

Editorial

"OBJECTIVITY? I ALWAYS HAVE AN OBJECTIVE."

Kurt W. Clausen, Editor

Throughout her long career as a journalist, Jessica "Decca" Mitford (1917-1996) continued to give the above response to her multitude of critics whenever they questioned her ethics. To her, objectivity did not really exist – at least the objectivity that she had observed among the so-called unbiased reports that had no point of view. To her, this was just a reporter's way of remaining uninvolved with a story or the people s/he was trying to understand. Instead, she promoted the concept of accuracy in research:

Accuracy is essential, not only to the integrity of the work but to avoid actionable defamation. It can be ruinous to try to tailor the evidence to fit your preconceptions, or to let your point of view impede the search for the facts.

But I do not try to cultivate the appearance of objectivity, mainly through the techniques of understatement, avoidance where possible of editorial comment, above all letting the undertakers, or the Spock prosecutors, or the prison administrators pillory themselves through their own pronouncements (Mitford, 1979, p. 24)

In this way, she always wore her brand of "objectivity" on her sleeve, giving commentary and judgement where she felt it was warranted. However, she never twisted the facts to suit her own agenda. The same could be said for those who practice Action Research. Like reportage, this form of research endeavours to bring about a reform. As well, it does not pretend to be "objective" – investigators inevitably become actively involved with their own study, and in so doing are themselves transformed. However, unlike Mitford's desire to "embarrass the guilty", most action researchers hold a more benign desire: "research that is practical, directed at their own concerns and, for those who wish, a tool to bring about social change" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 223).

In the case of the group from **East Carolina University**, there was a wish to ameliorate the situation of teachers through the use of action research methods. In the research reports submitted by **Grace Jones** and by **Maureen McCarty Murray**, both investigators wanted to see their students succeed using the provided innovations. In all three cases objectivity is not dealt with because it is obvious that the researchers cared – about the results and the participants. This is where accuracy must step in. Through the methods of observation, triangulation and grounded data, the field workers must endeavour to be as accurate as scholars within the "academy" performing "controlled" research. As Mitford would say, they *have* to be if they are going to be believed (and remain out of litigation).

References

- Bogdan, R.C. & Biklen, S.K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Mitford, J. (1963). *The American way of death*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Mitford, J. (1969). *The trial of Dr. Spock, the Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr., Michael Ferber, Mitchell Goodman and Marcus Raskin*. New York: Knopf.

Mitford, J. (1970). *Kind and usual punishment: The prison business*. New York: Knopf.

Mitford, J. (1979). *Poison penmanship: The art of muckraking*. New York: Knopf.