An autoethnographic account of a PhD student’s journey towards establishing a research identity and understanding issues surrounding validity in educational research.

Tariq Hamood
University of Leicester

Abstract:
This paper is presented to act as both a mode of reflection and inquiry as an autoethnographic account. The aim was to not only present my findings from the literature but mainly to embed the complexities of my personal learning journey as I work towards establishing my ‘research identity’ as a doctoral research student in the field of education. I am of the view that we should constantly seek out ways of looking at our world differently i.e. rethinking how we perceive research, from how it is analyzed and presented to how it is used and disseminated. The very idea of adopting younger research methods encourages researchers to free their minds from existing structures through exploration. The use of personal stories, for example, acting as ‘centerpieces’ for scholarly work in the form of autoethnographic research is just one of the many ways we can achieve this. However, I have come to learn that there are many potential challenges that such approaches may face in the current HEI (Higher Education Institutions) structure. The paradox here is the issue of validity, which is even more sought after in these recent forms of research. This ultimately works to restrict us. I question what exactly is meant by the term ‘validity’; how a paper ‘becomes valid’; and who has the authority to make that call? We can see an attempted move away from the tick box approaches to validation to more fluid argumentative and persuasive techniques in recent years within research of a qualitative nature. This is not to say that the more traditional approaches to validity are flawed; rather the influence and
importance of the audience in the process of validation is now at the forefront of the discussion. This in turn requires knowledge of our audience and their expectations in order to develop the power of ‘persuasion’ as researchers. Validity may appear to be an elusive concept and many a time, I feel, it is over emphasized. However, it is still a concept that is necessary within our research whichever way we decide to adopt and apply it.

**Key words:** Educational Research, Validity, Audience, Narrative, Autoethnography

**Introduction**

When writing this paper, my main concern was not only considering how I could present what I have learned through my readings. I also wanted to embed the complexities of my journey; the experiences; and the changes and developments that I saw in my understanding of the topics discussed below. It is for this reason that I chose to communicate this paper in the form of a reflective piece with my writing acting as both a mode of reflection *and* inquiry (McCormack, 2009: 12).

Although I do accept the benefits and uses of positivist based research, I have always felt myself naturally lean towards more qualitative styles of research. I feel this is due more to the ‘human’ aspect that the qualitative approaches accommodate for when studying phenomena and the less prescriptive style to how research can be conducted. I am still very much in the exploratory stage of trying to establish my own research identity. This struggle to determine my identity as a researcher has proved more difficult than I initially thought would be the case. It is a question that has surfaced unexpectedly as it is not something I thought I ever had much of an issue with. I am currently a doctoral research student and I know what I want to achieve through my research in general; however, the issue that I
am battling with is associating myself, aligning myself or ‘pledging allegiance’ to a particular approach. Which camp do I belong to, if I have to belong to any at all that is?

I have dealt with the subject matters that I covered in the literature review largely in the same order in which I read them chronologically. This, I feel, helps to illustrate the journey that I embarked upon in my review of the literature and partially portrays how I honed in on the issues that I come to focus on in my final thoughts. It will also be noted that the literature review is not massively extensive. This again was intentional to a certain degree; not because I did not want to further widen my readings and develop my understanding but more due to the fact that I was on a journey and only realized where I was going the further I read. It represents an attempt to extract from a sampling of the literature that I felt was significant in my ongoing understanding of the concept of validity in educational research and this paper is by no means a closure to that journey.

**Basing research on myself written by myself… Is that even possible?**

The steps that led up to the focus of this article began through conversations in the teachers’ staffroom with a colleague. I shared my doubts and concerns of using our current place of employment as a site for data collection for want of producing a piece of research that felt would be a genuine contribution to knowledge. Due to the nature of our institute, staff turnover is high and management interest in initiatives such as research is low. This led me to question the possibility of conducting research about leadership development in education using myself as the subject and author of the research. I just threw the idea out there to my colleague, something I probably would not have done with an academic supervisor, which is probably due to previous rather negative experiences of supervisory support. My colleague immediately reassured me that it was indeed possible and recommended I read some work
of a former colleague of his. McCormack’s paper (2009) was the first major step in the creation of this article and the positioning my current thinking.

