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# Authenticity in Constructivist Inquiry: Assessing an Elusive Construct

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## Authenticity in Constructivist Inquiry: Assessing an Elusive Construct

### Abstract

Methodological rigor in constructivist inquiry is established through an assessment of trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness parallels the positivistic concepts of internal and external validity, focusing on an assessment of the inquiry process. Authenticity, however, is unique to constructivist inquiry and has no parallel in the positivistic paradigm. Authenticity involves an assessment of the meaningfulness and usefulness of interactive inquiry processes and social change that results from these processes. However, the techniques for ascertaining authenticity are in the early stages of development. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to describe a process for assessing authenticity in a constructivist inquiry. A brief overview of constructivist inquiries are described in relation to a set of techniques designed specifically to assess five dimensions of authenticity. Implications for constructivist researchers and social work research are presented.

### Keywords

Authenticity, Constructivist, Methodology, Qualitative, Social Work

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## **Authenticity in Constructivist Inquiry: Assessing an Elusive Construct**

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*Methodological rigor in constructivist inquiry is established through an assessment of trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness parallels the positivistic concepts of internal and external validity, focusing on an assessment of the inquiry process. Authenticity, however, is unique to constructivist inquiry and has no parallel in the positivistic paradigm. Authenticity involves an assessment of the meaningfulness and usefulness of interactive inquiry processes and social change that results from these processes. However, the techniques for ascertaining authenticity are in the early stages of development. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to describe a process for assessing authenticity in a constructivist inquiry. A brief overview of constructivist inquiries are described in relation to a set of techniques designed specifically to assess five dimensions of authenticity. Implications for constructivist researchers and social work research are presented. Keywords: Authenticity, Constructivist, Methodology, Qualitative, Social Work*

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Methodological rigor in constructivist inquiry is established through an assessment of trustworthiness and authenticity. The criteria for establishing trustworthiness were intended to parallel the positivistic concepts of reliability and validity, and have been defined elsewhere (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997; Rodwell, 1998). Establishing credibility, dependability, transferability, and trustworthiness answers the foundationalist desire for rigorous methods in qualitative research. Authenticity, however, is unique to qualitative inquiry and has no parallel in the positivistic paradigm (Manning, 1997; Rodwell, 1998). The concept of authenticity was proposed in later work by Guba and Lincoln (1989), but the criteria and techniques to demonstrate authenticity have yet to be fully considered. In fact, we found no journal articles in our search of qualitative studies that focused on assessing authenticity. Therefore, researchers who wish to establish authenticity must develop and test their own methods for doing so (Lincoln, 1995; Manning, 1997). In a sense, this is as it should be because of the uncertainty, fluidity, and emergent conceptions that are integral to the qualitative inquiry process (Lincoln, 1995). We argue that authenticity is a crucial component of qualitative inquiry, and it remains elusive to qualitative researchers. Given this chasm, the purpose of this article is to discuss and suggest practical criteria to assess authenticity which evolved over the course of two constructivist inquiries. We also welcome an open dialogue with others who wish to pursue authenticity in their own research.

### **Authenticity**

To establish authenticity, researchers engage in several processes to ensure that the findings are credible not only from the participants' experiences but also with regard to the larger implications of research. Subsumed under establishing trustworthiness in an inquiry, authenticity is concerned not only with a worthy topic of study but with how the project has

the potential to benefit society (James, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described five dimensions of authenticity to consider when evaluating a constructivist inquiry:

- a) fairness,
- b) ontological authenticity,
- c) educative authenticity,
- d) catalytic authenticity, and
- e) tactical authenticity.

Each dimension focuses attention on different aspects of possible change in participants, systems, or power structures that may be associated with the inquiry process.

Fairness involves an assessment of the range of all viewpoints and whether these viewpoints are represented in a fair manner. Fairness is achieved when stakeholders are empowered to have voice and encouraged to participate in the consensus building process (Guba, 1981; Nolan et al., 2003; Rodwell, 1998). Inviting stakeholders to become a part of developing informed consent procedures, for example, is one way to establish fairness (Manning, 1997). Authenticity is demonstrated when the researcher is able to show several different perspectives and depth of understanding that fairly represent these perspectives. Therefore, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, reflexivity, and member checking are critical processes for ensuring fairness (Mays & Pope, 2000; Reason, 1981; Sands, 2004).

