

Title:

Reflective Practice in the iField: Reflection and Reflexivity in Information Research

Organizers:

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Abstract

Reflective practice, analytic reflection and (particularly) reflexivity, are generally recognized as core characteristics of qualitative inquiry and evaluation research. Reflecting (along with planning, acting and observing) is an explicit step in the classic fourfold cycle of action research, but also forms an integral, often taken-for-granted, part of the whole process of social inquiry for both qualitative and quantitative researchers. Methods texts in our own and other domains reference the use of reflection in reviewing literature, developing research questions, formulating hypotheses, and judging research contributions; they acknowledge its crucial role in locating researchers ideologically and surfacing their assumptions, and foreground its use in data collection, analysis and reporting. Yet there is a shortage of accessible practical guidance on being a reflective and reflexive researcher, threatening the quality of information research. This workshop will collaboratively explore some frameworks, models, and tools available to facilitate reflective inquiry and assess their utility for iResearch.

Keywords:

Analytic reflection, Collective reflection, Critical reflection, Qualitative analysis, Reflexivity,

Description

Purpose and intended audience

The purpose of the workshop is (1) to advance the use of reflection (reflective thinking, reflective writing and reflective dialogue) in research, evaluation and audit in the information field; (2) to explore and evaluate established and emergent methodologies, techniques and tools for reflective inquiry, drawn from information science and cognate disciplines; and (3) to build a community of interest around the development of reflective and reflexive approaches in information research for continuous enhancement of our practice.

The intended audience includes all those with an interest in designing and conducting research in the information field, including experienced scholars, early career researchers, practitioner researchers/evidence-based practitioners, doctoral students, research advisers, and research methods instructors. If our proposal is accepted, we plan to invite prospective participants to contribute material in advance to enrich the workshop content.

Proposed format

Our outline assumes a half-day event of 3.5 hours, but could be adjusted to 3 hours if needed.

Introduction and orientation (20 minutes)

Introduce workshop leaders and participants; Present goals and expected outcomes; Outline project background and planned activities; Present working definitions of key terms and concepts.

Warm-up activity: Distribute handouts with definitions and our preliminary model of reflective inquiry; Invite participants to review material and to provide comments; Collect feedback on flipcharts; Post flipchart sheets around the room so participants can add comments later.

Frameworks and models breakout (10 minutes intro, 45 minutes breakout, 20 minutes plenary)

Introduce tools providing high-level views, holistic models, or overarching frameworks for reflective inquiry that facilitate understanding of the role of reflection in the conceptual (pre-empirical) stage of research (e.g., Blaikie's (2007; 2010) typology of researcher positions/stances; Coghlan and Brannick's (2014) action research meta-cycle of reflection-on-reflection, Patton's (2011) reflective practice process for developmental evaluation, Patton's (2015) framework for triangulated reflexive inquiry framework); Distribute sample tools (prepared by workshop leaders).

Invite group members to test and evaluate usability of their assigned tools individually, share and compare results, and capture findings on flipcharts for plenary presentation. Encourage participants to suggest improvements to tools and/or additions to toolkit, and present their suggestions alongside their evaluation.

Refreshments and walk-round (20 minutes)

Methods and techniques breakout (10 minutes intro, 45 minutes breakout, 20 minutes plenary)

Introduce tools providing frameworks, models, or prompts/checklists that promote adoption of reflective and reflexive approaches to generating, analyzing, and representing research data or evidence (e.g., Alvesson and Sköldbberg's (2009) four-level multi-paradigmatic framework for reflexive interpretation; Alvesson, Harley and Hardy's (2008) tabulation of four sets of reflexive textual practices; Mason's (2002) model for reading data three ways; Saldana's (2015) reflection topics for analytic memos). Distribute sample tools (prepared by workshop leaders).

Invite group members to evaluate tools, share findings, present suggestions (as above).

Conclusion and reflection (20 minutes)

Review key messages from presentations and discussions; Explore interest in continuing the conversation beyond the conference; Agree next steps, e.g., writing up the event (leaders and participants).

Goals or outcomes

- Promote shared understanding and vocabulary for the concepts and terminology of reflective inquiry in the context of information work.
- Review tools to facilitate reflection and reflexivity in social inquiry and assess their utility for information researchers.
- Facilitate networking with a view to seeding collaborative initiatives and projects to accelerate reflective scholarship in the information sector.

Relevance to the iConference

Reflection is an essential dimension of both academic and practitioner research in the information field. Reflective practice, including analytic reflection and particularly reflexivity, is a “core characteristic” of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2014, p. 102), especially in data analysis and report writing (Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2015); and it is an important feature of the qualitative approaches of narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic and case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Reflection is associated with practitioner research as an explicit step in the classic (participatory) action research cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, a social research strategy that has been described as “simply a form of self-reflective enquiry” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162) and characterized as “critical self-reflective practice” (McNiff, 2013, p. 23); it is an integral part of interpretive, participatory, and collaborative approaches to evaluation in education and other domains, where it forms the basis for dialogue and validity testing (Goodyear, 2005).

Reflection also constitutes an integral and often taken-for-granted part of the whole process of social inquiry for both qualitative and quantitative researchers. Popular research methods texts from our own and other fields reference the use of reflection and the importance of reflexivity in reviewing literature, conceptualizing research ideas, developing research questions, formulating hypotheses, interpreting results and judging the contribution of a study; methodologists acknowledge a crucial role in locating a researcher ideologically and surfacing their assumptions, as well as noting its use in specific methods, techniques and procedures, such as participant observation, research diaries, and discourse analysis (Connaway & Radford, 2017; Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Pickard, 2013; Wildemuth, 2017; Williamson, 2002). Brophy (2009, p. 63) highlights a key contribution of reflective practice in identifying problems for investigation, noting “One common feature of reflection is the recognition of a problematic situation where different courses of action were possible”.

However, overall, coverage of reflection and reflexivity in information and library science methods books is disappointingly limited, especially compared with other social research texts. Our literature is particularly deficient in practical guidance, with a noticeable shortage of the types of reflective frameworks, models, and tools found in other social science disciplines and professions. Our project targets this gap, using participatory action research to collaboratively develop a reflective practice toolkit for the information field, by looking for candidate tools in the social research literature, and assessing their potential for adoption in or adaptation for

information research settings, with a view to building a community collection of customized resources to support information scholarship.

Duration

The workshop will be a half-day event.

[Note we are also proposing a half-day workshop on the use of reflection in education. We have designed the two workshops as related but self-contained events, recognizing some delegates may be interested in attending both sessions, but others who are more involved in research or teaching may prefer to attend only one. The two events share a common theoretical heritage and conceptual framework, but each will cover different techniques and tools, and use different examples and exercises, with minimal overlap in content.]

Attendance

Our workshop format uses a mix of plenary and breakout discussions. We expect to attract 25-30 people, but we could work with as few as ten or as many as 50 participants.

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