REPORT ON CONSULTING SERVICES
PROVIDED BY RAY CHESTERFIELD TO IDRC
APRIL 14 TO MAY 15, 1983

This report summarizes the work completed by Ray Chesterfield as a consultant to IDRC during the period April 14 to May 15, 1983. The document is divided into two parts. The first presents a detailed chronological description of the consultant's activities as a participant in the international seminar on the interpretation of qualitative data on schooling held in Bogotá, Colombia. The second provides his general impressions on the work being carried out by the network of Latin American scholars conducting qualitative research on schooling and offers suggestions which might be considered by the authors in preparing their works for publication.

A. Work Completed under the Consultancy

April 14 - Travel to Bogotá. Review of the completed ethnographies on Escuela/Comunidad from Colombia and Bolivia and of interim documents from the Venezuela and Chile.

April 15 - Planning sessions on the workshops' structure and content with Beatrice Avalos, Araceli de Tezanos and Rodrigo Vera. Specifically, it was decided to divide the participants of the general sessions into four small training groups, each of which would contain individuals from each of the participating countries and from each type of project. The actual division was left to the discretion of
Ms. Tezanos. It was also decided that the lecturer at each general session would rotate among the small groups to answer questions related to the theme of his/her presentation.

Scheduling of additional presenters and of administrative meetings for the coordinators of the various research groups were also arranged. Finally, it was decided that small group sessions aimed at summarizing the workshop experience would begin during the first week of meetings rather than the second as originally planned. This was to allow a reasonable period of time for reflection over the various themes and preliminary conclusions to produce a useful concluding document.

April 16-17 - Review and preparation of materials for the consultant's presentation on Tuesday, April 19, 1983. The paper, entitled "Análisis Comparativa de Estudios Etnográficos (Cross-Site Analysis of Ethnographic Data)" was reworked to address some of the epistemological issues to be addressed during the first day's (Monday) presentations. In addition, an exercise on implicational scaling using data from an ethnographic study of bilingual schools carried out by the consultant was developed. Finally those presentations for the following week which were available in written form were reviewed.

April 18 - Attended presentations and participated in the general discussions on the themes for the day which revolved around the epistemological approaches of critical theory and analytic philosophy.

April 19 - Presentation of paper on cross-site analysis of ethnographic data. Paper dealt with issues of quality control, data retrieval and storage, and four approaches to cross-site analysis of ethnographic data used in studies of bilingual schools which I directed.
These were: Analytic Induction, using data displays; Analysis of Specific Events (in this case, lessons); Implicational Scaling; and Enumerative Systems. Participation in small group discussions of the theme. Discussions focused on distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research and if categorizing and coding naturalistic observations or counting them was not inconsistent with the epistemological positions presented the previous day. I suggested that the important distinction was in the manner of interpretation and further, that quantitative and qualitative techniques can be used successfully in conjunction to lend greater explanatory power to a research problem. Examples were presented from my work with bilingual schools. The themes of quality control, reliability and validity, and generalization of naturalistic observational data, which became reoccurring throughout the seminar, were also introduced.

Attended presentations and participated in discussions of the afternoon presentations which dealt with similarities in quantitative and qualitative research approaches, and with the relationship between children's perceptions of teachers and teacher effectiveness in Chile. Suggested alternative hypotheses and an alternative data analysis approach to the second presenter.

April 20 - Attended the presentation and participated in small group discussions related to the theme of "Action Research" (investigación acción participativa). Discussions focused on the role of the investigator and maintaining objectivity.

The same themes as well as those of the unit of analysis and the necessity of realizing the limits of a given research study in drawing
implications were discussed in the afternoon session dealing with inservice workshops for Chilean teachers.

April 21 - Attended presentations and participated in general discussions on school-community ethnographies. Suggested that the small group discussion in which I participated leave the discussion of epistemological issues and concentrate on the theme of design of qualitative research. This became the theme for the next two days of small group discussions as we began to define what qualitative research was and how it was carried out (as opposed to how it differed from quantitative research).

Participated in the evening meeting of the network of qualitative researchers in Latin America.

April 22 - Attended presentations and participated in general discussions related to in-service workshops for Argentine teachers. Suggested that as observers were being used in a formative sense to provide feedback for improving the workshops, the presentation of the same data as outcome measures in evaluating the program may face challenges to the objectivity of the researcher. Afternoon small group sessions devoted to discussions of interpretation and presentation of results. Used examples from my data to show how qualitative information could be presented in ways which convincingly support conclusions.

April 25 - Attendance and participation in the general discussion on the interpretation of data from the school-community study conducted in Colombia. Participation in small group workshop dealing with the interpretation of fieldnotes and interview data. Suggested that discussions be structured to include problems with the fieldnotes and
interviews used as examples and what would be the interpretation process, rather than solely attempts at interpretation. Discussed the way in which data could be organized into categories without the necessity of preconceived ideas about relationships. Showed how interview and field-notes could be structured to triangulate on a particular question.