Ontological authenticity is assessed by determining the degree to which participants become more aware of the complexity of the social environment, and educative authenticity is assessed by determining the extent to which participants experienced an increased awareness and respect for the viewpoints of others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997; Seale, 2002; Tracy, 2007). This suggests that a study is not merely a study of convenience but one with significance and intentionality. Ontological and educative authenticity can be achieved when the inquiry process involves the development of an effective hermeneutic circle generated by the emergence of dialogical conversations among all stakeholders (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Kvale, 1995; Manning, 1997; Rodwell, 1998; Whitemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

Catalytic and tactical authenticity are often difficult to assess because action towards change and empowerment resulting from engagement in the inquiry process must be demonstrated (Nolan, 2003). Catalytic authenticity is assessed by examining whether the inquiry process stimulated action on the part of stakeholders. Tactical authenticity is assessed by examining whether a redistribution of power among stakeholders occurred. Increasing the potential for action on the part of stakeholders may evolve from actions taken during the inquiry process. For example, disseminating findings from the inquiry to potential change agents (e.g., policy makers, funding sources), conducting trainings and presentations, providing support for stakeholders to advocate for change, treating stakeholders as co-researchers, negotiating outcomes, and co-constructing working hypotheses all may increase the possibility for change (Kvale, 1995; Manning, 1997).

Qualitative researchers have long rejected the notion of positivism in favor of “the assumption of multiple constructed realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 294). The two inquires below focus on young children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families, and the professionals who serve them. We describe these two studies and show how authenticity was assessed; however, we do not mean to suggest that these are the only approaches to assess authenticity. Instead, it is our aim to encourage other researchers to generate additional possibilities for assessing authenticity.

## Background of the Inquiries

The first inquiry (Inquiry 1) was an analysis for the implementation of Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in one Local Interagency Coordinating Council (e.g., early intervention system). The Council consisted of center-based, home-based, hospital-based, and school-based programs in an urban environment. Ethnographic interviews were conducted with family members receiving early intervention services and with early intervention professionals to elicit perspectives about services in the Council. Multiple interviews were conducted with stakeholders to compare and contrast different perspectives in an attempt to attain the highest level of mutual understanding about implementation of Part C in this Council. Additionally, documents from the above service providers such as annual reports, descriptions of agencies and programs, minutes of local Council meetings, and publications were analyzed and incorporated into the findings.

The data revealed that families experienced barriers related to the early intervention system, difficulties with coordinating services with providers outside this system, and barriers related to unique family characteristics. The findings described the difficulty of providing family-centered services when there are multiple systems involved. Empowerment of families may rest on the ability and willingness of professionals to provide education and training to families. Thus, families can advocate for their particular needs. Families, however, must be willing and motivated stakeholders in the empowerment process. An external audit was completed after completion of the case report. A written audit report confirmed that the criteria for trustworthiness were met. A unique aspect of this inquiry, however, was the completion of an assessment of authenticity, conducted one year after the case report was written. This assessment led to another study complete with methods, findings, and a report. Additionally, an authenticity audit using a modified version of the Halpern (1983) algorithm (see Table 1) was conducted.

The second inquiry (Inquiry 2) examined Child Protection System (CPS) practice with children who have developmental disabilities. This constructivist inquiry used an emergent design and included ethnographic interviews, purposive sampling, inductive data analysis, and grounded theory building. Ethnographic interviews were conducted with foster families, administrators, intake screeners, special investigators, and workers in one local CPS office. An external trustworthiness and authenticity audit was completed after completion of the case report. A written audit report confirmed that the criteria for trustworthiness and authenticity were met. Stakeholders expressed concern about the ability to identify disabilities, placement options, services to meet complex needs of children with disabilities, training and support for families, collaborative arrangements with other agencies, and disability training for CPS workers. Findings suggested strategies for improving CPS practice for children with developmental disabilities. Lessons learned from this inquiry suggested that improving services for children with disabilities in child welfare could focus on training with CPS staff, supporting families, improving placement options for children with disabilities, and enhancing collaborative relationships with other providers.

