

Raising the bar on validity: Exploring the relationship between reflective practice and traditional research practice in the classroom

Vivian Schoner, Robert Gorbet, Katrina Strampel, Pia Marks and Tom Carey
University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Theme (2): Understanding Methods of Inquiry
Presentation Format: Single Paper
Facilitator: Vivian Schoner
Keywords: Validity, Research Methods, Reflective Practice

Summary

We observe that reliance on systematic research practices alone often fails to incorporate the experiential dimensions of the teaching-learning process. Conversely, reliance on reflective practice alone overlooks the need to systematically validate observations that inform change in classroom settings. To enhance the validity and applicability of research findings, we propose integration of reflective practice into the traditional research process, thereby adding a vital component to methodological triangulation designs to incorporate naturalistic dimensions into classroom-based research.

Abstract

A growing number of faculty are researching impacts on learning when trying new solutions to instructional problems or introducing innovative practices. Most hold the familiar experiment/control model comparing different types of teaching as the norm for this research. While some are familiar with reflective practice, this is seen as an informal means to “think” about teaching, not as a means to incorporate holistic interpretations of findings and practices.

Most empirical studies will typically employ some systematic combination of method, measurement or investigator triangulation to better establish validity through cross-confirmation of multiple source findings. Often lacking is documentation of the personal reflections that impact practice, those that necessarily occur during the research process.

Incorporating reflective practice into systematic inquiry should enhance both the validity and applicability of research. This reflects two aspects of SoTL work that empirical models may lack:

- (1) Including conceptual changes in both teachers’ and learners’ experiences
- (2) Showing how these experiences impact validity and credibility of the study

To illustrate how these qualitatively different approaches can be applied, we will describe a study that enhances research by embedding cycles of reflective practice into the research design itself, where instructors and students reflect on and then “journal” their observations. This design uses combined forms of reflective practice, methodological and investigator triangulation. It also integrates students and instructors as research partners in a joint quest to understand how conceptual knowledge changes, as illustrated in a case study of a cross-disciplinary course comprising two distinct disciplines, Fine Arts and Engineering.