McCormack’s article (2009) explores a specific issue within teaching and learning by means of an autoethnographic story, which acts as the ‘centerpiece’. His experiences (and that of those highlighted in the incident) are symbolized through a moment by moment description of the events, which McCormack (2009) believes act as a ‘gateway for development’. The paper has a very unapologetic approach of bringing the subjectivity of the author to the foreground, which for me made it much more interesting and refreshing to read as I felt I was invited to explore the thoughts, experiences and emotions of the author, which can be quite rare given what I perceive as the largely sterile environment of academia.

I approached this paper initially without really knowing what I was looking for. I just wanted to know what this approach of autoethnography was, how it looked in practice and whether or not it was really what I was looking for. In retrospect, what is interesting, is the fact that I almost instantly picked up on McCormack’s (2009) argument put forward for legitimizing autoethnography as ‘valid scholarly knowledge’. The argument presented in the paper is very similar to the earlier works of Bruner (1985), who argues that the Western concept of ‘true knowledge’, rooted in Greek tradition is not the only form of knowledge. Bruner (1988) questions why we cannot study life in just as much detail as we do physics or any of the other natural sciences in order to understand our experiences as narrative seems to be the only way in which we can describe our lived experiences. It is proposed by Bruner (1988) that the way we think is governed mainly by our cultural influences, which in turn shapes how we perceive our life experiences. Hence we become the person whom we narrate in our stories. Therefore,
narrating stories not only sheds light on who we are as a result of past and present experiences but *how* we narrate our experiences, influences who we become.

The paper sparked enough interest for me to continue searching for similar papers online. Whilst sifting through articles the title of Dolerier and Sambrook’s (2011) piece immediately caught my attention. Their article, ‘Accommodating an Autoethnographic PhD’ is based upon the journey of a doctoral student trying to push forward an autoethnographic research project in a postgraduate research school that is mainly driven by positivist research norms. The paper addresses a series of questions in relation to the appropriateness of using autoethnography for a PhD thesis. Many details are revealed in relation to the challenges that were faced by both the PhD student and the supervisor. There is much that can be learned and gained from the article for doctoral students interested in adopting this approach in their research such as myself.

One of the main aspects that struck me about Dolerier and Sambrook’s (2011) experiences was the extremely rare level of support provided by the supervisor for the project (rare, at least in relation to my personal experiences and that which I have read and heard first hand from others). In the Dolerier and Sambrook’s (2011) case, the research project appeared to be just as much the supervisor’s as it was the student’s. There was a point that they wanted to prove (together) and they explored all means possible to achieve it.

After reading this article, it is easy to fall into the romantic notion that taking on an autoethnographic approach to a PhD research project will be a ‘great adventure’. One that will provide the opportunity for both the research student and supervisor to discover aspects of research previously unexplored in
their postgraduate school/department. However, after reading the paper several times and much reflection, the same questions repeatedly came to mind (and admittedly still do now): Will everyone realistically receive the same level of support that Sambrook provided for her student? Will all supervisors have the same level of influence within their schools to ‘make things happen’ that may not usually happen as was the case in Doloriet’s research.

After reading the papers cited above, I made direct contact with McCormack and started working through texts he recommended.

The first text that I read to gain more of a general understanding of autoethnography was that of Ellis et al. (2011). The article titled ‘Autoethnography – an overview’ practically does what is stated in the title. Set well within the current literature, the paper is a good starting point for those less familiar with the research approach with a wealth of references in each section that are clearly signposted.

My interest in this paper was almost instantly directed to the section on the ‘history’ of autoethnography and the approach’s ‘criticisms’. Ellis et al.’s (2011) choice of words and phrases throughout the paper strongly suggest an underlying desire to break the mould of influence positivism has on research and push boundaries beyond that which has been previously accepted and adhered to. These feelings are not unique to Ellis et al. (2011) (see Polkinghorne, 2007; Kvale, 1995; and Freeman, 2011). Ellis et al. (2011) are trying to open up the discussion in relation to rethinking how we perceive research as a concept from how it is conducted to how it is analysed, presented and used. Their belief is that there are ‘innumerable’ ways in which research can be conducted, which can be linked to the discussion raised above by McCormack (2009) and Bruner (1985).
One of the main issues that autoethnography seems to be trying to overcome is finding its place in relation to its perceived quality, as Ellis et al. (2011) explain that autoethnography could be seen as a combination of both autobiography and ethnology. The issue is how should autoethnography be judged? Autobiographical standards view autoethnography as being ‘too scientific’ in its approach, whilst ethnology criticizes autoethnography as being too ‘artful’ and ‘literary’ due to a perceived lack of rigour, theory and analysis. Ellis et al. (2011) question these arguments by asking why research can’t be all of the above; why is there such a rigid either/or binary approach? Ellis et al. (2011) are not the first to ask these questions (see Richardson, 2000b). There are papers such as that of Hughes et al. (2012) that specifically look into the issue of how to ‘judge’ autoethnography according to specific criteria i.e. that of AERA (American Education Research Association) standards. However, my interest is not in relation to how autoethnography is judged per se. I am more concerned with how such tools, mechanisms and processes are devised because ultimately ‘criteria are not found; they are made’ (Bochner, 2000: 269). Hughes et al.’s (2012) paper is clearly not the only piece out there that propagates such a rigid approach to judging or validating autoethnographic and narrative research (See, for example Tracy, 2010). My question is essentially, how do we validate our process of validation? Which process of validation is correct? How and who decides all of the above?

