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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance of pilot studies in the development and implementation of a research project, focusing on the use of a pilot study to revise conceptual and methodological issues in dissertation research on higher education leadership. It examines the hermeneutic circle, as described by M. Heidegger, that stresses the importance of involvement and participation in practical activity as necessary to the development of understanding. The paper then describes the conceptual framework, research focus and goals, and methodology of a pilot study on inclusive higher education leadership models. Finally, it discusses how the pilot study helped to identify methodological changes in the dissertation research project, including the unit of analysis, data collection, the interview process, analysis, and interpretations. The paper illustrates the importance of grounding the research process in practical activity, highlights how reflection can help improve research practice, suggests the value of day-to-day experiences in shaping research, and emphasizes the importance of re-iterative studies and emergent research. (Contains 57 references.) (MDM)

PILOT STUDIES: BEGINNING THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE

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PILOT STUDIES: BEGINNING THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE

ADRIANNA KEZAR

INTRODUCTION

In August of 1994 while initiating my dissertation I found myself in a predicament. I had a grounding in the higher education leadership literature but little tacit, intuitive, experiential understanding of leadership. As I began to work on my dissertation proposal, this lack of experiential understanding made me uncomfortable: did my conceptual framework and methodology make sense? Because of this limitation, I decided that I needed to embark on a pilot study since a it would allow me the opportunity to obtain first-hand, "real world" experience with leadership. A qualitative pilot study would allow me to talk and interact with people involved with leadership. Initially, my overall goal was to test my theoretically derived assumptions. Later, I realized that an even more important outcome was that the pilot study helped me to develop an experiential understanding of leadership that reshaped the way I studied this phenomenon. I now realize that this initial working out of possibilities, within my pilot study, was the beginning of my journey through the hermeneutic circle.

The pilot study process involved several phases. First, I developed a research design based on a review of the literature, yet I attempted to leave the research design open to some changes that would emerge as I conducted the study. Next, I conducted the study as a part of an ethnographic interviewing class. After completing the study, I developed a portfolio and reflected on the process. While I reflected on the project, I identified several shifts in my understanding over the term. Although these shifts were not noticeable to me as I conducted the study, they became more vivid as time passed. Finally, I drew upon hermeneutic theory to assist me in comprehending the way the pilot study had so significantly shaped my understanding of how to study leadership. These changes were not merely the result of testing out half-conceptualized ideas or of studying leadership in a new context or in a new way; they were the result of layers of understanding surfacing from engagement in practical activity.

In this paper, I present the various conceptual and methodological revisions that the pilot study allowed me to make within my dissertation project. I believe these revisions would not have been possible without engagement in practical activity and long-term reflection. My pilot study highlights two important ways for developing understanding -- engagement in practical activity and reflection. I

believe my specific experience/story can be generalized to suggest ways that researchers might expand the techniques used for developing knowledge and possibly improve their research practice. The paper will be organized as follows: (1) review Heidegger's interpretation of the hermeneutic circle; (2) present an overview of the pilot study to set a context for reviewing the conceptual and methodological revisions; (3) discuss the conceptual changes made possible by the pilot study; (4) discuss the methodological changes made possible by the grounding in practical activity; (5) discuss the ways the pilot study affirmed several of my initial conceptual and methodological assumptions; (6) present implications and broader generalizations that can be drawn from this example/story; and (7) draw conclusions. Before I begin this discussion, I would like to present some concerns I had in writing this paper.

My major concern as I have written this paper is *will people view the changes in my understanding as lack of rigor rather than improvement in the research process*. Because my ideas have changed so much as a result of the pilot study, some may feel I did not carefully read the literature on leadership or that I began the study before I had prepared enough. I will argue that most, if not all, of these changes would not have been possible without engagement in practical activity through the pilot study. However, this concern did make me hesitant to write and present this paper -- I have put myself at risk by presenting my "faulty and flawed conceptualization" and my "mistaken methodological choices." I hope that these will be viewed as appropriate choices, but you will be the judge of that.

In addition, I have placed myself in a potentially precarious position -- a junior researcher examining, and in some ways, challenging the research conventions of a particular community of researchers. I have taken this risk because I want to continue a dialogue of ways to improve the research process because I honestly believe this process can be a way to positively transform and change our world. But to be successful in transforming the world -- if only incrementally -- I think we as researchers need to acknowledge (1) that there are several ways for developing understanding and knowledge; (2) our mis- or half-understandings; and, (3) our place within the world of practical activity. But, I am getting ahead of myself. I would like to begin by first describing the hermeneutic circle.

THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE

The hermeneutic circle, as described by Heidegger, provides a helpful framework for understanding the importance of pilot studies within the research process. This framework assumes that these studies provide contributions to research projects that cannot be obtained through mostly, or only, contemplation (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger assumed that involvement and participation in practical activity were necessary to develop understanding. He described three modes of engagement: contemplation or "present at hand;" circumspection or "unready to hand;" and participation or "ready at hand" (Heidegger, 1962). During the "present at hand" stage, one is involved with detached contemplation; the individual's setting and perspective are essentially ignored. Until my first year of graduate school, my outlook on leadership remained at this stage; I had a detached, theoretical understanding. At the "unready to hand" stage, one experiences a dissonance and begins to view aspects of the setting which obstruct, intrude or are missing. In my first organizational behavior class in graduate school, I experienced feelings of dissonance toward research on organizations and leadership; it seemed to be missing pieces. This dissonance was exacerbated by my experiences working within administration at the University of Michigan. The gaps between my experience and theory thrust me into the hermeneutic circle. At the third stage, "ready at hand," one is involved in everyday practical activity and the phenomenon is transparent, the setting is visible. As one continues to become involved, however, one becomes absorbed in everyday practical activity and the setting becomes invisible again. *Understanding is developed as one experiences a breakdown during the circumspection stage and grounds this breakdown within practical activity.* During occasions of breakdown, people look around (circumspection), notice their project (reflection), consider alternatives to the course of action they are engaged in (deliberation), and start to repair based on this understanding or knowledge.

