Reviewer's report

Title: Remediation of At-Risk Medical Students: Theory in Action

Version: 2 Date: 15 July 2013

Reviewer: Tina Martimianakis

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This is an interesting paper relevant to educators and faculty developers interested in devising and implementing effective remediation learning opportunities. The authors are clearly building on previously published research and this study is an essential component to the remediation theory they have developed. Attention to the way the methodology is described and the findings are presented will improve the paper and provide a more thoughtful discussion for readers interested in this topic. The following recommendations are provided to assist the authors in better highlighting the strengths of their work.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Abstract:

1. The authors speak about the convergence of opinion of participants. What were they in agreement about? Remember the abstract is a stand alone component of an article.

2. Which theory of remediation are the author’s referring to in the last sentence of the opening par or the Background section of the Abstract?

Background:

Opening par:

1. Be more specific about geographic context throughout the paper. For example, in what educational setting is the issue of retention a problem? What about the issue of students not being adequately prepared to attend higher education institutions – who is reporting this as a problem? Given that you are working with constructivist and socio-cultural theories of learning – it is important to align this with the way you describe education as a process and a situated relational experience.

2. Section describing aims:

The first aim seems to be an evaluation of the capacity of the methodological approach to apprehend details relevant to the remediation of students. While the second aim, as described, focuses on the specific remediation approach and the difference between experienced and inexperienced teachers in remediation classroom contexts. My suggestion would be to inverse the objectives. The way the findings are presented and later discussed fulfill the second objective more
so than they do the first objective.

Methodology

1. This is the weakest part of the paper. An interesting tension is set up, the desire to develop a theory of remediation that is transferable and potentially generalizable to many contexts, using a combination of methodological approaches and qualitative methods that focus the exploration on the context specificity of situated interactions. This tension is interesting and should be better highlighted. As it stands, the results and discussion reproduce the tension (particularly through the limitations section), and the reader is left wondering why if the purpose is to come up with something that is generalizable did we engage in this exercise to spend so much time on the situated specificity of the interactions? I should note that I am of the camp that there are important and meaningful reasons to spend time thinking about situated relational issues in educational contexts and think your research has a lot to offer the research community. I am objecting to the way the data is being presented and framed.

2. You spend a lot of time speaking about the objectivity of the data and the so many ways it can be confounded by a situated approach (including the standpoint of the researcher). A more productive discussion would be to spend time orienting the reader to the several methodologies you are drawing from and how you plan to combine them. What makes ethnography, socio-cultural discourse analysis, conversation analysis, discourse interpretation (is this a methodology or an analytical approach), and discursive psychology compatible? How are you drawing from each of these approaches when analyzing the data? Why did you need all these approaches? Does combining them act as a form of theoretical triangulation?

3. Along the same lines, you speak of a hybrid realist analytical approach. Given that this hybrid approach is linked to your current objective 1, it is important that you roadmap for the reader how you handled your data analysis. What were you looking for when you read the transcripts? What is your unit of analysis how does this unit represent the foci of the different perspectives you are using? Did you read the transcripts multiple times using a different approach each time? How would the reader recognize the concepts you are drawing from when reading your finding’s and discussion sections? Since the emphasis is on realism, a certain reproducibility of the findings is presumed. That is, a second reader of your transcripts, following your methodological approach should be able to conclude with a similar certainty that in your specific context the expert teachers handle classroom interactions differently than more inexperienced teachers, and that the features of these differences are those described in Table 2. As it stands, there is no analytical roadmap for the reader to follow.

Discussion

1. In paragraph two of the discussion the authors draw a direct correlation between the performance of the less experienced teachers, short term outcomes of their students and the risk of future difficulties. The sampling and research
approach used does not enable the authors to draw correlations. (A point the authors also make in the limitations section). My recommendation would be to change the wording so that they speak of a potential association, that should then be tested with an approach that lends itself to speaking to long-term outcomes or generalizable relationships.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests