

Research Brief

Learning and Social Change: Using Interviews as Tools to Prompt Reflection on Practice

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Background

Reflective practices can occur when an unprompted action or realization takes place during an event. Reflective practice is a course of action where one ponders significant incidents in their life and in so doing can make critical decisions about their own wellbeing. Although widely used in education pedagogy, the concept of reflective practice has largely not been empirically investigated in relation to interviews.

Purpose

This article argues that interviewing is a process in which interviewees can reflect on critical decisions about their academic careers. We explore the following research questions: 1) How do interviews trigger new realizations among interview participants? 2) How do interviews have the potential to act as agents of social change?

Methods

This analysis is part of ADVANCE-Purdue's Institutional Ethnography study on promotion and tenure (P&T) policy. Data for this analysis came from interviews with 18 STEM faculty members at Purdue who were either tenure-track or tenured. Interviews focused on their experiences with application and use of university and departmental level P&T documents. Data analysis focused on revelations that participants had during the interviews.

Results

Approximately 70% (13/18) of participants commented about how the interview questions prompted them to think they could have done or would do something differently because of the question. Most instances centered around participants saying they would explore university and department websites to determine what P&T documents were available and where they were located. Additionally, they planned to find out more information about the specific contents of the policies, particularly regarding expectations or requirements for P&T. Finally, they planned to ask more questions of their departments heads regarding mentoring committees.

Conclusions

Despite being intended as methods of data collection, the questions asked during interviews also generated new ways of thinking and had the potential to initiate social change. When interviewees realized they had overlooked certain information regarding P&T application processes, they decided to act differently to obtain this information. Rather than being seen as only a drain participants' time, then, interviews can be thought of as beneficial to participants as well as researchers.

Implications for Practice

- Institutional research questions should be designed specifically to maximize the potential for learning and reflective action of participants.
- Administrators should be aware that faculty members are not as knowledgeable about P&T processes and requirements as they previously believed themselves to be. Further efforts are needed to ensure that all faculty receive consistent and comprehensive information about P&T.

Citation

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