

Doubt and Unsettledness: Learning and Teaching the Practice of Research

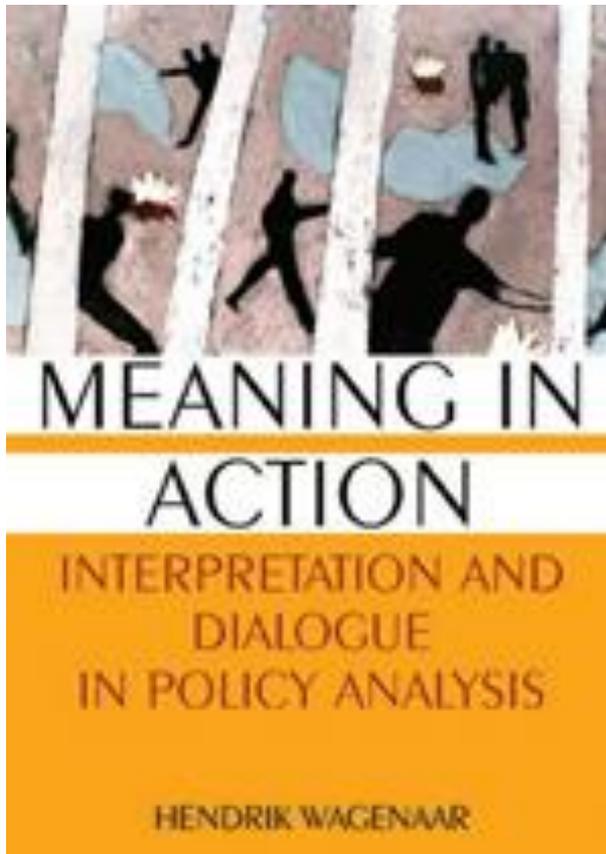
Koen Bartels – Bangor University

Hendrik Wagenaar – University of Sheffield

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Looking back



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE THE PRACTICES OF 'INTEGRALITEIT' IN MARIAHOEVE



Research Master Thesis
Department of Public Administration – Centre for Modern Urban Studies
Leiden University

KOEN P.R. BARTELS

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Supervisor: Dr. H. Wagenaar
Second reader: Prof. dr. D. Lowery

Practice

- Practice is not applied knowledge; what we know emerges from the ways in which the world ‘talks back’ when we intervene in a ‘situation’
- Learning means actively engaging in a social practice and overcoming resistances
- The experiential and interactive nature of the work of organizational and policy practitioners
 - and researchers...

Teaching and learning practice

- Not supplying theory and findings to apply in future work, but facilitating real life experiences with practice
- How to encourage students to engage in a perilous learning process with unsettling affects?
- Working through resistances and reframing these as signals of a creative process of discovery

Background

- One-week course on interpretive and qualitative research to PhD students



- Auto-ethnographic practice approach: log and joint reflections

The push and pull of research practice

Resistances	Strategies
Methodological ignorance	Stimulating methodological awareness
Genre confusion	Using heuristics
Method fetishization	Research as craft
Theoretical entrenchment	Grounding in a real world problem

Eva's story

Towards the end of the week, both of us had an individual meeting with Eva, who was doing research on “the influence of identity on the effectiveness of multi-team systems” in military practice. She had already done observations and interviews for one and a half year, and was now struggling how to interpret her data and how to continue. She had hoped that the course would provide her with tips and tricks for doing so, but now she felt even less secure about what to do. The course had mostly given her the feeling that she had not done her research well up to now. The reason was, she admitted, that she had never heard of interpretive research before this course and did not really understand the nature and value of it. We had to reassure her that her realist approach to qualitative research was far from useless and that she should not throw out all the valuable data she had collected up to now.

Methodological ignorance

- Misunderstanding the course outline
- Instrumentalist notion of “hands-on” research:
 - all research is of one kind;
 - consists of data collection & analysis techniques;
 - leads to objective conclusions about reality & truth
- Without the requisite experience, the insights, even when they are spelled out, have no way to register or ‘sink in’.

Samuel's story

A presentation on the fourth day gave us the impression that something was changing in the group dynamic. Samuel was only halfway his Research Masters and was still very unsure what to do. He had a big, yet fascinating question: why does democracy fail in Africa? While there is a huge literature on this, he had identified a dominant explanation (the role of cultural and ethnic diversity). But he did not really know how to proceed from there. We agreed that it was a broad topic in which he risked to get lost. One of the main pieces of advice that emerged from the group discussion was not to be so fixated on democracy. He should not see it as a normative ideal or something static and fixed that can be achieved. And what if it is not about democracy at all? Democracy is a strong Western concern, but how useful is it for how things should work in Africa? One of the participants even walked up to the white board to draw a quick map of a Western African region where she had worked for some time to explain that people living in some areas were not concerned with democracy or citizenship at all (but solely with their tribe and surviving).

Using heuristics

- Starting to employ Abbott's (2004) heuristics intuitively
- The road to productive research is one of doubt, uncertainty, confusion, and vulnerability
- Not an indication of failure, but an invitation to be imaginative and playful

Concluding remarks

- Learning the practice of research is a prolonged, uncomfortable process
- Creating conditions for working through the doubt and unsettledness involved
- Reflecting on own experiences with (teaching and learning) the practice of research