

Chapter Three

Comparative Methods and Methodology

Introduction

The rate of teenage pregnancy began to decline in both Finland and Scotland during the early 1970s. By the 1980s the rate of pregnancies to teenagers had dropped significantly in both countries. Since that time, however, whilst Finland has witnessed considerable further decline, the rate in Scotland has remained relatively unchanged for over two decades. In order to offer an explanation as to why these differing trends occurred, this research set out to explore the relationships at work between a number of specific policy areas and the rate of teenage pregnancy in both countries.

As was highlighted in Chapter One, the most noted difference between the two countries in relation to the sexual behaviour of young people was the level of effective contraceptive use. Further to this, at the beginning of Chapter Two, three of the most important pre-requisites to effective contraceptive use were highlighted as;

- Knowledge about sex, sexuality and contraception,
- Access to sexual health services
- The motivation to both access and make effective use of contraception.

Explanation as to how these three pre-requisites translated into the three policy areas under exploration was then presented within the review of the literature in Chapter Two. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the research process which led to the production of this thesis.

First, the process by which the final research design and choice of methods was achieved is documented. Detailed explanations about the natural history of the research process are often noted by their absence in the final write-up of research projects. Many problems in the design were incurred as a result of this research being of a comparative nature and the effect that the remedies to those problems had upon the final research design was considerable. I therefore considered an account of the natural history, an important process that required documenting.

Second, this chapter explores a number of current issues concerning the pursuit of comparative, cross-national social policy research. In doing so, I locate my work methodologically within those fields as a qualitative researcher.

Finally, discussion is then presented of the methodological decisions taken within my own research process including access to and the collection of the data, the use of interpreters in foreign research, as well as the process of analysis and writing up of the findings.

Natural History of the Research Process

The research project that is documented within this thesis originated from a proposal to study AIDS education in the UK. At the time of application for ESRC

funding the opportunity arose to conduct a piece of cross-national comparative research with Finland, due to contacts my principal supervisor had with the University of Tampere. Due to the fact that Finland had an incredibly low rate of HIV cases, a comparative project of each country's respective school-based AIDS education appeared at first a very plausible project.

After further exploration it became very evident that whatever the reasons behind Finland's low rate of HIV, it was not due to a superior provision of AIDS education in school. Rather than discard the opportunity to conduct a comparative project, this research took on the novel experience of a reverse approach to comparative research design, whereby the research design was developed around the two countries available for comparison.

After widening the literature review to incorporate all issues relating to teenage sexual behaviour, the decision was made to broaden the scope of this research. Having noted that there was a significant difference in the rate of teenage pregnancy between Scotland and Finland, the decision was made to pursue a research design to explore the potential reasons as to why this difference existed.

Having taken this decision, the process of narrowing the research focus and producing an effective research design began. Initially this process included reviewing the available literature on teenage pregnancy, looking for the obvious gaps in knowledge as well as airing the ideas arising from this process informally

with a group of four mothers (aged 22-25) who had conceived during their teenage years¹.

The discussion with the group of mothers was crucial to the development of the final research design as it highlighted a key point, that there was no single solution to the prevention of unintended teenage pregnancy. The mothers identified a range of issues that they perceived retrospectively as causal factors in their lack of effective contraceptive use including a combination of:

- A lack of knowledge about how contraception actually worked²,
- A perception that pregnancy couldn't happen 'the first time',
- A lack of confidence to access their doctors for contraceptive advice and/or supplies,
- A lack of direction in their lives at the point they became pregnant.

In the six months following the discussion with the group of mothers, a number of potential ideas were raised and their feasibility thought through. Many of those ideas were not deemed to be original. Of those that were, they were either not practical, or not achievable for a number of reasons. The main recurring reasons

¹ Contact was made with this group of mothers, who all attended a self-esteem workshop group, via a personal connection my mother (a general practitioner in Glasgow) had with the individual who ran this group.

² One particular example of this point was made by Laura, who had conceived at the age of 16. Both she and her best friend had decided after months of going-steady, that the night of a particular party was going to be the first night they would have sex with their respective boyfriends. Both young women borrowed a couple of contraceptive pills from a packet belonging to a friend, took the pills and thought, 'well that's me on the pill'. Both Laura and her friend delivered their babies within three days of each other. Therefore, whilst both young women knew about 'contraception' neither had received any information about how different forms of contraception actually worked.

were the constraints of both time and language.

For example, despite being aware that large proportions of people, especially young people in Finland have a good command of the English language, when talking about sex, one is talking about an entirely different language altogether. In other words a very topic-specific language, which is likely to be culturally specific. It was therefore concluded that the likelihood of conceptual misinterpretation was too great for a number of the research ideas that had been raised by that point in time.

After further analysis of the literature and the discussions with the group of mothers, what suddenly became evident was that despite a wealth of research exploring issues relating to teenage pregnancy, they were generally only focused on one potential causal factor related to contraceptive use. In other words, the focus would be on teenage pregnancy and sex education or teenage pregnancy and sexual health services, very few pieces of research had actually considered exploring a range of policy areas and their potential effect on teenage pregnancy. This therefore led to the decision to explore teenage pregnancy from a number of policy areas that had been identified by previous research and the group of mothers, as important causal factors in the (in)effective use of contraception.

Studying the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy incorporates a potentially unlimited number of areas for exploration. The next stage therefore involved deciding which policies were the most relevant and feasible for comparison. To

reach this decision, consideration was first given to the different levels of policy, which could impact on young people's lives.

On one level there are many influences which could affect young people including family, peer groups and school. The decision was made to concentrate on policies found at the school level because school is one institution where it is possible to reach almost all young people and because of the decision to examine policy affecting school-age teenage pregnancy (up to 16). Another research project might choose to compare the influence of peer group or family. This, however, is not the aim of this piece of research.

On a second level, young people are faced with many external settings which could have an influence on their lives, but in which they may have no direct participation. These could include local health and education authorities that can set and/ or guide school policy and community influences such as youth orientated services and social services organising sexual health services for young people, which complement efforts in school. For this reason the decision was made to examine policy at the local authority/ municipality level as well as policy relating to inter-agency collaboration between health and education services.

On a third level there exists a further set of possible influences such as the political system. For this reason the decision was taken to examine the national policy framework developed and influenced at the governmental level.

Consideration of a number of different levels of influence, in this case three, is important in order to gain an overall understanding of any influence on a young person. The immediate setting in which a young person is located is not necessarily responsible for a certain phenomenon and therefore it is crucial to consider and examine the wider picture. As the various levels of context are sets of influences intertwined with each other, what happens at one level may have an impact or influence on what happens at other levels. As a result, this investigation included several layers of context, in order to explore more fully the effect that policy may have.

An initial prospective research design was then developed around the different levels of policy within the areas of health, education and inter-agency (collaboration between health and education), which had arisen as key policy areas from the initial review of the literature. This design was then presented during a preliminary visit to Finland, at a Public Health seminar at the School of Public Health at Tampere University.

Many of the academics present at the seminar were experts in the field of young people and sexual health in Finland and were both enthusiastic about the project and encouraging in their advice about ways of improving the initial design. I was then invited to visit a family planning nurse and a school nurse during my stay and these visits I now believe, were crucial to the final research design.

Prior to arriving in Finland I had assumed that sex education was likely to be the most important difference between the two countries. This view had been

influenced by and developed due to the overwhelming focus on sex education within the literature on teenage pregnancy and within the British media. Following discussions with the two nurses in Finland, it became apparent that whilst sex education was a crucial element in providing young people with knowledge about sex, sexuality and contraception, this alone could not explain the difference in pregnancy rates between the two countries. The nurses highlighted the importance of their roles as service providers, in particular the ease of access that the school health service provides to young people in Finland.

