice. Extracts from a group

discussion involving the supervisor and supervisees (after the trainees had completed

their studies) are provided to illustrate some of these themes.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; learning; supervision; research methods; research.

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The rise of qualitative research in professional psychology training

Qualitative research in professional psychology has grown in popularity over recent years if mentions in professional-oriented research methods textbooks are any indication (e.g. Barker *et al.,* 2002; Camic *et al.,* 2003; Dallos and Vetere, 2005; Good and Watts, 1995; Krahn and Putnam, 2003; McLeod, 2001; Marks and Yardley, 2004; Potter, 1998; Slade and Priebe, 2006). However, this growth is marked by international variation.

For example, a number of surveys reveal that only a small amount of clinical research on US clinical training programmes use qualitative methods (e.g. Keeley et al, 1988; Ponterotto, 2005b; Shemberg et al., 1989). Ponterotto's (2005b) survey of qualitative research training on counselling psychology programmes in North America, reported that qualitative methods courses were largely elective and that although 95% of the responding programmes accepted qualitative methods dissertations, only 10% of students had actually conducted qualitative studies in their research. North American writers have described a number of sources of resistance to qualitative research in psychology generally (Walsh-Bowers, 2002) and in professional psychology in particular (Ponterotto, 2005b).

In contrast, in the UK, qualitative research in professional psychology has continued to grow at a faster rate than in some other countries (Harper, in press; Koutsopoulou et al., 2006). In Harper's (1993) survey conducted in 1992, 81% of UK clinical psychology training programmes which responded reported that they taught qualitative methods[4] though the average amount of time devoted was just under five

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[4] On UK clinical psychology training programmes research methods courses are generally non-elective.

hours and only a small number of trainee clinical psychologists (trainees) submitted qualitative dissertations. During the 1990s, Henwood (2004) reports that the increased popularity of qualitative research (e.g. amongst trainees) was met by a varied response from programme staff, ranging from being actively, passively or anxiously facilitative to reactive or relatively indifferent. Interestingly, in a repeat of Harper's survey in 2006, 100% of the responding programmes reported that they taught qualitative methods, devoted over 30% of method-specific teaching time to qualitative methods and had an average of 38% of trainees using solely qualitative methods in their final dissertations (Harper, in preparation).

There have been other signs of growing acceptance in the UK -- for example, there have been special issues on qualitative research of publications like the *Journal of Mental Health* (1995), *Changes* (1996) and *Clinical Psychology Forum* (Henwood *et al.*, 1998), guidelines for evaluating qualitative research project proposals (Cooper, 2001) and debates about the criteria to use when evaluating the quality of qualitative research (e.g. Elliott *et al.*, 1999, 2000; Reicher, 2000; Turpin *et al.*, 1997).

The mystifications of discourse analysis

In the same way that qualitative approaches in general have grown more quickly in the UK than in some other countries, discourse analysis (DA) is also more common here (Rennie et al., 2002) with many of the key discourse analysts based at centres like Loughborough University, Manchester Metropolitan University and the Open University. Of all qualitative approaches, DA is probably one of the most complex to learn. In attempts to get to grips with the field of discourse studies, students read a wide variety of material but many, especially in the early stages of their research, find

the literature confusing. Some also find the absence of discussion about how discourse analysts actually conduct an analysis both surprising and mystifying. Over ten years ago, Figuera and Lopez (1991) commented that such an absence of discussion created a number of difficulties. Although introductory texts have attempted to give a little more detail on how one might go about analysis (e.g. Banister *et al.*, 1994; Billig, 1997; Coyle, 2000; Hepburn and Potter, 2003; Hollway, 1989; Potter, 1998; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 2002; Willig, 2001; Wood and Kroger, 2000), over a decade later there are still relatively few accounts which explain either the process of the production of an analysis or how the writing up of projects is structured. Moreover, because of their attempt to cover a variety of situations such texts or guidelines are often very general.

The caution about not detailing the processes behind analysis may be due to an understandable unwillingness to bow to methodolatry and produce a cook-book approach to analysis, especially since the relative freedom enabled by DA was what drew many researchers to it in the first place. In part, there has perhaps been a clash of epistemologies in that researchers may fear that, in attempting to describe their experiences of DA, they may be tempted to make use of common-sense psychological concepts (e.g. the self of the analyst) whose taken-for-grantedness they might normally question. However, the development of practices of reflexivity (e.g. Finlay and Gough, 2003) has opened a space for researchers to detail at least one reading of the process of their analysis (e.g. Clegg, 1998; Harper, 2003).

Learning the craft of analysis

Proponents of DA note that it is a craft-like process which is hard to specify in written form (Potter, 1998). However, although there have been some discourse analyses of material produced by novice DA researchers (e.g. Burman, 1998) there have been relatively few accounts of the experience of learning to do DA. This absence means that there is a danger that processes which 'expert' analysts follow remain implicit rather than explicit and so seem mystifying to those new to DA. It thus seems important to detail some of the steps which novice researchers follow, the challenges they are most likely to face and some of the things which can be done to help them in the learning process.

Another challenge for novice analysts is how to produce work of good quality. Potter (1998) has suggested that much qualitative research is of dubious quality and has noted the particular difficulties faced by busy clinical practitioners (to which one might add trainee practitioners) who are more isolated from specialist discourse analytic research units. Is it possible to provide a context for professional psychologists to learn about DA without either setting up an unhelpful elitism or producing work of poor quality?

Antaki *et al.* (2003) and Burman (2004) have discussed some of the shortcomings which can bedevil discourse analyses. Though such debates are useful and helpful, if we focus only on evaluative criteria rather than on facilitating opportunities to do DA, there is the risk of noting potential pitfalls without developing an understanding about why these pitfalls might occur and also about how they might best be avoided.