Over the last few years I have been at the stage of *circumspection.* Recently, I began to *reflect* on my particular project -- higher education leadership models -- through the process of writing my dissertation proposal. As I was writing my proposal, I was considering many possibilities (*deliberating*). I decided it was necessary for me to conduct a pilot study to ground some of the theoretical possibilities I was reviewing. Heidegger believed that an individual must have a practical sense of the domain or context within which a phenomenon is situated in

order to develop understanding; he termed this Fore-having (1962). My pilot study provided me with the engagement in practical activity that facilitated my decisions about how to approach my dissertation and to start repairing the problem I had identified. The pilot study allowed me to make many meaningful revisions to my proposed conceptual framework and methodology, and fostered my understanding of higher education leadership.[1] Now that I have reviewed the hermeneutic circle to provide a way to interpret changes in the way I conceptualize and study leadership, I will now present an overview of my pilot study.

PILOT STUDY

I will summarize the conceptual underpinnings and approach employed in my pilot study to develop a context for discussing this project. This section of the paper will be organized as follows: (1) conceptual framework; (2) research focus and goals for the pilot study; and (3) methodology.

Conceptual Framework

Three conceptual/methodological weaknesses in the leadership literature framed the pilot study: (1) the nature of higher education leadership models; (2) the focus on positional leaders for understanding leadership; and (3) researcher imposed definitions and interpretations of leadership. The nature of leadership models or representations shaped my research questions, while the last two concerns shaped the methodology chosen for the pilot study. I will briefly describe these three weaknesses.

First, higher education leadership models do not reflect the leadership of some women leaders. Instead, these models tend to reflect, for the most part, what has been termed directive leadership (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989). Directive leadership emphasizes individualism, hierarchical power relations, one-way use of power and influence (and even some two-way uses of power that are based on hierarchical relations), and depersonalized representations of power.[2]

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[1]However, I want to specify that I am not arguing for the extreme approach taken by Heidegger -- that one can only come to "know" while involved in practical activity. In this paper, I am using this framework to suggest the importance of practical activity for developing understanding.

[2]Traditional or directive models of leadership are characterized by the following features: The leader tends to be the focal point of power and leadership is conceived of as an individual, not as a group (Bachman, 1968; Benezet, Katz, & Magnusson, 1981; Birnbaum, 1989; Fisher, 1984, 1988). Further, traditional models are characterized by directive or one-way use of power and influence for attaining goals. As a result, the leader's agenda is typically developed without, or with limited, input of other members of the organization (Benezet, Katz, & Magnusson, 1981; Bensimon, 1991b; Birnbaum, 1989; Fisher, 1988; Roberts, 1986). Leaders tend to see their task as to get others to comply with or conform to the leader's directives (Birnbaum, 1989). Higher education models tend to characterize or define power as "power over" and emphasize positional power, social distance, and hierarchies (Bachman, 1968; Fisher, 1988; Kerr & Gade, 1986; Roberts, 1986). The leaders are typically separated and distinguished from the followers. Traditional

This representation of leadership differs from some of the representations associated with women's leadership. In my review of the literature on women's leadership, I identified some distinct trends that tend to be associated with the leadership of women. These trends include a more collective and interactive representation of leadership; a more participatory, relational, and interpersonal style and behavior; two-way, less hierarchical types of power and influence strategies; and a de-emphasis on hierarchies and the positional nature of leadership (Astin & Leland, 1993; Desjardens, 1989; Helgesen, 1990; Lyons, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1987). Recent research on leadership in higher education has begun to describe different representations of leadership that more closely coincide with descriptions of women's leadership (Bensimon, 1989; Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Birnbaum, 1989).[3] The leadership trends associated with women's leadership have been called collaborative, relational, enabling, interactive, and feminist. For ease of discussion, I will refer to all of these qualities as an enabling orientation in this paper.

A second conceptual weakness was the exclusive nature of who had been studied in order to understand leadership. Past research on leadership within the field of higher education has mostly focused on positional leaders, specifically presidents, and inferred that leadership can be understood best from their stories and descriptions. In a few studies, leadership has been explored through the perspectives of others within the institution (faculty, trustees, or alumni); however, the focus remained on positional leaders. These other individuals are usually asked to describe the president or other positional leaders as an embodiment of leadership (Birnbaum, 1992).

A third concern was that researchers imposed a particular definition of leadership on the individuals they studied (Yukl, 1989). Traditionally, researchers come to a study working within a certain research tradition. Within this research tradition, leadership was theoretically defined as either: (1) a set of traits; (2) a set of behaviors or particular style; (3) certain power and influence processes; (4) cognitive processes; (5) situational defined or contingent on particular organizational variables; or (6) as part of the culture of the organization. Individuals would only be asked to comment on these specific aspects of leadership.

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typologies of social power, e.g., expert, reward, and charismatic, are often mentioned (Fisher, 1984, 1988). The leader directs others rather than empowering them.

[3]I am not implying that these newer representations of leadership are necessarily shaped by gender. I suspect that they are shaped by changing power relations within organizations. I was not concerned specifically with issues of causality or influence in the pilot study.