Evening meeting with seminar participants to discuss my general impressions of the seminar and the work undertaken. (These impressions are summarized in the following section of this report). Agreed to provide feedback on written work and to provide bibliographies and information or documents from my work as requested.

April 26 - Travel Bogotá - Los Angeles.

April 30 and May 2 - Development and write-up of the report on the work accomplished under the consultancy to IDRC.
B. General Impressions

I was impressed with the quality of the research being conducted by the network of Latin American qualitative researchers. I think that in their efforts to make the findings of their research immediately relevant in a problem solving manner the investigators are far ahead of their colleagues in other parts of the world and are to be commended. I felt that both the presentations during the seminar and the written reports which I reviewed were well written and informative. Further, the descriptions of classroom settings and interactions found in the fieldnotes and used as examples in the texts of the ethnographic studies are not dissimilar from my own findings in similar school settings elsewhere in Latin America. In addition, the cumulative findings suggest that, with careful quality control, the fieldnotes would provide sufficient description to establish patterns of repetitive sequences of behavior and interaction for cross-national comparisons.

I feel, however, that while the interpretations may be convincing to someone familiar with the situations under study, the presentation of supporting data in all of the ethnographic studies could be improved so that members of the scientific community not familiar with a particular reality could more readily follow the authors' arguments. I would suggest a number of steps that might be taken to strengthen the reports prior to their publication.

(a) The trends for each individual observational unit (schools, classrooms, teachers, children) should be shown and discussed. It makes a much stronger case to show that each teacher, for example, uses the same types of question and answers in a similar situation (which could
be done effectively through the comparison of one or two examples of discourse for each teacher) than to simply present examples of discourse. Such a comparative analysis would also facilitate a discussion of general trends.

(b) Presentation of some summary data to give the reader a feel for the general magnitude of a given phenomenon. For example, a discussion of how often a teacher uses irony in a random sample of one hour observations over the year, would show that the aspect of classroom discourse chosen for discussion was not a trivial one. (I realize that there is some hesitancy to quantify or count the occurrence of things. I think, however, that one result of the seminar was the consensus that categorization and quantification were ways of displaying data in qualitative research and did not take away from the interpretive power which came from long-term intensive participation in a particular reality.)

(c) There should be some attempt to show change over time (or lack of it) in the analysis and interpretation of the data. In our own work we have found tremendous changes in the teachers' behavior with individual children over the course of a year's observations.

(d) A review of some of the most relevant studies dealing with similar problems or using similar methodologies should be undertaken. Studies such as "Special Study A" (an ethnographic study of teacher effectiveness), of Far West Laboratories' Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, Sinclair and Coulthard's Towards an Analysis of Discourse, and Hugh Mehan's Learning Lessons would appear to be extremely useful. (I have agreed to supply annotated bibliographies of those works I feel
are most relevant to the researchers and when possible to furnish them with the actual work.)

(d) I would not call the research School/Community studies in a published form. It is my feeling that, with the possible exception of the Bolivian study, all are basically classroom ethnographies. Although in all of the studies there has been some attempt to integrate observations and interviews undertaken in the communities with the findings in the classroom, the major emphasis of the reports is on teacher-student interaction in the classroom.

(e) Methodological assumptions should be carefully reviewed. For example, two observers in a classroom do not necessarily mean greater precision in the observation of the same phenomenon. (In our work we have found that even short focused observations of a single child or teacher may be influenced by the positioning and the interests or previous experience of one of the pair of observers). Similarly, work in groups to elaborate fieldnotes may produce a consensus description of reality rather than the reality each observer sees. Finally, the authors should be careful with statements such as "the information is presented in their own words" for while it is true that all of the studies use actual classroom dialogue, all take an emic approach as opposed to an etic one in analyzing and interpreting. That is, categories and terminology are externally generated rather than reflecting those terms used by informants in their own organization of their reality.

Although I have not read the studies on the in-service workshops for teachers in Argentina and Chile, I found the presentations
fascinating and feel the work to be very important. Thus, my few comments on these efforts should again be viewed as aspects of the studies to consider when preparing them for publication. First, both groups of researchers should be aware of the limitations of their studies (e.g. the type of sample selected) and what such limitations mean for making inferences or drawing implications. Second, the design of the workshops as programs of directed change which use observational research both as an instructional or interactional technique and to calibrate the workshop sessions may face challenges to data presented as evidence of program impact. This would be especially severe in the case of the Argentine work as observations of the teachers in the classroom were not made prior to the beginning of the workshops. Thus, there is no way to measure the change in teachers' behavior in the classroom. Observations of each workshop are available, therefore, information on the change in the teachers' behavior within the workshops themselves does exist. However, the objectivity of the researcher making these observations may be questioned as they were made principally to improve the workshop and not to evaluate the program.

Finally, the question of an epistemological framework as basic to the interpretation of the data (as opposed to the design of the research) should be dealt with clearly in those studies where it is relevant. Further, questions raised in the seminar but not resolved, such as -- is the term qualitative research too broad and encompasses too many disciplines and approaches to be useful and is a more operational definition of the work being undertaken by the group needed -- should be dealt with.