Encountering and embracing self in academic inquiry

David Wright, Susanne Gannon & Dorian Stoilesuco
School of Education
Western Sydney University, Australia

Paper: 30mins

The research process is constructed systemically, through networks of relationship and commitment. These can be understood, in social-ecological terms as encounters between the self, society, the physical world and the world of ideas and imaginings (Wright, Camden-Pratt, Hill, 2011). It is in these inherently complex encounters, within moments of vulnerability, that potential for ‘perspective transformation’ arises (Mezirow & Assoc., 2000; Newman 2016). Subject matter, researchers and research subjects are entwined and co-implicated within such inquiry processes (Van Manen, 1990). This leads to what Capra, drawing on Maturana and Varela (1987) describes as ‘a continual bringing forth of a world through a process of living’ (Capra, 1996: 260). Instead of the objective documentation of things and people pre-existing in the world, any such research process becomes a deeply embodied occasion for systemic learning that changes the ways we reflect upon ourselves and our subject matter: perspective transformation (Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006; Pryer, 2011).

In this paper we, the researchers, reflect upon personal learning arrived at during research into the experience of disadvantaged students. The merits of our learning, as a consequence of this experience, need to be assessed first and foremost, from the perspective of the participants. Given that others can only perceive it through their own experience, how do we, as participants in the process, experience anew our relationships to our subject matter and each other? How can ‘perspective transformation’ be known and, if it can be known, how can its impact be captured and communicated? How can it be addressed as ‘learning’?

References

Contact
Email: david.wright@westernsydney.edu.au