SARA DELAMONT

5. COM MUITO AXÉ

Or "Can a Woman Be an Intellectual?"

The phrase of the title, which is in Brazilian Portuguese, means 'with maximum energy' or 'with all the force you can muster'. The subtitle is one I used when speaking at a conference in Finland to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the University of Helsinki. I asked rhetorically 'Can an Intellectual be a Woman? Can a Woman be an Intellectual?' and focused on the women of the First (1890–1920) Chicago School of Sociology. If the first phrase is my aim, the second is my 'meaning of life' question. The first phrase needs further explanation. *Axé* is a word of Yoruba (West African) origin, used in the African-Brazilian religion *Candomblé* and, as *Ache* in African-Cuban Santería, to mean the power of the gods and goddesses (*Orixas* in Portuguese, *Orichas* in Spanish). It is used in the African-Brazilian dance and martial art, *capoeira*, to mean positive energy, or a positive charge a bit like The Force in *Star Wars*. The phrase is the title of a *capoeira* song composed by *Mestre* (Master) Kenura called 'Woman, oh Woman'. The song urges, or exhorts, women to play *capoeira* with maximal emotional and physical engagement. *Capoeira* is the only martial art that is always done to music: five instruments are played including drums, songs in a call and response pattern are sung, and everyone claps the rhythm. The music raises the *axé*, so the players have more energy and the games are better.

I have chosen the first phrase for two related reasons. It summarises my academic life because I have always tried to engage in educational research with *muito axé.* For the past fourteen years I have been doing educational research on *capoeira* classes in the UK, focusing on the learning environment and on how it is taught and learnt far away from Brazil: that is diasporic *capoeira* (Assuncao, 2005). This is the first autobiographical piece I have written for an educational research audience in the USA, so I have sketched in the other autobiographical fragments that have been published which are probably unknown to readers of this volume, because they are located in books or periodicals issued outside the USA or not in educational journals. This piece does not recapitulate those earlier reflections. There are three items (Delamont, 2012a, 2003, 2008) in sociological or feminist publications, and one educational paper in a journal based in New Zealand (Delamont, 2006). Delamont (2012a) is an autobiographical paper in a collection of symbolic interactionist writing, that contrasts my life with that of my mother who was a bohemian neopagan witch. It adds to the brief 'personal note' in my

A. R. Sadovnik & R. W. Coughlan (Eds.), Leaders in the Sociology of Education, 57–67.

book *Feminist Sociology* (Delamont, 2003, xiii) and Delamont (2008) includes a reflexive autobiographical element in a paper on feminist methods. Most relevant to what follows here is Delamont (2006) which locates my educational research in the context of some biographical episodes. In this essay I have given a very brief outline of my life and career, contextualised in the context of the UK education system, and then focused on the key ideas that have driven my educational research since 1968, when I began my doctoral research, in sections on the growth of ethnography, a weakness I freely confess to, and my three key principles.

BRIEF LIFE HISTORY

I was born in 1947 in Southampton, a port on the south coast of England. I went to a single sex selective secondary (grammar) school near Southampton, and then to Cambridge to Girton College (then all female) to read Archaeology and Anthropology, specialising in Social (in American terms, cultural) anthropology. From the age of seven I had planned to be a barrister (a trial lawyer) but by the time I was 17 I had discovered that all the men I knew reading law were finding it very dull *and* that to be a barrister I would need a parental subsidy for about five years after graduation. Deciding that there would not be any such subsidy I chose to be an anthropologist instead.

England had the 11+ exam for my generation, which I passed in 1956 to get to grammar school, and I was the first pupil from the new school (it had opened in 1954) to get into Oxford or Cambridge. Girton, founded in 1869 by feminists (see Delamont, 1989), was the first college for women at either Oxford or Cambridge, and its feminist tradition was still strong in the 1960s. I got a first class degree in 1968 and went to Edinburgh to do a PhD in educational research, committed to ethnographic fieldwork as the method of choice. The UK does not have education as a subfield of anthropology so I was *de facto* migrating to sociology. The UK PhD does not have any courses or examinations: it is entirely earned by researching a thesis. My thesis was classroom observation in an elite Scottish girls' school (I call by the pseudonym St Luke's) and I defended it in 1973. By then I had been appointed to a lectureship in England, at Leicester. It was there that I became involved in the ORACLE (Observational Research and Classroom Learning Environment) Project, which ran from 1975–1981. That project is published in Delamont and Galton (1986).

In 1976 I moved to a lectureship in the sociology department at Cardiff (the capital of Wales) where I have been ever since. So since I turned 21 I have lived in Scotland (for five years) and in Wales, spending only three years in England. The four nations of the UK have different education systems at school and university level, and only England's is run from London, a fact most English and nearly all non-British educational researchers are unaware of. I have never married, or had any children: Paul Atkinson and I have lived together since 1970. I love detective stories (mysteries), cricket, *capoeira*, Brazilian music and visiting Italy and Greece.

The highlights of my research of the past 45 years have been projects located where anthropology, sociology and history intersect to focus on education, broadly defined. I have also written and taught about the anthropology of the Mediterranean and of Brazil, and published on qualitative methods. My doctoral research and my time at Girton led me to investigate the modern (since 1848) history of education for clever elite women in the UK and in other English speaking countries. That work is presented in Delamont (1989) and a series of papers. The ethnography of 'St Luke's' led on to other ethnographic research in educational settings, such as English and Welsh comprehensive secondary schools. An interest in how social classes and other social entities such as professions, science, and academic disciplines are reproduced in western societies, can be seen in all my work, usually with gender as a core theme, and often focused on elites. Those ideas are all apparent in work on how academic social science and science disciplines reproduce themselves: a funded project that was sadly based only on interviews not observation, with doctoral students and their supervisors (see Delamont, Atkinson, & Parry, 2000). In 2002 I began the investigation which I am still doing on *capoeira* and in 2009 I added a subsidiary ethnography of *savate* (French kick boxing), for reasons explained below.

I have been lucky enough to hold office and get awards. BERA (The British Educational Research Association) was founded in 1974 with 100 invited inaugural members of which I was one. I served as the first ever woman President in 1984, and was given the John Nisbet Award for lifetime service in 2015. I was involved in the founding of ALSIS, the forerunner of the UK Academy of Social Sciences, in the 1980s, and was elected an academician (a fellow) in 2000. I was awarded a DScEcon in 2007, and accepted as a Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales in 2014. In 2013 the BSA (British Sociological Association) gave me its Lifetime Award. Ironically I still think of myself as primarily an anthropologist. Generally, I describe myself as an ethnographer, a feminist, and a symbolic interactionist, rather than by discipline.

ETHNOGRAPHY GROWS

The whole of my career has coincided with the growth of research in classrooms and schools. In 1968 it was still rare to find educational research (in any sector, formal or informal, for any age group, or any purpose) that focused on the processes of teaching and learning as they happen. There are four main ways in which research in education settings has grown and developed. There is a tradition of coding the teaching and learning using a pre-specified schedule to produce statistical generalisations. Flanders (1970) is a famous pioneer, and the ORACLE projects were a landmark UK project in that tradition. (See Croll, 1986 for an overview.) Linguists have worked on the talk in educational settings, usually making live recordings for subsequent transcription and analysis (Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1974). Researchers have experimented with audio visual recording, the technicalities changing as the technologies have evolved, from time lapse photography, through to full filming, with both amateur and professional 'crews' (Walker & Adelman, 1976).