After continually asking these questions and searching for an answer, I came across Richardson’s (2000b) comments, which could not have been more relevant at the time. Richardson explains that the paradox of younger approaches to research (such as autoethnography) is that on the one hand, they can be seen as freeing researchers to explore and present research differently. However, in many ways they also ‘constrain them [by] asking them to be more self-conscious about claims to things’ such as validity (Richardson, 2000b: 253-4), which is exactly what I found myself doing. That said, even
after reading Richardson’s comments, I was not discouraged in my search for clarification on the issue of validity.

The issue of validity

By now, I could see my reading becoming more focused and I found myself searching for more specific texts. I realized I was onto something; not only in relation to finding a focus for this paper but also in addition to answering some personal questions that I felt I needed a response to in my doctoral research in general. Validity was the main issue on my mind and this word/concept began to narrow my search for further readings.

Merril and West (2009) present a useful chapter ‘Is Biographical Research Valid & Ethical?’ in their book ‘Using Biographical Methods in Social Research’ (2009). The chapter is a good starting point for presenting some of the differing views on how validity is defined and interpreted across and even within the same research communities. Much of what is offered is a simple presentation of what different communities consider to be a requirement of what should be included within a biographical research project in order for it to be considered valid. The chapter is a good read for those less familiar with the issues that surround validity in research of this nature; however, much of the discussions are only surface deep. This, I feel, is where Polkinghorne’s (2007) paper works well to encourage the reader to think more deeply about what validity actually is as a concept; how it is implemented; and who in reality has the authority to validate research.

The main purpose of Polkinghorne’s article (2007) was to examine how stories in narratives relate to the idea of validity. Polkinghorne displays strong views in relation to the influence of the audience in
the process of validation. It is explained in his paper that the process is largely about ‘convincing’ the audience of the paper’s validity. The terms ‘validity’ and ‘confidence’ are even used interchangeably at one point (2007: 476). This was probably one of the main aspects that stood out for me in the article. Effectively, Polkinghorne’s (2007) argument is that validation should not be viewed as a mechanical, tick box process. Rather, validity should be considered an argumentative practice. Reports need to ‘persuade’ readers.

This is interesting as Polkinghorne (2007) is fundamentally changing the dynamics of how validity is claimed in research in comparison to the more traditional approaches. In the positivist traditions (or more conventional research), validity is claimed by the author who illustrates that a certain number of predetermined and prescribed steps were followed to make the research ‘valid’. However, Polkinghorne takes this authority away from researchers and authors and hands it to the audience. The audience effectively ‘awards’ validity to the piece of research based on how well they felt the research ‘convinced’ them. In short, validity cannot be declared by researchers; it is granted by the audience. This illustrates the significant role that is given to the audience when publishing research in a ‘customer is always right culture’ (Kvale, 1995: 32).

Following on from this then, if validity is awarded by the audience, there will inevitably be a variation among the audience in relation to the ‘believability’ of the findings. Therefore, an either/or verdict of ‘valid/invalid’ may be too rigid. Perhaps then a ‘graded’ approach to validity may be more appropriate as different communities and even individuals will ultimately validate claims according to their accepted norms and cultures. It is these differences that Polkinghorne (2007) calls for to be recognised and respected. Ellis (2000) and Boehner (2000) present separate papers related to validity in
ethnography from their own perspectives. When describing the aspects of a paper that stand out for them in the process of validation, their very choice of words highlights the undeniable human element and level of subjectivity involved in the practice: ‘I look for’; ‘I expect’; ‘I am attracted to’; ‘I want’; ‘I prefer’ etc.

