Handout & Discussion Guide – Self-Study Methodology

Colin Dring, January 18th 2018 – Qualitative Research Methods Community of Practice

Grounded in social constructivist learning theory, self-study is seen as a systematic methodology to explain and analyze the mechanisms by which teachers learn (Wilson & Berne, 1999, in LaBoskey 2004). Social constructivist learning theory posits – change cannot be effected from outside a person, learning is processed through previous experience (personal history and cultural context matter), and learning is enhanced by problematizing assumptions/worldviews/current practices through critical reflection of practical experience and multiple perspectives (e.g. other teachers, students, peers & broader academic literature) (LaBoskey 2004). There is an explicit rejection of foundational criteria for knowing – that is generalizability and knowability. Therefore a focus is made on the subjective and particular in which inquiry occurs through a process of dialogue (with self and others) to question what the practitioner is coming to know and to seek alternative explanations and ways of construing meaning (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998).

Arising from the discipline of education with an explicit interest in the praxis (reflection and action) of teachers desiring to link their practice to theory. The work of self-study is the study of one’s self including actions, ideas, and those concepts and criteria that comprise ‘not the self’ or the ‘other.’ It is autobiographical, historical, cultural and political (Pinnegar & Hamilton 2009). The object of self-study is the self as knower and inquirer. It is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative, methods; and it defines validity as a process based on trustworthiness (LaBoskey 2004).

On validity: “However, if the inquirer has a personal stake – the understanding and improvement of the practices and relationships they are enacting with the other(s) in the practice setting – then developing accurate, coherent trustworthy accounts has value. present what we come to understand in two arenas: one is in peer-reviewed research publications and the other is in the change or improvement of practice. marks an ontological commitment more than an epistemological one, because it asserts publicly who owns the responsibility for both the practice and the research on it.” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p.13)

Data collection includes the range of qualitative methods available (e.g. survey, focus groups, interviews, journaling, autobiography, testimonial, photo elicitation, etc…).

Data analysis, like grounded theory, base understanding in relation to understanding of others in context. Employing an iterative process examining how phenomenon under study arise in patterns, categories, relationships. Others follow a broad qualitative analytical procedure: organizing the data, immersing in the data, generating categories and themes, coding the data, offering interpretations through analytic memos, searching for alternative understandings, and writing the report (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009).

**Potential Discussion Questions:**

As graduate students in a natural sciences faculty, qualitative methodologies are often subject to increased scrutiny. What did you find surprising with respect to self-study? How comfortable would you be in articulating your own positionality and context in a research paper?

LaBoskey defines validity through trustworthiness rather than through traditional scientific concepts – generalizability, replicability, etc… How do you interpret trustworthiness? How might your discipline approach trustworthiness similarly or differently?

Self-study arises in the educational disciplines, but seems applicable to other practitioner/researcher fields where the division between knower/inquirer is blurred. How might others react to efforts to bring subjectivity, cultural context, etc… into the research process?

*Framework-for-Analysis of the work of other researchers (Pinnegar & Hamilton 2009)*

* What is the purpose? The purpose of a self-study – any study – should be obvious to the reader.
* What is the definition of self-study? The definition of self-study needs to be apparent for the reader to understand the researcher’s frame.
* What is the definition of self-study methodology? How the researcher defines their methodological approach becomes essential for the readers to discern whether they are reading a self-study.
* What are the rigorous research practices of S-STTEP methodology? The use of strategies that fit the researcher’s questions empowers any study.
* What is the explicit evidence? Evidence of the data collected, like excerpts from fieldnotes or interviews and so on, helps readers see the connections the researcher identifies.
* What is the authority of experience expressed in the paper? The ways researchers position themselves within practice–experience–theory inform the reader about the study and the stance of the researcher.
* How is the research situated within a related yet broader research literature? A self-study must be situated within the broader related research literature to help the reader understand the frame presented.
* What is the story of self? The ways the researcher situates self, provide evidence of self-study.
* What are the questions raised while reading the study?

References Cited:

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