Chapter 8
Ethical Dilemmas of a Self-Study Researcher: A Narrative Analysis of Ethics in the Process of S-STEP Research

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Stefinee sat in a small hotel meeting room at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference, she had been listening to reports of studies of teacher thinking. As she thought about the studies, someone asked a question about participants in their studies. The answer revealed that the studies presented had been done with preservice or inservice teachers the researchers were teaching. As she thought across the sessions she had attended, it dawned on her that most of the studies were based on data gathered from writing or observations of activities students did in classes taught by the researchers, but this fact only came to light when the researchers were pushed about their data sources. All of these researchers were engaged in studies of their own practice, but they had not reported this. This raised an ethical tension for her and was an impetus that moved her more fully to embrace Self-Study of Teacher Education Practice (STEP) methodology. Bullough and Pinnegar (2004) argue that one of the powers of S-STEP work is that in this work the integrity of the researchers leads them to own their role in the construction of the context, data, interpretation, and presentation of the work.

8.1 Introduction

This narrative suggests one of the strengths of S-STEP work is that the researcher acknowledges their central position in the design, implementation, and reporting of the study conducted. However, since the Arizona Group (2004) wrote a handbook

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chapter arguing teacher educators need to reveal their central position in every aspect of studies they conducted on their students, Shaun and Stefinee have engaged in a rich and varied conversation that continually circled around the issue of ethics (see, for example, Murphy & Pinnegar, 2010, 2016; Murphy, Pinnegar, & Pinnegar, 2011; Pinnegar & Murphy, 2011a, 2011b). Regardless of the studies they worked on together, their conversations seemed to end up in consideration of ethics in relationship to whatever work they were doing. Ethics in S-STEP work was, for them, fraught with tension. What we (Shaun and Stefinee) attempt to do here is uncover the ethical dilemmas S-STEP researchers face as they engage in such research. We determined to review the practice of S-STEP research in relationship to the characteristics of such research.

8.2   Methodology

For this project, Stefinee and Shaun used the framework of *intimate scholarship* (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015). We initially began this work using LaBoskey's (2004) five characteristics of S-STEP research: self-focused and self-initiated, improvement aimed, interactive, multiple primarily qualitative methods, and exemplar validation. These characteristics provide a functional definition that allows one to determine whether the work being examined is a S-STEP study. However, we decided we wanted to examine ethical dilemmas using a more theoretic and more encompassing framework so we utilized the framework of intimate scholarship described by Hamilton and Pinnegar (2014):

> Intimate scholarship takes up an ontological stance where recognition of the individual/ collective relation has value, uncovers embodied knowing through autobiography and action, and explores the coming-to-know process based in dialogue (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2014) that captures particularities to document the ways we navigate lives and experiences in the educational world. When engaged in intimate scholarship teacher educators reveal the vulnerabilities and passions that most often remain hidden in talkabout experience. (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2014, p. 153)

Such scholarship is taken up from a subjective, relational orientation which examines experience, practices, and life from an up-close personal look, allowing explorations from a personal subjective perspective. Considering ethics in scholarship from this perspective allowed us to widen our view and consider other subjective, ontologically oriented methodologies where issues of ethics similar to those relevant to S-STEP existed (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015).

We began our work by articulating the ethical tensions we experienced as we engaged in research. We identified tensions around self as researcher and researched, place, practice, context, interpretation, presentation, and Institutional Review Boards (IRB). We then reconsidered our categorization using the characteristics of intimate scholarship as a framework. These characteristics include relationship, vulnerability, ontology, dialogue, and openness (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015). This

framework allows for deeper, more nuanced, and more integrated analysis and representation of our ethical tension. We make a distinction in our work between the moral and the ethical. For us ethics refers to the people, the humans, with whom we are in relationship and interaction, while the moral represents our obligations to larger groups and systems (Margalit, 2002).

We then realized that these tensions would be best uncovered and articulated from the perspective of the notion of dilemmas, since with ethics we find ourselves in situations where balanced and difficult choices have to be made between two alternatives where each may be undesirable. After identifying these tensions in relationship to S-STEP research practice, we engaged with two critical friends both S-STEP researchers, and we asked them to interrogate our analysis. Their questions and wonders led to the deepened and more integrated representations that make up our reported findings here.