Research Focus and Goals for the Pilot Study

The research problem that necessitated this study was rethinking exclusive representations of leadership that tend to privilege certain people and ways of leading. The focus of the pilot study was to challenge the inclusiveness of directive models of leadership and to more fully understand an alternative model of leadership that had been termed enabling leadership. I planned to explore and document an alternative model or representation of leadership in order to develop more inclusive representations. Initial studies that identified an enabling form of leadership did not fully explore this model; only a few aspects of enabling leadership have been described within higher education institutions. I was proposing to more fully describe this alternative model. Continued analysis of this model might identify further differences in terms of style, behaviors, and power and influence strategies from those in traditional directive models.

I initiated the pilot study to refine my theoretical understanding of enabling leadership. I had two main objectives in conducting this pilot study: (1) to refine my definition of and interpretive framework for understanding enabling leadership; and, (2) utilize this refined conceptualization of enabling leadership for finalizing an appropriate research design. These two goals were reciprocal. As I reconceptualized leadership, I gained a better understanding of the necessary data collection techniques and as I experimented with different interview questions, I began to redefine leadership.

Methodology

In order to understand enabling leadership in higher education institutions, I proposed the study of a case through naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic inquiry allowed me to explore this emergent phenomena in greater depth than previous studies. Utilizing a case allowed me to study various individuals' (people of different gender, race/ethnicity, and with different roles) representations of leadership in-depth within a single context. This was particularly important as I was seeking to understand how people throughout the institution constructed leadership, rather than just the president. This form of inquiry allowed the people I interviewed to present their understanding of leadership without me imposing "traditional" models or definitions of leadership because it suggests open-ended, semi-structured interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, these individuals defined and constructed leadership based on their understanding of leadership not based on my a priori assumptions about leadership.

Case Selection: I explored leadership on a campus that had indicators that people might construct leadership as enabling. First, I assumed that people might construct leadership as embodied in the president, so I attempted to find a leader who might exhibit a different representation of leadership. I chose an institution with a woman president. This particular president had been employed by a women's college for quite a few years and had been a mentor for the American Council on Education fellows program. I thought that these conditions might indicate that she might have an alternative leadership orientation. Second, the campus selected had a large percentage of women and people of color within its faculty, staff, and student body. Third, I knew that the campus had several innovative programs (e.g., Women's Studies, Black Studies) that have challenged traditional notions or ways of knowing, and I thought that people in these programs might construct leadership differently.

Within Case Selection: Within case selection was based on a positioned informant approach (Conrad, Hayworth, & Millar, 1993). This approach assumes that people are positioned within the organization and their perspectives varies according to their vested interest as well as their personal characteristics and experience. However, the emphasis in this theory is placed on their position within the organization. It is assumed that positioned informants' perspectives might vary and that these different interpretations are important to further understanding of leadership. The individual/groups identified as important for interviewing within the college setting were the president, faculty, administrators, and students. I extended the positioned informant approach to include race/ethnicity and gender as positional factors that might influence individual's perspectives.

Data Collection: Multiple sources of evidence have been identified as helpful in understanding complex phenomenon like leadership (Birnbaum, 1992; Yukl, 1989). Thus, I experimented with several field methods to understand leadership, including interviews, document analysis, observations, and an analysis of the physical environment. Document analysis, observation and analysis of the physical environment were used mostly to assist me in developing a tacit knowledge of the context in order to facilitate my interpretation of the interviews. Observation allowed me the opportunity to see members of the community interact. Since the interviews were one-on-one experiences, observation allowed me to understand more about the social environment in which the leadership process exists. The analysis of the physical environment was an architectural and spatial analysis. I drew diagrams in my fieldnotes and took photographs of the physical environment.

I relied mostly on interviews since my interest was in examining how different people within the institution construct leadership. Rather than asking individuals to comment on a positional leader or a group of positional leaders to explore leadership, I asked them to describe leadership on campus, however they defined it. I attempted to understand the respondents' perspectives on leadership rather than imposing the perspective that leadership on their campus was embodied in particular people or processes. I developed a set of questions that were refined over the semester. The protocol that evolved was divided into three main sections: (1) experience of leadership and/or perceptions of leadership on campus; (2) personalized experience of leadership/direct relationship to leadership; and, (3) personal understanding of leadership.

Analysis: I utilized four different techniques in analyzing my data: (1) categorical analysis; (2) componential analysis; (3) discourse analysis; and (4) narrative analysis (Mischler, 1986; Ouchs, 1979; Riessman, 1993; Rosaldo, 1993; Spradley, 1979; Strauss, 1987). These techniques were not chosen based on theoretical considerations but were all required components of the class in which I was conducting this study. After experimenting with several techniques, I relied most heavily on categorical, componential and narrative analysis. Categorical analysis was extremely helpful in organizing my data into themes such as how people defined leadership, how people defined what is not leadership, what people noted as influences on leadership, etc. (Strauss, 1987). This technique assisted me in organizing my data at a macro level and helped me to identify themes or issues for further analysis. Componential analysis allowed me to focus on the differentiated way that people described leadership (Spradley, 1979). This method is used to divide categories into different components. For instance, the componential analysis led me to seeing people's constructions of presidential leadership as coinciding with descriptions of directive leadership and the descriptions of leadership more broadly on campus tended to coincide with descriptions of enabling leadership. Because many of the interview transcripts appeared to be manifested as stories, I also decided to perform narrative analysis (Mischler, 1986; Riessman, 1993).

Having presented an overview of the conceptual framework and methodology for the pilot study, I will now present the changes that were made possible by engagement in practical activity.