Therefore after further consideration and review of each policy area outlined for exploration, some changes were made to the main policy areas. The most substantial change was to 'Inter-agency' policy. It had become apparent that there were two main areas of interest with regard to inter-agency, namely, where health professionals were utilised within a school health service or services were linked to a school and where sexual health professionals were utilised within the provision of sex education. Therefore, whilst retaining 'Education' as a distinct policy area under exploration, the other two main policy areas shifted to from 'Health' and 'Inter-agency' to 'Sexual Health' and 'Sex Education', within which the noted inter-agency issues are addressed.

Reflecting on the initial visit to Finland therefore, two very important lessons were learned. First, the recognition that the original policy areas were too broad, requiring a more specific focus and second, I had to be wary of assuming too much about what the eventual findings may be. It is important that any research framework is loose enough to accept that the underlying assumptions formulated at

the start of the research may not in fact be the most important issues. This is something that is taught in every research methods class, but never really internalised until you are faced with the reality of the rigidness of your own assumptions and bias.

The initial visit was therefore invaluable in helping to develop a research design that would test underlying assumptions whilst remaining open to new ideas. Additionally, having had the opportunity to meet and discuss my research with experts in the field of teenage sexual health in Finland, I was able to translate those meetings into contacts, which were to prove invaluable during the time I was to spend later in Finland.

This included if required, the offer of an interpreter (who worked in the same field with a social science background), who also offered to make initial contacts on my behalf to gain any access that I would require in order to conduct my research. Additionally I was provided with an office to work from and all associated facilities such as phone, postal service, a computer, email, printer, photocopier (and a never ending supply of exquisite filter coffee). Finally, I had the comforting knowledge that I would be returning for twelve weeks to a country, of whose language I spoke very little, where I knew I would not be isolated, personally or professionally.

The preliminary visit proved to be a crucial step in my research process and one that cannot be underestimated in importance for anyone considering cross-national/comparative work, no matter how many contacts they perceive themselves to have,

or how appropriate they believe their set of research questions to be to the other country/ countries involved in their research.

The ‘reverse approach’ to comparative research

Rather than choosing a number of countries within which to explore my research design, this research has taken the reverse approach to comparative research. Reflecting on this experience, had the choice of countries followed the design, I may have overlooked a number of important issues that made Finland one of the best choices for comparison.

For practical reasons, Scotland was an obvious choice primarily because I was located there and common sense and financial limitations made this an obvious choice. However, another important and valuable reason to consider Scotland (in relation to teenage pregnancy) as independent from the rest of the UK, as can be seen in the review of literature in Chapter Two, is that very little research on teenage pregnancy has done so. Scotland has her own legal system, education system, religion and culture, many of which are important elements when considering policy development. For this reason I believed that considering Scotland as separate from the rest of the UK would be a very enlightening angle from which to pursue a piece of research on teenage pregnancy. Additionally, my research would produce some valuable insights and policy options to present to the Scottish Executive at a time when Scotland is entering a new era of self-government.

With regard to Finland being the country of comparison, had the option of choice been open to me to compare Scotland with any other European country, the Netherlands would most likely have been my first choice, as it has lower teenage pregnancy rates than Finland. The Netherlands, however, has already been researched to some degree in connection with England, sex education and teenage pregnancy, as was noted in Chapter Two. Additionally, as was noted in Chapter One, although the teenage birth rate in the Netherlands is just over half of that in Finland, Finland has seen more of a continual decline and percentage reduction over the last two decades than has been the case in the Netherlands. These were two key points that I would have perhaps overlooked had I simply been choosing the country with the lowest rate.

Another key reason why these two countries make a good comparison is that they have been relatively ignored in the field of comparative research in general. The review of the literature in Chapter Two revealed that although there has been a degree of research in the area of teenage pregnancy in both countries, as yet, there has not been a piece of comparative work between the two. There are, however, further issues that make Scotland and Finland a particularly good comparison.

Both Scotland and Finland are developed European countries, with similar population sizes and the proportion of each country's inhabitants who are women aged 10-19 years are also very similar (see Figure 3.1 below).

Figure 3.1**Population Statistics for Finland and Scotland (1994)**

	Total population	Females aged 10-14	Females aged 15-19	Females aged 10-19 as a % of total population
Finland	5098754	161405	160375	6.31%
Scotland	5132400	158042	151443	6.03%

Source: Tilastokeskus (Statistics Finland) 1996: Scottish Abstract of Statistics 1996.

Additionally, both countries have a legal age of heterosexual consent of 16 years and it is also believed that the age at which both countries' young people first engage in heterosexual intercourse is also similar (Wallace & Vienonen 1989; Currie & Todd 1993; Papp 1997). As was shown in Chapter One, the levels of sexual experience were also noted to be very similar between young people aged 15(/16) in both countries. These are all important constants and the similarities between the two countries make the differences that do exist (such as effective contraceptive use), more notable.

Comparative Cross-National Research

In British social science research in general there has been a large increase in comparative research in recent years, especially within a British / USA and European context. The realisation that “comparisons can lead to fresh and exciting insights and a deeper understanding of issues that are of central concern in different countries” (Hantrais & Mangen 1996:3) has led comparative research into an era of significant importance and recognition.

Despite this growing enthusiasm for comparative research, it appears that there is little consensus on many aspects of this type of research. What it should be called is an important starting point. Many names are given to this style of research: comparative, cross-national, cross-cultural, cross-societal, trans-national are to name but a few. Confusion arises when authors use these names synonymously or fail to identify why they place their research under one specific title. As a result “the vocabulary for distinguishing between the different kinds of comparative research is redundant and not very precise” (Øyen 1990:7).

Hantrais and Mangen provide the following definition whereby “a study can be said to be cross-national and comparative if one or more units in two or more societies, cultures or countries are compared in respect of the same concepts and concerning the systematic analysis of phenomena, usually with the intention of explaining them and generalising from them” (Hantrais and Mangen 1996:1). This is a very broad definition and incorporates almost all comparative research.

I prefer to define cross-national research as that which does in fact cross two or more national boundaries, as many different societies and cultures can exist within one country. I would also refer to my own work as cross-national because I see the nation as the context of my study. This research deals with government, local government, laws, policy and legally regulated institutions and therefore the nation-state is an important context (Kohn 1996: Clasen 1999). I will therefore throughout this thesis presuppose the most common sense interpretations of the words ‘comparative’ – to compare and ‘cross-national’ – across (in this case) two national boundaries.

Comparative Cross-National Social Policy

Although comparative research of all kinds has been gaining in recognition for some time, the emphasis of study has changed in recent years. Over the last twenty years there has been a shift from large scale survey research with an emphasis on descriptive, culture-free approaches (Hantrais 1999), to a new style of smaller-scale, qualitative research, more reliant on cultural sensitivity which aims subtly to draw on similarities and differences in a wide range of areas within social policy (Clasen 1999:2). Rather than examining large-scale social policy programmes across a variety of countries searching for typologies and generalisability, such as the prominent work conducted by Esping-Andersen (1990), there has been a shift in emphasis to explore through qualitative research the development, effectiveness and changes in particular social policy programmes.

As Clasen has noted, this is not to say that both styles of research are not as equally important, but for the present time at least, “the shift in research interest from the general to the more specific, from the correlational to the case study approach, can be understood as a process of catching up” (Clasen 1999:3). This new qualitative, case-study, culturally sensitive approach has much to offer the development of social policy, both nationally and globally. As Øyen states “the need for more precise, reliable comparisons has become part of a political and economic reality which is a driving force behind the demands for more cross-national comparisons most of which apply to specific problems and are fairly limited in scope” (Øyen 1990:2).

The purpose of comparative cross-national social policy can be seen as two-fold. Not only is it in itself an approach of academic enquiry, but also a means to producing policy-advice and some would argue that it is best described as a combination of both (Antal et al. 1996). A central purpose of comparative cross-national social policy is to provide not only empirical knowledge in areas of both national and foreign social policy, but also to present policy makers with choices; to provide alternative pictures of and policy solutions to issues common to many nations and also hopefully, to prevent policy makers from repeating previous mistakes and developing ineffective strategies. “In short, it can help policy makers decide what not to do as well as what to do” (Madison 1980:12).

