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Thinking About Knowledge and Research

By Janine Lim

Upholding experimental research design as the gold standard of research is disturbing to me. In quasi-experimental design, the classes are intact, not assigned randomly, and have different teachers. The treatment is given to some of the classes and other classes are treated as controls (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). While this research design is currently preferred under the "scientifically based research" requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (Reyna, 2006), this design is still difficult to do within schools. It is politically challenging to give treatment to certain classes within a school or certain schools within a school district. I am uncomfortable with the idea of randomized trials being "the gold standard" of research (Reyna, 2006) as it seems to deny methods of knowing that are just as valid (Belenky et al., 1986). It also devalues the human as just a plant or animal that can easily be assigned to treatment and control groups (Dalton, 2006). It "outlaws questions that cannot be answered in that fashion" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 96). It is difficult for me to conceptualize any research questions that would use this design in my current and future educational work. However, the non-experimental research designs are all comfortable for me and make sense in my work and research.

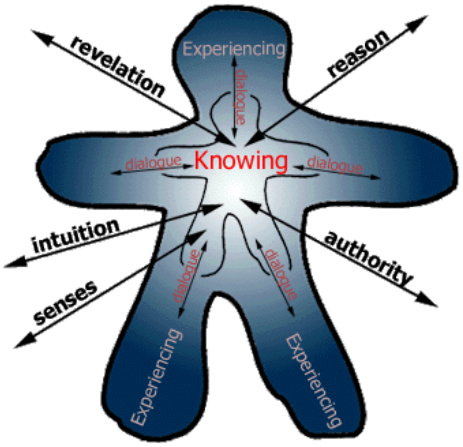
Considering the Nature of Knowledge and Research

Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." - Albert Einstein

My dissertation work raised several questions about the nature of knowledge and research. In some ways, my dissertation results confirmed my own experience in

supporting videoconferencing. While some results were surprising, they were explainable from my experience with schools. The K12 Curriculum Videoconferencing Implementation Scale arose from the conversations of educators in my online class, and was polished based on my work and experience with videoconferencing educators internationally. This foundation in real life application resulted in impressive reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .851), test-retest validity (.950), and cross validation (1% shrinkage). The tension between experience and research is strong and challenging.

Freed's Epistemological Model (March 1, 2009) helps me make sense of the sources of knowing, including experience and research. In the model, the person accepts several different sources of knowing: revelation, reason, intuition, senses, and authority. My reason and senses are used to observe, collect data, analyze it, and reach conclusions. Authorities such as other research and theoretical frameworks guide my reason and senses in creating my research studies. My intuition and experience contribute to my understanding, and are evaluated and confirmed or modified based on reason and authority. My experience is the window through which I accept knowledge from authority, reason, and my senses. My dialogue with colleagues across the nation, via my personal learning network of blogs, real-time communication tools, and Twitter, allow me to expand my understanding and learn new ways of utilizing and evaluating sources of knowledge. Belanky (1986) suggests that this type of knowing is "constructed" as a person integrates intuitive knowledge with "knowledge learned from others" (p. 134). Michael Gold shares that, as in jazz, combining intellectual rigor



with the intuitive somatic creates new polyrhythms (Gold, 2009) which complement and challenge each other.

As a researcher, I continue to consider the philosophical ideas behind different methods of research. Knight (2006) notes philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, especially the forms of qualitative research that address power and oppression. I enjoy both qualitative and quantitative research. I find satisfaction in "solid" numbers; but I also the value of thick personal descriptions of various perspectives in a given issue. I realize the value of considering the frame of reference and the potential ways to examine, question and develop systems for research and constructing knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986).

Questions about the nature of knowledge, knowing, and the views of others around me will continue to challenge my thinking and learning in the future. Practitioners around me implicitly trust numbers. The accountability and data driven decision making movements in K12 public education are driving certain types of knowing and research. Yet other sources and methods of knowledge provide answers to questions not answerable by quantitative methods of research. How are these types of knowledge balanced in my work, my learning, and my relationships with other researchers and colleagues? These questions will continue to simmer in my brain in future learning and thinking.

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