8.3 Assertions for Understanding (Findings)

Consideration of ethics represents an ongoing tension for S-STEP researchers. LaBoskey (2004) argued self-study of practice (S-STEP) research is self-initiated, self-focused, aimed at improvement, and interactive and uses mainly qualitative methods and exemplar validation. Such scholarship exists permanently in a zone of both maximal contact and inconclusivity (Bahktin, 1981). Bahktin argues that the zone of maximal contact exists at moments when all dimensions of time come together. We bring forward past experience into the present and in that moment the past is reconsidered, the present is altered through this reconsideration, and the future is reimagined. This positioning is reminiscent of the narrative inquiry pattern of living, telling, retelling, and reliving narratives, since as we engage in such cycles all past, present, and future experience is reimagined and our understandings are potentially partial and always unstable since it is continually open to new consideration and understanding.

The researcher is the researched and based on data collected is seeking to understand practice and experience from his/her perspective in relationship to the research conversation. The texts themselves invite readers to draw forward their own experience and understandings of practice so that the assertions for action and understanding uncovered while evidence based remain fluid. The epistemology and ontology are relational rather than abstractionist (Slife, 2004) since what is ontologically real cannot be understood separate from its relationship to the aspects of context in which it occurs. Since this is shifting ground, the researcher is always in a space of becoming, (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015) and knowing of the phenomenon shifts as practice and inquiry into it unfolds. The expectation in S-STEP research is that the researcher will learn and grow in the process of research and the phenomenon under investigation will shift and often transform as the researcher seeks to understand practice and create living educational theory (Whitehead, 1993). To more fully dis-

entangle and explore the ethical dilemmas, we will consider these in relationship to each of the characteristics of intimate scholarship: relationship, vulnerability, ontology, dialogue, and openness. We will begin each section with a short explanation of the characteristic and then examine the ethical dilemmas entailed in it.

8.3.1   Dilemmas of Relationship

Even though the shortened name of S-STEP research is *self-study*, the research itself is conducted in the space between self and others in our practice. Indeed, we argue that a critical ethical difference in conducting S-STEP work is that our ethical concerns emerge in the relationships in the study; however, when we turn to consideration of practice, moral obligations guide our work. This dual orientation to the ethical in relationship to humans in our research including ourselves and the moral as we consider our practice more abstractly in itself is fraught with tension and turns us again and again to dilemmas of ethics in tension with obligations to the moral. As LaBoskey (2004) argued S-STEP work is always interactive. Hamilton & Pinnegar (2015) in describing the characteristics of intimate scholarship suggested:

> As we move forward in becoming a teacher educator working in the midst of experience and practice, we learn and grow. We shift in our understanding, experience tensions, resolve problems, develop relationships, and learn about being a teacher educator. (p. 185)

S-STEP researchers learn, grow, and change in interaction with the self and with others in the practice being studied or engaging in the research process with us: students, colleagues, critical friends, or co-researchers. The quality of our research and the depth of interpretation are dependent on the quality of the relationships developed with others in the practice, others in the research, and ourselves. Relationships are fundamental to this research methodology. As a result, it is continually fraught with ethical dilemmas related to relationship.

When we consider the ethical dilemmas of research into S-STEP research, we consider the ontological roots of S-STEP which reside in moral obligations to practice. According to Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009):

> …[S-STEP research] lives because it is based in practice, and therefore as practice grows and changes, our understanding grows and changes and our theories grow and change. S-STEP research leads us to understand practice better, share the assertions for understanding and action in practice, and create more vibrant living educational theory. (pp. 49–50)

As S-STEP researchers it is our interest and concern for our understanding of our practice that initiates our various studies and propels us forward. It is a research model committed to improvement, improvement in our practice and most certainly situated in ourselves. This orientation and focus on "the improvement of our practice and the lives of children and young people—orient us toward ontology" (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 55). This ontology orients us as a cohesive group. Our epistemological orientations may differ, but fundamentally, we are "oriented toward making *what is* better for others" (italics in original, Hamilton & Pinnegar,