Some clear guidance for undergraduate students, supervisors and examiners has begun to emerge (e.g. Gough *et al*., 2003; Madill *et al.,* 2005).   However, given the likelihood that the context of research will affect the analyses produced, there is, perhaps, a need to delineate the different kinds of processes which studies might go through. For example it is likely that there will be both common ground and also substantial differences between work conducted by undergraduates, postgraduate students on professional psychology programmes, postgraduate researchers registered for Ph.Ds and experienced academic staff engaged on longer-term empirical and/or scholarly contributions. It would be unfair and unrealistic to expect the same standard of quality irrespective of its context – as we have already noted, professional psychology trainees also face demands in terms of teaching and work placements and their time for research is necessarily limited. Smith discusses this issue in relation to IPA:

> [a] student new to qualitative analysis should be thinking of producing an analysis which is 'good enough' rather than feeling forced to produce one which is devastatingly insightful. If the latter comes then fine, but how much research in psychology as a whole is at that level?
>
> Smith (2004 p.46)

Our aims

This article is based on a tape-recorded discussion the four of us had after the research projects discussed here had been completed. In it we hope to provide a rich description of some of the steps involved both in students' production of research projects using DA and in the supervision of this work. We note some of the

difficulties but also make recommendations for other researchers, supervisors and examiners.

It is important to note that we are *not* setting out here to develop a discourse analysis of the text of the discussion. Instead, we are, somewhat ironically, making a non-discursive epistemological assumption: that there is some concordance between what we said in our discussion and our experiences[5]. In other words, we are interested in the experience of learning to do DA and thus the texts are taken as representational in that they tell us something about what is/was going on in our experience.

We have chosen to quote extracts from our discussion because we have often found that textbook descriptions or structured guidelines lack a sense of the richness and complexity of conversations about doing DA. We feel that Walsh-Bowers' (2002) account of the development of qualitative research in psychology in Canada was evocative precisely because he drew on material generated in interviews with graduate students and members of faculty, helping to elucidate important contextual influences. We hope that, in the same way, these extracts will illustrate some of the ups and downs of the research process and that, through the citing of concrete examples, readers will find this article of use to them in their research and supervision.

Our context

One of us (Dave) is a clinical psychologist who has used DA in two major research projects and who has been involved in teaching about qualitative methods and

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[5] Thanks to Carla Willig for helping us to clarify this point.

supervising qualitative projects for over ten years. Three of us (Julia, Peter and Phil) graduated from our Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology programme in 2001 and used DA in our final major research dissertations. In our discussion, Dave introduced a number of questions which he had previously circulated in a letter (see Box 1). However, this was not, strictly-speaking, a semi-structured interview since Dave also participated in describing his own experiences in learning to use DA and in supervising DA studies. It took place in early September 2001, shortly after Phil, Peter and Julia had submitted their theses and successfully defended them in the *viva voce*. Dave supervised Peter and acted as a consultant to Phil and Julia.

BOX 1 ABOUT HERE

UK Clinical psychology programmes are all three year full-time doctoral degrees with trainees salaried employees of the National Health Service. During this time they are expected to produce several reports of clinical activity (e.g. case studies), some service-relevant research, other pieces of academic work (e.g. trainees on some programmes have to sit exams) whilst also working in clinical placements. Programmes vary in the amount of teaching and supervision available for qualitative research methods. Julia, Peter and Phil had received approximately eighteen hours of teaching on qualitative methods[6] which represented about two thirds of their method-specific teaching. The vast majority of trainees on this programme used qualitative methods mainly supervised by programme staff. At the time of the discussion the amount of time to conduct the major research project (maximum word length: 28,000 words) was 11-14 months from submission of a draft research proposal to the first

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[6] Sessions at UEL included: Introduction to qualitative research methods; Discourse Analysis; Foucauldian Discourse Analysis; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; Repertory Grids; and critical appraisal of qualitative work. The research methods module has been revised since this discussion.

point at which the dissertation could be submitted[7]. However, trainees also had to attend one day's teaching per week during academic terms, attend clinical placement 2-3 days per week and submit three other pieces of academic work during this period. During term time trainees had approximately one and a half days per week set aside as a designated research day (this increased to two and a half days during vacations) with approximately ten days available to be taken as blocks of research-related study time though, in practice, much work was done in the evenings and at weekends. We will organise the paper around key steps in the process.

Formulating a research question

One of the first steps in the process of conducting a study is to formulate a research topic and question/s. On most professional psychology training programmes, students have to submit a formal research proposal before beginning their study. Many novice researchers experience this as a difficult challenge especially with an unfamiliar topic or method.   Indeed some qualitative researchers argue that it is only possible to specify one's research questions at the end of a study. As undergraduates, many trainees have been socialised into an acquaintance with quantitative methods adopted from a naively realist standpoint and so often come to this step with hypotheses framed as questions of comparison or frequency. However, there are a number of different ways questions can be framed which each imply different epistemological positions (Barker et al., 2002). Whilst questions need to be phrased in an open matter, there is still a need for careful conceptual thinking about what the trainee is interested in. This helps to avoid them becoming paralysed by being faced with large amounts of unstructured data with no clear idea of their focus.

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[7] Since the time of the discussion this period has been increased to 16 months.

Another challenge is to match the research questions with both the chosen method and epistemological framework so that the method actually addresses the questions in the manner proposed. One difficulty which Dave, as a supervisor, sometimes faced, was that some trainees chose DA to address questions for which it was not best equipped. Since a DA-appropriate way of framing questions can be counter-intuitive a number of helpful strategies were identified -- for example, encouraging trainees to find published DA studies which had been conducted in other areas to see how the research questions had been framed there and how they could be adapted for the trainee's own study. A cross-fertilisation of ideas could also occur.

