

### CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW AND SOME THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

*“[Palmerton, Pennsylvania] is...a town torn by an environmental civil war, a war whose battles rage over a devastated terrain: ...33 million tons of perilous waste...massive derelict buildings...a mountain looming nearby, stripped so bare of vegetation by pollution that it looks like an environmental Mount St. Helens...and, unseen, stores of cadmium, lead, and other dangerous heavy metals mixed into the soils of this Carbon County valley.”*

*(Fried, The Patriot-News, Harrisburg, Pa., Wednesday, 1994b, August 17, p. B12)*

Although Palmerton is unique in many ways, the story of community contamination is one that occurs in many cities and towns across America. The federal National Priorities List (NPL), a catalog of the nation's worst known hazardous waste sites, as of December 1995 included 1,238 locations (*Report to the Chairman, Committee on Environment and Public Works, U.S. Senate*, 1996). In addition there are a plethora of nonfederal Superfund sites.

Why do communities-at-risk, like Palmerton, tolerate the conditions to which they are exposed? How do towns and neighborhoods make sense of the contamination and the disintegration of their natural resource heritage? Pollution is both systemic and institutional, but many times neighborhoods participate in its legitimization by accepting contamination as an admissible contemporary social phenomenon. On the other hand, some communities are engaged in the contentious struggle of constructing the meaning of their exposure to toxins in a process of ideological and political critique carried out in a social context. Put succinctly “each of us constructs our own reality. What we assume to be true becomes a frame for making sense out of the world we experience” (Cunningham, 1988, p. 135); knowledge, including environmental knowledge, is actively built by the individual.

There is consensus among most social scientists that much of what is known, is a matter of agreement and belief. In fact, Babbie (1992) goes so far as to state that “the fundamental basis of knowledge is agreement” (p. 17). But what is “know” is also a matter of construction.

The arena of knowledge making is an area of significant contemporary research. It is recognized that once established, dominant (normative) knowledge and culturally prevalent modes of sense-making are often hegemonic forces. This phenomenon has been documented numerous times, for example in the work of Bernstein (1971); Apple (1979); Giroux (1983a, 1983b); and others.

Environmental perturbations, including toxic exposure, pollution, and contamination of communities have become sites of struggle in the past few decades in America as citizens interrogate the truth claims of parties involved in, and affected by, technical catastrophes. The knowledge of elite hazard specialists is now held by community members as only one of many ways to construct meaning around environmental disaster. Experiential knowledge outside of the control of specialists, most often dismissed by keepers of codified knowledge as subjective and therefore irrelevant, is a part of the struggle surrounding the question of who has cultural authority in contaminated communities. The national trend in conflicts between community groups and officials "have become battles between self-taught citizen-experts (and their occasional mainstream-expert allies) and the 'official' experts" (Blumberg & Gottlieb, 1992, p. 7). Citizens have been recognized as "popular epidemiologists" and "intuitive toxicologists." They detect and act on environmental hazards, resulting in clashes with officials in numerous arenas, including, problem definition, health study design, interpretation of findings, educational content of materials, and policy application (see Brown, 1993). A growing number of official studies confirm what citizens already know, and what citizen-based research already shows, namely, that pollution is making people in communities sick (Clipp, 1994). It is recognized that citizens do not act irrationally when they make claims based on local knowledge (Wandersman & Hallman, 1993). Citizen challenges, based on locally constructed knowledge, have produced counter-reactions by some elite bureaucrats. Popular epidemiology is now labeled by them, "political epidemiology" (Westrum, 1991). And, they suggest that citizen health studies which indicate an environmental problem--as perceived by local folks--are "misdirected application[s] of a community's power. (p. 593).

Toxic studies show that the culture of neighborhoods in environmental conflicts result in the purveyors of ideology and power attempting to fix meaning in a particular direction; the work of the Highlander Research and Education Center, New Market, Tennessee is exemplary of this research. It marks the exception to the silence of adult educators in regard to environmental adult education and the struggle of local communities to control the meaning of environmental hazards that they experience. Highlander studies excavate the varied and rich research that is conducted by adults in communities associated with hazardous or toxic pollution, but that has laid undocumented by researchers in the field of adult education. Members of these communities are engaged in resistance to the particular ends, direction and interests of dominant social groups' sense-making.