Inquiry 1 was the first author's dissertation and involved a detailed and rigorous approach. At the time, as a novice researcher, the first author's understanding of authenticity was in its infancy. Inquiry 1 took place in the late 1990's when little work had been published related to how constructivist researchers assess authenticity. In hindsight, the criteria developed and implemented was more linear and even causal (see Table 1). Inquiry 2 occurred almost a decade later using a modified and more focused approach to authenticity. A serious challenge to establishing criteria for authenticity is to be both open of all the possible nuances of a constructivist inquiry and potential strategies for establishing authenticity, yet present the process in a manner that is understood by the scientific

community (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandel, 2001). The purpose of the following discussion of authenticity is to examine how the inquiry process improved the potential for change and how constructivist researchers might assess this process.

Table 1: Halpern's Algorithm

(i)	<i>Crit eria</i>	Auditor Tasks	Guiding questions	Strategies
(ii)	<i>Fair ness</i>	Determine fair representation of stakeholder perspectives.	1) Is there evidence of a process for assuring fair representation? 2) Was there fair representation in the sampling process? 3) Is there evidence of informed consent? 4) Was there member checking? 5) Was there prolonged engagement and persistent observation? 6) Did the inquirer engage in a reflexive process?	*Stakeholder consultant notes *Reflexive & methods journal *Peer review notes
	Ontological	Determine level of participant awareness of the complexity of the social environment.	1) Did stakeholders become aware of the complexity of the system and their role in it? 2) Is there evidence of a hermeneutic process? 3) Are stakeholders quoted directly in the case report? 4) Did stakeholders make personal growth statements? 5) Is there evidence of dialogical conversation?	* Post-case study interviews * Stakeholder consultant notes *Reflexive & methods journal * Field notes review
	Educative	Determine if inquiry led to increased awareness of other stakeholder perspectives	1) Do stakeholders have an increased awareness of other stakeholders? 2) Is there evidence of a hermeneutic process? 3) Are stakeholders quoted directly in the case report? 4) Did stakeholders make statements indicating understanding of other stakeholders? 5) Is there evidence of dialogical conversation?	*Post-case study interviews * Stakeholder consultant notes *Reflexive & methods journal * Field notes review
	Catalytic	Determine the degree to which	1) Is there evidence of actions that may have evolved from the	*Post-case study



	the inquiry process facilitated change in the system.	inquiry process? 2) Were findings disseminated to stakeholders and change agents? 3) Were working hypotheses co-constructed? 4) Were there follow-up activities such as trainings, or informational meetings?	interviews *Stakeholder consultant notes *Documents *Reflexive & Methods journal
Tactical	Determine if power has been redistributed among stakeholders leading to lasting change	1) Is there evidence of a redistribution of power? 2) Were stakeholders treated as co-researchers? 3) Were outcomes negotiated? 4) Do stakeholders perceive that they have power to change? 5) Have there been any changes in the system that relinquish control to consumers?	*Post-case study interviews *Documents *Reflexive & methods journal * Stakeholder consultant notes

### Assessing Authenticity-Inquiry 1

Authenticity was assessed after the initial case report was completed at the request of a dissertation committee. What resulted were a set of criteria for conducting a post-case study intended to assess retrospectively as opposed to witnessing and participating in change as it happened. Thus, the approach appeared to draw causal connections between what was done (the inquiry) and what happened (change in stakeholders and systems). Seven strategies were used to examine authenticity including:

- 1) post-case study interviews,
- 2) stakeholder consultants,
- 3) peer debriefing,
- 4) reflexive journaling,
- 5) methods journaling,
- 6) analysis of post-case study documents, and
- 7) review of expanded field notes.