My own preference has always been for ethnography, the fourth approach. By ethnography I mean, as I have explained elsewhere, (Delamont, 2012b): the use of traditional fieldnotes and ethnographic interviewing to gain access to the participants' world view(s). Fine (2003) calls this 'peopled ethnography' and has used it in the American high school (Fine, 2001) as well as many other settings. In the USA that approach spread from the anthropologists of education out to other disciplines, in the UK the approach was pioneered by people who were sociologists with intellectual sympathies for anthropological methods and for American symbolic interaction. Throughout my career the use of ethnography in educational settings: schools, colleges and informal ones: has grown steadily. In the USA the use of ethnography was pioneered by anthropologists (see Spindler, 2000), such as George and Louise Spindler and Murray and Rosalie Wax. The journal *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* and the big Handbooks (Anderson-Levitt, 2012; Levinson & Pollock, 2011) are the showcases of that approach today. In the UK there is no tradition of anthropological ethnography of education but the method has grown in popularity consistently since the pioneering work of Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970) and Lambart (1982).

The use of ethnography in the UK was more sociologically informed, drawing on the symbolic interactionism of the Chicago School. Its early years are described in Hammersley (1982) and its variety in Atkinson, Delamont and Hammersley (1988). The differences between the American and British 'traditions' are discussed in Delamont and Atkinson (1995) and Delamont (2012b, 2014). During the 1990s the mainstream educational research journals became more receptive to ethnographic work, and two specialist journals *Qualitative Studies in Education* (QSE) and *Ethnography and Education* were established. My academic career has been paralleled by, and a contribution to, the movement to make ethnographic research on education more acceptable and better recognised. My doctoral research on pupils' classroom styles and strategies in a Scottish elite girls' school, subsequent projects on the first weeks of new pupils in six English secondary schools (Delamont & Galton, 1986), and on mainstreaming pupils with learning difficulties in Welsh secondary schools were part of a trend. Since 2003 I have been doing ethnography on how two martial arts are taught and learnt, and there is no problem about placing that fieldwork in educational journals (Delamont, 2005; Stephens & Delamont, 2010).

A WEAKNESS CONFESSED

I love embedding educational research in literature from beyond social science research, such as travel writing, poetry and crime fiction, and framing my findings or arguments with metaphors from other fields. All my writing starts with 'catchy' titles and quotes from some non-educational source. Delamont (2014) uses Zora Neale Hurston's (1935) *Of Mules and Men* to provide chapter subtitles ('Heading my toenails', p. 183) and opening themes 'ah come to collect some old stories'. In the advisory text on how to be a great doctoral advisor the chapters all open with

quotes from Dorothy L. Sayers's (1972) *Gaudy Night*; a mystery set in an Oxford women's college in the 1930s. My textbook on fieldwork (Delamont, 1992, 2002, 2016) has an extended metaphor: the golden journey to Samarkand drawn from a poem by Flecker (1947) all about 'the last blue mountain' and trade goods of 'spikenard, mastic and terebinth'. The plenary address to the joint conference of the New Zealand and Australian Educational Research Association in 2003 used another bit of Flecker – about the four great gates of Damascus – to exemplify four possible journeys an educational research project can take, including, metaphorically, one into the terrifying and deadly desert. The only exception, which uses a conventional social science text to provide the quotes at the heads of the chapters, is the book on doctoral study, draws on Bourdieu (1988).

These flights of fancy annoy some people, but they are the way I get every project started: when writing up my part of the ORACLE project I played with writing on Greek myths about oracles at Delphi and elsewhere to begin. I have learnt that whatever strategy 'works' to get the writing going should be *used*: therefore when I am starting to write anything I find the catchy title, the opening quote, the extended metaphor(s) and if a book, set up the folders for the chapters so I can then *write*.

KEY PRINCIPLES

There are three key principles which drive my research.

A Firm Commitment to Traditional or "Peopled" Ethnography (Not to Qualitative Research More Broadly)

The term 'peopled ethnography' which comes from Fine (2003) and Brown-Saracino, Thurk and Fine (2008) captures my chosen method perfectly. I mean by this ethnographic research where the data are gathered by the researcher being physically present in the setting and regarding any formal or informal conversations as subsidiary to, and intellectually less important than, the fieldnotes. The popularity of qualitative research by interview, and the loose terminology of describing something as ethnographic when it is only an interview study dismay me. My beliefs here are spelled out in Delamont (2014, 2016).