As is happening in Palmerton, conflicts over meaning and making sense of experiences are part of the ongoing historical struggle in communities across the United States. As alternative discourses--ways of seeing "otherwise"--emerge, the dominant ideology continually reappropriates the sites and activities of resistance, reinvesting them with new hegemonic meaning--a process that results in social discord. Power and authority in the cultural setting are dynamic forces that are perpetually negotiated and renegotiated by the agents in these contestations. Resistance, quiescence and rebellion are possible outcomes of power asymmetries; knowledge and power are the grounds of contestation. The inspiration for community members to take up a voice against the official or prevailing narrative in neighborhoods in environmental conflict is initially often neither obvious nor intuitive. Since the process of education has been defined, in part, as teaching people how to cope with their society, it is in this space that adult educators as critical cultural workers have a significant role to play.

### **Adult Education and Citizen Activism**

Thomas and Harries-Jenkins (1975) noted that the dynamics between adult education and social change occur along a continuum. This continuum ranges from preservation of the *status quo* to radical transformation of society. The sociology of adult education, in part, examines mechanisms employed by society to classify, transmit, and evaluate knowledge (Bernstein, 1971). It can be a liberatory force when it addresses the questions: To what degree does education make society better by making it more egalitarian, and to what degree does it legitimate or enhance existing social inequalities (Rubenson, 1989)? Adult education that is counterhegemonic is poised to address the struggles of grassroots communities in toxic plight. I speak here of adult education in its broadest construction, referring to both that which occurs in the academy, and more importantly in the case of Palmerton, that arises in communities-at-risk.

The thread that links learning to social justice has a long and venerable history in adult education. Starting with Dewey (1964) and the progressives of the 1920's, the goals of education have been couched in social terms. Lindeman focused on adult education as the most reliable instrument for social action. He wrote that all successful adult education groups eventually become social action collectives (1929, 1945, 1961). Bergevin (1967) perceived education as fostering democratic ideals, and Blakely (1967) pronounced that education leads the individual to a better, more fulfilling personal life while making the world a better place to live. These attributes speak obviously for the role adult education can perform in environmental conflicts.

Building on the transformative quality of adult education, critical pedagogy advocates radical social change. Proponents such as Freire, Illich, Horton, Reimer, and Counts recommend a catalytic role for education. From these wellsprings, a plethora of current adult educators advances a social agenda that includes justice, equality, civil rights and democracy. Their goals are to create a more desirable society; to them a primary purpose of learning is to

make sense of the world and to give meaning to experience. Welton (1991) argues that with the collapse of andragogy (the dominant adult education paradigm), new competing discourses have filled the field and practice of adult education. The critical theory of Habermas provides the direction for much of this emancipatory *praxis* in education (Mezirow, 1985, 1991; Hart, 1990). This *praxis* has transformative potential for Palmerton and similar communities exposed to hazardous waste.

In her compelling book, *Teaching To Transgress*, the black feminist educator bell hooks (1994) explores pedagogical theories and practices that teach students to rupture oppressive social boundaries. She asserts that the learning taking place within contemporary western society is deterministic, marginalizing many groups of people. If we are to construct a just and equitable society it must be contested. O'Loughlin, (1992) urges teachers to engage in transformative knowledge construction. In Freirian terms, most education results in the domestication of learners, the colonization of their life-world and the reproduction of unjust social structures. However, hooks and others leave unexamined the terrain that adults, schooled into the *status quo*, must navigate once they leave the classroom or the academy.

In many ways this study centers on critical eco-literacy, a dreadfully under-investigated field. It is critical in the sense that it attempts to understand the oppressive aspects of society so as to construct the situations for empowerment and transformation of those who have been marginalized. Eco-literacy refers to what it means to be environmentally literate in United States culture today; to negotiate the terrain of everyday life in an environmentally sensitive way. Eco-literacy is about possessing the skills necessary to fulfill ones own self-determined objectives as individuals and family and community members. Quigley (1990, 1997) is one of the few adult education researchers who applies intentionality and agency to literacy in pursuit of liberty-- although not in the context of eco-literacy. His is a theory of resistance applied to learning basic skills in adulthood using, in part, phenomenological methodology. Hautecoeur (1994) focuses on world-wide grassroots change with action research. Some researchers recognize that individuals and communities have environmental needs, and that agents have both social and ethical responsibilities to see that these needs are met. Yet, to paraphrase Keddie (1980), no

authors ask how these needs are constituted and understood, how they are articulated, and whose voice has standing in the community. This is especially true for environmental literacy.