Phil: I suppose the actual questions were refined again by looking at what other people had done with literature particularly round work that had been done using Discourse Analysis and media images in other areas, and so a kind of wider Discourse Analysis literature and helped refine the question as well. A lot of it, I suppose, was applying it into another area, marrying two different areas of research: Learning Disability research and Discourse Analysis work that had been done in other areas.

It was helpful to read widely, not just around the clinical topic, as many psychologists are socialised to do, but to read DA studies, especially empirical examples, in other domains. This was useful in learning the craft of analysis: how different analysts approached analysis and how they framed their research questions. In contrast,

Peter's curiosity (about the rhetorical construction of justifications for the use of Electro-Convulsive Therapy -- ECT) had been piqued whilst attending a public debate on the topic. Julia talked of becoming increasingly curious about the origins of the notion of 'trauma' as she learned more about working with refugees and asylum-seekers.

Gathering data: Developing an interview schedule and interviewing

On many professional psychology programmes, there is a requirement that trainees gather data from human participants and this is often taken to imply the use of interviewing or focus groups. There is debate about the appropriateness of semi-structured interviews in DA research (e.g. Potter, 1998, 2002; Potter and Hepburn, 2005; Speer, 2002). They were used for the three projects here because in each study a key research aim was to map out some of the discursive resources which were available to speakers as professionals or service users. It seemed to us that this would involve an analysis both of published texts (e.g. the professional literature) but also of the kinds of contexts where more informal use was made of resources (Barrett, 1996) and interviews have been one way of identifying such use (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). The investigation of the interview material was augmented by an analysis of the professional literature (in order to delineate the discursive resources which were drawn on in those accounts) and, in one case, an analysis of stories in the media.

Many issues relating to the conduct of interviews have been covered in other texts (e.g. Smith, 1995; Willig, 2001) and, here, we will address only some aspects. The prospect of having a less structured interview led to feelings both of excitement (about what issues might be raised in participants' responses to interview questions)

but also anxiety (in case the material was lacking in richness). There was concern lest the interview go off at a tangent onto other issues which, whilst legitimate in themselves, were not the focus of the research questions. How could one ensure the interview covered the topic of interest without overly influencing how that topic was discussed? Would, for example, asking an interviewee whether they had heard of the notion of 'trauma' mean that the interviewer would be leading the interviewee in a particular direction either explicitly or implicitly? It would certainly imply that the issue was not introduced by the participant but, if the interviewee understood and readily responded to this question then it was likely that this demonstrated the cultural availability of this term to them. To some degree the extent to which this was an issue was dependent on the context of the interviews. For example, for Peter's interviewees who were doctors and nurses, the use of diagnostic language was not really an issue since this was the language they used in their everyday working lives.

Although Peter, Phil and Julia reported feeling anxious as they began their interviews, this reduced after the first few interviews when they felt more confident about remembering key areas of interest and so felt comfortable enough to improvise with the structure and order of their interview questions. Their confidence increased following transcription when they saw that the material was quite rich.

Positions adopted by the interviewers in the interviews included: the encouraging facilitator; the 'journalist' (asking questions which explicitly acknowledged that the speaker had taken a particular position on a contested topic); and the 'devil's advocate' where an opposite view to that given by an interviewee was adopted or reported by the interviewer. The aim here was not to be partisan, rather, the adoption

of these positions was oriented to providing richer material and to avoid simply sticking rigidly to a structured interview format which might allow little possibility for discursive variability.

This raises the delicate issue of 'bias' and 'neutrality'. The notion of (certainly a simplistically understood position of) neutrality has been critiqued in both research and therapeutic arenas (e.g. Cecchin, 1987; Speer, 2002) -- indeed, Burman (2004) has reminded us that 'objectivity' is simply a particular form of subjectivity. However, sometimes the most interesting aspect of the analysis proved to be when the interviewer's (and thus analyst's) 'openness' and 'neutrality' were subjected to a critical analysis. For example Phil focused on his own role in his interviews as a part of his analysis (see appendix for transcription conventions).

Phil: […] what was really interesting having tried so hard to be open and neutral was then when I did the analysis to focus -- I focused one whole bit of my analysis on me -- on the language I was using and the way I interpreted things and that I think for me was the most eye-opening bit of the analysis actually, having thought that I was trying to be as open as possible.

Professional psychology students are often part of the systems they are researching in a variety of ways (e.g. previous and current National Health Service employment, clinical placements and so on) and so they share similarities in the language which is culturally available to them with staff and service users, though there may also be some differences (e.g. between psychological and psychiatric terminology for

example). This can be a source of difficulty. However, it can also aid analysis in that it can enable a respectful curiosity (c.f. Cecchin, 1987) towards participants. Julia, Peter and Phil found that they learnt a great deal about their interviewing styles and the discursive moves they made in interviews which was of use in developing their clinical skills. This is a factor which has led some to suggest that DA can be useful in clinical supervisory and training contexts (Heenan, 1998; McKenzie and Monk, 1997; Marks, 1993; Roy-Chowdhury, 2003).

Understanding key DA concepts

Julia, Peter and Phil began reading about DA early on in their respective studies. However, they felt that they only really began to understand key ideas when they actually started using them in their analyses.

Phil: That's what I found, I didn't really get to grips with it until, I mean I felt I had some kind of theoretical knowledge from what I'd read, but I didn't really have a sense of what you do and how you do it until I actually did it, until I had some real data that I was looking at, just having some real data that I could piece together and pull apart at the same time.

Dave: … Right, and that's when kind of concepts made more sense then?

Phil: Yeah. Also I think it was then that I was able to tailor my reading on to more of the sort of things I was interested in and I was able

to read something and say 'yeah, actually I've got an idea of what I'm talking about because that sheds some light on something I've read from my data'. Before then it was all kind of quite too theoretical really, and too abstract in lots of ways.