Interview data of all types, whether oral history, narrative, or responses to questions, and gathered from individuals or groups, in real locations or cyberspace, are, for me, less valuable and interesting than observational data. What people, whether school pupils, college lecturers, driving instructors or Japanese master potters, *do*, watched closely over a long period, is far more important to me than anything anyone says. *Sharing* the boredom or the danger, the heat or the cold, the noise or the silence, at six a.m. or ten p.m. with the learners and teachers is, for me, what educational research is meant to be about. In contrast the interview is like eating in a drive in burger bar, while ethnography is slow food, regional ingredients lovingly combined by an expert (Walford, 2009).

A Perpetual Struggle to Do Educational Research Which Fights Familiarity (Not Staying in Any Comfort Zone)

The need to make the familiar strange was articulated by Blanche Geer (1964) and Howard Becker (1971), and then reiterated by Wolcott (1981) and Young (1981). Subsequently Lave and Wenger (1991), Singleton (1998, 1999) and Varenne (2007) have also called for educational researchers to look beyond mainstream schools in their own culture in order to make education anthropologically strange which will, coupled with tough reflexivity, lead to higher quality educational research. I have published a good deal on fighting familiarity, alone (Delamont, 2005), with Paul Atkinson (*e.g*. Delamont & Atkinson, 1995) and others (*e.g*. Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2003; Delamont, Atkinson, & Pugsley, 2010). The biggest difficulty I have in explaining the history of the familiarity problem is that I have done so very frequently since Delamont (1981) and there seem to be no novel ways to relate the sad story.

Geer (1964) set out the familiarity problem when describing her initial fieldwork for the study of liberal arts undergraduates at Kansas published as *Making the Grade* (Becker, Geer, & Hughes, 1968). She noted that inexperienced ethnographers often find fieldwork and all its precursor and successor stages baffling. Such people 'can spend a day in a hospital and come back with one page of notes and no hypotheses' (1964: 384) complaining that 'everyone knows what hospitals are like'. Geer showed how she had to re-configure her own preconceptions about the lives of American liberal arts undergraduates to develop decent foreshadowed problems, and made a plea for all ethnographers to do likeways.

Becker, her co-investigator on two ethnographies of higher education, made the same point in 1971 in a footnote added to a paper by Wax and Wax (1971). He stressed that doing fieldwork in American school classrooms was hard, because they were 'so familiar that it becomes impossible to single out events that occur in classrooms as things that have occurred' (1971: 10). Getting such observers to 'stop seeing only the things that are conventionally "there" to be seen' *is*, Becker continues 'like pulling teeth' (1971: 10). Wax and Wax (1971) was a clarion call for 'a solid body of data on the ethnography of schools', and Becker was highlighting the difficulties posed by familiarity that faced those trying to gather that mass of data. In the UK at the same time, but intellectually independently Young (1971) argued that too much educational research 'took' its agenda from educational insiders (educators) rather than 'making' its own research questions.

Ten years later Wolcott (1981) elaborated those points in a self-critical reflection on his research. Coming from anthropology, Wolcott wrote that 'central features of education are so taken for granted that they are invisible' (1981: 253). He added that the graduate schools of education in the USA should systematically send their doctoral students to observe teaching and learning in an unfamiliar setting while admitting he had only once done that: when he sent a nurse educator into a school of nursing. For me that chapter is the most powerful of all Wolcott's many important writings.

When Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that American educational research was far too obsessed with American schools rather than studying learning in other contexts, they failed to mention that Geer, Becker and Wolcott had already proposed a widened, non-school focus. Singleton (1998, 1999) writing when the journal *AEQ* celebrated its thirtieth birthday, once again argued that insights into learning and teaching should be gained by contrastive investigation. Varenne (2007) produced a similar argument in *Teachers College Record* a decade later. Sadly, from my perspective, none of the attempts I had made between 1981 and 2006 to propose strategies for fighting familiarity had been noticed by Lave, Wenger, Singleton or Varenne. Some of the scholars who have diagnosed the familiarity problem have not made practical proposals to help researchers diagnose and tackle it. In contrast I have concentrated on advocating six strategies to fight familiarity, which are set out below.

a. Revisiting the insightful educational ethnographies of the past.
b. Studying formal educational settings in other cultures.
c. Taking the standpoint of "the other."
d. Studying unusual schools, or other actors in the usual schools.
e. Studying education outside "education."
f. Using a non sexist lens (good research has to challenge gender) in reading, citing
g. and research design.

