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Auditing Constructivist Inquiry: Perspectives of Two Stakeholders

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What is This?

Auditing Constructivist Inquiry:
Perspectives of Two Stakeholders

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Using the Schwandt and Halpern model of auditing a constructivist study, the article describes an audit from the perspectives of both the auditor and the inquirer requesting the audit. Presented are the steps of the audit as enacted, the issues raised during the experience, and recommendations for those seeking and performing audits of constructivist inquiries.

To assure confidence in the findings of research and evaluation efforts, researchers follow generally accepted procedures within the research or evaluation approach they embrace. Such standards have been established and clearly articulated for traditional research, whereas analogous standards for establishing the trustworthiness of constructivist inquiries are still emerging (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schwandt & Halpern, 1988; Smith, 1984). Several approaches for establishing constructivist rigor have been suggested, including specific technical recommendations (e.g., Boreman, LeCompte, & Goetz, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schwandt & Halpern, 1988), but the debate about appropriate warrants of the quality of constructivist inquiry is far from over (see Phillips, 1987).

Though not without criticism (Green, Doughty, Marquart, Ray, & Roberts, 1988; Guba, 1990; Smith, 1984), methodological rigor currently seems to be established in two ways. The first, *trustworthiness*, was developed because conventional methods for establishing rigor cannot be applied to constructivist inquiries. The axioms on which constructivist inquiry is based differ so markedly from those of traditional inquiry to make traditional approaches meaningless. Trustworthiness has four elements that roughly correspond to internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. These elements—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—assess the qual-

ity of the research *product* for truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility is established through activities that increase the possibility that credible findings will be produced. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefings, and member checks help to increase the likelihood of congruence between the participant constructions and the reconstructions presented in the final case study. Prolonged engagement with, and persistent observation of, the stakeholders (those with a stake in the phenomenon under investigation) lead to credibility in understanding the depth and scope of the issues involved. Information gathered from noting, watching, and taking into account the physical and psychosocial dynamics present in the environment, plus any other data collected, is validated through triangulation. Triangulation uses multiple sources, methods, investigators, or theories to test for the existence of consistent, distortion-free information (Denzin, 1978). Peer review and debriefing are also advised for credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ask the difficult questions, to explore methodological next steps, to provide sympathy and support, and to clarify inquirer thinking and bound inquirer bias. Material from debriefing is recoded in reflexive journals. Member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is the ongoing formal and informal testing of the accuracy and meaning of the data collected and assessment of the overall adequacy of the portrayals before the completion of the final version of the report.

Transferability allows for the tentative application of findings to other contexts. Differing from generalizability, it gauges how well the working hypotheses of one inquiry might hold in another context by looking at the quality of the report. To be transferable, the case study must contain careful and extensive description of the time, the place, the context, and the culture in which the hypotheses were found to be salient to allow a reader to determine if transfer of the findings to another known context is possible.

Dependability is achieved by accounting for the instability and emergent design-induced changes in the process. These data collection decisions and methodological shifts must be understandable and appropriated to constructivist assumptions. The inquirer documents all methodological decisions in a methodological log. In addition, the use of triangulation and the creation of an audit trail for a dependability audit allow a dependability assessment. A finding of credibility through the audit also supports dependability because credible findings are dependent on good inquiry methods.

Finally, *confirmability* is established if the case study results can be linked to the data themselves. Confirmability speaks to the quality of the data management and the data analysis. It is documented through an audit trail that traces findings through raw data, documentary evidence, interview summaries, data analysis, and methodological and reflexive journals. All of the aforementioned elements, in combination, establish the trustworthiness of the data management, analysis, and reporting of the inquiry.

Authenticity, the second approach to establishing methodological rigor, resulted from the realization of the limits of trustworthiness as a parallel strategy to traditional aspects of rigor when the research approach is from an alternative paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Authenticity is uniquely derivative of the constructivist perspective and is attentive to the nature and quality of the research *process* rather than the research product. By focusing on the integrity and quality of the inquiry process, authenticity assesses fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. Though still evolving in its operational details (Chambers, Wedel, & Rodwell, 1992; Lincoln, 1990), and building on the mechanics of demonstrating trustworthiness, authenticity can be documented in the following ways.

Fairness requires even-handed representation of all viewpoints. To establish fairness, the inquiry process and the case study report must reflect a balanced view that presents all constructions and the values that undergird them. Was there an attempt to create equal power in the research process? Did the inquirer set the research situation to empower all with a stake in the process to have a voice? Were all the perspectives sought and then given due consideration? Fairness is demonstrated in stakeholder identification, in the solicitation of group constructions, through open negotiation of findings, through the establishment of appellate mechanisms when there is lack of agreement, and finally through the constant use of member checking processes.