In his analysis of the sociology of education, Rubenson (1989) probes, "To what extent does education make society better by making it more egalitarian, and to what extent does education legitimate, and even enhance, existing social...inequalities?" (p 66). Most schooled adults have not had the fortune of experiencing teachers that taught us to critically question, let alone to transgress dominant or preponderate social relations, as prescribed by hooks. Yet, many adults learn to give a voice to their hopes, dreams and struggles; we learn to trespass. Freire calls the process, "conscientization"--the development of a radical consciousness that has learned to see that certain social forms are unjust, unethical, and oppressive (Fay, 1977, p. 220).

Throughout the last three decades, environmental education has developed as a formal academic discipline focused primarily at preparatory learners (grades K-12 and in higher education). This environmental education, not unlike education in general, reflects a curriculum favoring dominant ideologies, reproduces hegemonic power relations, privileges the elite group, and marginalizes many (see Sharp, 1980; Giroux, 1983a; Bowles & Gintis, 1976 for educational processes in general). Until very recently, the relationship between adult education and environmental education has eluded practitioners in the two fields. Imel (1990), Andrews and Camozzi (1994) and Andrews, Camozzi, and Puntteney (1994) are exceptions, yet critical environmental education for adults, as a liberatory process, is not addressed.

In an extensive analysis of the relationship between environmental knowledge and action, Finger (1994) reviews the models constructed by environmental educators and environmental psychologists. Most researchers were found to conclude that environmentally sensitive behavioral changes will result from information, knowledge, concern, and awareness. Yet, Finger (1994) postulates, "today's major challenge for environmental educators stems from the fact that individuals are already highly aware and concerned when it comes to environmental issues and problems, yet they do not display the corresponding environmental behavior one could expect" (p. 143). With the possible exception of plastic, metal, and glass recycling, there

is little evidence, based in research, that shows environmental knowledge results in behavior changes or in environmental actions that challenge social structures. Despite the ample evidence that citizens in the US and elsewhere have strong environmental attitudes and concerns (Dunlap, Gallup, and Gallup, 1993), environmentally destructive behaviors persist. People seldom become agents of social transformation despite strong beliefs and concerns until specific crises arise.

There is abundant evidence that threats to the lifeworld--not information, knowledge, concern or awareness--politicize and radicalize those experiencing environmental disasters, making of them agents of change. In the face of crisis people mobilize. This opposition by citizens is founded on several grounds, including instances when uncertain science is a part of the social issue. "In such instances citizens find themselves facing divided expertise--qualified scientific experts who have produced different scientific findings...or who disagree over the interpretation of a scientific consensus when that consensus is challenged from outside the scientific community" (Bingle & Gaskell, 1994, p. 187, 188). Barnes (1985) offers anecdotal evidence that citizens commonly contest scientific truth claims because their personal experiences conflict with the official understanding of the situation. Additionally, citizens revolt when they sense that certain interests are having an undue influence on the negotiation of cultural authority (Bingle & Gaskell, 1994). Edelstein (1988) provides examples of the ways that emergent citizens groups, galvanized around experiences that have disrupted their ontological security, enable toxic victims to resist, contest, and renegotiate the power asymmetries in a community.

Where personal experiences of specific, local pollution or hazards impinge on individuals' lifeworlds and communities, an indigenous response oftentimes occurs. Habermas (1981) remarks that the "tangible" environmental phenomena that "attack the *organic foundations of the life-world* (italics in the original) and make one drastically conscious of criteria of livability, of inflexible limits to the deprivation of sensual-aesthetic background needs" will provoke resistance and protest (p. 35).

