Reflexivity

Reflexivity is commonly understood to mean individual researchers’ awareness of the influence of their advanced knowledge, subjectivities, values and beliefs in shaping their research. Methodologically, the construct is key to the conduction of rigorous qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Etherrington, 2004; Kleinsasser, 2000; van Heugten, 2004).

However, the term is not limited to recognising the effect of the researcher on the research, but may also encompass the impact of the latter on the former (Edge, 2011). In other words, as we reach out to shape our research, the experience of that reaches back to shape us. In the process of bidirectional shaping researchers internalise influences from their contexts and take action to impact that very context.

Reflexivity in Multilingual Research Practice

Much of the literature that has addressed aspects of cross-language inquiry has also stressed the role of reflexivity as essential to research practice (Magyar & Robinson-Pant, 2011; Temple & Edwards, 2002). As researchers make decisions they are invited to critically reflect on their research undertaking and deeply analyse their conceptual and methodological stances.

The following section presents an example of reflexivity in multilingual research practice as reflected in Parneet Chahal’s profile. The context of this doctoral study is street children in India. The entire account is posted on the website of the AHRC-funded project Researching Multilingually (www.researchingmultilingually.com).

The two-facets of reflexivity complete cycles of mutually-informing change in multilingual research practice reflecting researcher developing competence vis-à-vis her specific area of research. We notice how Parneet pursues her research goals, articulates awareness of subjective decision-making processes, and shapes and is - in turn - shaped by these processes and their subsequent outcomes.

Articulating Cycles of Reflexivity

“I came to Keele University to study Counselling Psychology and become a Counsellor. As a part of the MSc at Keele, I pursued a Heuristic research. The deeply personal nature of Heuristic research challenged me into further developing my ability to reflexively engage with my own experience … Since then reflexivity continues to evolve as a strong component of my work as a practitioner and a researcher”

In the following, we illustrate Parneet’s cycles of reflexivity using colour codes whereby blue represents how she shapes her research and yellow represents how she is – in turn – shaped by it.

“For my Doctoral research I am exploring adolescent Indian Street children’s understandings of their experiences. I am hoping to gain insight into their perceptions and understandings of what their needs are and the means they employ to address those needs and to be able to identify ways in which they can be helped”

“In addition, with the aim of applying myself more actively, I am exploring what we can learn as practitioners or Counselling Psychologists from the stories they tell”.

“This will involve using myself as a practitioner-researcher or a scientist-practitioner and will form a major part of the reflexive component of my research”.

“I first realised that I could, in the sense of having the permission to, conduct my doctoral research multilingually when my supervisor explained the way in which I could handle my multilingual data. Being permitted to present the data in its original language within the thesis surprised me to the extent of not believing it at first”.

“At the risk of sounding silly, when addressing the issue about multilingual data during my mock panel upgrade, I became fearful of being asked questions to which I had not yet found methodological answers and stated the common practice of translating data into English, thereby reluctantly adopting the dominant discourse of presenting the English translations and minimising the focus on the multilingual aspects of the data”.

“After a second tutorial and reconfirmation, I decided to set foot on beginning to understand my experience of engaging in multilingual research”.

… And the researcher’s reflexive cycles continue.

How do yours look in relation to researching multilingually?

References


References


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