CONCEPTUAL REVISIONS

The revisions that I will describe in this section are fundamental and critical to my pursuit of developing more inclusive representations of leadership. The pilot study shifted the way in which I approached the reconstruction of leadership; altered the theory I drew upon to interpret leadership; modified the paradigm I employed; refined my definition (conceptual framework) for understanding leadership; and, modified my framework for interpreting leadership.

From Alternative Models to Reconstructing Leadership

Prior to the pilot study, I had developed a conceptual framework for re-examining leadership based on the assumption that the most appropriate way to develop more inclusive higher education leadership models was to create alternative models. I had decided to identify and conduct a study of an institution that might exhibit an alternative orientation to leadership, called enabling. I hypothesized that certain types of institutions would be more likely to exhibit an enabling form of leadership, for instance, institutions that had larger percentages of women and people of color in positions of leadership and as students, faculty, staff and administrators. By studying this alternative leadership orientation, I hoped to expand people's understanding of leadership in higher education.

I became concerned with this approach to reconstructing people's understanding of leadership (through alternative models) during different phases of my pilot study. First, during site selection, I realized that alternative models might be used to stereotype certain approaches to leadership because an enabling approach was hypothesized to be exhibited more often by women and people of color. Second, I developed research propositions that identified qualities or characteristics that might be associated with enabling leadership, based on the research on women's leadership, to provide focus for my study. These propositions tended to strongly differentiate representations of enabling leadership from traditional leadership models. While interviewing, I noticed that these propositions were more differentiated than the representations individuals described. Third, in writing-up the results of my pilot study, I realized how the process of describing an alternative model tends to exaggerate differences, rather than focusing on similarities. Further, alternative models tend to be represented in binary or opposing ways; a process that can reify differences (Lather, 1991). Conceptualizing "enabling" leadership as an alternative model distorted the participants' stories and tended to represent them as

the "other." Another concern was that alternative representations might serve to categorize and stereotype people because these categorizations are often embedded within power relationships or hierarchies (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Fine, 1994). For instance, traditional models might be seen as better than enabling models of leadership or vice versa.

Because of these concerns with alternative models, I began to reconceptualize the way I approached the study from developing alternative models to reconstructing leadership. In my final project, I view leadership as a multi-perspectival phenomenon and I have proposed a way to study leadership without developing an alternative model. Instead of conceptualizing the way women and people of color represent leadership as an alternative, I explore these representations as unheard voices or missing pieces that need to be included within traditional models or understandings of leadership, which are conceptualized as incomplete. In addition, this new approach explores the ways these unheard voices are similar to, as well as different from, traditional leadership models. I have proposed that rather than develop alternative, differentiated leadership models, I wanted to reconceptualize leadership itself, how it is defined and understood, and not let women or people of color become the "other" leader.[4]

From Essentialistic Standpoints to Positionality

When designing and initially interpreting the study, I was guided by assumptions from standpoint theory. This theory assumes that people's views of the world are influenced by their experience (Collins, 1991; Harding, 1986; Harstock, 1986). Individuals have different experiences because of conditions of power that shape their lives. These different experiences result in different positions or perspectives for viewing the world and making meaning. While interviewing, I noticed many interconnections between the leadership constructs/descriptions of the faculty, administration, and students. My interviews illustrated how constructions of leadership are influenced not only by people's position on campus and in society, but also by their relationships to each other. For example, students and faculty had somewhat different constructions of leadership but in many ways their descriptions were similar. Their descriptions were not as distinct as standpoint theory might predict. The results of the interviews challenged me to explain the interconnections in people's stories. Positionality theory was helpful for explaining

[4] Fine has suggested the danger in creating alternative models more generally. I extend her general argument to the study of leadership (Fine, 1994).

people's various representations of leadership because it emphasizes people's interconnections and relationships to each other (Alcoff, 1991; Haraway, 1991).

In my final study, I discuss how people's constructions of leadership are influenced by their interpersonal relationships with each other. Positionality emphasizes connections and relationships among groups -- these connections appear to be critical to the way people construct meaning. It also suggests that these relationships are dynamic and therefore the way people construct meaning is also dynamic and changing based on changing relationships between groups and individuals.

From a Constructivist to a Critical-Constructivist Paradigm

I began the pilot study working within a constructivist paradigm, which maintains some of the following assumptions: 1) that individuals might construct leadership differently, based on cultural or social influences -- reality as socially constructed; 2) a belief in multiple ontologies -- leadership as constructed locally and within a specific context; 3) an interactive, transactional, subjectivist epistemology in which the understanding/construction of leadership developed would be created jointly between the "researcher" and the "researched;" and, 4) hermeneutical and dialectical methodology (Bruner, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).[5] The multiple constructions of leadership that I collected during my pilot study appeared to be related to people's position within the institution and society. These findings appeared to affirm some of the assumptions of a constructivist paradigm. However, interviewees also discussed power relations within their context which influenced the way they constructed leadership. As I conducted the observations, especially the analysis of the physical environment, I identified some differences related to the size and decoration of the buildings and access/entree issues that suggested different power relationships among faculty, administrators, and students. For instance, the buildings that administrators were located tended to have more elaborate decoration and more difficult access while faculty tended to be in less ornate buildings with less attention to the physical environment. Moreover, faculty offices tended to be located at the center of the building with easy points of access. Engagement in practical activity helped me realize the importance of applying a

[5]It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain in detail the assumptions of a constructivist paradigm. Instead, I provide a brief overview of major assumptions and a reference for further exploration of this paradigm / theory. For more in-depth review please see Denzin & Lincoln, 1994.

critical-constructivist framework rather than only a constructivist one for understanding individuals' constructions of leadership.