Popular environmental education in these situations transpires at the location of the problems and is based on first-hand experience of an often vexing dilemma, not on theoretical abstractions. In recent years, the hazardous waste/toxics environmental justice social movement has brought together traditional "environmentalism" and American "populism." This synthesis includes "greater...access to...education" and information (Szasz, 1994) but is rooted in first hand experience and local creation of meaning. Grassroots, action-oriented, problem solving groups, referred to as emergent citizens groups in the sociological literature (comparable with VCOs, or voluntary community organizations in the political science field), arise in response to real or perceived environmental threats. They engage in the environmental education enterprise, often based in folk education. Their popular education initiatives are built upon several principles, including: the awareness that knowledge resides within the community; unofficial, or fugitive knowledge, is much more appropriate than the codified knowledge of outside officials; individuals' conscious appropriation of their own reality; citizens' efforts to influence and control their daily lives; peoples' defense of their life worlds and their construction of definitions of what society should look like, and the subsequent defense of this definition; their opposition, resistance, erasure, negotiation, or renegotiation of existing power asymmetries; movements toward popular participation of the community; and the recognition that cultural and social control are as important as control of the economic and productive sectors of society.

Perilous pollution that leads to technical environmental disasters in a community, unlike natural disasters, is often accompanied by psychological dysfunction, quiescence, feelings of powerlessness, frustration and despair (Gaventa, 1980; Gibbs, 1986; Gibbs, 1982; Edelstein, 1988; Kroll-Smith & Couch, 1990) as well as rebellion and resistance. Palmerton is no exception to the advancements and retreats in the shifting terrain of ideological contest that mark cultural formations in social discourse. John Gaventa (1980) has shown that communities with a history of dependency on a single industry, especially in Appalachia, are often subject to enduring patterns of power asymmetries and authoritarian control. These often grip residents in a way that renders them impotent to affect social dynamics in the public sphere; stifles

involvement in decision-making which impacts their lives; and frustrates the possibility to challenge existing political structures.

This study is an inquiry into how a small group of Palmerton's adults, living in neighborhoods exposed to industrial contaminants, have come to transgress the dominant industrial narrative. It is a study into their attempts to infuse new meaning into industry-oriented language, events and behaviors, and to resist the dominant ideology's continued reappropriation of the sites that they succeeded in transforming. It is an inquiry into the conditions that opened spaces in which the grassroots citizens, as adult educators and cultural workers, could transgress boundaries, and could examine their experiences, engage in sense-making and speak their voices within the sphere of historically colonized existence. As bell hooks reminds us, this is not an easy task to perform in a social context. Her experience of students in the classroom setting is paradigmatic for many individuals' reactions when faced with alternatives to the *status quo*. She writes, "For reasons I can not explain [the class] was ...full of 'resisting' students who did not want to learn a new pedagogical process, who did not want to be in a classroom that differed in any way from the norm. To these students, transgressing boundaries was frightening....Their spirit of rigid resistance seemed always to be more powerful than any will to intellectual openness" (hooks, 1994, p. 9). As hooks has found, students whose lifeworlds have been ideologically appropriated are often comfortable with their location, despite its consequences. "Colonization" of the life world of individuals, as happened in Palmerton, leads to dependency, pathologies of power and corruption. People resist, create new learning, and challenge the power asymmetries in communities as they negotiate cultural authority with the dominant group in a process of emancipatory knowledge construction.

In contaminated neighborhoods, the process of cultural work is usually not effortless since cultural production involves constant struggles for narrative space, language, and developing intellectual and moral faculties within communities. Cultural products provide the systems of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting (Goodenough, 1981, p. 110), and particular forms of knowledge and experience are central areas of competition and conflict (McLaren, 1994). Learning and education are central to the struggle. In the broadest

sense, education involves generating messages and meanings in a specific context, from appropriated cultural materials. It includes education about the self, the self's relation to the world, and to others in it (Willis, 1990). Central to the tale of the environmental civil war cited in the opening of this chapter is the process of cultural production, taken up by cultural workers in neighborhoods throughout the borough. It concerns people who struggle to generate, manage, and propagate the meanings about their human experiences. The setting for this drama was the lifeworld of individuals and communities--the places in the valley where each person learned what life meant and what held it together. It was the space where a small group of individuals continued the search for personal and collective points of reference, and self-reinforcement. For them, the contaminated environment was the site of significant learning. They believe, as the adult educator Cunningham, "what we make [e.g. pollution], we can unmake" (1988, p. 136). We can learn to question, to challenge, to contest, and to speak defiant talk. In a commodious way, this study probes what learning to negotiate the "terrain of the otherwise" and alternatives to the community norm looked like in the contaminated borough at Palmerton, Pennsylvania.

Highlander Research and Education Center is a rare example of adult education pioneering creative educational strategies oriented toward citizen activists (see Peters and Bell, 1987), including training in their STP (Stop The Pollution-Save The Planet) programs. Few studies (see e.g. Hill, 1995a; in press) attempt to understand how regulatory agencies and grassroots emergent citizen's ECGs construct knowledge about local environmental issues, or how multiply constructed knowledge is used in decision-making and problem-solving. My research, too, is aimed at addressing this lacuna. More importantly, few studies investigate who controls the meaning of hazardous situations, and by what mechanisms, and finally, how is sense made of the situation by participants in the contest. This inquiry explores the contemporary battle over the control of meaning in risk scenarios, the methods utilized in that struggle, and the process of negotiating and renegotiating power and cultural authority.

Using multiple theoretical frames--in addition to those cited above--this study examines the intersubjective nature of meaning-making and knowledge construction. It builds on the

transformative learning theory (based on individual processes) of Mezirow (1991), and the Freirian liberation model (Freire, 1978) of new awareness of self-hood, and the critical examination of the social contexts in which the learners are embedded, resulting in social transformation. Central to the transformation of an individual's perspective is the process of reflection which can take place in the accompaniment of group members where there is an opportunity to challenge and to be challenged. Action, too, provides the ground for focusing group reflection. It is through the dynamics of active "questioning" rather than the utilitarian approach of "questing for accomplishment" that the critical distinction is made between "problem solving" and "problem posing" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 105). Extending the paradigm from individualistic to social contexts, this study positions the group as a basic unit of learning, and states that learning occurs best through dialogue and discussion linked to critical practice.

Of special focus, are the roles of "narratives" and the construction of locations from which to speak in the personal and community learning dynamics of Palmerton. Narratives, including the dominant community narrative and its unspoken (dark) underbelly, as well as counter narratives function significantly in what is speakable, thinkable and therefore knowable in the community. The processes utilized by individuals to select which experiences to narrate are power-saturated (Foucault, 1980).

The literature shows that the health of the environment, despite several decades of public interest waxing and waning, remains persistently on the public policy agenda (Gillroy & Shapiro, 1986). In response to recurring environmental problems, citizens construct multiple axes of interpretation around environmental hazards. Social conflicts surrounding the meaning of risks, and how such situations should be managed, are on the increase; Palmerton is just one of the national battle grounds. Fay (1975 and 1987) has shown that under appropriate circumstances knowledge can be used by citizens to change conditions in their communities. Not knowing about contamination with toxic substances and the risk of exposure to them is a manifestation of oppression (Kellogg, 1993).

In recent years the awareness of such risks have prompted the emergence of several new cultural phenomena, such as social movements in the arenas of: eco-justice/environmental

democracy/toxics; action-oriented environmental education for community problem solving; and a subset of communication, called risk communication (Kasperson & Stallen, 1991; Morgan, Fischhoff, Bostrom, Lave, & Atman, 1992; Fischhoff, Bostrom, & Quadrel, 1993), among others.

### **Palmerton: A Critical Ethnographic Account**

*“Critical ethnography is a way of applying a subversive worldview to the conventional logic of cultural inquiry....It offers a...direct style of thinking about relationships among knowledge, society, and political action.”*

*(Thomas, Doing critical ethnography, 1993, p. v).*

My goal was to examine the processes of cultural production, sense- and meaning-making, learning to transgress, opening of descriptive space, and the dynamics of the contest for cultural authority in Palmerton’s “environmental civil war.” I was interested in employing a methodology that provided rich, descriptive data about contexts, activities, and beliefs of the participants. Depth interviews within an interpretive framework, as a part of critical ethnographic methodologies, were deemed appropriate for this purpose (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 17). The “interpretation,” however, is not the result of representational reading in a process of unveiling inherent meaning in events or experiences. Rather, the study explores the sense that is produced, and that emerges, out of the practice of critique itself as taken up by the contestants. This study is critical in that it begins from the life problems of social agents--a select group of Palmerton’s citizens--that are marginalized and alienated from social processes they sometimes maintain, at times resist, and sometimes create in an effort to gain control of their lives. Critical educational ethnography refers to the means and methods of transforming the social structures that allow inequities in the learning environment of agents. It is oppositional practice within the

social norm, transgressing boundaries that circumscribe what is both utterable and knowable. Critical ethnography provided an opportunity to explore the meanings life's events had to those experiencing them. It allowed me to touch the ordinary, everyday world of community members by way of a naturalistic, qualitative, ethnographic study.