Questions have however been raised as to how effective policies which have been devised in one national context can be ‘borrowed’ and applied elsewhere (Antal et al. 1996; Hantrais & Mangen 1996). One particular school of thought goes as far as to state that due to the fact that every cultural setting and context is unique, it is impossible to apply policy lessons that have been learnt outside one’s own cultural context (Antal et al. 1996). Although I recognise and would argue that this is one of the central issues for consideration in comparative cross-national policy research, I do not perceive that there are no lessons to be learned from the ways in which others have dealt with common policy issues. There is, however, a need for an acute awareness of the cultural context within which the policies being explored and examined have been developed and the degree to which that culture plays in the effectiveness of certain policy solutions.

One particularly important aspect of this cultural context that researchers must immediately become aware of is that of norms and values. A policy “is a conscious contrivance, reflecting human purposiveness, and in some sense a moral act” and therefore it goes without saying that there will be “a normative element at the heart of any effort to develop some systematic, comprehensive study of public policy” (Anderson 1978:20). How to deal with this normative element is at least one area where there appears to be a large degree of agreement. It appears that in order to “unravel the subtle interactions between political culture and public policy predispositions” (Heidenheimer et al 1983:5), one must consider any normative assumptions to be key variables when undertaking the analysis of comparative policy (Antal et al. 1996).

The extent to which policies can be applied outwith the context from which they were derived will vary from policy to policy and country to country. Even where it becomes explicitly obvious that one policy cannot be ‘borrowed’ due to reasons of applicability, feasibility or because that policy solution does not conform to the normative values of a nation, comparative cross-national social policy still offers choice. As stated by Antal et al. “Choice between different policy objectives and different policy instruments, choice between maintaining the status quo and innovation or reform, choice between public and private responsibilities, and choice between different patterns and beneficiaries for the distribution of public resources. Indeed it is difficult to conceive of policy without invoking the notion of choice” (Antal et al. 1996:13).

Therefore even if the findings of this research do not appeal to officials at the Scottish Executive, local authorities or at the school level, on the grounds of non-conformity to normative values, they will at least present a choice, both in policy options and possible future directions in policy.

'Real' comparative research?

“Thinking without comparison is unthinkable. And, in the absence of comparison, so is all scientific thought and scientific research” (Swanson 1971:145). This quote relates appropriately to the constant debate present in many texts on comparative research as to whether or not research cross-nationally is methodologically any different from other comparative research. Virtually all social research involves comparison at some level or another (Ragin 1996) and therefore it appears appropriate to argue that there should be no great difference in methodology between different styles of research. Hantrais & Mangen appear to support that opinion by stating that cross-national research can be “descriptive, evaluative and/ or analytical and is therefore subject to many of the same problems” [as other kinds of research] (1996:4).

The situation however is not that simplistic and as Øyen concluded, there is little consensus on this matter (1990). Øyen herself has attempted to classify four different types of researcher by their beliefs on this subject under the headings of Purists, Ignorants, Totalists and Comparativists (1990:5). In summary she sees Purists as those who see absolutely no difference between sociological research in general and cross-national research, but who are aware of the methodological issues raised by conducting multi-level research. Ignorants, however, will conduct

research cross-nationally with no consideration at all to the possible difficulties that may arise in methodology or the interpretation of data. Totalists she believes settle for compromises when conducting cross-national research as they are all too aware of the problems posed, but believe that the development of knowledge is more important than the scientific standards of testing hypotheses in situations where this is simply not possible. And finally, she sees Comparativists as those who concur with both the views of purists and totalists but who also believe that it is imperative when conducting cross-national research that one considers the problems that arise due to the research being cross-national (Øyen 1990:4).

If I were to place myself somewhere within Øyen's typologies then I would have to concur with the Comparativist viewpoint. Having conducted a piece of cross-national comparative work I do concede that there are perhaps no major differences in methodological approach between within-nation and cross-national research. I would however argue that there are many areas where conducting cross-national research can exacerbate some problems that arise when compared with other kinds of sociological or social policy enquiry. Time pressures, financial constraint, organisational difficulties are a few such issues. The descriptive account of how this research's final design was developed is an example in itself, but also highlights some of the additional issues needing consideration when developing a piece of research in order that it can be conducted cross-nationally. Additionally, problems that arise such as those related to language and in particular the virtually ignored issue of possible interview bias incurred as a result of using interpreters in foreign research¹, are specific to cross-national research.

¹ This issue will be discussed at length at a later stage in this chapter.

Comparative Cross-National Qualitative Research

The shift in methods used in cross-national, comparative research already discussed, from large-scale survey research to smaller-scale case study research, reflects a more general shift in the direction of more qualitative styles of research that have been occurring within sociological and social policy research over the last twenty years. The desire to unravel the secrets of how private lives are affected by public issues has been at the core of this methodological shift. The use of qualitative methods in cross-national, comparative research however, are still very much in their infancy (Ungerson 1996).

As a result very little is written about how to approach cross-national research using qualitative methods. There are few guidelines available to the inexperienced or the experienced researcher and the reality of pursuing the use of qualitative methods in this field is very much a 'learn as you go along' process.

The decision to use qualitative methods to obtain the data for this research was taken because I wanted to examine policies that affected teenage pregnancy rates both at a documentary and practical level. A crucial element of effective workable policy is whether policy developed at government level reaches the stage of implementation at the local level. Therefore to compare only policies at one level for similarities and differences would not have provided the whole picture and would result in an inaccurate analysis of the situation.

I perceived that a valuable approach that would enable the study of each nation's policies for similarities and differences as well as to view the policies within each respective country from government down to school level, would be to interview those who were responsible for the development and implementation of those policies. By conducting semi-structured interviews with relevant informants from government, local authorities/ municipalities and schools, I aimed to obtain both 'content' information on the policy areas of interest, as well as reflective responses regarding the value, effectiveness and implementation of those policies. This was something I felt could only be achieved by qualitative means.

The Organisation of Cross-National Research

"It can be assumed that much research, comparative or otherwise, is guided by the principles of least resistance or invitation by opportunity. One of the central research strategies, although not much discussed, seems to be the preference given to available data and methodological tools, and the leaning towards accessible data works and easy funding" (Øyen 1990:15). This statement holds a large degree of truth. As with other aspects of methodology presented in this chapter, this is an area not often discussed and hence the following part of this chapter presents an organisational picture of my research process.

In organising a comparative cross-national research project involving two or more countries a researcher has many issues to consider, such as those of time constraint, monetary resources, access to comparable data and collaborative relationships including both informal and formal networks (Øyen 1990). The decision on which countries to include in a piece of research is the first logical step

in the organisation of a piece of comparative cross-national research. As I have already stated however, my position in the process was a reverse approach. Usually “appropriateness, research feasibility, availability of collaborators and funding are key concerns” (Kohn 1996:45), and just because my countries came before the research design made these issues of no less concern. In some senses having the countries before the design enabled me to tailor the appropriateness, feasibility, funding and contacts to a greater degree of satisfaction than perhaps would have been possible if the situation had been reversed.

The establishment of workable collaborative relationships prior to the research and sustaining those relationships during the research is another problematic area of cross-national research (Hill 1962; Sarapata 1985). Again, luck on my part played a central role to the success of the establishment and development of such relationships.

Despite the large degree of help provided by my contacts and having the basic funding to do comparative work, the combination of both was not nearly sufficient to adequately fund this research. As I was later to find to my cost, the amount of funds required to conduct comparative cross-national research is very much understated. My largest financial mistake was to underestimate the cost of the translation of my Finnish data. The Finnish language not being a mainstream European language cost on average three times the amount that French or German would have cost to translate. As a result the process of analysing my data was

seriously delayed while I attempted to raise the funds to have my data translated, funds that were not forthcoming from the ESRC¹ or my University.

Access

Access to the data is a key area of concern for any researcher. Without achieving relevant access, many projects simply would not proceed. During my access negotiations I was presented with both an expected experience in Scotland, and a pleasant surprise in Finland.

