Exploring an extended role for legitimizing self-study action research projects: From examiners' perspectives

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Abstract

This paper aims to elucidate the standards of good practice that external examiners developed when considering written reports of self-study action research projects. It also seeks to reveal the methodological and epistemological assumptions in the examiners' thinking regarding the academic legitimacy of self-study action research projects. The context is the work of four examiners appointed by Walter Sisulu University (WSU) between the years 2011 and 2012 to review and write narrative reports on one doctoral thesis and one masters mini-dissertation project. The perspectives of the four examiners regarding the depth to which self-study action research candidates should go in the process of validating their research projects are analyzed using autobiography and documentation. The data sources comprise the examiners' evaluations, the author's evaluations and the University research policy documents. Analysis reveals that the process of gaining academic legitimation for a self-study action research project can be enhanced by developing principles and standards as criteria for self-study action research assessment. The paper concludes by making a claim that external examiners' understanding and criticism of self-study action research projects deepen and extend ways of validating self-studies as scholarly research work. A set of criteria are provided for consideration by university higher degree committees (HDC) and other practitioners in their quest for quality in self-studies.

Keywords: **Self-study Action Research; Legitimizing Self-studies; Quality in Self-studies; Transformative Education/al Studies.**

1. Introduction

I need to indicate from the outset that this paper looks at the external examiners' reports on a written and approved doctoral thesis and a masters dissertation, and not at oral examination. The master-dissertation candidate graduated in 2012 and I, the doctoral candidate graduated in 2013. We are both graduates from Walter Sisulu University (WSU) – South Africa. Self-study action research examiners often complain about the time required to write assessment reports on self-study action research projects. They find the exercise time-consuming and frustrating due to some of the universities' requirements. When external examiners judge a research report (at any level) they are instructed to assess the work in terms of specific criteria. In this paper, I highlight ways in which self-study scholarly work can be critiqued. I also highlight some of the normative criteria used by institutions to evaluate research projects – mainly scientific traditional research – and then go on to reflect on criteria as seen by the three examiners of the self-study doctoral thesis and the one examiner of the masters' mini-dissertation.

The examiners were required by the university to judge both the thesis and masters' mini-dissertation and write a narrative report of their impressions including an overall result – a percentage for the masters mini-dissertation and a 'pass' or 'fail' for the doctoral thesis. A set of criteria as guidelines were provided to the examiners. It is doubtful that some of the criteria are designed to judge self-study action research projects. My skepticism is based on the fact that self-study action research should have its own language and terms, "that could hold big ideas central to the field" (Graig, 2009, p.31). These methodological principles of self-study action research are lacking in WSU research policies.

The methodological approach of self-study action research requires different criteria to judge validity (redefined as 'trustworthiness'). One possible explanation of why self-study action research projects are difficult to assess for quality is the introduction of *self* (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.15). Studying ones-*self* makes the project sound as if no scientific research was conducted and as a result the work lacks trustworthiness and quality. I concur with Bullough and Pinnegar (2001, p.15) that the criteria for making a case for quality have yet to be developed. However, I am also of the view that the case for judging quality in self-study action research can be speeded up by our higher degree committees (HDC) by reforming policies around what constitutes a legitimate research output. This paper claims to make a contribution in knowledge generation regarding the challenge that faces both self-study action researchers and examiners in ways to enhance the robustness of the trustworthiness and quality of self-studies.

2. Methodological principles used in legitimizing self-study action research reports – literature

The issues for enhancing legitimacy include authenticity, trustworthiness, generalizability, and transparency (Loughran & Northfield, 1998; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Graig, 2009; Samaras, 2011). One of the criticisms against teacher inquiries and self-study action research is their lack of generalizability – the results of the findings are limited to the author's practice context and cannot be generalized beyond their classroom. Generalizability is realized by "wider interaction with colleagues" (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p. 8) through which the implications of my work can become applicable to others' own contexts (Samaras,

2011; Dzakiria, 2012). However, I have observed that practitioners of self-study action research do not put emphasis on the issue of generalizability *per se*, but on what Whitehead and McNiff (2006) call "global influence". According to these authors, this can be achieved by collaboration among the "communities of educational enquiry" (*ibid*, p. 160). Dzakiria (2012) suggests that, after effecting changes to one's own context, the power of generalising the conclusions should be left to the readers based on the premise of relatability. "The concept of relatability entails the degree of relatedness on whether knowledge gained from one context is relevant to, or applicable for other context, or the same context in another time frame" (Dzakiria, 2012, p. 46).