Some examples of DA are more accessible than others and Julia, Peter and Phil felt it was a good idea to read some of these first, especially those which reported empirical studies since these gave an idea of how discourse analysts developed, structured and reported their analyses. Some of the most useful texts included: Burr (1995) on social constructionism; Coyle (2000) for giving an overview of different approaches; Parker (1997) for a clear account of a critical psychology approach; and Potter (1996), Potter and Edwards (1992) and Potter and Wetherell (1987)[8]. Pedagogical aids included discussion of the differences between Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian DA (see, for example Willig, 2001). Later on, after they had grasped some of the basic concepts in DA, reading accounts of debates (e.g. Parker, 1998) helped Julia, Peter and Phil to clarify their own epistemological positions but this took time and the arguments could be confusing.

Julia: I think I started from feeling that I knew what discourse analysis was about because I'd read lots of journal articles where people had used discourse analysis, so sort of seeing intricate pieces of research, as it were, so kind of making 'yes, I know what this is about and what I ought to be doing' and then when I started to

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[8] Since the time of the discussion other introductory texts have been published -- e.g. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002), Harper (2006) Hepburn and Potter (2003) and Willig (2001).

move more towards reading more about the sort of theory, I
started to get a bit more lost, as it were.

Once they had begun the analysis proper it was then possible for Julia, Peter and Phil to tailor their reading to focus on certain aspects which were proving to be helpful in understanding their material (e.g. positioning theory c.f. Davies and Harré, 1990 and rhetorical devices c.f. Edwards and Potter, 1992). They also found that it was possible to feel that one had finally grasped a concept only to become confused again after reading another commentator's account.

Confusion, analytic paralysis and losing sight of one's research questions are all normal experiences for novices (and more seasoned researchers too!). One question which arouses confusion is whether the frequency of occurrence of discursive features is important. That there is a link between significance/importance and frequency is a core assumption for those socialised into more quantitative methods (e.g. content analysis -- Potter, 1998). Within methods influenced by the turn to language, the number of times a feature occurs may be less important than that it was said at all, by whom and in what context. It seems likely that more frequent features may be significant for some research questions since they suggest which features are prevalent and so culturally available. However rare features may also be important. For instance, one might hypothesise that in the relatively formal setting of an interview, some socially unacceptable behaviour (e.g. racist or sexist language) might occur less frequently and thus if they do occur that might be significant and might imply that, outside of the constraints of an interview, they might occur more

frequently. Moreover, they may be useful examples of counter (and counter-counter) claims if an interviewer has adopted a 'devil's advocate' position.

We have noted how students on professional psychology programmes have to juggle competing demands on their time and so it can be difficult to fully get to grips with DA. Having to take continual breaks from their DA study meant that Julia, Peter and Phil's were concerned that their understanding of DA might evaporate. One strategy to address this was to ensure that they continued to think about their studies during this time, for example by taking articles or interview transcripts with them on placement so they could read them if clients cancelled, or failed to attend, appointments.

Transcription

Introductory texts commonly report how long transcription may take but, even so, those new to DA are often still surprised at the length of time it can take.

Phil: Everything forewarns you about how long it's going to take and stuff, but it still took me a lot longer than I expected. And it was so boring as well.

There is debate about how detailed a transcript should be and this can cause particular dilemmas where a trainee has had to collect maybe eight hours of transcribed material. Turpin *et al*. (1997) suggested that five hours of material was a minimum for DA research by clinical psychology trainees (largely, it seems because this was the amount of material in some published studies) whilst Gough *et al.* (2003) recommend

that three-four hours of material is the minimum amount of data for undergraduate projects. For these projects, time constraints meant that a detailed Jeffersonian level of transcription was not possible and, instead a more manageable (but still substantial) transcription rate of one hour of taped material to ten hours of transcription was the aim.

Julia, Peter and Phil felt that it was important at the outset to be clear about what transcription conventions were to be adopted as they sometimes had regrets about the level of detail they had chosen and found that changes part-way through were costly in terms of time and effort.

Julia: Yeah, I found the actual, my ideas about how I was going to do the transcriptions during the course of it, and I still managed to regret all the decisions that I made (laughs) you know, I sort of started doing it one way, very detailed and then I thought 'no, I'll just try and get down, you know'.

The level of detail very much depended on the research questions and it was important to be internally consistent in the analytic weight given to discursive features. For example, Dave suggested that if pause lengths had not been consistently timed, one could not justifiably use the number or length of pauses as evidence in the analysis.

Julia, Peter and Phil became more aware of their style of questioning, noticing questions which were too long or convoluted or which elicited only a short answer from the interviewee.

Dave: It's also painful seeing your own words written on the page and cringing at some of the things you've said.

Julia: I know.

Dave: That's a seventeen paragraph question (all laugh).

Phil: And a one word answer (all laugh).

This focus on the detail of the interview meant that more consideration was given to interview styles and to the effects of wording questions in different ways which was of relevance to clinical work.

Although it might be ideal to try to use a transcribing machine and to do all the transcribing at once (since one becomes more skilled and thus faster over time), this was rarely possible since there were only a limited number of transcribing machines available, the interviews were often unevenly spaced and there were other calls on time[9].

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[9] Since this discussion good quality MP3 digital recording devices have become widely available and UEL's stock of these has increased.

Initially in our discussion, Julia wondered whether it might be best to get an audio-typist to transcribe. This is one strategy (though it is very important to carefully check the transcription against the tape and to secure written confidentiality contracts with the transcriber). However, Phil found that the process of analysis began during transcription when he listened carefully to the words of speakers, hearing the words as they were spoken -- Peter and Julia agreed with this.

Transcribing allowed a distance from the actual interviews and allowed reflection on what was accomplished through both the interviewer's and interviewees' talk. Often discursive features were noticed by the analyst when they were not consciously looking for them – a common experience in writings about creative inspiration. Julia, Peter and Phil all wrote comments on the transcripts, noting interesting features at this stage which were good starting points as they began to develop categories and codes.