In Scotland I had not anticipated the access process to be impossible, but I had expected it to be a lengthy one. This anticipation arose from what colleagues had stated about difficulties they had had in achieving access to institutions such as schools in Britain. Gaining access to a Scottish Office official was the easiest and least time-consuming of all access negotiations in Scotland. The process took a matter of days from an initial letter to the Scottish Office Department of Education (SOED) and a reply with the name of an individual within the SOED who was happy to be interviewed by me.

The local authorities and their Directors of Education were also, on the whole, helpful from the beginning. First in allowing me to approach the schools in their area, second, by providing me with all their written policy regarding the areas under study and third by offering individuals for interviews (gaining access to officials in the local authorities took only one month). Some Directors of

¹ Whilst I am very grateful to the ESRC for my studentship, it is somewhat ironic that the encouragement by the ESRC for students to undertake comparative research is not met with 'realistic' funds to satisfactorily complete such work.

Education however, were initially a little too helpful, in that they ‘suggested’ the school/s that I contact. I say ‘suggested’ in that way because they implied that these were the only schools they would like me to write to and two authorities actually stated that one particular school was the only one I could contact.

After further investigation of these particular schools, I found out that they were all in some way ‘special’. Either they had just become involved a big inter-agency collaboration project, or they were the one school in the area who was working closely with the local authority to develop a new programme of sex education. Although it was interesting to examine what improvements local authorities were trying to make and to find out about new projects, which I have done through the local authority interviews, I decided not to pursue access to these particular schools, as I wanted to examine a more ‘typical’ rather than ‘special’ school.

Gaining access to schools was the most time-consuming process, taking seven months in total. In the first instance I had to apply in writing to each local authority and ask the Director of Education for permission to approach schools to take part. In total this process took 2 months. After acquiring this permission, I then began writing to schools inviting them to take part¹. Of the first thirty schools I wrote to, one indicated potential interest, eight replied to say that they are too busy at present and the other twenty-one did not reply. A further fifty schools were written to after I had begun my fieldwork in Finland, which covered every remaining school in all

¹ An example of this letter can be seen in Appendix iv.

three of the chosen local authorities. At this point I had to face the fact that if none of those schools replied positively then I would have to consider changing the local authorities and starting the whole process again from the beginning.

On my return from the fieldwork in Finland, I arrived to approximately a 70% response rate from the second round of applications to schools. The reason for the noted difference in response both positive and negative raised an interesting issue. I will never know why the difference in response was so dramatic, however I would speculate strongly over whether the fact that letters were sent on headed paper from a Finnish university may have helped in some way. Even although I clearly stated that I was studying at Stirling University but just happened to be researching in Finland at the time I was writing to them, it might have been perceived that I was in fact Finnish. This might perhaps therefore have fostered a feeling of obligation to provide the time for my research or to explain why they couldn't take part (but in many cases were still interested to be informed of my findings).

Of the replies that I received, almost half were inviting me to use their school in my research. After such disappointment in the early stages of attempting to obtain permission from schools, I was quite astounded by this very positive response and felt guilty having to turn so many schools down. Their letters on the whole had not simply been 'yes you can come here', but that 'we would be delighted to take part in this very worthwhile research etc.', which was very encouraging.

Compared to the process of access in Scotland, the Finnish process was a very pleasant surprise. I had anticipated difficulties in Scotland because in a sense I was 'in the know' about what to expect. On the other hand I was anticipating difficulties in Finland because I was not 'in the know' with regard to correct procedure, past experiences of other researchers and due to the obvious language barrier.

During my initial visit to Finland I became acquainted with Matti Rimpelä and Arja Liinamo, both researchers at the School of Public Health in Tampere. Part of an on-going project that they have been involved with for a number of years is the National School Health Study, a quantitative study involving a large number of schools in Finland. As a result of the contacts they already had, they offered to aid me in my access process.

The end result being that all I had to do was provide Arja with the letter I sent to Scottish schools regarding access. Arja then tailored this letter to be sent to the Finnish schools, translated the letter and then the rest of the access process was completed on my behalf. In approximately one month Arja had obtained access for me to conduct interviews in four schools, three municipalities and the Government Agency, the National Board of Education (NBE).

Research Settings and Sample

The primary data collection was conducted between March and May 1998 in Finland and between June and August 1998 in Scotland. It had been my initial intention to conduct the fieldwork in Scotland prior to my work in Finland. It

became apparent however in the early stages of the access process to schools in Scotland, that this process was going to take considerably more time than I had previously anticipated. Therefore the decision was taken to undertake the fieldwork in Finland first. In hindsight, this was a useful approach, as it helped me to view Scotland almost from an outsider's stance, having been sensitised to the Finnish system for the three months prior to my Scottish fieldwork.

During the three months I spent undertaking fieldwork in each country, I conducted research in a number of settings. In each country I gained access to four schools, one in each of three different municipalities in Finland and local authorities in Scotland and one pilot school in both countries¹.

Due to the fact that the local authorities and schools chosen in Scotland and Finland were not intended to be, nor could they be, representative of their country as a whole, in deciding on which geographical areas to focus on and which schools within those areas to approach, each municipality/ local authority and school was chosen purely on the basis that they were significantly different from each other. For example for the three local authorities in Scotland, one was an urban city-orientated local authority, one had an urban/rural mix, i.e. pockets of urban towns (one city) and villages set in a rural area and the third was a local authority with a large geographical span that incorporated a large urban city, a number of towns and a vast number of small villages.

¹ Scotland	Local authority	School	Pilot school
	Glendale	Glendale Academy	Lochend Secondary
	Arbourness	Arbourness Secondary	
	Scotallen	Scotallen Secondary	
Finland	Municipality	School	Pilot school
	Tehtaala	Tehtaala Peruskoulu	Koskela Peruskoulu

I did, however, wish to have a level of consistency between the areas and schools chosen in both countries, in a sense matching the areas by geographical type (urban/rural) and approximate size and the schools by size, location within their local authority/ municipality and similar catchment size areas.

Therefore, to ensure that the areas and schools chosen in Finland would be similar to those in Scotland, I undertook many discussions with Arja, to ensure that there was consistency between the two samples. The main difficulty in this matching process arose from the difficulty I had already encountered in accessing schools in Scotland, which meant that my fieldwork would begin in Finland rather than Scotland. Therefore, whilst I was able match the local authority areas with municipalities in Finland in advance, I had no schools to match. Therefore, I was once again faced with a reverse approach in my methods, whereby I had to decide on my Finnish school sample based on my likely school sample for Scotland.

Due to Arja's involvement in the School Health Study in Finland, however, she was able to provide detailed information about the areas and schools in which I may wish to conduct my exploration. The information on the schools was particularly important in that it enabled my desire to pick 'typical' schools in Scotland to be matched by similarly 'typical' schools in Finland.

Following these discussions with Arja the decision was taken to chose schools that varied in size¹, location within their municipality/ local authority and catchment population. As such of the schools in Finland, the pilot school, *Koskela Peruskoulu*, is an averaged sized urban-school with 400 pupils and 39 fulltime teachers, situated on the outskirts of the City of *Tehtaala*, within the municipality of *Tehtaala*. The intake for this school was from the local surrounding area lower comprehensives, few pupils came from out with the school catchment zone. *Tehtaala Peruskoulu* is an average sized school with 377 pupils and 30 fulltime, located in the centre of the City of *Tehtaala*. In addition to being a regular upper comprehensive school, this school was a language specialist school, which attracted pupils from all over the municipality and a small number from other municipalities. Therefore this school had a wide catchment area, 60% from within the school catchment zone of lower comprehensives, 40% out with the zone.

Vaarama Peruskoulu is an average sized school with 381 pupils and 36 teachers, located in the centre of the *Town of Vaarama*. The intake of pupils at this school came mainly from the local area lower comprehensives, few pupils came from out with the school catchment zone. Lastly, *Alajoki Peruskoulu* is below average-sized school with 308 pupils and 23 teachers, located in the centre of the *Town of Alajoki*. Being located in a relatively rural town, the intake of pupils at this school came mainly from the local area lower comprehensives, few pupils came from out with the school catchment zone.