Changing Conceptualization of Leadership

Another goal of my pilot study was to refine my definition of leadership. Defining leadership is one of the primary problems in research on this phenomena, so I knew this would be a problematic issue in my study. My pilot study assisted me in developing and, over time, refining my definition (or conceptual framework).

The research traditions employed to understand leadership tend to bifurcate the person and the context (March, 1984). My first conceptualization attempted to reflect my particular interpretation of how leadership might be understood through *both* people and processes that were influenced by the *context.* People's *perceptions* of leadership were deemed important to explore; cognitive theories were invoked to understand these perceptions. This conceptualization relied heavily on traditional, functionalist context-oriented and cognitive theories. (Please refer to figure 1 for a drawing of my initial conceptualization of leadership).

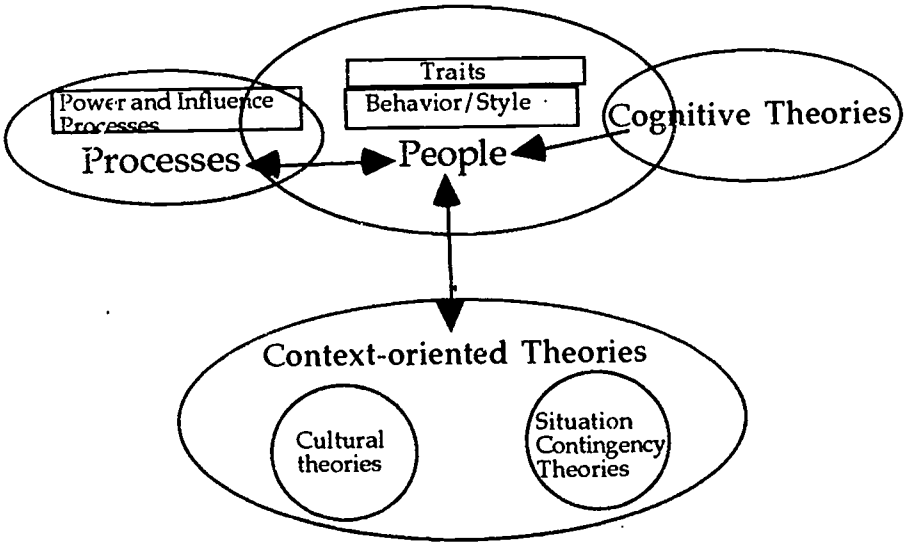

Figure 1

After conducting some interviews, I realized that my definition of leadership did not reflect the centrality or influence of the context in the way people construct leadership. Although I was attempting to interrelate the individual and the context, the individual remained somewhat separate from his/her context in my first

conceptualization. Also problematic was the way perspective was represented outside the influence of the context. The individuals I interviewed communicated a strong relationship between their context and their perspective about leadership. Lastly, interviewees mentioned conditions of power within the context that influenced their experience of leadership.

My subsequent conceptualizations of leadership interrelated the context and the individual by representing the individual as situated within a particular context. Further, the individual's perspective was integrated within the context. I also attempted to represent the way conditions of power influence situated people and resulted in different positionalities. Without my conversations with people who think about leadership in higher education institutions day-to-day, I don't think I could have made these changes. (Figure 2 illustrates my amended conceptualization)

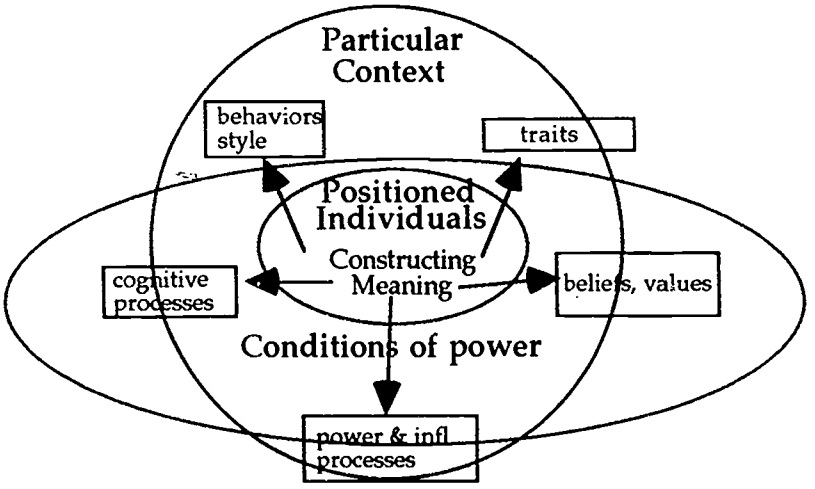

Figure 2

Revising my Interpretive Framework

In order to reconceptualize leadership and to explore an alternative model, I had initially drawn upon standpoint theory, cultural theories of leadership and cognitive theories of leadership. Figure 1 represents some of my first attempts to combine these theories. Through the pilot study and engagement in practical activity, I was able to modify these disparate theories into a comprehensive framework for approaching the study of leadership. All of the conceptual changes described in this section of the paper were integrated to develop this interpretive framework:

Positioned individuals (situated historically, culturally, and with a partial and positioned perspective) *within a particular context* (assuming most contexts are fairly unique and particular) *influenced by conditions of power* (assuming power relationships and dynamics pervade culture, social structures, and history) *construct* (develop an understanding based on their situatedness and particular context and negotiate this understanding with other individuals understanding) *leadership in shared, differentiated, and unique ways simultaneously* (assuming interdependent webs of situated individuals, connected by their changing positions on a variety of issues construct phenomenon in shared, differentiated and unique ways).