2009, p. 55). Within this scholarship we have ethical obligations to our work and moral ones to our practice. S-STEP is practice oriented and therefore the ethics of such an endeavor must also be practice oriented. Our ethical responsibility is to ourselves, our students, their students, and, ultimately, our practice. Can one have an ethical commitment to practice? We contend no. Ethics are for interactions with people. For us as S-STEP researchers this means ethical responsibilities to ourselves and our students (and by extension their students). Rather we contend that we have a *moral* responsibility to our practice. We intentionally split hairs here, attending to moral and ethical obligations (Margalit, 2002). Ethics in our work attends to the humans with whom we interact with; moral obligations reside in relation to larger groups generically (as in the idea of a group) and systems (Margalit, 2002).

Now we attend to the real center of our concern for ethics. Ethics must orient our relationships with other people. While we might contend that our ethics reside in an obligation to ourselves, our work is seldom focused only on the self. Rather it is the self in relationship. We cannot think about our practice without referring to others, as we must. We have a practice predicated on other and by extension the other of the other. We are in our work for the long game, and in a sense the long game entails interactions with others who are not known yet, nor will they ever be known; this however does not negate this relationship. Rather they are relationships that exist in our imagination; they are relationships of possibility.

In regard to ethics and individuals, we can situate ourselves on top of ethics, as in we position ourselves on top of knowledge, meaning it provides a ground for us to stand on. In our work, what is different is that to be ethical S-STEP researchers we must situate ourselves within knowledge, within relationships. A more practical explanation is the difference between thinking about ethics and thinking with ethics. As S-STEP researchers our commitment is to think *with* ethics in such a way as to structure our work as always guided by ethics. We do not take up the idea of ethics; rather we take up living moment to moment in ethical ways of being. This is the difference between situating ourselves on knowledge and within it.

There is a need to have thick relationships that enable us to work across difference and honor and respond to the issues raised and act in ethical ways with these varied participants, the self included. Appiah (2007) argues that thick relationships are close, loving, accepting relationships because they are oriented to understanding the humans we connect with. These relationships allow us to work across even fundamental difference of belief, political stances or alternative assumptions, etc. To us, this is one of the cruxes of ethical obligations and relates to who we have thick and thin relationships (Appiah, 2007).

Our thickest relationship is with the self. We have long wondered what our ethical commitment is to the self. How do we get IRB approval for an examination of the self and our very intimate practice? Do we sign a consent letter to the future self who will interpret the past self? What are the limits of our ethical obligations to our self? This resides in the issue of vulnerability. How vulnerable will we make ourselves as we uncover our practice? Would we draw participants who are other into such vulnerable places? We don't think so, in a sense that would be morally and ethically bankrupt, but we do this to ourselves. Here in lies the crux of S-STEP ethical prac-

tice. How do we protect the self? What is our obligation to the self? As individuals in the society we live in, we are constantly drawn to self-effacing practices, practices we would never inflict on someone else. Therefore, we pose the question: *Are you ethical to yourself?* If ethics is based on a foundation of beneficence and if beneficence is understood as "more than a supererogatory obligation to kindness or charity. It is an obligation that has been expressed in two (inconsistent) basic rules: Do no harm, and maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms" (Strike, 2006, p. 69), are you doing harm to the self at the expense of your research? Are you maximizing possible benefits? After all our work is situated in growth and improvement, but what if it comes at our personhood? Just as you would not harm another, we argue it is not ethical to harm the self at the expense of research or improved practice.

In our talk about ethics we turn to a consideration of Schwab's (1973) four curriculum commonplaces of teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu. We consider these in our practice and ask you to consider these questions in terms of your practice as a researcher. Does your ethical positioning attend to these four commonplaces? In your examination of your practice do you consider all four? They are in relationship. For a S-STEP researcher these four commonplaces are what we attend to when we consider our practices. When we consider Stefinee's narrative at the beginning of this chapter, where are our ethical obligations? Can we write about students when we do not have ethical permissions? Can we talk about our practice in ways that do not attend to students/young adults? If we are asked, do we have full ethical approval from everyone discussed in the research, can you say yes? Can you say yes to the self? Can you say yes regarding the people with whom you teach/work? These are ethical conundrums and ones that must be attended to in fulsome ways.