Table 1 presents an overview of how each strategy was used to determine fairness, ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical authenticity.

As sophistication and understanding of constructivist research and authenticity grew, so did assessing for authenticity. There were important lessons learned from the first inquiry that helped to structure the second inquiry. First, in Inquiry 1, the focus was on establishing trustworthiness with little consideration given to authenticity. Planning for authenticity, however, must be woven into the fabric of an inquiry as it unfolds. Second, the post-case study interviews proved essential to examining change, which we describe in the following section. Change in stakeholders and systems were observed during the inquiry process

through dialogical conversations and member checking, but sustained change takes time to develop. The result was an approach to authenticity that

- a) enhanced methodological procedures during the course of Inquiry 2 and
- b) refocused and enhanced data collection after the case study was complete.

### **Post-Case Study Interviews**

Post-case study interviews were used to assess each aspect of authenticity except fairness. In both inquiries, interviews were conducted with stakeholders one year after completion of the case report. Purposive sampling was used to select individuals. Field notes and the reflexive journal were also used to select stakeholders because they contained detailed descriptions of participant characteristics. In Inquiry 1, the interview schedule included questions about the degree to which the inquiry increased awareness of the early intervention system, improved understanding of other perspectives, stimulated stakeholder action, and the extent to which stakeholders were empowered. However, in Inquiry 2, questions focused on increased awareness of the needs of children with disabilities in child welfare, systems barriers and how to overcome them, needed policy and procedure change in the child welfare system, and how all stakeholders could be empowered. Data from all interviews were recorded via field notes and were expanded within 24 hours using word processing software.

### **Stakeholder Consultation**

Three stakeholders were consulted throughout the authenticity assessment for both inquiries to ensure equal representation of stakeholders in the sampling process and fair representation of stakeholder perspectives in the data analysis process. During Inquiry 1, the inquirer met with each consultant 10 times and also maintained contact via telephone throughout the course of the inquiry. Discussions centered on such topics as sampling, interview questions, data analysis, and emerging findings. There were fewer contacts with consultants in Inquiry 2 (six contacts), and discussions focused on how to engage stakeholders in change efforts. The content of these meetings were recorded in a reflexive journal.

### **Peer Debriefing**

Peer debriefing during Inquiry 1 was primarily used to promote fairness. The peer debriefing process utilized the insights of an experienced constructivist researcher to ensure that methodological decisions such as sampling, data analysis, and interpretations were logical and grounded in stakeholder perceptions. During these meetings, methodological decisions were discussed and the peer debriefer kept a journal of all meetings. Concurrently, the inquirer recorded the content of meetings in a reflexive journal. Whereas in Inquiry 2, the peer debriefer was an expert in child welfare policy. Thus, there was a stronger emphasis on promoting systems change to improve services for children with disabilities in the child welfare system.

### **Reflexive and Methods Journal**

Two types of journal entries were recorded in one journal. The first half of the journal was used to record researcher reflexivity. Keeping a self-reflective journal is a strategy that

promotes reflexivity so that researchers can examine their personal assumptions as well as “individual belief systems and subjectivities” (Ahern, 1999). This section of the journal in each inquiry was useful for recording design, methods, and personal thoughts as the research progressed. The journal was used to assure fairness, to document the logic and rationale of methodological decisions, and to focus the inquiry on improving the potential for change. During Inquiry 2, a focus on the researcher’s participation in the change process was documented, and the journal revealed that the researcher became less of an observer and more of a participant in the change process.

The second half of the journal documented all methodological decisions in the study. Whereas the first half of the journal documented the intellectual process of struggling with methodological decisions, the second half documented each decision and how it was implemented. That is, the methods journal helped the researcher have an audit trail of the *how* and the reflexive journal helped to tease out the *why*. Documenting how decisions were implemented also helped to establish fairness.

### **Post-Case Study Document Analysis**

Document analysis only occurred in Inquiry 1. Documents such as meeting minutes from an early intervention task force, minutes from several Council meetings, program and policy documents, and copies of a newsletter published by the Council were analyzed one year after completion of the case report. Several of the issues that emerged during the original case study evolved into research contracts with the state Part C Early Intervention office. Resulting research reports were also included in the document analysis.