One myth which was challenged in the course of these projects was that there would a perfect interview question which would trigger amazing material for analysis. In contrast to this, Julia, Peter and Phil found that it was sometimes apparently mundane features of conversation which proved most analytically interesting -- Potter (1998) has noted that DA requires a much slower pace of analysis.

Peter: In some ways, I quite liked the transcribing because it, I don't

know, it felt like the pressure was off and/

Dave: /It was on?

Peter: It was off. Although it took a huge amount of time and at times it was really boring and I don't know if I've done this right or not, but I felt that I was doing more analysis then than I was doing afterwards. That's the stuff that I wrote alongside the transcripts then formed the backbone of what followed in terms of the analysis, really.

Beginning the analysis proper

As we have already noted, the analysis began during the process of transcription. Based on notes made during the transcription stage, analytic categories were developed and extracts of text noted with their accompanying line numbers. One strategy was to have one piece of paper per category and then list all possibly related extracts underneath. It also helped to make notes in the margins of the transcripts. The categories were, as introductory texts note, very fluid with them being elaborated over time, transformed into other categories or being dropped as irrelevant. Phil had already done an earlier analysis of newspaper articles and that helped provide some structure for his later analysis.

Phil: But because I'd already previously done another analysis on my media sample, which had been the sample, I was already being structured by quite a lot of the ideas from that anyway. So I think I was looking at two different things, I was looking at what was similar and different to my previous analysis as well as looking at what was happening in that particular interview. I ended up with pages and pages of scribbled notes.

In any case this stage involved becoming intimately acquainted with the transcripts by reading and re-reading them to the extent that Julia, Peter and Phil began to remember whole extracts of text, which interview they were from and even where they were located in the transcript.

Julia: But I mean, that process seemed to go on several times because I'd do it once and then I'd go back over it again and I'd find myself kind of re-labelling things and re-coding them. And you know, it shifted so much and so quickly, really. And something that I wouldn't really pay much attention to suddenly I'd think 'gosh that fits into a higher order sort of theme' or something and I'd end up then kind of going back over the whole thing again. So it took quite a long time before I really felt I'd got a handle on what was sort of happening really.

Phil: I did the same, and I'd think to myself 'I've seen that before somewhere' and you'd have to search back through, maybe it was in a previous interview or maybe it was in the same transcript or somewhere I'd seen the same thing before.

Julia: But the most remarkable thing I found was the way I started to memorise (laughs) huge chunks of extracts and I could almost hear people's voices in my head who said what, you know, and I started to be able to find things really quickly.

Categorisation occurred both within and across the interviews. There was an iterative and recursive process with categories being developed, listed on sheets of paper with extracts listed underneath and then a re-categorisation. In common with other creative work, much of the analysis seemed implicit. Julia, Peter and Phil began to develop a way of reading the transcripts and it was only in actually putting words on the page that they realised what they had noticed in the interview transcripts.

The analytic process and writing

There is a symbiotic link between analysis and writing -- Harper (2003) has argued that the actual process of writing is part of the process of analysis in that during writing, the analysis itself becomes clearer in structure and detail. Both Clegg (1998) and Gough and Finlay (2003) contain different examples of the relationship between the creative process of writing and analysis. For Peter it was important to begin the process of writing up the analysis at an earlier stage, rather than to wait until he was fully happy with it, as the process of writing enabled him to develop his ideas.

Peter: I formulated, like I said, a lot of that detail and the finer points when I was actually writing up what I thought was happening in the text.

The analysis stage could be very unsettling since introductory texts did not promulgate a cook-book approach. Peter noted that it might have helped if there had been a recommended approach to beginning the analysis.

Peter: Yeah. So I think that's a personal thing, I know that there are

people who couldn't cope with doing it in a sort of ad hoc way, like that and it did feel quite ad hoc throughout the analysis, and that was quite unsettling sometimes because no matter how much you read about there being no method to this, you know, type of analysis, you do need, sometimes need to feel like you are doing something that is recommended or concrete and there was nothing to lean back on like that, so it was, yeah, it was.

For the first draft there was an ordering of the categories, often from disparate pieces of paper, into a coherent linear story with headings and key illustrative extracts. Then began a process of refining following a reading of these drafts with further questions and ideas. Sometimes it was helpful to engage with the original research questions to help focus the analysis.

Julia: I think for me, I've always found that just re-reading other people's articles of discourse analysis that they'd done, for me was really useful, just to kind of refine what the aim of what I was trying to do was (laughing) and to see how different people had approached it as well.

Julia, Peter and Phil continued to return to the transcripts and also the original tapes. Sometimes a first draft would report lots of rhetorical features but with relatively little analysis, for example of the functions or effects of these features. These might be refined by focusing on some, more interesting features rather than, for example,

simply listing all the rhetorical devices apparent in the extract -- something which Antaki *et al.* (2003) have noted as a shortcoming in some studies.

Since discourse analyses often radically depart from the structure of more traditional psychology reports it could be difficult to know how to structure the thesis and in what order to write the various chapters. For pragmatic reasons many choose to keep to a more traditional structure (introduction, method, analysis, discussion and implications chapters). Julia, Peter and Phil adopted different strategies with Peter writing the first three chapters simultaneously. In contrast, Phil wrote his 'method' chapter first (including a discussion of social constructionism) and followed this with his introduction and then his analysis of media stories. By writing his method first he felt he was more able to clarify his epistemological position. For Julia, the method chapter was the last one she wrote since she felt it would only be towards the end of the analysis that she would know which DA concepts had proved most useful. All found that they returned to these chapters again, regardless of the order in which they were written, as new ideas occurred to them, often as a result of developments in their analysis. It was often hard to differentiate between what should go in the introductory and method chapters – for example where should a discussion of the theoretical and epistemological framework (e.g. social constructionism) be best placed? In part this was driven by pragmatic concerns like the topic and research questions.   The anticipated audience of internal and external examiners and their hypothesised expectations and concerns were also a factor, particularly if they were not experienced in using qualitative research methods or their views on them were unknown.

