Part 3: Interpretation, limitations and the future

Part 3 is divided into three main sections:

1) Data Analysis and Synthesis
2) Limitations
3) Future possibilities

1) Data Analysis and Synthesis

Upon receiving consent from participants (Appendix B), I transcribed data from the

survey (Appendix C), then proceeded to code, describe, analyze and interpret the emergent data.

Data from the initial and subsequent interviews was transcribed and coded into themes that

described my understanding of the data. Data was transcribed from the questionnaires and was

used to determine the need and scope that informs subsequent in person interview questions.

Subsequently, new and better questions continued to emerge from the response(s) given in the

survey, and when that happened the respondent was re-contacted for their further input. Through

a synthesis of data by means of various research methods, I integrated and accounted for diverse

views, with the intention of improving the existing systems for evaluating diverse forms of

research---for my personal benefit and the improvement of the problem situation (McNiff,

Lomax and Whitehead, 1996).

2) Limitations

There are some obvious limitations in this study.

- First, I am limiting the interviews (Survey, Appendix C) for this study to faculty

  members who have sought or will seek promotion of rank and other rewards at

  institutions of higher learning. I have no ability to contact every single academic faculty

  member worldwide in the field of film and digital media, past and present, so I have to

believe that the 300+ faculty members I did contact, with 13 respondents, suffices as a representative number for a useful analysis.

- Second, I have chosen to focus upon faculty in the field of film and digital media at academic institutions of higher learning.   An opportunity for future research exists, perhaps motivated by this dissertation, to examine the process, problems and challenges of performance evaluation in other disciplines in fine arts such as painting, musical performance, performance art, creative writing and poetry, theater arts and many other fields where faculty may be producing scholarly work that is not text-based in nature; but in this dissertation I am focused only upon the problem of performance evaluation for faculty in the field of film and digital media.

- Third, I have chosen to focus upon faculty who submit films, videos and/or digital media work in their dossier for performance evaluation in teaching, research or service.

- A fourth problem that affected the way research was conducted is the fact that I am located in the United Arab Emirates, far away from most of the participants in this project. I have had to rely upon email as my primary means of information gathering and communication. Therefore, a limitation could be perceived that my access to a pool of potential respondents was limited to asynchronous contact in writing, and determined by the respondent's (un-) willingness to access/respond to email messages and apply their internet skills to respond to the survey. I reasonably assumed that a representative high percentage of the specific population that I was studying (faculty in the field of film and digital media) have adequate access to a computer with email capability, and that a reasonable number would take the time to check their email and provide an online response to the survey.

- The use of asynchronous internet-email based electronic interviewing as the sole means of information gathering might be perceived in a traditional and conventional context as a limitation, although I view it as a relatively quick and low-cost option. It does eliminate the dimension of face-to-face interaction with the nuanced reading of non-verbal behavior and expression. The rapport and emergent relationship that is formed through electronic means is arguably and potentially more superficial and difficult to establish, in comparison with personal contact, and there is an ever-present risk of misunderstanding, mendacity, or misrepresentation by all concerned parties, plus electronic interviewing can not fully ensure that anonymity will not be breached. On the other hand, Schaefer and Dillman (1998) found that email surveys achieved response rates similar to those of mail surveys but yielded better quality data in terms of completion and more detailed response to open-ended questions.

The focus of my dissertation is a restricted one, tied to a problem situation that has been framed in the opening paragraphs as the research problem and research question, and limited in the ways that are above-listed, with the particular problem more or less resolved by the conclusion. As described at the outset of this chapter, this notion of a conclusion reflects a conventional realist practice of textual organization. By framing the representation in such a fashion, closure of the materials can be claimed. Closure is itself an argument that subsumes knowledge to be verifiable, replicable and certain. Yet if I leave the issues raised in this dissertation without a determined resolution, up in the air, ambiguous, or in some other state of uncertainty, the reader would probably be disturbed and such an approach might undermine the authority of my work (Van Maanen, 1993).

Traditionally, shorthand terminologies such as validity, reliability, trustworthiness, and triangulation have been used in support of parsimony in the reporting of research. But as I have reflected and integrated multiple (media) data sources and mixed methodologies into this project, I have needed to be more explicit than reflective in reporting the process of data abstraction in the transition to text-based dissemination. Pink's (2001) call for new discourses to represent visual data raises the question of how to develop non-reductive languages for the abstraction of multiple media data that do not conflate seeing with knowing (Voithofer, 2005; Jenks, 1995). Exploring the limits of visual culture through aesthetic techniques such as video editing is one possible response to this question. Another possibility would be to develop a vocabulary of metaphors related to new media characteristics.

3) Future possibilities

After publication of this completed dissertation, I will be able to follow-up on program implementation possibilities in many universities, using appropriate action-oriented approaches for participant ownership and organizational change. Further, it is my intention to demonstrate how the process of documentary filmmaking and digital media production for social development, a particular kind of filmmaking practice, can exemplify all of the action research cycles to a credible degree that should be recognized during faculty performance evaluation.