Kvale’s (1995) stance is very similar to that of Polkinghorne’s (2007) in the dynamics between the audience and validity. Kvale (1995) indirectly proposes that, when writing up research, a large component involves having knowledge of who is being targeted with the research and subsequently ‘tuning’ the research into what they are looking for.

In Kvale’s article (1995), the term ‘validity’ is approached from an ‘everyday use’ perspective in terms of how we live life and the different meanings that the term can hold in our daily interactions outside the realms of formal research and academia. This, I found, was a very easy to follow approach and quite unique in comparison to the distant and rather confusing philosophical arguments and approaches that are adopted by other authors in their attempts to explain validity (see for example Freeman, 2011).

Kvale (1995) argues that knowledge has moved from observations to conversation through ‘discussion’, ‘dialogue’ and ‘communication’. His view is that validity in research is not necessarily how close ‘knowledge’ corresponds to reality. What is more important is the  
*conversation* within the investigative community about this relationship (Kvale, 1995; Flaherty, 1996: 296; and Polkinghorne, 2007). Freeman (2011) adds to this by explaining that people in conversations work together to bring new life and sense to findings (Freeman, 2011: 547). Essentially, it would appear that what is being
stated (indirectly) is that validity boils down to the ‘best argument’ winning through persuasion and dialogue.

**Who really matters in the process of validation?**

To have a dialogue, then, there obviously needs to be more than one contributor to the discussion, which leads onto the next issue. Who is regarded as a competent and legitimate partner in this dialogue? What are the criteria? Who chooses the criteria? The concept of validity being something that is awarded by the audience as claimed by Polkinghorne is interesting when put into the ‘communicative validity’ framework of Kvale (1995). Although Kvale agrees that ultimately, it is the audience who awards a paper its validity, the audience is still in effect chosen by the author. As a result, the balance of influence is evened out somewhat in this dialogue between the audience and the researchers. Although validity is ‘awarded’ by the readers, in reality, researchers will already have a particular audience in mind in relation to who they believe to be legitimate contributors to this discussion and this will directly affect how seriously comments in relation to validity are taken by these different groups of people.

In my case as a doctoral research student those granted these powers are mainly my future examiners, supervisors and course tutors. Consequently, I am already trying to predict what questions I may be asked, or from which angles I may be challenged in both the feedback from my more immediate assignments and chapters right through to my viva voce in the final stages.

Nespor et al.’s (1995) text takes this discussion of audiences and validity further. Their paper explores how audience assumptions shape texts using the production of a book jointly co-authored by
academics (the main authors of the text) and the participants. The authors highlight the fact that research is written for specific audiences and those who produce research must not only be aware of who their intended audience(s) is but it is also crucial to establish what their relations are to the various segments of their audience in order to cater for them.

For Nespor et al. (1995), research is defined as an attempt at re-representing a situation; happenings of events; or a phenomenon. These representations then begin their journey (depending on how well received they are, of course) through publications, articles, citations etc. into forming part of the body of literature. Latour refers to this sequence as a ‘cascade of re-representation’ (Latour, 1987, cited in Nespor et al., 1995).

Their argument appears to be that the audience is defined by how knowledge is created within any particular research community (see Kuhn, 1962 for more on research communities). This view is supported by Freeman who explains that ‘although the field of qualitative research is replete with arguments for and against particular relationships, it is generally agreed that the philosophical or theoretical orientation of the study determines the kind of validity questions that matter’ (2011: 544).

The authors call for an increase in narrative research to be disseminated in an attempt to ‘reshape the networks’ through which knowledge is discovered; to widen the ‘cascade of re-representation’ and not limit them to certain norms and traditions. This may no longer be such an issue for narrative research as it is now considered to be well established within education; however, the argument of ‘widening the cascade of re-representation’ is particularly relevant and important for me, especially if I decide to go ahead with autoethnography as an approach to my doctoral research. The channels of dissemination for autoethnographic research may not be as widely recognised or accepted in PhD
theses submissions as some of the more traditional approaches within educational research. I openly acknowledge this. However, surely this cannot be viewed as enough of a justification to negate its legitimacy for my dissertation.