### **Review of Expanded Field Notes Journal**

Finally, the expanded field notes from the original study were reviewed for statements that reflected personal growth and understanding about stakeholders’ contexts (ontological authenticity) as well as the contexts of other stakeholders (educative authenticity). The field notes were analyzed for statements such as, “I understand how my service coordinator can help us,” or “I have learned how difficult it can be for a pediatrician to identify a delay.” Statements were coded according to the type of authenticity they reflected. However, no further analysis was completed with this data, so the true potential of the process was not realized.

### **Assessing Authenticity-Inquiry 2**

As sophistication and understanding of constructivist research and authenticity grew, so did strategies for assessing authenticity. There were important lessons learned from the first inquiry that helped to structure the second inquiry. First, in Inquiry 1, there was little consideration given to assessing authenticity in the effort to establish trustworthiness. Planning for authenticity, however, must be considered in the planning of the study itself. Second, the post-case study interviews proved essential to examining change. Change in stakeholders and systems can be observed during the inquiry process through dialogical conversations and member checking, but real change takes time to develop. The result was an approach to authenticity that

- a) enhanced methodological procedures during the course of the inquiry and
- b) re-focused and enhanced data collection after the case study was complete.

## **Ontological Authenticity**

As both inquiries progressed, it was clear that the mechanisms for the delivery of early intervention services (Inquiry 1) and CPS intervention (Inquiry 2) for children with disabilities were complex. Assessment of ontological authenticity therefore involved an assessment of how family and professional stakeholders recognized this complexity. At the outset of Inquiry 1, many family stakeholders appeared to be unaware of important issues such as the extent of their rights. However, a year after the case report was written, many families became aware of their rights. For example, according to the service coordinator from the local Council, families began to call the Council's general information telephone number more frequently and began asking more informed questions about their rights.

Professionals also appeared to be more aware of the complexity of the early intervention system. One professional revealed her awareness of the system and its imposed constraints on all families. In the past, she believed that only low-income families struggled with early intervention, but now understands that families at all income levels struggle. The issue of physicians not referring families for early intervention services also emerged during this inquiry. However, according to a member of the Council, referrals from physicians have since increased substantially. Additionally, discussions between members of the Council, the inquirer, and professionals evolved into a funded, statewide initiative to provide information and training for physicians.

Stakeholders may have also increased their understanding and respect for the perspectives of other stakeholders. For example, a family participant believed that she learned more about how early intervention services were provided and that professionals experience many challenges in providing services to families. In turn, a professional felt that she gained insight into the challenges that families face when accessing services such as transportation, conflicting schedules, and the conflicting needs of their other children. The data point to the ways in which all stakeholders became aware of the complexity of the social environment. With Inquiry 2, the data collection process was driven by the desire to achieve ontological authenticity. Working hypotheses focused on an initial belief that parents, children, foster families, and CPS professionals understood the context of child welfare differently, resulting in conflicting goals. Questioning focused on exploring these perspectives to improve each stakeholder's understanding of his/her unique experiences and on engaging CPS workers, foster care parents, and others in a dialogue about collaboration and need for change. Member checking and reflexive journaling were critical for documenting the emergence of ontological authenticity during the data collection process.

## **Educative Authenticity**

Evidence also points to an increased understanding and respect for the perspectives among stakeholders who participated in this inquiry. First, several stakeholders have changed how they view themselves in relation to the early intervention system. For example, a family stakeholder felt that she became a partner in the process with professionals and not merely a recipient of services. Second, several stakeholders felt that they gained a better understanding of the issues faced by other stakeholders. For instance, a professional stated that she now works more closely with passive families after learning that they may be intimidated by professionals. She felt that by modeling assertive behavior, she could teach families skills for working in this system.

Third, there is evidence of an increased understanding of all stakeholder perspectives at the systems level. Members of a State Early Intervention Standards of Care Committee stated that they gained a better understanding of how families perceived early intervention.