Self-study action research *endurability* is, "grounded in the trustworthiness and the meaningfulness" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20). Trustworthiness is understood to mean the degree to which we can "rely on the concepts, methods and inferences of the study" (Mishler, as cited in Samaras, 2011, p. 217). Authors argue that trustworthiness is demonstrated and enhanced by collecting data from various perspectives and data collection methods – a research design generally known as 'triangulation'. Another interesting approach that also enhances trustworthiness and meaningfulness is *transparency*, which refers to making "one's practice explicit to oneself and to others" (Samaras, 2011, p. 216). This author is of the opinion that transparency can be enhanced by a group of critical friends. McNiff (1988) refers to this group of critical friends as a "validation group" which can help self-study action researchers move their ideas forward.

Trustworthiness in Graig's (2009) words means making self-study action research projects "more believable and actionable" to other educators and researchers (p. 31). Graig puts forward the following criteria for judging trustworthiness:

1. Intentional human action linked to human knowledge growth
2. A socially and contextually situated project
3. Engaging selves and others in interrogating aspects of teaching and learning by staging experience
4. Commitment toward the construction of meaning and knowledge.

According to Reddy, Ankiewicz and Swardt (2005) traditional scientific research sometimes seeks to establish trustworthiness by engaging the services of an experienced researcher to conduct interviews and data coding. In the same way, in self-study action research, the work should be presented to the validation group for trustworthiness.

The following section reveals the inconsistency and lack of methodological principles of self-study action research in WSU research policies.

3. Methodological principles used by WSU in legitimizing scientific research projects

Firstly, I need to state at this juncture that, despite general agreement among WSU-HDC members that self-study action research is a scientific research method, the members valorize compliance to third-person scientific research method. In scientific traditional research, objectivity is seen to validate the 'truth' of the results (Wood, Morar & Mostert, 2007). Objectivity contains issues of reliability, generalizability, validity and authenticity. WSU

added the following to its list of criteria to judging masters-dissertation and doctoral thesis projects:

1. sufficiency of sources including latest literature
2. overall contribution to development of knowledge
3. overall contributions and recommendations.

The regulations clearly indicate an inconsistency and/or contradiction with what self-study action research scholars deem necessary to be the criteria used to judge the quality of their research. Examiners are also required to include compliments about the work and suggestions for improvements where appropriate. I believe this last criterion was accepted and seen as an opportunity by the examiners to comment on the methodological principles of self-study action research as shown in the section *Criteria in examining self-study action research projects as seen by the examiners* (see Section 8 below). It is not difficult to imagine how difficult it must have been for the examiners of self-studies to award a pass or fail using a third-person scientific research instrument on self-studies projects. It is one thing to agree that a self-study action research approach can assist lecturer-educators improve their practice and another to recognize self-study action research to be a legitimate research approach. Globally, institutions of higher education have begun to recognize self-study action research as a legitimate research approach that leads to social change (De Lange, 2012, p. 2). My impetus to look at this seeming local ignorance arises from the stance of some WSU research ethics committees' failure to recognize self-study action research principles worthy of producing scholarly work of sufficient quality; academics are, however, allowed to improve their practice using action research methodology. Consequently, the findings of this paper should be of use to (1) the research ethics committees who wish to regard self-study action research method-logies as meeting the criteria for quality of research work and (2) supervisors and self-studies researchers who are keen to produce trustworthy and scholarly work of adequate quality.

4. Self-study action research in South Africa

Unlike countries such as Croatia in which a self-study action research approach is neglected (Bognar, 2013, p. 1), the attitude has changed towards this approach in recent years in South African universities. For instance, in 2011 three South African universities (Walter Sisulu University-WSU; University of Kwa-Zulu Natal-UKZN; Durban University of Technology-DUT) started a Transformative Education/al Studies (TES 2010) project funded by the South African National Research Foundation (SA-NRF). The project by its very nature raises concerns regarding our practice in terms of how we execute our duties as teachers / teacher educators / lecturers and the role that self-study and action research can play in improving the experience of teaching and learning, with a view to achieving better results for our students. The TES project is an interdisciplinary collaborative effort which aims not only to enhance and study the development of self-reflexive pedagogic research but also the supervision capacity and research through-put among the participants. The participants are lecturer-educators and researchers working at the three universities who are undertaking Masters and Doctoral research within their educational practice.

The results of the project to date (2013) are two qualified doctoral candidates and more than five masters of education students. A further study – *From rhetoric to reality: the role of Living Theory Action Research in transforming education* – conducted by Wood, Morar,

and Mostert (2007) from another South African University (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University – NMMU) is a clear indication that self-study action research is gaining recognition as an alternative approach that can assist universities in their quest to improve research through-put rate. However, the problem still lies with our university authorities – HDC in this instance. The seeming reluctance of the HDC to reform and endorse an instrument that can be used to judge and examine the quality of self-study action research projects compromises the legitimacy of such reports. It can further be described as a lack of clear professional vision. Our HDC should be aware that introducing the new scholarship into our universities means becoming involved in an epistemological battle, as Schon (1995) describes it. Schon (1995, p.31) argues that, if the new form of scholarship "is to mean anything it must imply a kind of action research with norms of its own" which will conflict with the prevailing epistemology built into research universities. The rigidity of these educational policies no doubt restricts academic staff members from putting their acquired knowledge through practice into action so as to improve their practice and generate new knowledge. Therefore, I argue that, if universities are serious about their 'contribution to the development of new knowledge', then the epistemology of educational policy must legitimize the use of self-study action research terminology in their 'evaluation instruments'.

5. The context, purpose and question

The question that prompted me to embark on the enquiry that forms the basis of this paper is: 'How can examiners' methodological and epistemological assumptions/undertakings extend and deepen understanding of quality in self-study projects?' Their narrative reports are used as a framework for determining what makes a self-study action research a scholarly work of sufficient quality. A set of criteria are drawn from their reports and discussed further for meaning. The order in which I discussed them is arbitrary. To avoid putting words into their mouths – by re-writing the reports – I italicize their direct quotations. Let us be clear about my purpose. This paper discusses a new way of assessing quality in self-study action research projects as highlighted by the examiners of a doctoral thesis and a masters dissertation. That is, the paper is mainly intended to offer other examiners and all others not familiar with the methodological principles of the self-study genre, the criteria that can be met to ensure quality in candidates' research projects.

According to Whitehead and McNiff (2009, p. 31) at master's level, self-study action research candidates focus on explaining their practice by interrogating their ideas and values as well as explaining how they have tested their thinking against the ideas of real people and those in the literature. At doctoral level, candidates make an original claim to knowledge and explain in what way it is original and what its significance might be for their own education and for the education of others.

Lastly, I need to (for the context of the paper) indicate that there is a subtle difference in meaning between action enquiries (study of one's own actions – Riel, 2010, p. 1) and self-study enquiries (use of self experiences as a resource – Samaras & Freese, in Lassonde, Galman & Kossnik, 2009): but because they have a common goal – *practice improvement* – some researchers refer to both forms of enquiry as 'self-study action research'. For instance, Laboskey (2004) is of the opinion that using participatory or action research, positions the self in relationship to the context of what is being studied.

6. Data gathering and analysis

In self-study action research, data is gathered and analyzed using autobiography and documentation because the researcher is one of the voices in the conversation (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16). Data sources comprise my personal reflections, examiners' evaluations and the WSU research policy documents. I reflected on my own doctoral thesis and the masters mini-dissertation self-study action research projects as I try to make sense of the examiners' evaluations of our projects. I have also critically analyzed the University research policy documents with the aim of determining criteria used to judge quality in candidates' projects. These different sources of data have allowed me to gain diverse perspectives on the criteria used to determine quality in self-studies and embrace the trustworthiness of my conclusions (Harrison, Pithouse-Morgan, Conolly & Meyiwa, 2012, p. 21).

7. Ethics

In line with the code of ethics, examiners' names are not revealed in this paper. I have opted to use symbols, for example Examiner A, Examiner B and so on. I also use a pseudonym (Siza) for the masters mini-dissertation candidate. I requested to use Siza's examiner's evaluation report. She e-mailed me both the report and her self-study research project.

8. Criteria in examining self-study action research projects as seen by the examiners

In this section, I present criteria as used by the examiners of the doctoral thesis and masters-dissertation projects, criteria that I believe can lead to an improved quality in self-studies. I highlight their views on how trustworthiness can be enhanced. Their perspectives are based on the methodological principles of self-study action research. Their comments are italicized and in between are supported by brief discussion and interpretation of their meanings.