The second element is *ontological authenticity* or increased awareness of the complexities of the phenomenon under study. What happened to the participants as a result of their involvement? Was their consciousness raised to a higher level of sophistication? As a result of the inquiry, do participants have an improved, more complete understanding of their own perspectives as individuals and of the systems they represent? Ontological authenticity is demonstrated through testimony of respondents in the audit trail, where there should be evidence of the growth of perceptions. This growth should also be apparent in all aspects of the member checking process.

Educative authenticity occurs when there is a demonstrated appreciation of others' constructions. Participants have a more complete understanding of, and respect for, the others' views. Participants need not agree or change fundamental positions. It is important, however, that they gain greater insight into the sources of alternative positions and why they are being maintained. Educative authenticity is demonstrated through testimony of respondents and through the data in the audit trail showing participants' greater understanding and appreciation of alternative views.

Catalytic authenticity accounts for change stimulus by detailing the actions and decisions prompted by the inquiry process. Catalytic authenticity is demonstrated in testimony establishing the willingness among participants to be involved in change. Resolutions about change issuing from the negotiations undertaken during the inquiry are linked to this dimension of authen-

ticity. Catalytic authenticity requires systematic follow-up to assess the extent of the change actions that occur after the inquiry is concluded.

Finally, *tactical authenticity* is demonstrated through effective change action. Is meaningful action undertaken by empowered participants? Has power been redistributed among the participants and are they empowered to act effectively? Tactical authenticity is demonstrated through participant testimony, through follow-up after the process has been terminated, and based on a judgment about the quality of the change that occurs.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Schwandt and Halpern (1988) recommended the use of an external auditor to warrant the rigor of a constructivist inquiry. This auditor is responsible for the examination of the methodological processes, the data collected, and the subsequent reconstructions derived from the analysis to attest to the trustworthiness and authenticity of the constructivist process and product. The audit involves a formal examination of the records to assess evident inquirer bias and to verify consistency, appropriateness, and accuracy of the content and the procedures for analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Skrtic, 1985). Because reports in the literature of such audits are few (see Chelimsky, 1985; Green et al., 1988; Halpern, 1983; Hudson & McRoberts, 1984; Skrtic, 1985), the voices and views of both the inquirer and the auditor have been included here to more fully illuminate the auditing process. In conventional social science, discussion about auditing would be regarded as theoretically superior to that of the auditor and auditee reporting their own case. Here, we provide both aspects of the discussion because the separation would go against the integrative goal of this article.

The following describes, in dialogue, a trustworthiness and authenticity audit from the perspectives of the auditor and the inquirer who requested the audit. Sources for the dialogue are transcripts from the reflexive journals, which were kept during the audit process, and conversations held on completion of the audit. We describe the auditing process as enacted from the initial contact through the delivery of the audit report. A second section highlights issues raised during the experience as a springboard for recommendations for next steps in audit development.

THE AUDITING PROCESS AS ENACTED

The procedural outline developed by Schwandt and Halpern (1988) (see Table 1) structures this discussion because it served as a guide for the trustworthiness and authenticity audit that was planned and undertaken. The narrative that follows is a frank illustration of two very different audit perspectives that should serve to underscore the interactive nature of an audit.

TABLE 1:   Auditing Procedure

Step	Goal	Product
Preparing for the audit	Identify audit needs Explore auditor/auditee fit	
Assessing auditability	Assess audit trail	
Negotiation and contracting	Set audit scope and objectives	Contract
Preparing the audit work	Determine how to achieve audit objectives	Audit work plan
Implementing the audit	Gather and evaluate evidence to test assertions	Audit work papers
Preparing the audit report	Form an audit opinion	Final audit report

SOURCE: Schwandt and Halpern (1988).

Preparing for the Audit

In the first stage, Schwandt and Halpern note that inquiries may be audited for a variety of reasons based on the needs and desires of the inquirer or other parties interested in demonstrating the rigor of the study.