8.3.2   Ethical Dilemmas from Attending to the Particular

Society faces intractable human problems. S-STEP researchers who seek to both understand and provide careful accounts of their practice and their knowing in their practice have the potential to contribute much to research conversations in teaching and teacher education. Such inquiries have the potential to create a surer knowledge base from which researchers might work. Putnam (2004) and Polkinghorne (1988) both argued that studies that seek to provide generalizable solutions to the human problems have failed to provide viable accounts from which those working in the trenches on such problem can respond. S-STEP research in providing careful accounts of experiences with particular problems, in particular contexts, working with a particular group of people provides a basis for reflection that can guide others in their responses to related problems. Audiences of such research are supported in attending to the variability of responses, the dignity of the participants, and the nuances of meaning in their own practice. Providing careful, coherent accounts of our particular knowledge, action, and practice contributes to the knowledge base of teacher education. Yet, such careful accounts and research focused on the particular raise ethical dilemmas for S-STEP researchers.

A commitment of S-STEP researchers is to make public the knowing we uncover within our practice. Since our studies focus on our practice, this means we will often uncover our errors, our missteps, our misconceptions, and our blunders. Because we are committed to making our practice and assertions for action and understanding public, there is an ethical dilemma about how in living within our ethics do we both report our errors and the learning that emerges without being salacious, titillating, sentimental, or precious. We must represent our errors in ways that others can learn from them without martyring ourselves or making us look polished and pretty. There is tension around being comprehensive, transparent, and yet ethical in our representation. We have to make smart and ethical decisions about what to reveal— what is vital to communicate to support other teacher educator researchers in understanding and yet keep private those things that are inappropriate and unnecessary for learning to emerge in others.

When we conduct research the relational (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009) orients our ethical stance to the participants. In studying the particular, we and those in our practice are easily identifiable. We have a deep ethical obligation to reveal about others only those things they would want to make public. While we get to decide and have an ethical obligation to report our own errors, we become vulnerable ethically as we determine how to uncover our knowing and yet represent others in hopeful and helpful ways. In her account of her learning about her experience as an African-Canadian, McNeil provides a helpful model. The way she responds ethically is that she holds the mirror up to herself and her own missteps and misunderstandings in relationship to her students' actions toward her. Another example can be found in Placier (1995) even though her headings are Fiasco 1 and Fiasco 2; she turns the spotlight back on her actions and understanding rather than student missteps. Part of our ethical obligation is indeed to reveal an actual account of our practice and our learning from it—not a *smooth* version of our experience. While revealing ourselves can also be problematic, since the study is of our practice, we must always attend to the ethical obligations we hold to others in our practice.

8.3.3   Ethical Dilemmas of Vulnerability

S-STEP researchers often report feelings of vulnerability as a finding from their analysis of their studies of practice. We do not have to be ethical because we are intimate but in such relationships we have exposed ourselves as vulnerable, yet we recognize here that vulnerability and ethics are not synonymous. Indeed, we suggest that S-STEP researchers must be concerned about the ethics connected to the intimate relationships (close, open, human communication, and interaction) that are part of this and the ethics that vulnerability in such relationships should call forth. S-STEP research positions researchers in a vulnerable space. Since our accounts are of our practice and our knowing of and in our practice, we open ourselves to attack—to judgment. In doing this work we feel emotional. Our integrity requires honesty about our work, our failures, our inabilities. S-STEP work always requires attention to an ethics of intimacy.

The knowledge we report emerges from our seeking to scrutinize carefully our thinking and our action to uncover our embodied knowing. We often embrace studies of living contradictions where we know we are asserting one thing but acting differently. We invite others to interrogate us, our action, and our thinking. We invite them to prod, poke, and uncover our weaknesses as well as our strengths. Further, the space wherein we work is unstable, evolving, and open. In our research space we accept responsibility for our knowing and acting in our practice. As S-STEP researchers we are committed to making public what we learn. Our being willing to be vulnerable positions us to confront ethical dilemmas.