METHODOLOGICAL REVISIONS

The pilot study helped me to identify methodological changes in all areas of my research design, including (1) unit of analysis; (2) data collection -- observation and focus groups; (3) interview process -- reframing the interview and re-ordering and re-vising the questions; (4) analysis; and (5) write-up of interpretations. As I mentioned earlier, methodological and conceptual changes were reciprocal. Some of the methodological changes resulted from conceptual changes. Other methodological changes facilitated the transformation of the way I conceptualized leadership.

Unit of Analysis

Enabling leadership was a phenomena that I conceptualized at an institutional level. Due to this conceptualization, I began the study with the institution as my unit of analysis. As I analyzed the interview transcripts, I realized that the way that some individuals constructed leadership on this campus did correspond with descriptions of enabling leadership. However, other individual's construction of leadership were quite different from an enabling orientation. I began to wonder when an institution could be considered to manifest enabling leadership. Did it matter if everyone did not construct the institution or aspects of the institution as enabling? At what point is an institution enabling? Is it when one person, or a hundred people, say it is enabling? Leadership is usually studied at an institutional level through an individual, the president. I am looking at a variety of individuals' constructions of leadership in order to try to understand the

entire institution. I began to reconsider my unit of analysis. By careful analysis of the interview transcripts, I realized that my unit of analysis was multiple. The individuals I interviewed discussed both their personal conceptions of leadership, which might be enabling, as well as department level and institutional level leadership. So leadership was understood by the people I interviewed to be a multi-level construct.

Data Collection

Observation: As I mentioned earlier, people within the institution discussed the relationship between the context and their understandings of leadership. The level of importance placed by interviewees on their context, suggested techniques for better understanding the context would be necessary in developing an understanding of leadership and for interpreting the interviews. The pilot study helped me identify observation as an appropriate techniques for developing this understanding. Faculty and students referred me to department, unit and governance meetings. These meetings allowed me to inconspicuously observe the context for leadership as well as how leadership is enacted. One example of the way observation helped me to better understand the interviews was my experience spending time in the student union. During lunch time, I noticed that faculty and students were seated at tables together on the bottom floor. The staff tended to eat lunch at a separate dining room on the second floor. Not only did faculty and students eat within the same area but they also dined at the same tables and had lively discussions. These types of observations helped me to better understand the similarities in the way faculty and students constructed leadership. Observation on campus was extremely helpful in placing the interviews in context. It was also key in helping me to rethink standpoint theory and to consider the concept of positionality.

Focus Groups: As I began my pilot study, I was considering the use of focus groups (group interviews) rather than individual interviews for understanding participants' representations of leadership. I believed that if a person's position within the institution (or their position in society based on race/ethnicity and gender) was related to their constructions of leadership than focus groups would assist me in capturing how people of similar or different positions construct leadership. I knew that I would perhaps miss some of their particular or individual constructs but that I could understand how people positioned within an institution within certain roles and with certain demographic characteristics define leadership. I

considered conducting focus groups of faculty, students, and administrators. In addition, I contemplated having focus groups of all men, all women, white, non-white, and other characteristics that I thought might affect people's construction of leadership.

Two issues that surfaced during my pilot study made me rethink this approach. First, I noticed that three-quarters of the people I interviewed were hesitant to talk critically about leadership or were hesitant to bring up conflictual issues. Informants talked carefully and vaguely about issues that they noted were sensitive or political. They were carefully choosing their words even though we were alone. After these interviews, I determined that the outcome of group interviews would probably be an understanding of a very public, negotiated construction of leadership. I don't think I would have obtained the more personal, individualistic stories in a group interview. The second issue I became aware of was group dynamics. I became concerned about the prospect that one or two people might dominate the focus group and I would obtain only these dominant constructions of leadership. Traditional research has mostly tapped into dominant perspectives on leadership; my study hoped to explore unheard voices (Amey & Twombley, 1992). A focus group environment had the potential to silence these less often heard voices. Therefore, the pilot study was instrumental in my decision to conduct individual interviews rather than focus groups or group interviews and has helped me to better develop an argument for why I want to conduct individual interviews.

The somewhat negotiated stories that I received also informed my conceptual framework. The interviewees hesitation and what I might interpret as fear of retaliation seem to be related to some conditions of power that they felt existed within their context. This made it important for me to stress conditions of power in my interpretive framework.

Interview Process

Re-Framing the Interview: Another outcome of the pilot study was the revision of my interview process based on learning more about the type of people I was interviewing. During my pilot study, I struggled with responses to my interview questions that were not concrete and contained few examples or specific stories. After months of trying different techniques to elicit more concrete answers as well as reflecting on the interview process, I realized that some people, particularly faculty, will tend to talk more abstractly and that I should let them know

before the interview starts that I am looking for concrete descriptions not abstract generalizations. In addition, some staff tended to be concerned about the political implications of being too specific with their responses, so they also answered questions more vaguely but for different reasons. Others, mostly students but also some administrators and faculty, didn't believe that their own experiences are important or that I am interested in what they have to say personally. In my dissertation study, I will attempt to make people comfortable to discuss their personal stories by telling them that I am interested in their personal experiences. Framing the overall experience is extremely important. In the final study, I will begin each interview by saying that I am interested in their "stories" and ask them to focus on concrete examples rather than generalities.

Re-ordering the Interview Questions: Another outcome of my pilot study was the re-ordering of the questions on my original interview protocol. The protocol began with abstract questions about how people defined leadership and then moved into more concrete questions. This started people thinking on an abstract level and they often never stopped answering my questions at that level. During the last few interviews of my pilot study, I changed the order of the interview questions and this elicited fewer abstract responses.

