

CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF A RESEARCH PAPER: WYATT, M. (2010). AN ENGLISH TEACHER'S DEVELOPING SELF- EFFICACY BELIEFS IN USING GROUPWORK, SYSTEM, (4), 603-613.

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ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to critique and evaluate, focusing on the issues of validity and reliability, a paper conducted by Mark Wyatt who is a professor at the University of Portsmouth. This paper was part of a larger study of an unpublished doctoral dissertation (Wyatt, 2008), which investigated how five teachers developed over the duration of their three-year course, with an emphasis on their growth in practical knowledge and self-efficacy with regards to various dimensions. In this paper particularly, the focus is on one participant who is an in-service part-time BA TESOL student in the Middle East working with young learners. This was a case study focusing on the developments of an English teacher's self-efficacy (TSE) beliefs in using groupwork.*

KEYWORDS: Critical appraisal, research paper, Wyatt, English teachers, developing self-efficacy, groupwork, System,

THE RESEARCH PARADIGM

A Paradigm is “a whole way of thinking about something” (Holliday, 2007) which can be characterized through ontology, epistemology and methodology (Guba, 1990). The ontology is the concept of reality and is essentially a construction based on the interaction of the individual within the environment (Richards, 2003). Epistemology is the exploration of this relationship which enables us to understand the ways in which the world is interpreted and how common understandings are constructed. (Richards, 2003)

Although it is quite difficult to define qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005a), this paper can be identified as qualitative research because it is underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm where reality is multiple depending on the individual. It is interpretivist as it is dealing with the teacher's perceptions (beliefs) regarding his self-efficacy regarding the use of groupwork. In my opinion, this approach was the right choice, as other approaches such as positivism or critical might

be unsuitable for this study and would not achieve its aims. Also, It is a three year study where the focus is on the process which is a longitudinal case study. By presenting his case study as a narrative account he constructed a reality which is based on Rashid's interaction within the environment. So, things will be understood by being inside or within the research. Furthermore, each individual constructs their own reality so there are multiple interpretations.

In this paradigm, all truths, like all investigation and understandings, are value-laden. Truth is regarded by qualitative research as the subjective reality rather than objective in nature because this is because each individual experience it differently which is why Wyatt's research seems very subjective where knowledge is interpreted differently by individuals.

Finally, based on parameters that Grotjan(1987) pointed out, this research is qualitative research as the type of data are qualitative in nature, the method of analysis is interpretive and the data collection is naturalistic (nonexperimental).

Research questions

The main purpose of Wyatt's (2010) research is to explore how an English teacher's self- efficacy (TSE) beliefs in using groupwork developed. To explore this, he formulated the following questions:

- 1.Which dimensions of a teacher's practical knowledge, regarding the learners and learning, the curriculum, teaching techniques, the self and the school context, appeared to develop most?
- 2.To what extent did growth in his self-efficacy in using groupwork with young learners appear to mirror growth in his practical knowledge?
3. What might explain the various changes?

These research questions here seem to be sufficiently focused as Wyatt determined the context and the dimensions by narrowing them. They were quite original as there is only limited research conducted on the practical knowledge of the various dimensions associated with using groupwork, which will make a contribution to knowledge. It is also operationalisable as the researcher defined sufficiently the main terms used in the research questions.

THE METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study methodology was used by the researcher, as he explicitly mentioned this “Using qualitative case study methodology” (Wyatt, 2010 p.603). According to Stake (1995), what a case study does is to particularize the study of complexity of a single case but not to generalize.

Cases are normally one or more individuals, but they can be community, institute or organization (Dörnyei, 2007). In this paper, the case is a single participant. Wyatt’s justified his choice of a case study in the form of qualitative research as it has been relatively underused in the field of TSE.

The research subjects or participants:

The subject was a Diploma-holding teacher in the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. He was attending a three-year in-service BA TESOL at the University of Leeds conducted for the ministry. Choosing one participant for this case is suitable for qualitative research as it studies a social phenomenon and does not focus on generalising (Dörnyei, 2007). The research did not mention the reason for choosing this particular participant.

Ethical considerations:

The participant was given a pseudonym which seemed to be an ethical aspect of the research. This helped to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of data when the participant was referred to in the research. However, as the research context is fully described and characterized, the participant might be identified especially as there are no researchers conducting the same research at the same time in the same contexts. So, this could have negative influence on the school and the participant himself from the higher authorities in the country.