¹ The size of schools in Finland did not vary very much regardless of geographical location in contrast to what was found to be the case in Scotland, an average school size in Finland would be classed as having 400 or more pupils, where as in Scotland schools would vary from under 100 to over 1000.

On my return to Scotland I then used the profiles of these schools to choose from the selection of Scottish schools that had agreed to take part in the research. Although it had become apparent that I would not be able to match the schools by school population size because the size of schools in Finland did not vary greatly, I did look for the mix of town/city location and variety in catchment size. As such, Scotallen Secondary School is a large mixed-ethnic comprehensive with 1226 pupils and 120 staff. The school is located towards the south of the City of Scotallen, near to the geographical boundary of Scotallen local authority. This school has five associated primaries, however, the school also receives a number of pupils (on average 80 per academic year) from other primaries on placement requests. This is due to the location of this school on the boundary of the local authority and also due to a large number of secondary school closures in this local authority.

Arbourness High School is the only local authority school in the town within which it is located (there is also one independent school). The school has 575 pupils and 48 members of teaching staff. The school being the only one in the town, has a catchment area of the whole town and surrounding local villages.

Lochend Secondary School was the pilot school for the Scottish schools and is a relatively small school with 130 pupils (to rise to 155 in 2001) and 19 members of teaching staff. Many teachers double or treble up on subjects to offer an almost fully comprehensive range of subjects at all levels of examination. The school is located in a small-industrialised village within the local authority of Glendale and

its intake comes from a rural catchment area. The school has four associated primaries from four local villages, including the one in which the school is located.

Finally, Glendale Academy is situated in the centre of a large city surrounded by a rural area in the local authority of Glendale. It has 1050 pupils and 80 (76 fulltime) members of teaching staff and is one of the largest schools in the local authority of Glendale. The intake of pupils in this school comes mostly from its six associated primaries, although a small number come from surrounding rural areas.

At the outset of the access process two of the three local authorities in Scotland requested confirmation that the area and school chosen for study in their area would remain confidential. Therefore all the names of the places and people (except my Finnish colleagues) have been changed to protect identity. In order to maintain this protection of identity, Appendix ii provides a flavour of each area rather than specific ingredients by which it would enable a reader to identify them.

At the level of government in both countries the individual interviewed was an Inspector of Education, with a particular remit for sex education (Scotland) and Health Education (Finland). Similarly at the level of local authority and municipality, the individual interviewed was an education official with a particular remit for sex education (Scotland) and Health and Family Education (Finland).

At the school level, in my initial letter to schools I asked specifically to interview the head teacher, the teacher/s of careers guidance (or equivalent), teacher/s of

biology and as many teachers as it was possible, who were involved with the development of and/ or teaching of sex education in that school. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 below outlines the subjects who were interviewed in each country and the names by which they will be referred to throughout this thesis.

Figure 3.2 Interviewees in Scotland

Scottish Office Education Department (SOED)

Inspector for education with an additional remit for sex education.

Reference name in thesis: **SOED official**.

Local authority

Local authority education official with an additional remit for sex/ health education.

Reference name in thesis: **(name of local authority) official**.

School level

Lochend Secondary School

Reference name in thesis:

Head teacher - male (1)

Biology teacher - male (1)

Careers Guidance teacher – male (1)

PSE teacher (including sex education) - male (1)

Glendale Academy

Reference name in thesis:

Head teacher - male (1)

Biology teachers - male (2)

Careers Guidance teacher – female (1)

PSE teacher (including sex education) - male (1), female (1)

Scotallen Secondary School

Reference name in thesis:

Head teacher - male (1)

Biology teacher - male (1)

Careers Guidance teacher –female (1)

Health education teacher (including sex education): female (1)

Arbourness high School

Reference name in thesis:

Head teacher - male (1)

Biology teachers - male (2)

Careers Guidance teachers – female (2)

PSE teacher (including sex education) - female (2)

Figure 3.3 Interviewees in Finland

	<u>Finnish name</u>
National Board of Education (NBE) Inspector for Education with an additional remit for Health Education. Reference name in thesis: NBE official. Interview language : English, no interpreter.	<i>Kouluhakitus</i> <i>Koulutarkastaja</i>
Municipality level Municipal officer for education Reference name in thesis: Tehtaala official: interview language, majority English – interpreter used. Vaarama official: interview language, majority English – interpreter used. Alajoki official: interview language, half English, half Finnish – interpreter used.	
School level	<u>Finnish name</u>
Koskela Peruskoulu Head teacher (1) - female Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used. Physical education teacher (1) - male Interview language, all Finnish – interpreter used. Home economics teacher (1) - female Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used. School nurse (1)- female Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used. Student counsellor (1) - female Interview language, half Finnish, half English – interpreter used. Biology teacher (2) – 1 male 1 female Interview language, half Finnish, half English – interpreter used.	<i>koulunjohtaja</i> <i>liikunnanopettaja</i> <i>kotitalousopettaja</i> <i>koulutervydenhoitaja</i> <i>opinto-ohjaaja</i> <i>biologianopettaja</i>
Tehtaala Peruskoulu Head teacher (1)- female Interview language, majority English – interpreter used. Physical education teacher (2) : 1 male, 1 female Interview language, majority English – interpreter used. Home economics teacher (1) - female Interview language, majority English – interpreter used. School nurse (1)- female Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used. Student counsellor (1) - male Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used. Biology teacher (2) – 1 male 1 female Interview language, majority English – interpreter used.	<i>koulunjohtaja</i> <i>liikunnanopettaja</i> <i>kotitalousopettaja</i> <i>koulutervydenhoitaja</i> <i>opinto-ohjaaja</i> <i>biologianopettaja</i>
<i>Continued below...</i>	

Figure 3.3 continued.

<u>School level</u>	<u>Finnish name</u>
Vaarama Peruskoulu	
Head teacher (1)- male	<i>koulunjohtaja</i>
Interview language, majority English – interpreter used.	
Physical education teacher (2)	<i>liikunnanopettaja</i>
: 1 male, 1 female	
Interview language, majority English – interpreter used.	
Home economics teacher (1) - female	<i>kotitalousopettaja</i>
Interview language, majority English – interpreter used.	
School nurse (1)- female	<i>koulutervydenhoitaja</i>
Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used.	
Student counsellor (1) - male	<i>opinto-ohjaaja</i>
Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used.	
Biology teacher (1) –1 male	<i>biologianopettaja</i>
Interview language, majority English – interpreter used.	
Alajoki Peruskoulu	
Head teacher (1)- male	<i>koulunjohtaja</i>
Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used.	
Physical education teacher (2)	<i>liikunnanopettaja</i>
: 1 male, 1 female	
Interview language, majority English – interpreter used.	
Home economics teacher (1) - female	<i>kotitalousopettaja</i>
Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used.	
School nurse (1)- female	<i>koulutervydenhoitaja</i>
Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used.	
Student counsellor (1) - male	<i>opinto-ohjaaja</i>
Interview language, majority Finnish – interpreter used.	
Biology teacher (2) –1 male, 1 female	<i>biologianopettaja</i>
Interview language, majority English – interpreter used.	
English teacher – (taught option on <i>dating dynamics</i>)	<i>englanninopettaja</i>
(1) - male	
Interview language, majority English – interpreter used.	

Data Collection

During the three months spent researching in each country, the end result of my fieldwork was a selection of varied data consisting of policy documentation, national guidelines and curriculums and tape recorded semi-structured interviews with relevant individuals at the level of government, local authority and school, as described in the previous section.

During the interviews I collected systematic data on the content, aims, and objectives of existing policies, indications of changes in policy direction and reflective data on the effectiveness and practical use of those policies. Details of the subject areas and semi-structure of the interviews conducted (at each policy level) can be found in Appendix iii.

