

Q Applied to Educational Issues

Diane Montgomery

Oklahoma State University

Putting together a special issue within an entire professional domain in order to demonstrate the questions and usefulness of a method is a daunting task. Learning is a basic human function that is as natural to sentient beings as breathing; however, education is the business of responding to individual needs, goals, aspirations, credentials, curiosities, and development. As educators strive to learn more about the uniqueness of clients, students, learners, or colleagues, we find that our own openness to experience, mindfulness, and critical consciousness (Friere, 2000) will teach a deep and abiding respect to subjectivity. Q methodology is our window to learning about subjective reactions or responses to the issues confronting professionals daily.

This issue of *Operant Subjectivity* is dedicated to teaching and informing educational researchers and others about the strength and value of Q as studies are conducted to learn more about the lives of the people encountered regularly. The articles represent studies of subjectivity among people within a broad range of ages from preschoolers in daycare centers to those in undergraduate and graduate programs in higher education. Geographical representation is across Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States. From the technical to professional to philosophical, this issue promises to teach new lessons and initiate subsequent discussions!

Placed first in this issue is a representation of the foremost value of ethics in research. Thorsen and Størksen present an analysis of the ethical concerns, practical issues, and details for Q methodology that must be addressed when studying very young children. They detail the lessons learned in a study conducted in Norway with children aged five, some of whom were in families of divorce or separation. They describe the necessity to understand the lived experience of the child in order to make sense of the sorting patterns and offers methodological suggestions for effective sorting practices. Their use of images and a condition of instruction to detect general emotional responses is innovative, demonstrating skill in using the method appropriately.

Hathcoat and Montgomery present a methodological curiosity for epistemology. Based on two studies that used the same Q sample and P

set, a second-order analysis of results demonstrated another level of understanding of the ways that the participants described what they believed about personal epistemology in academic learning compared to knowing about religion. The authors discuss how the second-order analysis brought surprising results compared to analyzing all sorts only one time.

Two of the entries in this issue make a call for using Q methodology in specific fields of study, one in educational leadership and the other in nurse-education outcome research. Oterkiil presents a study of perceptions of leadership among all school personnel at four primary schools in Norway. Petit dit Dariel calls for the use of Q methodology to better plan nurse education programs accommodating the views of key stakeholders including patients.

Closing out this issue is a report of a study conducted with occupational therapy students to determine views about e-learning. Khatri used Q to find two somewhat opposing views and uses the results to generate recommendations for addressing student needs and views when implementing electronic techniques to enhance coursework in the professions.

Reference

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum. (first published in 1970).