Fourth, an important finding from the case study regarding the fear that families have about early intervention workers reporting them to Child Protective Services was discussed at several Council meetings, which led to the development of a plan to address the issue. Finally, a professional participant and a family participant modified their views that many families who refused services or missed appointments lacked motivation. Both stakeholders now recognized that families experience obstacles, such as lack of transportation, that make it difficult for them to follow through with appointments. As a result, the Coordinator of the Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LICC) incorporated these perspectives into brown bag lunches/trainings she coordinated.

It is important to note that ontological and educative authenticity focus on individual change. The knowledge that stakeholders gained in this inquiry has the potential of direct application to how families approach services and how professionals provide these services. For family stakeholders, the information they shared with other families and professionals has the potential to change the number of families who approach early intervention services. Family stakeholders who passively approached early intervention providers may have learned from assertive families that they can benefit from being more assertive themselves. Professionals learned that they need to work with tenacious and passive families differently—by approaching their work with families with empathy, patience, and compassion.

### **Catalytic Authenticity**

The process used in Inquiry 1 may have influenced change along several dimensions. Evidence can be seen in the actions of stakeholders as well as changes in policies and practices. For example, two stakeholders reported an increase in the number of families participating in Council activities. They felt that this was due to the increased awareness about issues such as access to services, interactions with physicians, and family characteristics that this inquiry stimulated in families and professionals. Council members advocated with the state early intervention agency to conduct a statewide training needs assessment with pediatricians and family-practice physicians six months after the case report was disseminated to stakeholders. The needs assessment involved three focus groups with family stakeholders, a survey of all 40 Council coordinators in the state, and a survey of 1100 pediatricians and 800 family practice physicians. The findings were distributed to all Early Intervention Councils in the state, presented to pediatric residents at a teaching hospital, and were published in an early intervention journal (Buck, Cox, Shannon, & Hash, 2001). The needs assessment led to a contract with the State Early Intervention Agency to develop and implement a training model with physicians and Council coordinators to improve physician awareness of early intervention services. The model focused on providing information and training to physicians in practice, physicians in residency, and medical school students. A potential outcome of these efforts is that physician referrals to early intervention programs will have increased.

Another change that took place at the Council level was the development of a resource book for families. The book included information about eligibility, funding, services, descriptions of providers, where services can be provided, rights, and information about support groups (Buck, Uhl, & Yoder, 2000). The intent of the book was to provide families with information regardless of their decision to access services. In this way, the inquiry nudged stakeholders at the Council level to keep families informed of the services provided.

Change generated by Inquiry 2 was more purposeful and intentional. As the inquiry progressed, opportunities arose for the researcher to participate in system-wide change efforts that emerged, in part, from conversations generated by the data collection process. The Child

Welfare System was contemplating the adoption of a system-wide Practice Model to standardize practice at all levels. Solution-Focused Case Management was chosen partly because of the unique needs of children with disabilities in child welfare. Solution-Focused Case Management emphasizes individualizing interventions which may be beneficial for children with unique needs, such as disabilities. A task force was formed that included case workers, supervisors, administrators, and foster and biological parents, two of whom had children with a disability. The task force was responsible for the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Practice Model. While there is no claim of a causal connection between the inquiry and the Practice Model, there certainly was an opportunity for stakeholders to be more intimately involved in the shaping of the process. Assessing redistribution of power is the purpose of tactical authenticity, and Inquiry 2 aimed to achieve this goal.

### **Tactical Authenticity**

Evidence suggests that there has been some shift in power relationships in this Council. First, there is evidence that professionals now recognize that families have sound reasons for choosing not to pursue early intervention services. For example, one professional said that she has learned to give families more choice and not pressure them to commit to services. She believes this approach has improved the experience for her work as a provider of services and for the families she serves. Another professional reported that her participation in this inquiry increased her confidence in working with providers and has made her a better advocate for families.