8.1. Criteria 1: Candidates opinions and insight should take priority over other people's knowledge

According to Examiner D, the masters mini-dissertation candidate (Siza) was afraid of facing whatever her critical reflections would reveal. The examiner encourages the self-study action researcher to write what is in their minds and hearts so that the reader can understand their *research action and the outcomes that will follow.* To achieve this not only was I able to link my voice to the self, my voice was *heard throughout the study* (Examiner B). I also acknowledged my students' voices by including their voices in my narratives. My *voice* means I used 1st person voice when pointing to personal experiences "fulfilling an important quality standards of the interpretive paradigm" (Taylor & Medina, 2013, p. 8).

In critical reflective self-study action research, candidates must refrain from quoting others for validity. Examiner D reminds us that one of the major objectives of critical reflective action research is that researchers will become competent in investigating personal and professional behaviours for their improvement. The examiner argues that too much emphasis

on quoting others for validity may imply that *the candidate's opinions and insights have no validity.* In order to avoid too much reliance on other people's opinions, self-studies candidates must write a full account of their values and beliefs. Both of us used our values as standards against which we measured our practices to judge if indeed they have improved. Siza demonstrated in her study that, in order to distinguish something as an improvement, one must consider making a value-judgment. I also demonstrated in my study how a negation of one's values can become a concern. I set the study to allow myself an opportunity to live my values fully in my practice and use them to test my claims to knowledge. In Examiner D's view, self-study action research projects must be values-driven for them to have the required educational influence and social influence. Our beliefs documented (separately) as an account of all that we were thinking and doing relative to our studies.

8.2. Criterion 2: The self-studies candidates have an obligation to demonstrate their insight of the self-study action research methodology

Both Examiners C and D became worried about the lack of consistency shown by us. Siza used questions to frame her thoughts and I failed to do that throughout my thesis. Examiner D urged candidates to use framework structure and questions *for clarity and impact*. Self-study action research projects normally start with the questions of the kind: 'How do I improve…?', 'What is my concern regarding…?', and 'Why am I concerned about…?' Whitehead (1989) uses questions to judge the validity of self-study action research studies as well as the claim to knowledge. The author explains that the explanation given by educational practitioners in making sense of their practice is characterized by the logic of question and answer. My insight of self-study action research methodology was demonstrated by the manner in which I presented my study – *in a clear and logical sequence which makes reading easy* (Examiner B). Reacting to the way I followed and applied the cyclic nature of action research, the examiner wrote: *Data for each cycle were collected, analyzed and reflected upon to decide on the next cycle.* That is, the purpose together with criteria and standards used to judge the performance in each cycle must be clearly articulated. Examiner C congratulated me for the *wonderful showcasing of a typical action research study.* That is, I manage to demonstrate my insight of self-study action research as methodology that teacher educators should embrace to develop their practice. Examiner D argued that, in a critical reflective self-study action research project, the candidate should answer the question: *What was the process that led to his/her knowing?* The process should therefore start from the identification of the concern or question to the final reflections, thus demonstrating to the reader that the work has met all the requirements.

Self-studies candidates should be prepared to answer the question, 'What do I expect to contribute to the knowledge base of my practice subject?' A candidate who fails to provide or partly provides an answer to this question cannot be trusted – the quality of his/her research can be questioned. Siza's insight into the methodology of self-studies is demonstrated by her ability to present her study in a clear and logical sequence which makes reading easy. Her main research question ties up neatly with the purpose and significance of the study. Examiner C says: *self-studies research have become quite topical as they provide a different angle of our understanding of research and knowledge generation.* In this era of e-Learning, I see in my everyday encounter with students, that knowledge found in books is

disputed; it is as if everything written in books does not make sense anymore. I see more 'new' knowledge being created and 'old' knowledge being disputed. I have learned that teacher educators and students should be given an opportunity to contest and create knowledge that makes sense in this era and, most importantly, in their world – their life is surrounded by changing climate, shifting socio-political imbalances and new technologies. Siza says that self-study action research helped her learn that is not about doing her own personal inquiry but helping others.

8.3. Criterion 3: Educational and social influence should form the primary goal of self-studies projects

Self-studies candidates need to be clear about the influence of his/her research on him/her. Whitehead (2011) encourages self-study action researchers in the generation of a living educational theory to acknowledge and explain their influences. Scientific traditional research principles put emphasis on generalizability of findings. We (self-study action researchers) value the influence of the end results on the participants and the researchers. According to Examiner D this can be done by reflecting on the question: *"How has my study influenced me?"* In responding to this question, Siza responded by referring to the realization that, when conducting the study, it became more than just teaching to her but instilled a desire to improve what she was doing. The candidate should also be able to translate their critical reflections into useful action, not only for their own benefit but also for the benefit of others. One member of my validation group had this to say about the influence: *I found your area of research very interesting. It would be great to try your theories in other institutions of higher learning*. Examiner D was also of the view that a critical reflective justification should be provided of how the self-study action research approach can contribute to the improvement of education. Through the creation of my living educational theory, my study contributes to the development of teaching and learning skills at institutions of higher learning. Living educational theories simply mean that explanations of educational influences in learning are created in the course of the inquiries (Whitehead, 2011).