> Inquirer: The audit was a planned-for culmination of a two-site constructivist study of what constitutes child neglect sufficient to warrant formal intervention. Sixty-three stakeholders in the decision about neglect in two communities, including judges, attorneys, police officers, school personnel, social workers, and parents, participated in the 6-month inquiry. The results were presented in two case studies with inquirer interpretations and lessons to be learned from each site.
>
> For trustworthiness, I planned credibility, dependability, and confirmability audits. I also planned for an authenticity audit at least along the dimensions of fairness, ontological authenticity, and educative authenticity. Because the other dimensions, catalytic and tactical authenticity, required after-inquiry follow-up, no documentary evidence was systematically collected for auditing. I wanted to test the feasibility and usefulness of a full-blown audit.

Once a decision has been made to engage in the auditing process, a potential auditor must be contacted. Schwandt and Halpern (1988) suggested methodological expertise is the primary criterion for selecting an appropriate auditor, though they add that familiarity with the substantive issues in the study is also important. After locating a possible auditor, the inquirer must describe the study and the scope and goals of the proposed audit in sufficient

detail for the potential auditor to make an initial decision of whether or not to undertake the audit.

> Inquirer: The idea of finding an independent external agent to assess the quality of the inquiry process and product was both intriguing and threatening. Whereas, I welcomed the idea of a nonstakeholder's appraisal of the quality of the work, I feared that I would never find someone who was technically competent to perform the audit. I also wanted someone sufficiently familiar with the substantive, theoretical and conceptual issues surrounding the case studies to attest to the integrity and quality of the inquiry in order to satisfy the project funders.
>
> Finally, I realized that I had met the perfect match for my needs several years earlier at a national conference. She knew constructivism and she was a social worker with child welfare experience. While she had been learning about constructivist inquiry from Egon Guba, I had been learning the same material from Yvonna Lincoln. We had similar child welfare practice experience and research interests. To me, she had both content and methodological expertise. In addition, she was interested in developing auditing skills.

Assessing Auditability, Negotiating, and Contracting

The second stage of auditing involves an initial examination of the audit trail to determine auditability and then negotiation of an audit contract that details its scope and objectives, as well as such procedural details as time lines, deadlines, and fees.

> Inquirer: Although I was sure that my potential auditor had the qualities and qualifications needed to complete the audit, I wanted to be sure it remained my audit. To that end, I outlined specifically what I wanted to be accomplished, no more and no less. I wanted to make certain the audit verified my work so that it was defensible, but I also wanted to do my best to avoid additional work on the inquiry process and product. Therefore, initial telephone conversations were directed at testing the scope of the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity audit objectives and determining if my records and evidence met with her expectations for auditability.
>
> Auditor: From previous contacts, I was familiar with the general nature of the study, but in our discussion about the audit she provided more detailed information, not only about the study itself, but also about the extent of the audit trail she had laid down.
>
> Because of the distance separating us, I was unable to examine the audit trail to determine auditability. I had to rely on the verbal description of the trail as well as on my own assessment of the probable quality of the work. Had I not known her and her work, I doubt if I would have agreed to audit without a more thorough examination of the audit trail to identify potential shortcomings to the conducting of a complete and thorough audit.
>
> I agreed to audit this study for a variety of reasons. Uppermost in my mind was the opportunity to "learn by doing." I was excited by the challenge of applying what I knew about constructivist inquiry to the auditing process. I was convinced I would learn more about constructivist inquiry by engaging in the

audit, specifically how another researcher had conducted her study from beginning to completion. The opportunity to see someone else's research from an inside perspective was a rare one and I valued the trust placed in me to complete this audit.

As someone involved in constructivist research, I could empathize with the anxiety associated with having one's work audited. Knowing the quality of prior work, however, I had an expectation that I would find the study to be both trustworthy and authentically rigorous. Acknowledging this general expectation, I determined that I owed nothing less than my own best effort (albeit, my first) at a rigorous audit.

Inquirer: I was relieved and excited by the enthusiasm about the audit, but I still wanted to maintain control of the process. In the contract, I detailed the ways in which I wanted the auditor to assess credibility, confirmability, dependability, and authenticity following my best understanding of Schwandt and Halpern. I also controlled the amount of time she had for on-site review and subsequent audit.

Auditor: I understood the researcher's need to control the parameters of the audit, but I also took seriously my responsibility to determine the quality of the audit within that framework. Thus I sensed a dynamic tension (and possible source of conflict) built into the auditor/inquirer relationship. I felt the need to acknowledge this tension and develop an understanding between us if we were to work collaboratively and not antagonistically. I did not think the constraints imposed compromised my ability to perform a rigorous audit.