Another difficult issue for those new to DA is the distinctive kind of language used. It provides a new way of seeing text and talk and so crafting an analysis is very like learning a new language. Thus Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002) note how the discourse analyst might talk about how 'certain discourses operate in a particular text, or that the text draws on, or is informed by, these discourses' (p.156). Julia, Peter and Phil noted how they began to use words like 'legitimate', 'legitimise' and 'warrant' in ways they had not before. Julia described one strategy which she found helpful.

Julia: I had a lot of really good articles on hand that I would regularly re-read, even though the content had nothing to do with what I was doing, but just to kind of read back and think, this was how this person, and actually when it came to the writing up stage, just looking at how different people had tried to write up I thought, for me it was really helpful to kind of look back and think that was something I could even include in mine, even little strategies like introductory sentences that I could kind of borrow until I could kind of manage to get up a selection of my own that I felt confident in using, but you know, it was almost like poaching but/

It was also helpful to go back to introductory texts like Burr's (1995) *Introduction to Social Constructionism*[10] which helped keep basic principles in mind especially if there was an awareness that something was missing from the analysis.

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[10] Since the time of this discussion a second edition has been published (Burr, 2003).

Dave: It's funny, isn't it, how you forget these things, because I always, whenever I'm writing I always sort of lose a bit, of what is it that I'm doing and why am I writing this and it's good to remind yourself of the kind of principles and it makes you look at it in a different way, you think 'oh, I've just been following a particular track' and then you think there's a whole other side of this study to think about (inaudible).

Tracy (1988) has noted the varied manner in which different discourse researchers conduct and describe their studies. Whilst such differences had been noted by Julia, Peter and Phil to be a source of confusion, ironically their own analyses began to take different forms and shapes. Thus Peter found that the concept of rhetorical devices was extremely helpful in understanding how professionals accounted for the use of ECT. Julia found that critical psychology concepts (e.g. Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997) were more helpful in deconstructing the notion of trauma and PTSD. In contrast, Phil found positioning theory helpful in understanding his transcripts.

Reaching saturation (and exhaustion!)

It is always difficult knowing when to bring the analysis to an end. Billig (1997) somewhat sardonically suggests one continues 'writing, reading, thinking and analysing until you produce a version with which you are not totally dissatisfied' (p. 54). Kelly (2002) has suggested questions for the qualitative researcher to ask themselves in order to judge when the can conclude their analysis -- see Box 2. Some of these may need adapting for DA (e.g. 'adequate representation' of the interviewees' views might not be a goal of a DA study).

However, one of the most pronounced ways in which the context of professional psychology training exerts itself is that there is a definite deadline for the handing in of the thesis and this provided a major focus for the ending of Julia, Peter and Phil's projects. Given the competing pressures, this was a major challenge as they had roughly eight weeks of analysis proper (i.e. reading, categorising, writing etc). Although they felt they had reached a good enough level of 'saturation' (Kelly, 2002) there was also a sense that there was always more to be got from further analysis and that it could potentially take as much time as one had.   Phil developed an interesting take on when his analysis was good enough to submit:

Phil: And I think if I'd had thirty weeks, I probably would have taken

          thirty weeks to do it. I think for me, it was getting it to a point

          where I had something to say, rather than the point where I felt it

          was right or it was finished.

At this point it was extremely helpful to be able to become totally immersed in the material for example by having a considerable amount of time (e.g. a month) away from clinical placement so that one could keep the material and emerging categories in mind. On the other hand, being on a placement which was relevant to the topic could also aid the analysis.

Julia: […] I think I really only felt that I started to really have the time to

          think about it properly when I actually arranged to have a big

chunk of time off both work and college, I think I had about a

month off and that was probably the most helpful time, when I

could just focus all my thoughts on that, really. So that was really

helpful and then I went and started a placement, which was

working with refugees and asylum seekers, and I'd already done

quite a significant part of my analysis by that point and then to

be back on placement then felt really helpful because the kinds

of things I was picking up on were sort of going on around me all

the time during people's conversations, during referral meetings,

and that was quite a kind of stimulating process, really.

Making use of supervision

It seemed that supervision became most important during the analysis and writing-up

stages with discussion of how to structure the analysis being a major theme. As the

analyst becomes more competent in using DA and more confident, the role of

supervision changes. As a supervisor, Dave noted that he often felt that it was hard to

know whether someone was on the right track until a first draft of the analysis

chapter/s was produced, when it became clearer how the analysis might be developed

further.

Dave: […] I suppose from my perspective, I mean, I was just aware

that you know, it would start when you'd got it in writing really,

and that's when the process would start, so as long as you were

getting there in a reasonable kind of stage, then it's always

going to develop. Things are always going to be a bit weak to start with, but it will evolve […]

For Julia, Peter and Phil, handing the first draft of their analysis chapter to Dave was anxiety-provoking since they had already put a considerable investment of time into it and they wanted both reassurance and also detailed comments on how it could be impoved.

Julia: That's also the most anxiety provoking thing for me, the very first draft, the first thing I'd written and just sending it to you because it just felt, this feels so basic and so immature, that you know, it sort of, undeveloped, you know, and just sort of thinking, I'm really not sure I would want anyone to see this and sending it to you, that kind of felt really hard. But it was really useful because then I kind of thought 'it's okay I'm kind of on the right lines', you know, 'I just need to do more work', whereas before then I was just thinking 'what if he sends it back and says "you need to be doing a different kind of analysis?"' (all laugh) 'You should be doing quantitative, start all over again!'