The study explores the contest for cultural authority, and the processes which made understandable the culturally constituted differences in environmental ideologies. The "civil war" mentioned by news reporter Fried (1994b) was a result of the battle for the prevalence of a particular ideology and the sites from which to articulate this. Cultural struggle is the terrain of negotiating and renegotiating meaning.

This study was designed so that I began, by intention, as an onlooker, moving to greater degrees of interaction through the course of time. In accordance with Denzin (1978), the study simultaneously combined document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and introspection. This study begins with the assumption that the researcher does not have primary knowledge, subjects (a problematic term) of the study are potentially equal partners in the research, knowledge is a collaborative enterprise so that its production and use are shared by those who are its focus. This model was chosen because it assumes empowerment, through knowledge, of people who are positioned away from the center, and opens up the possibility that reflection and action will democratize the public sphere and lead to the transformation of unjust social situations (Freire, 1992).

In order to obtain well-founded data I employed self-corrective techniques that critiqued the validity of the information and which reduced distortions of personal bias (Kamarovsky, 1981) through triangulation, self-reflectivity, and member-checks (Reason & Rowan, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). In order to withstand the rigors of critical scrutiny, a study must bear "truth value" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Denzin (1978) offers triangulation as a means of establishing data trustworthiness. This process is the act of drawing on multiple sources of data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Patton further refines the idea, by suggesting four important ways to employ triangulation: data triangulation, using a variety of data sources; investigator triangulation, using several different researchers or evaluators; theory triangulation,

using multiple perspectives; and methodological triangulation, using multiple methods of research. This study incorporates three of these, namely, data triangulation, theory triangulation, and multiple methods of investigation. Finally, the researcher and the instrument in qualitative research must be credible (Patton, 1990, pp. 472-493). Reciprocity means a dialogical process of shared power and mutual respect between the researcher and the researched. Everhart (1977) suggests that a sign of reciprocity is the movement of the researcher from stranger to friend. My own journey with the members of Palmerton's neighborhoods went from an unknown outsider to an associate and then a confidant in the two years that I sojourned closely with the community. Triangulation, an essential methodological element for establishing trustworthiness of data, allowed me to use multiple measures of data collection and analysis. This dissertation incorporated multiple data sources, multiple study methods, and multiform theoretical schemes. Long term observations (nearly three years of immersion from start to finish) increases validity and reliability.

A key aspect of the research was to continually return to the participants "with the tentative results, and [to refined] them in light of the subject's reactions" (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p. 248)--a process known as "member checks." A collaborative approach was employed in an effort to empower the researched, and to ascertain credible data, validly collected and analyzed. Although I realized that the methodology of sharing prepublished text with those being researched is not uniformly accepted (England, 1994), I felt that the informants in this research had the right to know what I was thinking in its sometimes tentative and frequently bookish way. This aided my attempt to keep from appropriating meaning and resignifying it. The process of reciprocal reflection with those being researched was used to avoid misrepresentation. Although I was not interested in representing the voices of those under study to anyone--they are quite capable of that on their own--one informant told me, "while reading your draft I yearned to have the scientific community and educators eat it up as I was [while reading it]."

In order to better understand the historical and social conditions under which citizens' actions took place, I began by undertaking an historical analysis of the town of Palmerton,

Pennsylvania from its founding as a “planned industrial community” in 1898, through its incorporation as a borough in 1912, to the present moment. In many ways this was a high altitude flight over the terrain in an attempt to learn the changing texture of life throughout a nearly one hundred year history. This resulted in a macroview of the historical and cultural setting in which citizens are now embedded. It was an attempt to locate their position in a social and historical context. A goal of this historical investigation was to gain a better understanding of the current social dynamics as a function of the history of the community; the contemporary contest for cultural authority was thus embedded in a context of the one hundred year history of Palmerton.