The contract was drafted after we negotiated dates for the on-site visit. The contract outlined the scope of the credibility, confirmability, dependability, and authenticity audits, standards to be used, time frame, fees, auditor qualifications, the nature of the audit report, and a procedure for contract renegotiation. I agreed to the contract specifications and the audit was underway.

Preparing the Audit Work Program

In this third stage, the auditor develops a preliminary plan for the audit based on the scope of the audit and the standards to be used, including the constraints of agreed-on time lines.

Inquirer: Preparing for the audit, I reviewed the audit trail and decided that if there were serious gaps or problems it was too late to rectify them. I had confidence in the structure of my inquiry process. I had less confidence in the unfolding logic of the reconstructions that I had created. I was still suffering from what Berreth (1986) identified as a rhythmic loss of focus permeated with feelings of uncertainty and the loss of an internal standard by which to judge my own work. I was not going to rest easy until the audit was completed.

Auditor: Prior to the on-site visit, I developed a detailed work plan. I relied on background material (research proposal, case studies, etc.) supplied to suggest specific steps in document examination. In reviewing materials, I made notes about the content, issues raised, questions that needed clarification, and specific claims made to pursue later in the auditing process. From this work, I also

became familiar with the case studies, so the time on-site could be devoted exclusively to audit trail review. In reading the case studies, I noted particular statements or questions that seemed surprising or otherwise interesting to serve as material for backtracking to the original data sources on site.

My audit plan included procedures and focusing questions to determine whether findings were credible, dependable, and confirmable to participants in the study. Below are examples of focusing questions I used for trustworthiness:

- What appeared to be the reason for the difference between the two sites in terms of the average number of data units per contact?
- Is there evidence of bias in the selection of five people from each site to participate in the final member check process?
- Do the categories for each site emerge from the data or is there evidence of any imposition of a category system or premature closure on category development?

For authenticity I planned to look for evidence of multiple perspectives, negotiation, fully informed consent, demonstrations of an increase in participant appreciation of the complexities of the neglect decision, and a gain in appreciation of the challenges and opportunities of each stakeholding group in neglect. The other aspects of authenticity would not be assessed.

Examples of focusing questions I used for authenticity included:

- To assess fairness: Are all important stakeholders' perspectives tapped and present in the final report? Are the voices of parents and children as powerfully heard as those of the judges? Is there evidence of stakeholder opportunity to criticize, amend, or negotiate findings through various levels of member checking?
- To assess ontological authenticity: Is there evidence in interviews or member checking material that participants were learning about neglect and the system of child protection? Is there evidence of growing insight about different standpoints on neglect and child protection? Is there evidence of improved understanding of personal perspectives?
- To assess educative authenticity: Is there growing evidence of stakeholder sensitivity to alternative views in interviews and member checks? Do interviews and member checks show that participants seem to better understand views differing from their own?

Implementing the Audit Work Program

Schwandt and Halpern have provided more focusing questions to pose to specific audit trail material in assessing confirmability, dependability, and credibility. We refer the reader to their work for a more complete discussion. Unfortunately, no such clarity currently exists for guiding an authenticity audit. However, because of the relationship between the quality of a research product and the quality of a research process, we decided it stands to reason

that, at least to some degree, demonstration of elements of trustworthiness will also serve to demonstrate dimensions of authenticity.

Credibility in understanding the depth and scope of the issues involved will assure that fairness or a balanced view has been established. Credibility also suggests that increased awareness of the complexity also is achieved. With this, ontological authenticity can be asserted. If a quality hermeneutic circle has been constructed to achieve credibility, an increased understanding of the constructions of others also should have developed, which is educative authenticity.

Dependability will demonstrate the appropriateness of methodological shifts that occurred during the emergent process. One measure of appropriateness is if all perspectives were allowed to have voice and if the data analysis and report represent the multiplicity of perspectives, regardless of assigned or inferred power. If this is demonstrated via participant and data inclusion, then fairness is also demonstrated.

Confirmability demonstrates that the findings are grounded in the data. Credibility also establishes that the results are related to the participants and are not just a reflection of the inquirer's point of view. Participants' warranting of the accuracy of the final product is also a measure of fairness.

Clearly, these are not all the aspects of authenticity, but they served to frame the preliminary elements of the authenticity aspect of our audit.

Auditor: The site visit started late on Friday evening and continued through mid-afternoon Sunday. The first evening, as we spoke informally about the study, we discovered we were drawing similar conclusions from the data. This discovery facilitated the development of trust as it established a bond between us regarding the data and the inferences to be drawn from them. In my mind it also raised questions of auditor bias related to when the auditor should be drawing conclusions about the meaning of the data, but I kept on.