There is a recognized need to shift power from professionals to families by providing more education and support to passive families. Stakeholders felt that this has increased the ability of family members to advocate for their needs. A member of the Council shared his belief that families are receiving better information from professionals during their assessment, resulting in a reduced need for information from the Council. A family participant felt that her involvement in this inquiry improved her ability to work with physicians. In fact, she reported feeling more confident in her ability to advocate for her child's needs. Another family participant stated that her confidence improved when she discovered that other families were also experiencing confusion. Initially, she thought that her confusion was unique to her experience, which made her reluctant to ask questions.

Finally, there are indications that system changes have resulted in a redistribution of power. Implementation of the family satisfaction surveys has assisted families in two important ways. First, their voices are now being requested and heard by providers as well as by the Early Intervention Council. Second, the process of completing the surveys was empowering because families were asked questions about the types of services they should have received, as well as their rights according to federal legislation. Finally, according to a member of the Council, more families now call the information line to ask questions about discrepancies between services to which they are entitled and what they receive.

In many ways, shifting power is more challenging in child welfare systems. Child Welfare systems and resulting practices are guided and often mandated by state and federal law. Families in particular lack access to power. A result of Inquiry 2 was the realization that the ability to shift power to families is difficult. However, focusing efforts on a practice model (Solution-Focused Case Management) has strengthened the voice of families in the child welfare process. It is too early to tell whether this inquiry has resulted in a shift in power, even if the process of individualizing services has the potential to promote empowerment of families. Therefore, a follow-up study is underway to examine the implementation of the Practice Model and its impact on families that include children with disabilities.

## Discussion

Lincoln (1995) challenged qualitative researchers to move beyond abstract criteria for evaluating research by developing a concrete list of traits that demonstrates a shared notion of what good research entails. The description of the methodological strategies used in these inquiries may be useful as a benchmark for constructivist researchers to extend and expand on strategies for assessing authenticity. That is, how might other social scientists such as educational researchers, sociologists, or anthropologists conceptualize assessing for authenticity in their own work?

The first inquiry was conducted over a four-year period, which allowed for a thorough assessment of authenticity. Active involvement with this Early Intervention Council provided a unique opportunity to observe change in stakeholders and in the early intervention system. The length of time also proved useful for developing and advancing new strategies for assessing authenticity. Valuable lessons were learned about the nature of authenticity, the overlap and distinctions with trustworthiness, and the process for establishing criteria. The second inquiry took place within a shorter timeframe (18 months), but because authenticity was considered as an integral part of the design, assessment began as the study unfolded.

Authenticity involves both a process that must be woven into the case study method and post-case study assessment criteria after enough time has elapsed from the completion of a case report. There is both an internal change process (e.g., changes in people's understanding of themselves and others) and an external change process (e.g., changes in actions, policy, practice, or systems) that must be assessed. Researchers must be intentional about the research design to promote the potential for change by establishing a fair process, one that promotes both dialogical conversation and introspection. All five dimensions of authenticity should be assessed at the same time as the trustworthiness audit is conducted, as the criteria for assessment are part of the initial research process.

Change, however, takes time to emerge. Change in perspectives, behaviors, action, policy, and practices, as well as feelings of empowerment, may emerge six months to a year after the inquiry process has concluded. Therefore, the constructivist researcher must plan a post-case study assessment to examine change. We recognize that methods to address authenticity for this inquiry may or may not apply to other contexts, but follow-up strategies for assessing change are sorely needed. If the assessment of authenticity is concluded at the time of the trustworthiness audit, then only the potential for change created by the inquiry process would be assessed. Actual change would be left unexamined.

The data point to change for individuals who participated in these inquiries as well as in the service delivery systems. While no causal links between this inquiry and subsequent change can be made, by assessing ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical authenticity, there is some evidence to suggest that the constructivist process played a role in facilitating some individual and systems changes.

Social work as a profession is committed to social change through partnership with others. Thus, research approaches that stimulate social change through shared decision-making as part of its process, such as constructivist research, have an inherent appeal for many social workers. Consequently, establishing criteria for assessing possible social change as the result of an inquiry process are important tools for social workers engaged in constructivist and other change-oriented research.

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