Phil: … Yeah, the whole thing, I think, is quite exposing, as an analyst, well, in every way, because you have to look at yourself so much and even in writing the analysis, you as the analyst are in there and you can't take you out of it, so every time, I mean, I felt quite anxious every time I kind of showed you something or showed someone else something, or even re-read something I'd written before, I felt quite anxious about it because I felt I was on

show as well.

Dave described a dual aspect to his role both giving detailed written comments on how drafts might be improved and responding to this anxiety by trying to instil confidence.

Dave: Yes, because there is that sense in which there is a kind of anxiety about, is there actually going to be anything there? And I mean I feel that as a supervisor as well, that I'm just kind of, well, I'm pretty sure there will be, you know, I kind of know that there will be something there, but actually not knowing and trying to foster confidence that there will be something as long as it's given time.

The analysis chapters changed a great deal over subsequent revisions in response to comments with early versions sometimes being incomparable to later ones.

Peter: I kept all those drafts and looking back at those first things I was doing, they just bear no relation, really, to what the final thing was and looking at them now I think 'jeez, what was I trying to do there?' (laughs) and that is why I think I've come to that conclusion, it was that process for me that was the most useful.

One thing which helped at this stage was being pointed in the right direction of other DA literature which might be relevant to portions of the analysis (e.g. positioning

theory).   The open-endedness of the analysis seemed to be much less anxiety-provoking if one had already conducted some kind of cultural analysis as Phil had.

Phil:　　　But because I'd already previously done another analysis on my media sample, which had been the sample, I was already being structured by quite a lot of the ideas from that anyway.

Feedback on Dave's supervision and consultation suggested that timing was an important consideration.   Julia, Peter and Phil felt that, at the beginning of the analysis, supervisors should have a lighter touch rather than too much focus on detail which could become dispiriting.   In the middle of the analysis detailed comments were helpful and then, as the handing-in deadline approached it was less helpful to have overly detailed comments as this could provoke anxiety about whether the analysis was good enough to be examined.

Julia, Peter and Phil felt that Dave's comments were useful when he suggested DA literature or concepts which might relate to noted features and in helping to conceptualise issues in a manner more congruent with a discursive approach.   For example a common category of supervisory comments related to noting instances where the analyst appeared to impute that rhetorical features were being used intentionally by speakers.   Antaki *et al.* (2003) have warned of the dangers of the circular discovery of mental constructs which is a particular danger for those socialised in a psychology culture of 'intentions', 'motives' and 'beliefs'.

Peter: It was things like watching intentionality, that was, because I was getting really irritated with you noticing it, but in the end I was glad that you did and I was lapsing back into that sort of, making these things sound like they were intentional and it was a disservice, really, to the people I'd interviewed and it was that sort of thing, thinking now, looking back, that I'm really glad you picked me up on.

Julia, Peter and Phil sometimes agreed and sometimes disagreed with Dave's comments. Julia noted that even where she disagreed with his comments they had still been helpful as they helped her to clarify her own position and understand how her account could be misinterpreted which then led her to provide a more detailed explanation or rationale.

Some novice discourse analysts form peer support groups in order to share ideas, practice analysis of texts and so on. Peter, Phil and Julia felt this had both pros and cons and they decided not to form a group. For example they tended to prefer working alone when writing. They also said that hearing where others were up to could be anxiety-provoking since members might be at different stages in their analysis. However they had talked with one another during the research, for example about how each was transcribing their interviews and also about how stressful the process was. They found talking about common ground was more helpful rather than the structure of their analyses *per se* since they each seemed so different.

Dissemination, dissemination, dissemination

Cooper and Turpin's (2007) survey of clinical psychology trainee publication rates found that about one in four successfully published their thesis research in peer-reviewed journals. Whilst this may be less than for PhD students, it is unclear how this compares with the publication rates of either professional psychology programmes or other health professions. They note that:

> … a range of factors are associated with trainee success, including both the enthusiasm of the supervisor and the trainee's enjoyment and past experiences of research, as well as the quality of the final product and the time made available in the first job after qualifying. The absence of these factors, and including some who may feel traumatized by the process, is associated with failure to publish.

> Cooper and Turpin (2007, p.59)

Julia, Peter and Phil felt that they were excited about writing their research up in different forms at the time of our discussion. However, they were also aware of becoming interested in other areas of clinical practice and research and were about to embark on new and demanding clinical posts. In his final chapter, Peter had carefully laid out the implications of his study for different interest groups following Harper (1999) and he felt that this had encouraged him to want to publish (something he eventually did: Stevens and Harper, 2007). However, Julia, Peter and Phil were also tired at the end of a demanding training and felt that they needed a break. It was difficult to balance the need for a break from a demanding training with the fact that, as Hodgson and Rollnick (1995) note, the difficulty in writing a study up for

publication is correlated with the length of time since the completion of the study. Cooper and Turpin (2007) make a number of suggestions about increasing publication rates. One suggestion their survey respondents made (as did an anonymous reviewer) was for supervisors and supervisees to write the research up jointly but, given the demands of the newly qualified practitioner's first job, for supervisors to take the lead

Final reflections: looking back

Julia, Peter and Phil were glad that they had used DA in their research projects. They found that they had learnt a lot from the process both at an intellectual and a more personal level.

Phil: I'm glad I did it. I think I learnt a lot more from it than comes across in the final written thing. There's loads that I learnt personally which couldn't go in there and that's a bit frustrating sometimes, actually, not to be able to show that, I think especially for me, looking at myself in it, I found really useful, and kind of the way that I conduct interviews, clinical interviews as much, um yeah, so I think there's loads that I've learnt from it that'll never appear in my thesis.

Over time they had begun to notice how learning about DA had begun to generalise into other aspects of their lives. Indeed Gough *et al.*, (2003) note how 'some of our students who used discourse analysis found it difficult but rewarding -- a "pseudo-spiritual experience" according to one participant' (p.6). For example, Peter noticed

how speakers on the BBC Radio 4 news and current affairs show, the *Today Programme* drew on a range of rhetorical devices.