In Scotland the interviews (conducted in English) lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and all were tape recorded and later transcribed. In Finland the interviews also lasted between 20-45 minutes and were conducted in different languages depending on the language ability of the interviewee (the language used is detailed in Figure 3.3 above). In a minority of cases interviews were conducted completely in English, others were conducted half in English, half in Finnish and the remaining interviews were conducted almost entirely in either Finnish or English.

In order to ease the reading of this thesis the names referred to for the Finnish teachers will be their English equivalent. All texts that are highlighted in italics throughout the remainder of this thesis are Finnish names.

All of the interviews in Finland (except the NBE official interview) were conducted with the help of an interpreter. This process posed a number of methodological issues and as it is not often raised in relation to cross-national research, it is one of the areas I would place on my list of ‘things learnt as I went along’. The following section of the chapter therefore, is devoted to discussing this experience and in doing so, I hope to add to the very small knowledge base on this subject.

The interpreter effect

Within social science literature the issue of ‘language’ is often raised as a methodological issue in relation to cross-national, comparative research. In most cases the reference to, or discussion of, language is made in relation to the equivalence or consistency of meaning with regard to particular concepts, most often within large-scale quantitative studies (e.g. Bulmer and Warwick 1983; Iyengar 1983).

Within other social science literature, interview bias has been discussed in some depth in relation to the effect of the race, gender and socio-economic class of the interviewer (e.g. Rhodes 1994; Schaeffer 1980; Spender 1980; Cornwell 1984). With the exception of Jentsch’s work (1998), however, relatively little if anything has been written about the issue of using an interpreter in an interview situation where the interviewer herself is a cultural and linguistic stranger to the community under study.

Obeyesekere (1981) stated that “‘Interpreter effect’ is one of those problems swept under the carpet, when it is obvious that it is a crucial technical issue in anthropological fieldwork. I have yet to come across one sensitive, self-critical appraisal of interpreter effect by a social scientist” (1981:11). Jentsch’s work (1998) is, I believe, the first that attempts to produce such an adequate appraisal. Reflecting on her use of interpreters in conducting a study of labour and management representatives in Budapest, Jentsch raised a number of issues which I will go on to discuss in relation to my own experiences.

Jentsch began by reflecting on the interview as a social process whereby the interviewer is attempting to secure a ‘print’ copy of the interviewee’s knowledge, ideas and opinions on a particular area of interest. She argues that because the interview itself is a social interaction there will undoubtedly therefore be a risk of bias, whereby the background characteristics and the way in which the interviewer presents herself, will possibly have an effect on the interviewee and vice versa (Jentsch 1998:277).

In considering in what way these characteristics or behaviours may affect the interview process she refers to the work of Kaln & Cannell (1983) who devised a model of possible contributory factors to bias within data collection in an interview situation. The three main factors identified by Kaln & Cannell (1983) were background characteristics, psychological factors and behavioural factors. Jentsch (1998) using this model as a starting point develops it to incorporate the possible additional biases introduced into the interview situation by the interaction of a third person, the interpreter.

The main additional sources of bias that she considers are first background aspects, namely, whether the interpreter is lay or professional, the type of relationship that exists between the interpreter and the interviewee and the familiarity the interpreter has with the interviewer's research goals (Jentsch 1998:278). Second she adds to the behavioural factors outlined by Kaln & Cannell (1983) by including the effect of the interpreter not fully understanding the topic being researched and hence requiring throughout the interview to ask for clarification from both the interviewee and interviewer, and also the possible errors in translation, omissions, additions, substitutions and condensations (Jentsch 1998:279).

Before considering how these 'biases' could be said to have affected my own research, I wish to first discuss the seemingly clear-cut proposition Jentsch makes (1998) that there are four choices to be made when conducting research within a foreign country. The four broad choices being:

- 1) The interview is conducted in the interviewee's native language, as the interviewer is fluent in that language,
- 2) The interview is conducted in the interviewer's native language, as the interviewee is fluent in that language,
- 3) The interview is conducted in a language which is neither the native language of either participant but of which both are adequately fluent, or lastly,
- 4) The interview is conducted with the use of an interpreter.

(Jentsch 1998:277)

Although these may appear to be appropriate choices for conducting research in a foreign country, it was my finding that things were not as explicitly straightforward as these choices suggested. It was my experience that a combination of the first, second and last options were utilised. It had been suggested by my contacts at the School of Public Health in Tampere, that most of the respondents that I would be interviewing would have an adequate grasp of the English language to enable me to conduct most of my interviews in English. As a backup Arja Liinamo, a social science researcher connected to School of Public Health at Tampere University, herself interested in my area of work for future personal doctoral research, offered her services as an interpreter if and when it was necessary. Arja accompanied me to all interviewers except the final interview with the NBE official. Far from playing a minor role, Arja was in fact instrumental in the collection of the majority of my primary data.

Although many of my respondents did in fact speak some English, for the most part, their grasp of the language was conversational rather than terminologically specific to my research interest and therefore only a small number of interviews were conducted in English alone. For those respondents who had a relatively good grasp of the topic specific language being used, most expressed a desire to respond as far as possible, in English and used Arja for the most part, as a ‘human dictionary’ in order to clarify the meaning of terms being used or when they could not themselves think of the correct word in English that they wished to use. Lastly, for those respondents who did not feel competent enough to respond in English, Arja took on the main role within the interview process whilst I merely posed the questions in English before Arja translated them.

During these interviews, in an attempt to keep some level of ‘rapport’ between Arja and the respondent, Arja did not provide me with a literal translation of what was being said. Instead she provided a ‘gloss’ review, stating the main points of what was being said in order that I might adapt the semi-structured interview if I believed it to be relevant. In addition, due to the fact that my interpreter was knowledgeable in the subject under study, I felt confident and trusted in her ability to probe the respondents and pursue a line of questioning that I would have done, if I myself had not been linguistically challenged (this being an area of potential bias, I will return to it later).

Returning to the potential bias incurred as a result of using an interpreter, I will now consider the possible effect of my interpreter’s characteristics. Arja, in her mid-late 30s, dressed smart but casual, with a similar educational background and research interests as myself, did not present a particularly different picture from myself, with the possible exception of age and the obvious exception of nationality.

As Jentsch (1998) suggested, I too found that Arja and I were perceived and I felt myself from the very first interview, to be part of a ‘team’. Being perceived as a team by our respondents, most likely arose from the fact that we were always together, we arrived and left together and we would have most likely appeared to others to be good friends.

From my own perspective, I felt part of a team most probably because Arja had been involved in my research project for a number of months prior to the commencement of my fieldwork in Finland. We had both made a week long visit to each other's countries and had had many discussions about the aims and objectives of my research as well as many discussions about the subject area, as it was of particular research interest to Arja as well. These discussions continued throughout the time I spent in Finland conducting my research, most often fuelled by interesting issues that had arisen from the interviews. Additionally as referred to in relation to the access process Arja played an instrumental role in my access to schools, municipalities and the NBE and was involved in all interviews except for the final interview, with the NBE official.

As a lay interpreter, Arja did not fit many of the traditional 'negative stereotypes' presented by Jentsch (1998), which may have reduced or perhaps prevented a number of areas of bias that are talked about in relation to the lay interpreter. First, a lay interpreter's job is often regarded as 'bothersome' by that individual, mainly due to the fact that it is not part of their usual job description and they have as a result other things to be getting on with. With regard to my situation, Arja volunteered to help me with my data collection. This was largely due to the fact that she herself had a research interest in this area and a desire to pursue more qualitative work in preparation for undertaking her own doctoral thesis (as opposed to the quantitative nature of the study she was at the time involved). In order that I did not encroach on her busy schedule, I provided Arja with eight weeks in which it would be possible for me to conduct this research. In doing this, Arja was free to organise the interviews at times which would suit her schedule.