These are all based on the need for reading much more widely outside educational research than many scholars do. My list of favourites shows that principle as I practice it.

My strategies are based on reading more widely than is customary to develop better foreshadowed problems (the ethnographic equivalent of the hypothesis), and on deliberately gathering data in 'uncomfortable' ways. Strategies a, b, d and e can be based on reading to search out contrastive educational settings that can then be used to develop ideas. The ethnographies of the past are important because educational research tends to be very 'shallow': studies are quickly discarded as 'old' because, in England, for example, they were done before State schools were given control of their own finances (in 1988) or when clever state school pupils all learnt Latin (between 1944–1970). In fact careful reading of an old ethnography can force the researcher to confront their own, and the actors' assumption about school. Similarly reading about schooling in, for example France (Reed-Danahay, 1996; Anderson-Levitt, 1987) can lead to recognising that taken for granted features of education in one's own culture are actually radically different from those 'normal' elsewhere, and those worth studying.

During fieldwork it is possible to devise ways to see the familiar as strange. Forcing oneself to take the standpoint of a person different from oneself (*i.e.* if a man, imagine being female) and do the research that way. If clever, work hard to experience things as a failure and to see the school from the perspective of a failure (A failing teacher, a failing coach, a failing counsellor, or a failing pupil).

There are many studies of anti-school boys, of course, but very few on those utterly miserable loners, who cannot do the work, for whom every instant is a baffling misery. If 'white', explore the school as it is experienced a Chinese or Hispanic person. Choosing to study an unusual school is a good way to get culture shock – as Peshkin (1986) a Jew did in a fundamentalist Christian school, or Bullivant (1978) a Christian Australian in an Orthodox Jewish school. A period of research not in a school, in some other context where learning and teaching take place such as a kickboxing gym or an Irish dance class can re-focus the research in schools.

There are two other strategies which I have not used myself. One is to use the sociological perspective of ethnomethodology, the other, advocated by Mannay (2011) is to use visual methods to enforce the researcher to focus on alternate angles on the field setting.

The Duty to Combat the Erosion of Women as Author and Subject

There is a serious problem in educational research around the erosion of women as authors and as subjects. Work by women is cited less than work by men, because while women cite male and female scholars, most men overwhelmingly cite only work by men. Over time that means research by women does not get included in the literature. Because most of the research on women has been done by women, that means that studies of women also slide below the horizon of the discipline. This claim is documented for many social sciences and the evidence is reported in Delamont (2003). It is not clear how this feature of the educational research culture can be changed. First, it is necessary to gather the data and confront male authors with their citation practices, but it may be that only a radical change in the customary procedures of journals and even regulation will actually 'work'.

Currently it is not unusual to referee a paper submitted to a journal or a chapter for an edited collection, and discover that *no* publications on the topic by women are cited. However, pointing out that key studies by women are not cited does not necessarily get them incorporated. On one occasion, when a draft handbook chapter came in to me as editor that included no work on women, or by women, the male author was told that about twenty studies on or by women, specified with the full references, should be added, only to get the response paraphrased here as: 'I have never heard of any of those works, and so have never read them, and I do not have time to do so'. As editor it is hard to insist either to get the recalcitrant author to conform or worse to decide the chapter must be recommissioned when the whole project may be seriously delayed.

About thirty years ago most social science journals re-wrote their instructions to authors to forbid sexist and racist language. It is time for a parallel change to require all authors submitting papers to ensure that in their citations at least a third of the items are authored by women, and to require referees to check that and make suggestions for publication by women to be included if the target is not met. That would address the citation imbalance but not the erasure of women from the canon.