Koro-Ljungberg’s article ‘Some Methodological Principles in Research Practice’ (2010) advocates a move away from the notion of ‘external, over simplified and mechanical’ systems and checklists for gaining validity. Koro-Ljungberg (2010) agrees with Polkinghorne (2007) that researchers are going through the motions but not necessarily working towards validity. It has turned into a tick-box exercise for many; both for those who write research papers and those who read and evaluate them.

Validity in many texts such as ‘how to’ research books and research reports is standardized as a concept; a ‘procedure’ by which it is ‘achieved’. What is interesting about Koro-Ljungberg’s paper (2010) is that the author himself lectures on introductory research methods courses for postgraduate students and admits that he teaches these ‘tick box’ approaches as part of the course content. However, the author paradoxically questions these approaches in relation to increasing the actual validity of the research upon its completion.

It is these issues that I have come to realise I have been questioning throughout my readings since I started my doctoral research training. Many of my questions have targeted authority and who has the right to lay claim to this authority. Ultimately, questioning much of what seems to be widely distributed and accepted by many at face value. I have received positive comments in relation to this in the feedback for some of my assignments on the research training course, as my tutors felt it showed ‘I cared’. However, I have also been criticized for being a little ‘polemical’ in my approach at times. If
what is meant by this is my willingness to challenge and question concepts and ideas, then I am not sure I can (or even want to) change this approach. Why shouldn’t the stance of the author come through so strongly in their writing? This is something that comes naturally to me as an individual both within my writing and my everyday dealings in life. Richardson captures this well when she explains that ‘who we are and what we can be—what we can study, [and] how we can write about that which we study—is [all] tied [together]’ (2000b: 253). Richardson, also questions this culture of only the ‘tenured’ being able to explore and push the boundaries (2000a: 252). She ‘invites’ readers to ‘continue the ongoing discussion’ of how to judge and who can/should judge. She warns researchers against being ‘constrained by the habits of somebody else’s mind’ (2000b, 254).

**Final thoughts**

Kvale suggests that an over emphasis on validation may be a reflection of the uncertainty of the value and worth of one’s own work; the need to gain external approval and confirmation through some ‘official certificates’ (1995: 37). Although Bochner finds this fascination ‘boring, tedious, and unproductive’ (2000: 267), the reality is these comments could not more accurately describe where I currently am in my thinking and research; why I subconsciously decided to focus on issues of validity in this paper. My final goal is to produce research that will be perceived to be worthy of a doctoral award in my postgraduate school of education and the issue of validity is a crucial element of this. In fact, it is everything. My fixation on issues of validity has only increased the further I progress in my final research paper as I frame it into a thesis for examination purposes.

The reality is I am still not sure whether or not I want to adopt autoethnography as my chosen approach. I could still potentially look at approaches such as critical reflection and action research to
possibly achieve my aims and objectives. I am still fighting to ascertain what my identity is as a researcher. I do, however, feel that I have come a long way in my learning over the duration of reading for and writing this paper. The approach I choose, will depend largely upon my circumstances and the subsequent conversations that I have with my supervisors and colleagues. In retrospect, I think trying to definitively establish my identity as a researcher over the duration of a single research training module may be a reflection of my lack of familiarity with the complexities of the research process. Firmly establishing my identity as a researcher is something that will continue to develop as I carry out and write up my final research project and I suspect may well continue long after the doctoral programme.

After reading the papers covered in my brief review of the literature, it became clear that validity as a concept is defined in numerous ways (as seems to be the case for the majority of concepts in the social sciences). Few however, seem to have captured the position of validity in the literature as powerfully as Koro-Ljungberg, who explains that although validity as a label may be ‘inaccurate’, it is ‘necessary’ (2010: 603), which I agree with. The extraordinary potential of narrative approaches to inquiring into the complexities of education and life as a whole cannot be denied. However, surely there must be a form of judging how we recognize the value of a piece of research in this genre. This seems like a process that is so deeply ingrained in us as human beings that we do it on a daily basis in our lives with things that may appear to be far more trivial than research (even if done unintentionally).

Although uncomfortable with the idea of adhering to strict predetermined rules and procedures for ‘gaining’ validity, I do still believe that there needs to be something to illustrate that there is more to a piece of research than ‘methodological randomness’. Essentially, accepting that validity does indeed
have its place in research, yet at the same time taking from Kvale’s (1995) advice to de-emphasize the need to continuously pose the question of validity as the 'be all and end all' of research.