The next morning we reviewed the context of the study and the questions I had from the material that had been sent to me. I was provided an overview and orientation to the materials for the audit including condensed journals, expanded interview journals, data units on 3×5 cards, activity logs, documents, inquirer and debriefer reflexive journals, methodological logs, decision rules, category systems, and various appendixes including coding systems. I became thoroughly oriented to the various coding systems and symbols so that I could track findings back to original data sources.

I reviewed the methodological log to understand how, when, and on what basis methodological decisions were made. To gain further understanding of the inquirer's information processing and the inquiry experience, I then reviewed the reflexive journal, making notes of questions to address in the audit of the case studies. I also noted questions of clarification to discuss over lunch. I later cross-referenced the two journals to examine how what was reported in the reflexive journal related to methodological decisions and vice versa. I cross-referenced activities reported in the reflexive journal with the activity log. I arbitrarily selected for review three interviews conducted across the data collection

time period. I compared each complete field journal entry with the expanded journal entry for that interview, looking for inconsistencies, noting language as recorded and the development of lines of questioning.

During this time the inquirer was available to answer questions and clarify processes. In fact, she and I became aware of the interactive nature of the process as it unfolded and we interrupted each other from time to time with new insights or observations. This "waltz of trust building" allowed us to stay in touch with one another and build the collaborative relationship so important in avoiding the perception of the audit as a threat.

Inquirer: Given my increasing level of discomfort prior to the on-site audit, I was struck by how nonthreatening and helpful the first day's discussions were. By responding to audit related questions, I was putting into propositional form that which had only been intuited up to that point. I was articulating positions and thought processes more clearly. I was energized following this first time, in-depth discussion about the total process with someone who had not been involved, but who was knowledgeable just the same. This person was validating my methodological considerations and research implications without having participated in the inquiry.

Auditor: I was energized as well by the insights my questions engendered. While I had a sense of being part of the discovery process, I was concerned that the resonance we were experiencing on personal and professional levels might compromise the rigor and the trustworthiness of the audit, so I kept notes.

The following day, I reviewed the member check processes for both case studies. I reviewed two complete interviews in the expanded journal for the quality of recording responses and structure of questions. Using an appendix, I traced a number of "clumps" of data from each case study directly back to the original interview notes in the field journal via the note cards and the expanded journal.

With the two completed interviews, the member check feedback, and the methodological journal, I also looked for testimony that would reflect adherence to authenticity. I was particularly interested in evidence that all stakeholders had their voice represented. I looked for testimony and member check reports showing more complex understanding of neglect and for references to apprecia-tion and respect, for greater empathy for other's constructions regarding neglect.

Due to our time constraints, I completed the audit when I returned home by examining the decisions rules for category construction and the final categories developed for each case report. I reviewed the reports and the appendixes again before writing my report.

Inquirer: Having someone else reconstruct my work, looking at the logic of my thought processes and judging the degree to which my personal biases affected the quality of the inquiry process and product was humbling, threatening, energizing and empowering. Although I was powerless in the sense that I could not control or influence the audit beyond the parameters I had established, I felt powerful when the auditor became as excited as I was about what had occurred during my inquiry process; when she agreed with my interpretation logic; and when the importance and intensity of the audit was the subject of our conversa-tions. While I tried to remain nondefensive about my decisions and interpreta-tions, the process remained more intimate and intense than I had envisioned. I had expected a nonpersonal, business-like audit similar to what I had experi-

enced when running a social service agency. This, on the other hand, had a very personal quality to it, much like the inquiry itself.

Auditor: I, too, was empowered by our interactions in ways I had not anticipated. At the time of the audit, I was experiencing the same uncertainty and loss of focus about my own work. Hearing her express some of the same doubts, as well as convictions, about the constructivist methodology was immensely reassuring at a time when I was feeling isolated and stuck. This cross-validation was exciting for both of us.

Preparing the Audit Report

In completing the audit report, the auditor has a responsibility to both the inquirer and the other consumers of this evaluative report. The auditor owns the responsibility for conducting the audit, though the inquirer sets its parameters. The auditor is, however, neither responsible for uncovering unethical behavior nor for agreeing completely with the choice of the practices used in the inquiry process. The auditor's purpose is to attest independently to the fact that the practices used are (or are not) within the boundaries of sound, ethical, constructivist practices. The auditor, in the form of an audit report, offers an opinion, not a guarantee of quality.