If the idea of generalizability of knowledge becomes an important criterion for judging the quality of self-studies projects, then "emphasizing collaboration with and sharing among students, parents and colleagues, the methodology of action research has the idea of generalizability inherently incorporated within" (Schumacher, 2007, p.29). Self-study action research is research. In the definition of research, the portion that says research is systematic investigation is fulfilled by action research (Schumacher, 2007, p.29).

8.4. Criterion 4: The self-studies candidate should demonstrate knowledge creation and originality

Originality of new knowledge means going beyond existing knowledge. New knowledge adds to the existing body of knowledge. Originality is the idea that something is being done, or is discovered to exist, for the first time. In self-study action research that *something* is "You know how and why you have improved your practice" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009, p. 14). Another important factor to be considered is whether the candidate is able to add new knowledge to the existing body of knowledge about the phenomenon studied. The candidate in his/her claims to knowledge should say or reveal something never said or revealed before. Examiner C regards this point as a very important aspect of a thesis

presented *for doctoral candidature.* Interestingly, my claims were not entirely new knowledge according to Examiner A; however, I managed to add knowledge to ways of *inviting students to become active learners.* According to Examiner B there should be evidence that both the researcher and the research participants benefitted from the study. My main method of data collection ('chats') opened a dialogue between students and me; as a result I became a motivator to some students. I also received a lot of feedback from students that indicated areas where I could still improve. Original ideas and new discoveries are hard to come by, regardless of the research methodology. What needs to be checked, therefore, are the instances where the self-studies candidate demonstrates evidence of how his/her practice has improved. According to Examiner B my study will definitely contribute significantly to the improvement of the teaching and learning strategies *of both university lecturers and student teachers*. This is to say that, even if my study does not present new knowledge in its entirety, I appeared keen to move away from the teacher-centred approach that dominates university lecture halls, to a student-centred approach that fosters maximum student participation. The examiner seems to agree with Graig (2009) that knowledge contribution has a major role to play in self-studies. That is, the generation of new knowledge or original contributions to knowledge of the subject must be a requirement for doctoral degree candidates.

8.5.   Criterion 5: The role played by self in the problematic situation should be criteria candidates are held to

Examiner C says that the study of self-study action research is *self-evaluative,* when reflecting on the manner in which I (a doctoral candidate) used subjective personal pronouns, that is, the use of *I, We,* and *Our*. According to the examiner, I managed to bring to the study what he refers to as the *researcher's touch.* Nevertheless, he acknowledges the fact that a number of examiners and researchers still query the use of subjective personal pronouns. Whitehead (2010, p.4) was taught to remove 'I' from scientific traditional accounts to enhance objectivity; this was thought to reduce subjectivity and bias. Now, the use of 'I' has found a 'home' – in self-study action research. Examiner B uses a slightly different terminology: *self-corrective.* Masters mini-dissertation candidate (Siza) was shy about using the first person active voice. However, she was reminded by Examiner D that readers want to hear her voice. According to Examiner D the active voice should use action words, for instance *I-We*. The use of a third person passive voice leaves the impression that the candidate was a disinterested by-stander, possibly leading readers to question the methodological approach. Samaras (2011, p.215) emphasizing the role of self in the problematic situation asks: "Have you been honest about any personal bias you brought to the study?" Candidates should be open to outcomes of data other than should be clearly stated.

The methodology of self-study action research requires researchers to inquire *with* and not *on* research participants, meaning others (participants) are directly involved and will bring you – *self* – into the problematic situation whether *self* likes it or not. My-*self* was brought into the problematic situation by a way of exploring who I am as a lecturer educator. That was when I started thinking deeply and sincerely about my academic values. I agree with Biko (as cited in Boaduo, 2013, p. 223) that "...for we cannot be conscious of ourselves and yet remain in bondage. We want to attain the envisioned self, which is a free self". Examiners should check if the candidate has been able to position *self* (himself/herself) in relationship to the context of what is being studied (Laboskey, 2004). As a form of legitimizing my enquiry, I

reflected on what the research participants were telling me before I could bring my-*self* into the picture – sharing my beliefs and ideas about teaching-learning practices at universities.