There is more to gaining validity than merely pledging allegiance to a particular procedure. It is not purely about questioning the status quo for the sake of it. Claiming validity in the traditional sense alludes to a close of the research. However, can this be applied in studies within education such as narratives and autoethnography? Every day we live our lives, our perceptions, experiences and understandings will alter due to the changes that take place in our surroundings and encounters with others (Colleen et al., 2003: 5). There are authors who indeed question the validity of validity, such as Freeman (2011) in his paper ‘Dialogic Encounters with Hermeneutic Truths’. The author questions how we comprehend human understanding and interpretations of experiences and situations and whether or not the concept of validity should even be included in this discussion (2011: 553).

One of the main issues that I am currently facing is my desire to ensure that my approach to research will live up to the expectations of my audience within the university. I am finding it difficult to comprehend how to deal with the dilemma of a potential autoethnographic doctoral thesis surviving a viva voce examination.

Even the response given the in peer-reviewed feedback from the journal, almost made me question myself as to why I would choose such an approach in my writing if I know that this approach is not as easily accepted in mainstream academia and journal entries. Many of the concerns raised were in relation to the evocative use of language and what seemed to one of the reviewers as an over-narcissistic approach to my writing. However, this is exactly what the journey whilst writing the paper
has been about. Challenging the status quo and such responses to newer, less understood and less explored approaches to research such as autoethnography. In fact, David McCormack’s advice to me, after relaying my feedback to him, was to accept that such responses were ‘typical’ from those who may have had little if any exposure to autoethnographic research. This I feel further strengthens the points raised above about the importance of the audience and the power they hold in the process of validation. Now I can relate much more to McCormack’s (2009: 22) feelings of safety when writing papers in monologue as opposed to the exposure of dialogue with the peer reviewers in this paper, my first ever journal entry. This is precisely what I feared would happen if I attempt to adopt such an approach to my final piece of doctoral research with the examiners. However, I can say without doubt that although I felt exposed and vulnerable by the experience, I am now much more confident about being challenged, having the courage to go away and seek a response to questions and requests for clarification and be ready to present once again.

One of my main aims when preparing this paper (although unclear at the time of reading and writing in the early stages) was to try to understand how my research would be received; how it will be judged; and who has the authority to say whether or not it is worthy? Although I still have much more ground to cover in my reading in this area, I do feel I have taken a major step forward in understanding the concept of validity in educational research. I now feel more confident in my understanding of how to defend or justify my decision (even if only to myself at present) in taking my research in the direction I decide. I now have much more of an appreciation of the indirect politics that are involved in winning over the audience in relation to the perceived validity of research. Ellis (2000) presents an interesting paper that powerfully portrays the human element involved in the process of validation. An element that, I would argue, can never be completely eliminated. Ellis (2000) is very open about how particular
aspects affect the review process of articles and research i.e. her ‘mood’; her relation to the author; approaching deadlines; her inherent interest (or not) in the topic; fatigue; and stress. From personal experience of conducting peer reviews of research papers, I can say without doubt that these issues are all very real and do affect the practice of validation (2000: 276-7).

Polkinghorne (2007) emphasizes the audience’s significance in possessing the power to award validity rather than author(s) simply claiming it. Kvale (1995) indirectly claims some power is still retained by the author as they decide who is awarded such influence in their audience. I would add that the influence of the audience and that of the authors are both influential; however, the significance of their influence does not occur simultaneously. The control I hold as an author only remains for as long as I choose who that audience is going to be. The moment I decided to enroll on an official doctoral programme, I forfeited much of that authority to my chosen audience i.e. the university, the course requirements, the course tutors, the supervisors and ultimately the examiners. The fact is the field I have entered already has a pre-determined audience. Apart from choosing the university and requesting certain supervisors and examiners, much of the remaining process is out of my control. Doleriet and Sambrook’s paper (2011) is a perfect example of this. In a more recent email exchange with McCormack¹, I explained that I had finally decided to focus on validity in my paper (possibly due to an underlying feeling of insecurity I had in choosing autoethnography). His response was:

‘It seems wise of you to focus on criteria such as validity because – after all – we need to be able to establish how our research is to be judged’ (D. McCormack, personal communication, November 16th, 2015)

¹ I am grateful to David McCormack for his permission to refer to our communications and for his comments and support whilst writing this paper.
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