Auditor: Preparing the audit report was a straightforward process once the audit was completed. I had found no evidence to suggest that the categories and subsequent reconstructions were not derived directly from the data. I found ample evidence of the use of a variety of strategies and techniques in data collection and data analysis. I found evidence of informant affirmation of the case studies as accurate reconstructions of what they had said and as balanced holistic pictures of their respective communities. In addition, from the sampling, data collection, and informant testimony, the inquiry process was seen to be fair with educational and consciousness-raising dimensions. Testimony also suggested at least some degree of change resulting in greater respect and understanding between stakeholders in the neglect decision.

In writing the report, I followed the outline we had negotiated in the contract. Though I could not absolutely guarantee the quality of the study, I could and did attest that I could find no evidence to suggest major methodological difficulties with the case studies. I wanted to say more in the report, but felt a need to be restrained in my language. Given the models of rather dry accounting audit reports, I did not feel at liberty to express the enthusiasm I felt for the quality of the study, as well as the quality of the auditing process in which we had engaged.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR FUTURE AUDITING PROCESSES

Constructivist inquiry, though not focusing on establishing certitude or universally valid judgments, is directed at deriving meaning from experience.

The accuracy of the inquirer's meaning reconstruction is what the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability are testing. Constructivist inquiry is not simply an interpretive reflection of reality; it is a mutual construction of reality. Authenticity documents the quality of this interventive dimension. Even in alternative research, despite what some may assert (Smith, 1984), there is a difference between well-constructed or sloppy inquiry; between good and poor logic; between accurate and inaccurate reflections of multiple perspective; between respectful, empowering research and insensitive, oppressive research. The criteria and the processes described here do provide sufficient information to make judgments about the quality of a constructivist process and product. It is clear to us that using the Schwandt and Halpern audit model has much to commend it, but in the interest of further refinement of this very important dimension of constructivist inquiry, we offer some insights and suggestions.

Choice of Auditor

The choice of auditor is a critical decision for the inquirer. Our experience indicates the necessity of selecting an independent, external agent. The process is too intense and fraught with subjectivity that could impinge on outside acceptance of the audit results without the distance created by an independent outsider. Our experience also suggests two, not one, dimensions of technical competence are necessary. Content and methodological expertise are both needed to competently address all aspects of trustworthiness and authenticity.

Without familiarity with the substantive issues embedded in the entity being studied, there is little likelihood that the auditor could determine if the findings are logically based on the data for a confirmability audit. Although a naive auditor could trace data clumps back to the original data source, that auditor would be challenged to assess the quality of the logic of the category systems that emerged without some familiarity with the internal logic, assumptions, and understandings already reached in the field of study.

Though a dependability audit would not be much of a challenge for auditors unfamiliar with the content area, some of the methodological decisions based on the political issues that might emerge in the context may be beyond their ability to assess without the concomitant familiarity with the field. Credibility and all dimensions of the authenticity assessment are also substantially dependent on content as well as method expertise. Knowledge about the subject is central in determining if credible findings were produced. This knowledge is also essential in determining if all important voices have been included in the process and if the inquiry had resulted in education and new sophistication about the subject.

Finally, content expertise proved to be essential for us in facilitating the development of inquirer trust in the auditing process and product. Without

that trust, the inquirer remains perfectly able to stonewall and otherwise manipulate the content and process of the audit.

Inquirer Controls Over the Process

Although this inquirer had other reasons to limit the time frame of the audit, Green et al. (1988) suggested that conducting an audit over such a concentrated period allows the auditor to become immersed in the study and thereby gain a holistic understanding of the inquiry process. In addition, when an auditor is familiar with the content under investigation, efforts on the part of the inquirer to limit the scope and depth of the audit will not jeopardize the effort to validate methodological considerations and research implications because the difference between limits for personal self-protection and limits to cover or obfuscate will be apparent. With content familiarity, good judgments can be made to determine if the time limits imposed will impinge on the auditor's ability to attest to the quality of the process and product.

To further mitigate against potential inquirer manipulation, on-site audits are useful. On-site work not only minimizes the distractions for the auditor (just as is found in financial audits); it ensures the availability of all necessary documents and records. When information is not available, the auditor on-site will be more likely to recognize this either as a real gap or something not essential to the logic of the reconstructions being audited. In addition, the intensity of an on-site effort creates an environment within which trust can develop rapidly.