Behar and Gordon (1995) edited a collection of papers that focused on women who had been erased from the history of American anthropology, partly because they lived bohemian or transgressive lives and partly because they wrote in non-traditional ways. Educational research in the UK has routinely ignored its women scholars, and there is no parallel collection re-visiting and re-evaluating their contributions to the canon.

In my own sub field of school ethnography many of the women published papers and book chapters but not monographs (Delamont, 1989) and the standard overviews of that subfield, all by men, are ruthlessly sexist (Delamont, 2000, 2002, 2003). More worrying, when such an erasure is carefully documented, as Deegan (1988) has done for the women of the first Chicago School, many men continue to write as if that work had not been done. Moore (2013) for example, published a book about Basil Bernstein which systematically ignored all the women who worked with Bernstein, all his thinking on gender, and all the women scholars who had used his work to explore educational issues. In that one book the publications of about twenty women scholars were erased from the record of the structuralist tradition in educational sociology. No graduate student starting out from that book, published by a leading house, would know that Bernstein's originality lay precisely in the importance he placed on gender when no other sociologists of education in the UK thought beyond male class inequalities.

Fighting on this issue is my main retirement project.

MY FAVOURITE TEXTS BY OTHERS

1. J. Lowell Lewis (1992) *Ring of Liberation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.—A wonderful ethnography of *capoeira* in Brazil
2. Hugh Bicheno (2003) *Crescent and Cross*: *The Battle of Lepanto 1571*. London: Phoenix
3. Ruth Landes (1947) *City of Women*. — Sally Coles's (1995) work on Ruth Landes shows her as a classic example of a woman deliberately marginalised and erased from social science. The book is an ethnography of the African Brazilian religion *Candomblé* in Salvador de Bahia in 1938, rubbished at the time, but subsequently regarded as the 'best' account once the clouds of racial prejudice had cleared.
4. Carolyn Morrow Long (2001) *Spiritual Merchants.* — This explores the market in folk remedies and in objects and potions to hold lovers and keep away evil (such as John the Conqueror Root) central to North American Hoodoo or Voudou.
5. James Lee Burke (1995) *In the Electric Mist with the Confederate Dead*. — My favourite of the Lee Burke books about the tormented Dave Robicheaux, set in the country round New Orleans.
6. Amanda Cross (1981) *Death in a Tenured Position.* — A reminder of the deeply engrained hostility to women academics found in apparently liberal, tolerant universities.

MY FAVOURITE PERSONAL TEXTS

There are four books I feel particularly fond of:

1. *Interaction in the Classroom* (1973) — which was my first monograph
2. *Knowledgeable Women* (1989) — because it uses a structuralist anthropological framework to analyse the history of elite women's education

3. *Feminist Sociology* (2003) — which pulls together my feminism
4. *Key Themes in the Ethnography of Education* (2014) — which sets out my manifesto for educational research.

I hope that the monograph on the capoeira research, in press, will join those four.

The 'best' papers again in the sense of those I am proudest of are:

1. 1974: 'Classroom research: A cautionary tale' (with David Hamilton) — because it was the first peer reviewed journal article we had accepted, and Nate Gage requested an offprint of it.
2. 1980: 'The two traditions' (with Paul Atkinson).
3. 1981: All too familiar? — This was my first formulation of the familiarity problem.
4. 1984: 'A woman's place in education'. — This was my presidential address to BERA.
5. 2005: 'Four Great Gates'. — This was my keynote plenary to the joint conference of the New Zealand and Australian educational research association in Auckland in 2003.
6. 2007: 'The only honest thing'. — This is an attack on autoethnography.
7. 2008: 'Up on the roof' (with N. Stephens) *Cultural Sociology*. — This paper presents the best of the capoeira project and was shortlisted for the Sage prize for 2008.
8. 2012: 'Performing research or researching performance?' — This was a plenary at the big Urbana Champaign qualitative research conference, and argues for peopled ethnography rather than autoethnography.

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