Re-vising the Interview Questions: To a certain extent, this problem of generalization and abstract responses continued. At first I thought I was not emphasizing or asking for examples enough. After realizing I was asking for examples (in reading the transcripts), I tried to hypothesize when and why people answered in generalities rather than providing concrete examples. I believe I understand better why I received these abstract responses. As I predicted, people's position within the organization was affecting their responses from some people. If people did not feel directly a part of institutional leadership more broadly, they could only talk about this abstractly. I received specific response when people discussed leadership within their own context (the women's studies department, the development office, etc.) My mistake had been to ask questions at a more centralized institutional level. People could refer to what goes on but only more distantly. They did identify leadership at the local level and told vivid stories about life in this context. I did not realize this trend until I began analyzing the data through narrative analysis and realized most of the detailed stories revolved around leadership within their own unit. Within my dissertation, I do not focus my questions at the institutional level.

Analysis

As I developed an understanding of the way people tend to discuss leadership as a part of their da -to-day experience, I was able to determine appropriate techniques for analysis. In reviewing the transcripts, I noticed two structural patterns in the way people discussed leadership. Individuals tended to discuss leadership in terms of qualities or characteristics associated with leadership or discussed stories about leadership. These qualities and characteristics that interviewees described were best analyzed through componential analysis that helped both to divide and relate their descriptions of leadership. The stories they described lent themselves best to narrative analysis.

Beyond the structure of interviewee's constructions of leadership, I reflected on the content. I noted how individual's constructions were sometimes unique, often similar to others, and sometimes differentiated from other individuals. Interviewee's constructions of leadership challenged me to determine analysis techniques that would help to interpret a multi-level construction. Some analysis techniques -- focusing on only one level of a construct -- would lose this complexity. For instance, categorical or theme analysis tends to focus on shared trends and patterns rather than unique responses of the individuals.[6] I realized that it would be necessary for me to combine analysis techniques that explored different levels of a construct, for instance shared patterns and more anomalous descriptions, or I would need an analysis technique that helped to interpret complex, multi-level phenomenon. I ended up combining componential, categorical, and narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is useful in studying complex phenomenon at many levels and would have been appropriate for fulfilling these goals. But, I chose to conduct additional analysis using componential and categorical analysis because they were helpful in identifying patterns.

Writing-up the Interpretations

Lastly, my pilot study helped me rethink the way I will write up or represent leadership within my dissertation. In writing-up the pilot study, I focused on respondents' shared constructions of leadership but I tried to note where an individual said something that was unique or particular. Although I tried to present some of the unique ways that respondents represented leadership, I had difficulty understanding how to write-up these results. Should I place contradictory

[6]Categorical analysis, theme analysis and the constant comparative technique focus on analyzing categories or patterns. These three analytic techniques are related but distinct from one another.

comments in a side-bar or a separate section; should they be woven into the text? I was most familiar with writing-up the "results" of interviews within themes or categories. I realized that my write-up was limited by the techniques I was familiar with and that I needed to seek out other models for writing up the respondents' stories and my interpretations because the techniques I was familiar with could not illuminate or represent their voices. This realization came directly from my experience of talking to people and trying to write up their experiences. This process has led me to the work of critical ethnographers and critical educational researchers such as Ruth Behar (1993), Lila Abu-Lughod (1993), William Tierney (1993), and Patti Lather (1991) to draw upon for my dissertation project.

AFFIRMING ASSUMPTIONS

I want to briefly note some of the ways that my pilot study helped to guide my dissertation project by affirming (at least for now) assumptions that I had derived mostly through my review of the literature. My purpose in presenting this information is to illustrate that the pilot study did not transform or modify all of my initial assumptions. Many of my primary assumptions were only moderately reshaped. First, conceptualizing individuals as positioned within their context appears to be an appropriate assumption that will remain an important conceptual premise within my dissertation. Second, the pilot study not only affirmed the importance of the context for influencing individuals' constructions of leadership but it helped guide my understanding of the centrality of the context. Third, allowing participants to define leadership remains an important assumption. Participants described leadership in terms of campus values, individual traits, processes within the context, etc. I don't think I would have received these various constructions if I specifically designated a particular definition of leadership. Finally, utilizing field or naturalistic inquiry of a case through quasi-ethnographic techniques was extremely helpful for studying the context in depth, for being able to explore a variety of individuals' constructions of leadership, and for not imposing a particular definition or research tradition (which would have been necessary with a survey design).

IMPLICATIONS

I believe this research paper offers four important implications that contribute to higher education research and practice: (1) it illustrates the importance of grounding the research process in practical activity; (2) it highlights how reflection can help to improve our research practice; (3) it suggests the value of our day-to-day experiences in shaping research; and (4) it emphasizes the importance of re-iterative studies and suggests the need to value emergent research (and/or acknowledge research as emergent). The first two implications can be directly derived from my review of the pilot study while the last two are only inferred or suggested. I hope only to open a dialogue about these last two implications. Before I explain these implications more fully, I want to note how all of them may seem very "common-sense." Even though we, as a research community, may acknowledge the importance of some of these suggested practices or ideas, I am less sure that they are a part of our daily research practice and thoughts.

Grounding the Research Process

This study suggests, more generally, the importance of experiential knowledge and/or engagement of the researcher for developing understanding. This ontological/epistemological argument remains on precarious ground in some educational research communities. In my paper, I have tried to illustrate how engagement with practical activity can shape many aspects of a study, both conceptually and methodologically. Researchers often find themselves studying contexts, people, or phenomenon they are not familiar with; this paper suggests the necessity of researchers becoming experientially grounded with the context, people, or phenomenon that they are studying. By grounding the project, the researcher has the potential to develop an understanding that more closely ties to the experience of the people within the study. Even if I had been more experiential familiar with the phenomenon I was studying, I still would have benefited from this deliberate engagement in practical activity.