8.6. Criterion 6: Few sources in literature review of self-studies cannot be viewed as a limited reading

There should be a balance between old and new sources (Examiner B). Self-studies candidates should demonstrate that educational knowledge is not stagnant – what was held to be true three to four decades ago may not necessarily be true today. Examiner B contends that *evolution of concepts must be clearly indicated.* According to Examiner A, the evidence of hard and fruitful work can only be *demonstrated by a wide and deep reference to the literature.* Examiner D concurs: *the candidates should read widely and think deeply about his/her work.* Examiner C offers a different view: *only relevant literature should be consulted* – which is in keeping with the spirit and nature of self-study action research. A paucity of relevant sources is often the case in self-study research, frequently due to the uniqueness of a given research setting. Pithouse-Morgan and van Laren (2012, p. 416) noted the growing awareness among some academics that: "… changes recommended in academic research literature often do not appear to make any substantive difference too many of the problems that are being researched". Self-studies candidates on a normal basis would search literature that is within a similar setting. In my research project, I reviewed literature on studies conducted by other scholars into 'practice improvement'. Their work assisted me in searching for the answer to the sub-question: *How can I adapt my teaching and encourage students to ask questions as I am striving towards improving my practice?* I learned suitable strategies for practice improvement from their success and challenges; this should be the ultimate goal of literature review in self-studies. Siza explains that, in trying to explore the curriculum, she reviewed literature that assisted her understanding rather than just any literature to add more references to her account. She searched for literature that informed and shaped her research design.

During my DEd research, I discovered that a literature review in self-studies should be carried out from the moment one decides to put pen to paper. One should search the literature that informs research design, theories and phenomena that shape one's study, data gathering techniques and analysis, besides literature that extends one's knowledge on the topic. This is an ongoing process in self-study action research. This idea is supported by the work of Samaras (2011) into self-study teacher research, when she says: "A literature review enables you to locate and build theories that connect to your research and thinking about your goals and strategies" (p. 128). However, in my other paper entitled: "Using academic and life values to improve teaching-learning skills" submitted for publication (http://ersc.nmmu.ac.za/index.php?id=2), both the internal editor and the panel of external reviewers gave a score of 2 (i.e. below average) regarding the adequacy of the literature review – only because they felt it did not comply with the regulation: *literature that sufficiently extends one's knowledge on the topic.* The methodology of self-study action research was accepted as *good* by the panel; however, the problem lies with the limited sources that are available (supposedly) to extend my knowledge on the topic. Thus, I was left me with the question: *What role does literature review play in legitimizing self-study action research project*? This is my next assignment.

9. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have made an attempt to draw the attention of research ethics committees to how to draft a *good* code of legitimizing self-studies scholarly research projects. I emphasize the word *good* for the simple reason that the existing code largely excludes the methodological principles of self-studies. Judging by the comments made by the examiners, the methodological approach of self-studies requires alternative criterioa to judge its validity. Our universities need to cater for the 'new' research methodological approach in their quest to establishing rigour and validity of scholarly research projects that include self-studies. Until the university codes of practice recognize and accommodate the methodological principles of self-study action research, academic researchers will not accept self-studies as a legitimate form of inquiry. For example, one of the goals of the WSU research policy is to: *create an enabling environment for staff to conduct both applied and basic research.* This aim can be realized only if the university uses a broad range of research strategies that include self-study action research.

Despite the seeming contradictions and inconsistencies between the WSU research and self-studies criteria, the university research ethics committee accepted the examiners' judgments and certified us and our enquiries. I do not attempt to question the competence of the committee members but it simply shows that the final decision to determine whether a candidate's project represent scholarly work lies with the examiners. No assessment was subsequently carried out by the higher degree committee members. The first thing they should notice after an assessment is the language contradiction; in the university guidelines no mention is made of concepts such as *critical reflection, critical friend, living theory, trustworthiness, knowledge generation* and so forth. This is the terminology that makes self-study action research different from other forms of scientific research. On the other hand, even though the university criteria and guidelines put the examiners in an awkward position due to the absence of self-study action research terminology, they never raised the alarm about this critical point. The least they could have done was to check the consistency with the university regulations as stipulated in the evaluation instrument and any inconsistency should worry them. I believe the inconsistency or contradictions justify a call for a review of the regulations by the HDC in order to accommodate the methodological principles of self-study action research as academically legitimate.

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