Another unfavourable dynamic often related to the lay interpreter is the possibility of distortions in the data stemming from their attitude towards myself as the interviewer or towards the interviewees. As already discussed, Arja and I had developed a good working as well as social relationship, so I did not perceive the former of these dynamics to be an issue. With regard to the interviewees, a common observation of the interpreter/ interviewee relationship is that when the interpreter is familiar with the interviewee's situation they are sometimes prone to responding on their behalf, often without the interpreter even posing the question (Jentsch 1998:283). Although at the time I could not be sure whether or not this was occurring, the direct transcripts and translations do show that this was not the case. I make an assumption here that this was most likely because Arja, although previously a school nurse herself (one of the individuals that we were interviewing), was as interested in what they actually had to say as I was for the purpose of my research.

Another important issue that must be examined here is the transference and counter-transference of speech. Kline et al. (1980) talk of the reduced role of the interviewer in situations where an interpreter is being used. The problem here for the interviewer is that without an understanding of what is being said at the time it occurs, it is very difficult to remember reflections of body language that relate to that speech. The reality of this situation then is that, without an awareness of where emphasis is being placed by the interviewee, the interviewer may fail to pursue certain issues or themes that would have been of interest to the research.

In order to overcome this as much as it was possible, Arja did two things. First, she added any emphasis being expressed by the interviewee when doing her ‘gloss’ translations, in order that I would have some idea of the importance being placed on the response by the interviewee. Second, due to Arja’s understanding of the research topic, she herself was able to recognise issues and themes of importance to me and pursued them herself without my direction. The effectiveness of her ability here was shown a number of times when I would ask her to pursue a point and she had already done so.

The following section of text below illustrates this point, when I posed the question of whether the teacher believed the school should play an important role in the teaching of sex education, the teacher answered that she personally believed it was important. I, however, wanted to know if she believed the school as a whole saw this to be the case and on posing this question for Arja to ask, she noted that she had already asked the question and provided a gloss translation of that answer. To ease reading of this text, the questions are in bold, in italics are the discussions that were in Finnish and later translated, and in regular text, the discussions that were in English.

Alison: Do you think the school should play an important role in the teaching of sex education?

Teacher: “Yes I think that it is important, but I think that young peoples must self to take information”.

Teacher: I mean, adolescents should be able to seek information from other sources as well and not to think that they will get all the information they need in school. It’s an important theme in school, absolutely.

Arja: Does this school see itself as playing an important role in the teaching of sex education, in your opinion?

Teacher: I don't think that it is emphasised enough. For example, the timing of the teaching, when we start teaching them sex education...it should begin earlier than in the 9th grade. Then it's more like revision. And I teach only the 9th grade. That is, other teachers bear responsibility for sex education, biology teachers, PE teachers and the school nurse in the 7th and 8th grade.

Alison: She sees it as important, but does she think the school perceives its role to be important?

Arja – Yes I have asked this... She sees that perhaps school should show its role even more important than at the moment and but she says, thinks the school sees its role as very important and it is too late to give information on the 9th grade and but also pupils have to be able to find information from other sources also.

Returning to the issue of developing ‘rapport’, this can be a further source of potential bias. The first possible complication could arise if such a good rapport is developed between the interpreter and the interviewee that there is no space for translation. This was overcome to some extent by the use of Arja’s ‘gloss’ as opposed to literal translations. Although not intended for this purpose, as the interviews proceeded I became very aware that the development of rapport between Arja and the interviewee was important and because of the trust I had in her ability to probe and develop relevant lines of enquiry, I had no concern in those interviews for her to play the more central role.

Another common concern when rapport has been developed between the interpreter and the interviewee is that the interpreter is often tempted to pose

his/her own questions. In this case however, I did not perceive this to be problematic, quite the opposite. Due to the interviews being semi-structured, there was room for both Arja and myself, depending on which language was being used, to develop relevant lines of enquiry. So you could say that posing her own questions (within the subject areas) was exactly what I was hoping Arja would do. If you were to interpret ‘asking her own questions’, as asking irrelevant ones then that would be an issue. We had, however, spent a long time prior to the interviews and after many of them discussing which additional questions would be of use and again because of my trust in Arja’s ability, the issue of irrelevancy in her probing a particular line of enquiry, did not arise.

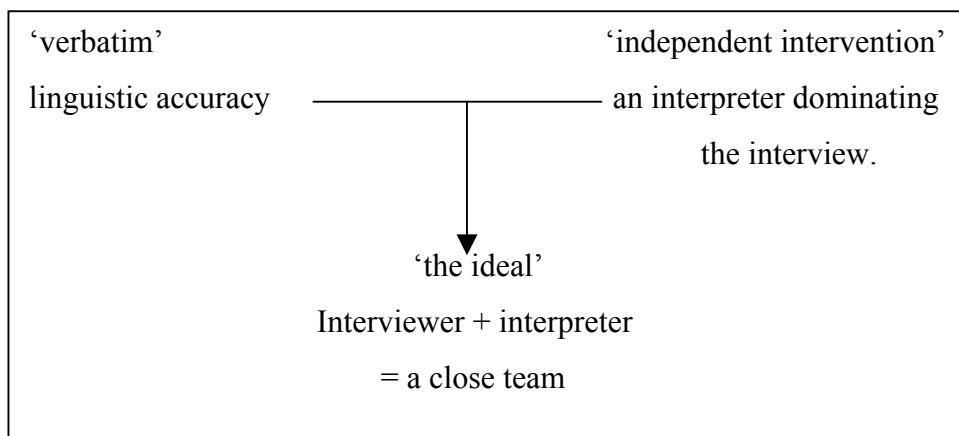
Some final areas of potential bias presented by Jentsch (1998) are those of the interpreter’s knowledge and confidence in the research area and language ability. Arja’s social science academic background and personal interest in research on young people’s sexual health and sex education, however, meant that she had considerable knowledge and confidence in this area. With regard to language ability, Arja had a very competent grasp of English and her topic specific language was excellent. As has already been discussed, Arja did not attempt to provide me with a literal translation during the interviews, as ‘rapport’ was considered of more importance and with the interviews all being tape-recorded and later transcribed and translated, I had not considered that any possible lapses in her language ability would be an issue.

In her work Jentsch (1998) also talked of the pros and cons of using a professional interpreter, balancing the benefits of this method with that of using a lay

interpreter. In my situation, there was no question of employing a professional interpreter due to lack of financial resources. Through the School Health Study with which Arja was involved, I was provided with a full transcription, from the tape recording of each interview. These were, due to a lack of finance, professionally translated at a later date.

Notwithstanding the ability of a professional interpreter, I feel that the overwhelming positive aspects to my lay interpreter, resulted in better transcripts, in this case, than may well have been possible with a professional. A professional providing a literal translation on the spot would most likely in many cases have affected the rapport that both Arja and I developed with the respondents. A professional interpreter would also most probably not have had the ‘insider’ knowledge of the research area or understood the aims and objectives or exactly what it was that I was trying to achieve in my interviews, in the way that Arja did. Baker (1981) refers to the many different styles of interview using an interpreter and suggests that they can be placed on a continuum such as that displayed in Figure 3.1 below.

After this critique of the role that Arja played in my interview dynamics, I think it fair to say that we did in many ways produce ‘the ideal’ close team that Baker (1981) refers to. It is quite apparent that in my case luck played an essential role in the interview process. If I could have afforded a professional interpreter or had an interpreter been provided for me, as opposed to somebody volunteering through their own personal interest, things could have been very different.

Figure 3.1**Baker's styles of interviewing with an interpreter**

(Baker 1981:392-3 in Jentsch 1998:284)

Analysis

The results of my fieldwork produced tape-recorded interviews with teachers, school nurses, local authority and municipality officials and government inspectors of education. In addition I had collected secondary statistics, a variety of documentary material including policy documentation, national guidelines and school curriculums, audit reports from local authorities, Green and White government papers, school course outlines, examples of pupil worksheets from schools, and notes from informal discussions with researchers in the field of teenage pregnancy in both countries. After arriving at this point the question still remained as to how I could analyse this material in a meaningful and methodical manner?