This paper also suggests the viability of action research, participatory research, and other methodologies that involve engagement in practical activity. These methodologies do not maintain as an extreme a view as Heidegger -- that one can only develop understanding by engaging in practical activity -- but they emphasize

the central role of practice in order to develop knowledge and understanding.[7] Researchers within these traditions argue for an equal value to be placed on knowledge from practical engagement. Further, they try to break down the problematic distinction between reflection/abstract thinking and practice and illustrate how these processes are intertwined and inseparable. I think it is important that we as researchers continue to discuss and rethink our ontological/epistemological assumptions and the problematic dichotomy between reflection and action.[8]

I realize that arguing for the importance of grounding research in practical activity might be misinterpreted to mean that current research is not based on practice. If interpreted this way, my argument seems problematic because most research studies are based on practice; they study phenomenon in the "real world" of practical activity. I am not arguing this point, instead, I am proposing that our understanding is often not grounded or informed by engagement with practice/experience. In addition, I am suggesting that we don't value the knowledge derived from engagement in practical activity as much as we do the knowledge derived from abstract contemplation. I am arguing for a more equal status for both types of knowing.

Reflection

I would not have gained the insights presented in this paper if I had not spent the past year reflecting on my pilot study. There are many different arguments for the importance of reflection to learning and growth. Reflection can also contribute meaningfully to the development of knowledge and understanding. I believe that the research process can benefit enormously from the knowledge that results from long-term, deliberate reflection. Thus, I am arguing for the valuing of another way that we can come to know, through deliberate, long-term reflection.

This does not mean that we cannot move forward on new projects. I am suggesting that we take the time to rethink past research projects and connect this research with our new projects. Further, I do not mean to imply that researchers are not reflective. Instead, I am suggesting that we might value this process more and

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[7]These research methodologies also maintain other ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that I will not detail in this paper. For a more complete explanation of these methodologies see Armstead & Cancian, 1990; Brown, 1986; Gaventa, 1988; Lather, 1986; Tandon, 1981; Whyte, 1991.

[8]As I write this paper, I am aware of the artificial and problematic distinction I make between action and reflection. I have used these terms as heuristic devices to discuss these trends in research and to move toward less problematic terminology that does not separate these ways of knowing.

encourage it as an important research convention/practice for developing knowledge.

Experience

I hope that the discussion in this paper helps to suggest the value of the researcher's experience in shaping theory and the research process. By experience, I mean the researcher's entire life experience, not limited to their experience while conducting a study (as my study had focused on). My intention is to extend my argument, of valuing the grounding of research in practice, to acknowledging the value -- in general -- of our day-to-day experience to our research practice and to developing knowledge. I think many of us unconsciously or semi-consciously utilize our experience to inform our research practice but we do not acknowledge the contribution that experience has made to our work. I believe it is important to be more deliberate in explaining the way we draw upon experience to inform our research.

Some researchers call this process of acknowledging the role of our experiences in research -- self-reflexivity (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Behar, 1993; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). I think that carefully reflecting on the research process, acknowledging how our experience may have informed our research beliefs and interpretations helps to make our work more rigorous, truthful, and helps others to evaluate our work. I hope to continue a dialogue about the value of our experiences for developing understanding. In addition, I hope to begin a conversation about the importance of documenting these experiences that inform our research.

Re-iterative and Emergent Studies

Researchers tend to present their research as final rather than as constructed and evolving (Tierney & Rhoads, 1994). I hope this paper helps to continue a dialogue about the way knowledge may be emergent, especially among phenomenon we are less familiar with on an experiential level. I believe that it is important to continue this discussion because accepting this assumption challenges research values and practices. For example, if we accept the assumption that knowledge is constructed and evolving, we might value re-iterative and emergent studies more. Re-iterative studies of the same phenomena, context, etc., can work toward a deeper, richer understanding. The research communities valuing of re-iterative studies can already be seen in the process of researchers adopting agendas

that explore the same phenomena within several different studies. Although re-iterative studies seemed to be valued, emergent studies seem to be less so.

I want to urge us to continue to value re-iterative studies, but at the same time, I think it is important to value studies that are emergent, which may come to very limited understandings and even fewer conclusions. By emergent studies, I am referring to studies that test out new areas (or even long researched areas in new ways) that sometimes develop no specific conclusions or clear understandings. Because research that is complete and has definitive answers/conclusions tends to be rewarded, emergent studies are often less common. In addition, researchers often feel that they must present the results of each study as having come to some fairly complete understanding of an issue or phenomenon. If we acknowledged knowledge as constructed and put more value on emergent studies, perhaps more of these type of studies would be conducted and researchers might feel more comfortable presenting their work as incomplete. I hope to encourage the research community to value making initial "mistakes or misunderstandings" and to challenge academic research conventions that tends to value studies that boast definitive conclusions more than emergent studies.

CONCLUSION

I hope that you have found this description of my journey through the hermeneutic circle helpful in reflecting on your own research practice/process. My overall goal for this paper was to provide researchers an opportunity to rethink their assumptions and as Heidegger would say, to start "repairing their research practice" where needed. I also wanted to continue dialogue about the ontological/epistemological assumptions that undergird our practice. I believe that there are many ways that we can come to know and understand, yet the research community tends to focus and value a limited number of them. By discussing two other ways of coming to know -- engagement in practical activity and reflection -- I hoped to challenge researchers to explore, acknowledge, and perhaps even adopt these other practices. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, I believe research can help to transform the world in very positive ways. But, it is our responsibility as researchers to continually review our practices to see whether they are effective in meeting this goal.

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