Building Trust in the Inquirer-Auditor Relationship

Because of the anxiety produced by laying open one's complete data files and reflexive journals to an outsider, the development of a trusting relationship is critical to a collaborative audit process with potential for reasonable warrants of quality. Like the constructivist inquiry, the audit can produce dynamic tensions and conflict. These can be a part of a hermeneutic dialectic (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) leading to intense, powerful insights about the inquiry, or this dynamism can be what constrains collaboration and limits a true auditing process.

Shared substantive and methodological expertise are a beginning basis for mutual respect. The intensity of the process, in combination with this mutual respect, can facilitate trust. For us, without this trusting interaction and exchange, it is doubtful that the new insights that were gained in this audit could have been reached as easily. But caution must also be taken regarding

the trusting bond between auditor and auditee, for such resonance may compromise rigor. Overidentification between inquirer and auditor, and the interactive nature of the audit as we enacted it, may create a sense of power about the inquiry and a reassurance about the quality that are unwarranted, given the data. The collaboration and the informality that tend to grow may subtly adjust the expectations about the quality of the work, compromising standards and thus jeopardizing a rigorous audit and solid judgments about quality.

Detecting Inquirer Bias

In this audit, two circumstances raised the question of whether the auditor could detect possible inquirer biases. First, the auditor admitted to preexisting expectations of finding a rigorous study based on previous experience with the inquirer. Second, stronger value resonance than expected on both substantive and methodological dimensions emerged in the audit. These, coupled with the development of trust, led to the auditor role as supporter rather than adversary. Though different from what might be expected in a financial audit, our experience seems congruent with the authenticity dimensions of the constructivist inquiry and the hermeneutic dialectic (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This congruence seems desirable in an interactive process that may be as unending as the inquiry itself. Just as feedback into the inquiry environment created opportunities for new insights and observations among participants, the questions, clarifications, and feedback during the audit produced new insights not possible without the intensely personal, intimate audit process that developed because of a supportive auditor.

The audit has its own power, but it is not without risk. There is the potential for such a strong bond to develop that the auditor becomes co-opted or blinded to potential inquirer biases, much like the potential for inquirer blindness to participant bias and manipulation in an inquiry. Shared mindsets and possible overidentification raise questions about the rigor of the audit that are similar to the standard questions about constructivist inquiry rigor.

Without having to resort to auditing the audit, accepted constructivist inquiry methods can be used as safeguards to enhance the trustworthiness of the audit. The audit process should be documented both methodologically and reflexively. The auditor must address issues of expectations and common values orientations during the process and in the audit report. Bounded subjectivity should be evident. A complete description of all audit activities should be part of the report to allow the reader to assess the rigor of the audit to be certain that compromised standards are not part of the warrant of quality.

This attention to bias should not move in a direction contrary to the constructivist assumptions to what we experienced as pseudo-objectivity in the audit report. A dry, at-a-distance reporting on standards of quality and performance fails to accurately reflect the power and the intimacy of our audit. We recommend replacing restraint with enthusiasm whenever it is warranted as a first step in the development of an audit report that has the same spirit of richness, which is the goal of a constructivist case report.

Need for Methodological Documentation

Though Lincoln and Guba (1986) and Schwandt and Halpern (1988) discussed the need for documenting methodological decisions and insights about the inquiry process, as well as emerging reconstructions throughout data collection and data analysis, we would urge the extension of that documentation to include case study writing and the audit. New insights emerged during the drafting of the case study. Continued journaling forced continued analysis, resulting in shifts in category systems and in the emergence of new relationships in the data. Documenting these shifts is important for tracing back to the raw data from the finished written product. It also aids the auditor in tracking inquirer biases.

It should also be clear that the auditing process emerged as an extension of data analysis. As the outsider becomes quickly and intimately immersed in the study and asked the naive or critical question, or commented on a relationship, the inquirer was able to clarify tacit knowledge. New propositional insights then were reflected in the final product as a result of the audit. For this reason, the audit should be timed before the inquirer has achieved final closure on the inquiry report.

Authenticity Audit

Schwandt and Halpern provided no guidelines for an authenticity audit, but our experience indicates that this type of audit is possible without the need to create new tools or documents for the audit trail. This is not to say that auditing for authenticity is not without its own special challenges, which must be addressed if this aspect or rigor is to become fully developed.

For now, we have demonstrated that fairness can be judged based on the degree to which stakeholding voices are heard and protected in the emergent design, data collection, and member checks. Two major warrants of fairness include the product of the process and the voices of the participants regarding the process. If even-handed representation of all viewpoints is clear in the case

study and if testimonials of the participants indicate that they felt included, respected, and heard, then there is a good chance that the process was fair.