Sampling was purposeful for acquisition of data using key informants and snowballing (interviewing recommended respondents). One ultimate goal of qualitative research is building a relationship characterized by trust, empathy, respect and a free and open exchange of information (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). A safe setting, with high levels of trust, is gained, in part, by interactions outside of the interview process. Therefore, I went to homes, to two annual autumn Palmerton Community Festivals, numerous public community meetings, and attended field trips that PCCE conducted for college classes visiting the environmentally damaged area. Additionally, the intercalation of a preliminary field period allowed me to spend time in the territory of those under study and to engage in an overt approach to gaining access to the subjects.

Historical data were gathered by various means, including, open-ended informal interviews, formal one-to-one and group interviews, on-site observations, newspaper articles, magazines, government and other reports, public records, oral narratives, community ephemera such as informational brochures, and recorded video tapes were used as information sources that served as thick data texts. The use of historical documents for ethnographic content analysis is a recognized qualitative research tool (Altheide, 1987). The study of historical data is well suited to reveal critical situations that disrupt the ontological security of a community, and to reveal the structural forces that influence the outcomes of peoples’ actions. In addition to the chronicled data, I set out to learn what it felt like for members of the community to engage in the

contest for meaning, especially for those who were mobilizing their desires for a safe environment, and healthier lives--to explore what Foucault calls the “ battle for and around history, [with the] intention...to reprogram, to stifle ‘popular memory,’ and also to propose and impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present” (Foucault 1989).

The sources of information on the history of Palmerton, Pennsylvania are numerous. For this study, newspapers played a key role in collection of material for interrogation. The industry published its own magazine from about 1915 to the 1950s, called *Zinc* which was an invaluable tool for historical analysis of the community from its early days. I relied heavily on the information in its pages, as did the historian John Parsons, author of the document, *Lehigh Gap Historical Society: Palmerton, PA* (1993). This latter book was also indispensable in my research. In addition to the magazine, *Zinc*, the company produced several “period” publications for wide distribution. These were reviewed for the information that was preserved in them. They included, *A Record of Accomplishments, 1848-1923* (1923); *Making Zinc: Our Contribution to Better Living* (1940); and *The First Hundred Years of the New Jersey Zinc Company: A History of the Founding and Development of a Company and an Industry, 1848-1948* (1948). The industry also produced reports by the company Sociology Department, especially on its Neighborhood House, an experiment in social welfare work. Sociological work was orchestrated by the New York office of the New Jersey Zinc Company, and found expression in many of the industry’s towns across the United States. A small number of the Department’s documents were located; they offered unique insight into the discourse of worker assistance, social engineering, and mechanisms used by the company to control social discourse.

Throughout the history of the community, anniversarial celebrations were pivotal events. As memorializing public performances, they were recorded in documents such as, *Silver Anniversary Celebrating the Founding of Palmerton, Carbon County, Pennsylvania, 1898-1923* (1923); *Silver Jubilee Celebrating the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Incorporation: Borough of Palmerton, Pennsylvania, 1912-1937* (1937); and *Golden*

*Jubilee Celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Borough of Palmerton, Pennsylvania, 1912-1967 (1967).*

My step-wise immersion into the varied neighborhoods of Palmerton began in earnest in May, 1995 and continued through the writing of the dissertation in the spring of 1997. Initial incursions into the community the year before were for reconnoitering and exploring the social layout of the terrain. I familiarized myself with the roads, churches, social clubs, recreational areas, city park, businesses and industries, and public institutions such as the Borough Hall, library and post office. I read grocery store bulletin boards, notices in the Borough Hall and other public spaces. In June 1995, I began introducing myself to the multiple stakeholders I believed were involved in the construction, management and distribution of knowledge centered on the environmental damage so evident in the Borough and surrounding countryside.

The subsequent interviews that I conducted were designed to probe the processes of resistant intellectuals in the grassroots community, negotiation and renegotiation of cultural authority, and explore where the systems of domination and power persisted in residents lives, as well as where these systems recycled themselves without conscious recognition of the members.

If conflicts over meaning are a part of an ongoing historical struggle, as I believe they are, the geography of contested notions requires a thorough understanding. Armed with the tools of an educational ethnographic researcher, I began to explore the life world of those who were party to Palmerton's social contestations.