The subject was a volunteer who signed an informed consent where strict guidelines were followed. An ethical issue which should be considered here is how Rashid decided whether or not to participate in the study. As the researcher is a tutor himself, Rashid may have decided to participate to please his tutor or he was pressured to participate.

DATA COLLECTION/ DATA ANALYSIS

With the case study methodology, there are different types of data collection methods such as interviews and observation (Dörnyei, 2007). Dörnyei stated that researchers normally combine a

variety of these methods.

This case study concerns individuals rather than social objects. This is a reservation about it which affects the generalizability (Dörnyei, 2007). Data obtained from a small sample, particularly in this paper which only use one person, can not be used to argue for trends or patterns within a larger population. However, the term “generalizable” is not claimed by qualitative researchers and they use the term “transferability” instead.

In Wyatt’s paper, a variety of data collection methods were used which are interviews, observations, assignments and feedback.

Transferability:

Transferability is the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be transferred to other settings (Brown and Rogers, 2002 Richards, 2003). According to Edge and Richards (1998), the main purpose of qualitative research is to try to understand a specific situation and so its results might be used in similar settings. From my view, these findings are not transferrable because it is quite difficult to find a research context or setting which is exactly like the one in this paper. Rashid’s school, school rules and environment, program modules and personal experience constitute a unique setting, making hard to find another setting that is similar to it. However, this study can be conducted in another sitting to produce different findings.

Credibility:

The credibility of this paper was enhanced by the fact that Wyatt (2010) observed the participant Rashid for three years and this is considered a sufficient period to ensure credibility. Using a variety of data collection methods and the period of the research could help to confirm the results of the study and enhance its credibility. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) suggested that credibility can be enhanced by different techniques, including conducting the research and collecting the data over a long period of time to ensure that the participant gets used to the researcher and behaves normally. Although the study was conducted over three years, Wyatt observed Rashid six times only over these three years. This in my opinion does not seem to be an inadequate number of observations over three years. This limited number of observations might lead Rashid to use groupwork only when he was being observed and so could reduce the research’s credibility.

Conformability and dependability:

Conformability requires researchers to provide full details of the data on which they base their interpretations and claims on (Macky & Gass, 2005). The notion behind conformability is that these data can be examined by another researcher and his interpretations might be confirmed, modified or rejected. On the other hand, dependability is the degree to which the research context and the findings are accurate and trusted (Macky & Gass, 2005).

The researcher used triangulation and member checking to strengthen the conformability and dependability, as will be explained next.

Triangulation:

Triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources and different research methods, can enhance credibility, transferability, conformability and dependability (Macky & Gass, 2005). Using triangulation will reduce researcher bias (Dörnyei, 2007; Johanson, 1992). Wyatt reflected a good use of triangulation as he collected data through interviews, observations, assignments and feedback. The use of these different data collection methods helped Wyatt to go in-depth and assess the degree to which the participant's stated beliefs approached to be based on reality and this is the key to addressing the research questions. So, the credibility was increased as it helped Wyatt to avoid bias when analyzing the data.

Member checking:

Member checking involves asking the original respondents to check the interpretations and results (Brown and Rogers, 2002). This study was strengthened by checking the findings with Rashid throughout interviews. This will enhance the quality of the research.

Thick description:

The researcher claimed that he used "thick description" which is defined by Geertz (1973) as giving rich details to an account to provide a clear, complete and detailed description of the research. Wyatt gave enough information and in-depth details about the participant and the research context. For example, in section 4 page 605, he mentioned all the required details, including sufficient information about the participant(Rashid) and the research context. So, thick description increased credibility and transferability (Brown and Rogers, 2002).

However, Davis (1995) claimed that the term “thick description” should have three components which are General description, interpretive commentary and Particular description. Particular description means some representative examples from the data. Drawing on what Davis (1995) claimed, this paper cannot be described as offering “thick description” as the researcher did not provide sufficient examples from the data.

CONCLUSION

The researcher has concluded by summarizing the research and which research gap he had tried to fill. He placed the findings in a context which indicates how new information is of interest, and its implications. The claims made by the researcher seem to be related to the data used to support them (Richards)

The limitations were included in the conclusion section. Even though Mackey (2005) claimed that it could appear as a separate section or as part of the conclusion, it might be better if they were mentioned in the discussion section. As a reader, reading the limitations in the conclusion section distracted me and I found it confusing at the end. Finally, he offered a recommendation that this type of study might be conducted in another context which might uncover different patterns of growth in particular knowledge and TSE.

Overall evaluation:

Even though I praised this study, it has some limitations such as the limited number of observations and the unfound claim to have used thick description as well as some ethical issues.

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