TRUSTWORTHINESS OF A QUALITATIVE ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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The aim of this paper is to present the three key principles — historical continuity, workability and dialectics — to validate the trustworthiness of an action research study. This is a methodological paper with no empirical data. Action research is a cyclic process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The study proceeds as a continuous process of consideration, discussion, and negotiation from plan to action, which will be minutely observed and then changed on the basis of the experience gained.

The central feature of an action research study compared to other qualitative research methods, for example interview, is the temporal data gathering during the implementation phase. The data is subjected to inductive content analysis in order to produce a range of themes that describe the events that occurred. The chosen findings are organized in chronological order to a time-line. The researchers scrutinize the theoretical literature and the earlier studies. A limitation of the action research study is that the results are based on only one case. The researchers do not have a large amount of data or statistics. The number of findings is small. In action research study a result may be based on only one observation, which will open a chain of other observations. This is an important reason, why an action research study needs its own criterions for validity.

According to the principle of historical continuity the research report is usually in the form of a coherent, chronological story. Thus, using the narrative method in reporting the observations is not a style to write. The long-term process and the fact that the findings form a continuum, a story, is a way to validate them. A reader may follow the advancement of the deduction of the researcher. The researcher narrates, how his/her understanding of the phenomenon has increased. Increases with the understanding leads finally to a workable practise. The truth is, what works. This principle of workability is the second way to validate an action research study. However, action research study report is not just description of the success. Insights occur often through problems, blind alleys and false steps. Wrong clues helps near of new traces, sensible hypothesis and questions. Third way to validate an action research study is the principle of dialectics. Better understanding of the action is constructed as an interactive outcome of thesis and antithesis. An action research study is a story of the authentic speeches and multiple voices of the thoughts of the researcher and the participants of the field. Also other findings of the phenomenon or references of the other researchers will be added to this story.

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