Short of observing the hermeneutic dialectic (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 12-13, 249-255) in action, warrants of ontological authentication should include data from member checks and testimony of participants. Participant responses, including those of the researcher, should show an appreciation of how complex the issue under investigation is. Statements about possession of a better understanding of self and others are adequate warrants that consciousness raising has occurred.

Educative authenticity should also occur through the continual circling of communication in the dialectic hermeneutic. But without observing this process, reflexive and methodological journals, expanded field notes, and the series of member checks can document educative authenticity. Evidence that the inquirer has incorporated ideas from one perspective into the conversation with individuals from another perspective as demonstrated in the field notes is a beginning measure. When these field notes also demonstrate that other participants are forging accommodations, full educative authenticity is apparent. If these accommodations are not apparent in the moment of data collections, they may be present as testimonials as the process is terminating.

Because of follow-up needs, catalytic and tactical authenticity are more difficult to document at the point of an audit. The difficulty with these dimensions of authenticity auditing is related to the political nature of constructivist inquiry. It is research that by its nature, if done well, empowers participants and facilitates social change (Crowley, 1995). Without direct observation of the hermeneutic dialectic and further follow-up to judge social change, it strikes us that true warrants of the quality of the process are close to impossible.

WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

Both the inquirer and the auditor of this constructivist investigation entered the audit with serious reservations about its benefits. We now see that having an independent external auditor attest to the quality of the methodology, the accuracy of the reconstructions, and the quality of the research process is beneficial. The auditor's immersion in another's study provided insights and learning about constructivist methods, which in turn made more competent constructivist researchers of both of us. We believe that the purposiveness necessary to create a thorough and complete audit trail rather than leading to possible deception and bias, as Green et al. (1988) suggested, introduced more reflexivity into the inquiry and more sophisticated searches for meaning. We are now convinced that the benefits in data management and

reflexivity to document trustworthiness and authenticity for outside audit increase the potential power of a constructivist research intervention for all participants. But much more development is needed if auditing for trust-worthiness and authenticity is to become a consistently implemented part of a constructivist inquiry. Further development is also needed if nonconstruc-tivists are to recognize the audit for its potential, instead of diminishing the practice as "misplaced rigor."

Generally speaking, both the trustworthiness and authenticity dimensions of the audit require further development. More guidance is needed for both the inquirer and the auditor. The inquirer should be provided more informa-tion about the degree of control that should be maintained in the audit. Because the inquirer has been involved in an emergent, almost uncontrollable and certainly unpredictable process, insecurities will be present about the quality of the structure of the inquiry including the audit trail. With this will come a tendency to wish to bound and limit auditor access to material. Guidelines about the degree of control appropriate for the auditee should be developed and included in auditing expectations.

This need for control might be moderated if standards were to be devel-oped to indicate what is sufficient documentation of trustworthiness and authenticity on all dimensions. In addition, focusing questions and issues for the auditee and auditor should be developed for the assessment of authen-ticity, just as Schwandt and Halpern have developed them for trustworthi-ness. Because of the delicacy in assessing the quality of an interpretive process in which different perspectives are compared and contrasted in an attempt to reach mutual understanding, if not consensus, direct observation may never be possible. Perhaps we must be satisfied with serious attention to the ideals of authenticity in the short term. In the long term, support for follow-up must be developed for true assessment of the quality of the constructivist inquiry process. Only through evaluation of effective change can judgments be made about the appropriate use of power and the degree of openness and empow-ering practices that are assumed to be central to quality constructivist inquiry.

Standards are needed against which to judge the appropriateness of categories and the logic used to link these categories for meaning making. Auditors should be helped to know when it is appropriate to draw conclu-sions about the meaning of data. We join Green et al. (1988) in calling for further development of standards for judging the emergent nature of the inquiry.

We also see the need for standards in developing the auditing relationship. Much guidance is possible from the expectations regarding relationships with respondents in the inquiry process, but until this audit takes on the character of constructivist inquiry instead of financial auditing, the auditor's role will continue to be unclear and potentially conflictual. Clear guidance is necessary

to assist the auditor in determining the degree of support to offer during the audit interaction.

This short discussion of our experience, full of warnings and advice, should be construed to contain more advice than warnings. We have become enthusiastic supporters of auditing who recognize areas in need of immediate development. We hope that our work has furthered this effort and that our suggestions will be valuable for other researchers committed to the development of constructivist inquiry.

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