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Theory & Method in Child & Youth Research.
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Achieving standpoint: Using 'I poem' narratives as a reflective tool within an institutional ethnography of 'care' in a primary school in the north of England

Jim Reid

11th June 2015

Inspiring tomorrow's professionals



- A different beginning!
- Institutional ethnography (Smith 2005)
 - Problematic is ‘how teachers come to care’.
 - Small urban primary school
 - Notice to improve
 - “Are you a spy from Ofsted?”
 - All female staff team
- The Listening Guide (Mauthner and Doucet 1998)
 - 4 readings of data, including an embodied ‘I’, in time and space, in the actuality of experience, and situated to reveal the disjunctures between different forms of knowing.

Institutional ethnography – Epistemology

- Dorothy Smith (2005) posits ‘a sociology for people’ that focuses on textually mediated social organization of people at work.
 - Institutional Ethnography as a project proposes to realize an alternative form of knowledge of the social in which people’s own knowledge of the world of their everyday practices is systematically extended to the social relations and institutional orders in which we participate (Smith, 2005:43).
- Standpoint - the researcher must start from the experience of people and avoid objectifying people to predominant ideologies and approaches.
 - The researcher speaks as the ‘located knower’ offering an experiential (rather than institutional) account of their work.
- Research beings in local sites of activity which are located throughout society.
 - Generalizable to other sites and wider networks of experience
 - IE is essentially an investigation of a “complex of ruling relations” (Mykhalovskiy and McCoy, 2002:19).

The need for reflexivity

- Iterative process
- ‘Institutional capture’ and ‘bifrucation of consciousness’ (Smith 2005)
- Participants must be objectified to IE’s social ontology and constitutive hermeneutic, particularly the researcher’s focus on texts. Less clear on the mediating power of a ‘sociology for people’ or its own ‘social relations of research’ (Walby 2007)
- Paucity in the literature critically evaluating the technical aspects of IE – data generation, data analysis, reflexivity.
- ‘Care’ and hence care research is political. Reflexivity is an aspect of the personal, social, moral and political exchange between research and participant (Tronto 1993).

Reflexivity?

- Van Mannen's tales (2011) – Confessional, realist, impressionist. The epistemological relation of the researcher to knowledge creation?
- Marton (2003):
 - individualistic researcher biases and mores creation of researcher subjectivities;
 - narcissistic 'about the sacred bourgeois formation of the writer and nothing about the profane formation of the subject' (Willis 2004, 169; cited in Walford 2009, 280); and
 - sociological reflexivity - which is again focussed on the researcher's relation to the participant in knowledge creation (the researcher's potential to objectify) rather than the researcher's epistemological relation to knowledge creation (in the actuality of the research experience, what is being objectified and why?)

Reflexive sociology

- Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) – Habitus and Field
- Smith's concerns - an individuated subject through which people and their activities disappear / habitus 'installs the reproduction of the social in the learning and experience of individuals' (2005, 59)
- However, habitus also involves practice and method. Habitus of its own does not have the power to create classifiable practices of experience; this requires habitus to be put to work, for example, in taking up institutional, mediating texts.

The Listening Guide

Mauthner and Doucet's (1998) The Listening Guide.

4 readings

The Listening Guide is used to foreground the voice of the participants and utilises qualitative collection of data, for example, interviews to achieve this.

Reading for plot and reflexivity (reading 1)

Reading for the voice of I (reading 2) – understanding how the informants speak of themselves rather than how the researcher speaks for them

Reading for relationships (reading 3) – all informants are understood as intrinsically relational and as part of networks of relations.

Placing people within cultural contexts and social structures (reading 4) - the narrative is explored within broader political, cultural and structural contexts.

My 'I' poem

I appreciate... fairness, respect and honesty
I am more than interested
I bring to the field
I have experienced violence, fear, discrimination
I am attracted to a field
I am certainly interested
I identify with that profession
I have to demonstrate my compliance
I acknowledge the time and commitment
I believe this is the ethical thing to do

I am the only male
I inevitably record
I am drawn into conversations
I am asked a question
I answer honestly
I might have given
I think this is an appropriate approach
I am compelled to work
I made her think
I have come to appreciate
I, as an observer.

The tension

- Hegelian dialectic tradition which focused on the power of the object to shape the material world.
- Feuerbach's reversal of the ideas to concepts dichotomy to argue for a concepts to ideas relation.
- However, dialectical conceptualization involves a consistent and entwined relationship between everyday and everynight experience and thought where each is shaped by and shapes the other (Allman 2007; 2010).
- A social constructivist ontology is insufficient – we require a concern for material conditions – subjective idealism and objective realism entwined.

Disjunctures:

- Protection –Normative, male dominated approaches to practice develop a form of privileged irresponsibility based on particular notions of justice and universalism.
- (Narrative) Production –the production of narratives or texts that persist in protecting that privilege and therefore in excusing the researcher from engaging with wider and more inclusive debates.
- Caring for my own –an ‘epistemology of ignorance’ (Tronto 2002, 136) through which researchers fail to take account how their activities exploit others.
- Personal responsibility –failing to take account of inequality and power in the production of knowledge
- Charity –This requires the use of the concept of reflexivity not just as a theory but also as a practice. A different beginning!

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