“The most serious and central difficulty in the use of qualitative data is that the methods of analysis are not well formulated. For quantitative data, there are clear conventions the researcher can use. But the analyst faced with a bank of

qualitative data has very few guidelines for protection against self-delusion, let alone the presentation of unreliable or invalid conclusions to scientific or policy-making audiences. How can we be sure that an "earthy", 'undeniable', 'serendipitous' finding is not, in fact, *wrong*?" (Miles 1979:591).

Despite the growing trend of qualitative research over the last thirty years and the development of methods by which to analyse such data, the problem of the validity and confidence in findings achieved by qualitative means, has not disappeared (Miles & Huberman 1994). Many researchers have presented findings from which it is very difficult to trace back the methodological approach of their analysis, making it near to impossible to determine exactly how the final conclusions had been reached. Others have 'mystified' the whole process of qualitative analysis to the point whereby researchers, especially novices to qualitative research are left feeling very disillusioned as to how to begin and/ or complete the process of qualitative analysis. On entering libraries or bookshops one can encounter a number of texts purporting to demystify the process of qualitative analysis, but on reflection, the majority only serve to mystify it even further.

At the point at which I began deliberating as to how I would approach my data, I found myself falling very much the victim of this process of 'mystification'. Having finally gone through the process and come out somewhat unscathed at the other end, I can only hope, while acknowledging that the process was both elaborate (more so than it need have been) and personal, to do justice to explaining my process. Therefore in the following section I present some guidelines for

readers to enable a comprehensive understanding of how my results and conclusions have been reached.

I begin by acknowledging that the process of my analysis was impeded for one major reason besides my confusion surrounding the general approach. Financial constraints prevented my immediate access to the Finnish data, which resulted in the process of my comparative analysis being seriously delayed. The Finnish language is not a standard European language, as such, translation of the data cost just over £800. With all of my fieldwork costs for both countries occurring within the same financial year (£330 for Scotland) and only a sum of £440 provided annually for research costs by the ESRC, I therefore had to raise the majority of the funds to pay for the translation of my data.

The delay between the time I actually undertook the data collection in Finland and my first viewing of that data was seven months. Having the ‘gloss’ translations provided by my interpreter enabled me to at least begin thinking comparatively about my analysis. I did not feel comfortable however, deriving anything concrete until I had had the opportunity to view and review all of the data.

When I was in a position to analyse all of the data, the largest problem that I had to overcome was the ‘fear’ of qualitative analysis. I spent considerable unproductive time worrying about what I was doing instead of doing it. I had after all completed two dissertations at undergraduate and post-graduate level, both of which were qualitative in nature, a fact I had sub-consciously chosen to ignore. I therefore spent two months producing and reproducing what I thought was analysis, which

was in fact no more than reproduction and representation of the physical data. That process was, on reflection, the first stage of analysis, becoming immersed in and gaining a general feel for the data.

The second step was to acknowledge that in those reproductions my 'bias blinkers' had returned. Many researchers find that they harbour an element of personal bias with regard to their own country when conducting cross-national research. In my case at this point I realised that it was relevant to say that my bias was in relation to the other country in my research.

I have very firm views as to what I consider to be 'best practice' in approaching the negative aspects of teenage sexual health such as unintended teenage pregnancy. What I had witnessed in Finland was more along the lines of approach that I would pursue if I were in the position to influence policy decisions in Scotland. What I began to realise was that I had not addressed my biases at that point in the research process and those biases were affecting my attempts to analyse the data. This recognition was pointed out through supervision of my writings at that time. With this recognition came both desperation, wondering if I would ever be able to leave my preconceptions aside for long enough that they would not invade my analysis, but also relief in the recognition of another part of problem in doing the analysis.

The next stage of my analytical process was three-fold. The first part was to leave the data aside and try to write papers on what I considered to be the main themes of the research and to develop those themes before taking them back to the data.

The second was to accept a teaching post on the advanced unit of qualitative methods at my university. The unit involved guiding 3rd year students through the process of a small qualitative project. My reasoning for taking this post was that I had to understand qualitative analysis in order to teach it. This was an enlightening and invaluable experience and benefited my students as much as it did myself. The process of being able to help others to read between the lines of data and draw out themes from that data enabled me to return to my own data and repeat this process. Prior to this point in time I was so close to my own data I could not read between the lines. Having the opportunity to distance myself from my own work whilst learning the techniques I required to analyse it, took me a quantum leap in my analysis process.

The final stage therefore, was to return to my data with a mind freed to a certain degree of expectations and bias. I began to recognise that I had been thinking linearly and was not considering the different levels within my data. At this point I began to make use of matrices and thought-diagrams in an attempt to map out the territory of investigation and to separate out the different levels of data and finally, from those matrices, I was able to see a pattern and a story beginning to form.

A fundamental starting point in the analysis and presentation of that story, however, which then lead to the eventual structure of this thesis as it is currently presented, was the recognition not only of the different levels of data within my interview transcripts, but also the requirement of a wholly different level of analysis to reflect this. Presented within Chapters Four and Five of this thesis, are maps of the national and local policy frameworks which form the basis for the

analysis of the key similarities and differences presented in Chapter Six. Within these three chapters the interview data has been utilised primarily as a means of leading me to further sources of written documentation and for the clarification and the backing up other sources of information such as policy documentation at the national, local authority and school levels.

Due to the fact that there had been such significant changes within the various policy areas under study in both countries since the mid-1990s, I felt that it was crucial for the thesis to incorporate those changes and suggest potential outcomes arising from those changes based on the analysis of findings in Chapter Six. As such, the ways in which I have used and interpreted that interview data in Chapter Seven is very different from the preceding chapters.

Whereas in Chapters Four to Six it is primarily my voice that the reader hears and my arguments and analysis that are presented, defended and open for debate, Chapter Seven presents very much the voice of others. It could be argued that Chapter Seven presents a here'say account based on often heated emotion towards the changing policy culture occurring at that time, but it is often those voices, especially at the ground level, which have a unique insider's picture of the directions of change, their implications and whether they are likely to be successful, long before the documentation relating to those changes is formalised. Therefore Chapter Seven, although presenting information at a different level from the remainder of the thesis, has been included in order to highlight the changing nature of policy at all levels as well as present an important reference point for future research.

Therefore, after many months of agonising over how to approach the process of qualitative analysis, I am amazed at the degree to which the fear ensuing from the mystification of the process had impeded the analysis process. I had made the process much more difficult than it need have been and yet it was a very necessary process both for the analysis of the data and again for making me face the issues that were impeding a successful analysis such as personal bias. If I had been fully knowledgeable in how to proceed with the analysis I may have overlooked the degree to which my biases were affecting the analysis and hence de-validate my findings.

Writing Up

The way in which I have decided to present the key policies, issues and conclusions of my research is in short, by telling a story. As I saw the story-like pattern emerging from the analysis, I concluded that it would be one effective way of presenting the research, with each stage of the ‘story’ taking the reader a step further and deeper into my understanding and interpretation of the research.

The purpose of the set of chapters prior to this one has been to set the scene. Exploration of the European trends of teenage pregnancy and related rates, associated and causal factors in Chapter One, enables the reader to place both Scotland and Finland within a European context. The exploration of the literature relating to the policy areas under exploration in Chapter Two highlights both the

existing knowledge on each particular policy area as well as the gaps in knowledge which this thesis aims to fill.

The next two Chapters (Four and Five) set out each policy area at both the level of national framework and local level of implementation. By mapping out and locating policies at the national and local level frameworks, attention is drawn to the similarities and differences between the two countries. This is then followed in Chapter Six with a presentation of the analysis of those similarities and differences, drawing out the main themes that have arisen from this research.

One of the greatest difficulties of policy research is that whilst some policy areas remain constant over time, development and change are equally common features. During the mid-1990s in both countries, there were the signs of change in the areas of policy under study in this thesis and therefore Chapter Seven, although at a different level of analysis, goes on to explore the direction of these changes and their potential implications bearing in mind the findings of the analysis in Chapter Six.

The conclusion to this thesis is presented in Chapter Eight. It includes a discussion of the key findings of this research and what this thesis adds to existing knowledge on the subject area followed by an exploration of the future research agenda.