Peter: And it was that that used to really bolster me and keep me going as much as the subject matter. And yeah, it changes, it doesn't just change that, it changes the way, you know, you think about science and truth and all these quite weighty issues that, and I think it does you good as a sort of a human really, because you … stop making easy assumptions.

Julia found it also influenced the way she listened to other conversations.

Julia: I think very similar to what Phil and Peter have said, I think it kind of develops the, I think kind of a third ear that sort of enables you to listen to things kind of critically, yeah, so you do sort of sit in the bath in the morning and listen to the *Today* programme, and you know, to be able to kind of carry that no matter where you are, sort of into referral meetings or conversations with friends, I find myself listening to conversations in a different way than I did previously, which I think has been really, really useful, um, yeah, that's the main thing really.

Discussion

In this article we have discussed some of the issues raised for students on professional psychology programmes carrying out discourse analytic research. Throughout we have identified some of the challenges such students face (e.g. time constraints). We have noted some of the common dilemmas experienced both by supervisees (e.g. how to manage their dual roles as practitioners and apprentice discourse analysts) and by supervisors (e.g. how detailed feedback on drafts should be). We have also provided a number of practical suggestions for graduate students conducting DA research.

One of the things we have learnt is that it is possible to conduct DA studies as part of professional psychology training. Though these will exceed the sophistication of undergraduate studies, since the research thesis forms only part of their assessment, it is unfair to judge them against the standard of a research-only Ph.D thesis.

Here we would like to identify how professional psychology training programmes could facilitate discourse analytic research by students.

Developing discourse analysis provision in professional psychology training programmes

Ponterotto (2005a) suggests a number of ways in which programmes could enhance qualitative research teaching: by employing staff with experience of qualitative research; by collaborating with other academic departments with relevant skills; and by offering training to current staff. He calls for institutional support for research within faculties and for journal editors to become more open including recruiting editorial board members with experience of qualitative research. Ponterotto also

proposes including a qualitative research curriculum in professional psychology training programmes and he helpfully provides a useful outline for programmes to use.

Programmes should include teaching on DA as part of a course in qualitative methods.   Given its different epistemological basis to more realist qualitative approaches, such courses need to include coverage of the philosophy of science and an acquaintance with debates about epistemology, including how these affect the criteria used to evaluate the quality of studies. There are now a number of accessible introductions to DA and courses could include a consideration of different DA traditions (e.g. Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis). It is important to complement theoretical teaching with practical skill development (e.g. workshop exercises). Students generally find it helpful to be exposed to a range of empirical examples so they can see the kinds of research questions DA can address (as well as those it is inappropriate for – Harper, 2006). Those wishing to use DA in their research projects could be encouraged to form method-specific peer support groups so they can give each other feedback as their project progresses. Another suggestion from an anonymous reviewer is to form mixed groups including both novice and more experienced researchers which would enable a form of group supervision and collaborative analysis. However, this might be easier to organise for full-time postgraduate students rather than those on professional psychology programmes since different cohorts and staff may be at the teaching base on different days.

Madill et al (2005) note that a key issue for building capacity for qualitative research teaching is enhanced support and training for supervisors. Interested supervisors and departments could supplement their reading by holding training events on both qualitative methods in general and specific methods like DA in particular. They could develop links with other departments where suitably experienced DA researchers are located. Indeed, a number of clinical qualitative research studies have been facilitated by collaboration between workers in specialist DA research units and practitioners (e.g. Antaki and Rapley, 1996, see also Harper, in press). Supervisors should read and comment on data collected by their supervisees and encourage them to begin their write-up at an early stage so the analysis has time to mature and develop. They should help students to develop research questions and analyses which are consistent with the approach to DA they have chosen.

A dilemma for programmes is how to respond to student requests to conduct qualitative studies when there is no appropriate supervisory resource. One response is not to allow students to conduct qualitative research. Whilst this is understandable, it could potentially lead to a vicious circle where qualitative research remains marginalised. As we have noted, building links with other departments and researchers may be a way forward.

We hope that the issues explored here have resonated with readers both inside and outside professional psychology training contexts and that students and supervisors will find this discussion of use in developing their own research practice.

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Box 1. Potential discussion topics circulated by letter

- Some description of the process of formulating a research question.

- Why choose DA?

- What helped (and didn't help) in trying to get to grips with the DA literature?

- Were there any particular books, chapters, articles or concepts which helped?

- Some description of the process of collecting data (e.g. doing interviews) and reflections on this.

- Some description of the process of doing the analysis -- what helped with this process? Did concepts begin to make sense here? What hindered this? Was there enough time?

- Were there any new areas that taking a DA approach helped open up in your research topic?

- What were the most useful DA concepts for you?

- Were there any areas it closed down? Any limitations from taking a DA approach?

- Looking back now, would you adjust the research project's timetable in any way?

- Looking back now, what advice would you give to other students and to others starting to think about using DA?

Box 2 When have I done enough? (from Kelly, 2002)

- When the kind of new thoughts I am having about the material are not adding anything new to the understanding I have already developed.

- When it seems that the interpretive account answers the questions that I set out to answer and adequately represents the material I have collected.

- When I have thrown a barrage of critical questions at the interpretation and it is still standing.

- When new material and new questions seem to add to the account rather than break it down.

- When I have shared my opinions with other researchers or my supervisor, and the account has provided responses to their questions.

Appendix: Transcription conventions

1. Transcription was rendered in a conventional orthographic representational form (e.g. extracts are punctuated to facilitate reading).

2. A slash (/) indicates an interruption by the other speaker.

3. […] indicates that an extract begins or ends part of the way through a sentence.

4. … indicates that a small number of lines have been omitted.

5. (laughs) indicates the speaker laughed at this point.