The central ethical dilemma related to vulnerability is a dilemma fueled by relationships and honesty. Since the strongest S-STEP work (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015) reveals the fiascos and difficult learning of the researcher, ethical dilemmas emerge as S-STEP researchers seek to clearly account for the experiences and the understandings that emerged. The dilemma emerges from two facts about S-STEP work. First, the researcher is the researcher and the researched and thus the context of the event and others involved are easily identifiable. In revealing, unflattering details about personal experience tension between obligations to the self as discussed in relationships are in play. In terms of others in the account, the researcher to communicate learning seeks to find ways to reveal an accurate accounting and yet protect, respect, and honor the identity of others. McNeil (2011) faces this dilemma as she seeks to account for the emergence of her identity as an African-Canadian teacher educator in the face of racist behavior on the part of her students. She seeks to communicate the challenges she faced from student behavior and comments and yet respect the rights of her students.

Another way S-STEP researchers face ethical dilemmas emerging from the characteristic of vulnerability is the shifting ground from which their inquiries are conducted. As Hastings (2010) argued the researcher's stance is reflexive and responsive and as mentioned in examining other ethical dilemmas studies can never be clearly articulated:

> There must always be an emergent aspect of the research—an interplay between the design and what emerges. The emergent issue is a result of the learning that occurs through engaging in research that in turn demands a shifting lens, which exposes different issues as it mediates the text. (p. 308)

The dilemma noted here relates to the ethical challenge of being true to the developing understanding of the self, to the accounts used from others in our practice, and being true to the theoretical framework the study is situated in. Being true to these accounts always requires concern and adjustment.

In S-STEP work we position ourselves as vulnerable and we recognize how we are situated in the work. However, ethical dilemmas emerge as we progress in our inquiries and we are reminded that we are engaged in what Josselson (1996) labeled an "interpretive enterprise" (p. xii). Our intention is to listen to our stories and those of others in our practice and yet bring only our own interpretation to it. We interpret the data and accounts we collect on the basis of what we believe, what we know, and come to understand at that point in time. As we do this, we need to make clear that this is so. As we suggested earlier this is tricky because we need to honor and respect ourselves and the others who are part of the study we engage in. We need to

avoid providing a smooth story because doing so not only misshapes our accounts but also makes them less valuable to others who seek to connect our understandings in resolving intractable dilemmas to their own circumstances. Josselson (1996) raises the question "…how can we take an ethical position to both participants and our [commitment to furthering the research question] at the same time?" (p. xii).

8.3.4 Ethical Dilemmas from Openness

Openness is a basic characteristic of inquiries in S-STEP. As intimate scholarship S-STEP studies are grounded in embodied knowing. As Polanyi (1966) articulated tacit knowing is holistic; therefore, when we focus on a particular aspect of our tacit knowledge and uncover the knowing entailed in it and then act on this knowing what we learned and how we acted immediately become part of the whole of the tacit knowledge we are exploring. The ideas and understandings we uncover slip back holistically into our embodied knowing. In doing so, our knowing is altered and thus our inquiry is forever open. The Deweyan characteristics of continuity and interaction are basic to our experience and our learning from experience. These characteristics again mean that the research we conduct continues in openness. Inquiring into experience and embodied knowing position S-STEP research as open. Openness results in ethical dilemmas for S-STEP researchers.

An ethical dilemma that emerges from the characteristic of openness arises because of the open nature of S-STEP work. Even after they are published, S-STEP studies are designed to remain open—to invite scholars reading the work to enter into relationship with the work revisiting, sometimes reimagining, and often reinterpreting what was presented. For example, in the conclusion to the first edited book of S-STEP work, Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) invited participants to read the Barnes afterword to the book and based on what he says reopen and reconsider the work presented. What they propose is that the ending is actually a new beginning. This fundamental openness pushes the researcher ethically to consider the possible consequences that could result not just in its initial presentation but its ongoing openness. Pinnegar, Hutchinson, and Hamilton (in press) asserted that as authors of this work we are always situated in a space of becoming. Our work never closes down and this very openness requires additional consideration of the ethical and makes resolving ethical dilemmas completely problematic.

Relevant to this dilemmas is one raised by Bakan (1996). His ethical misgiving (raised about narrative research but relevant here) is that it is "based on real lives of people made public"; further he argued it "… converts the private into; public; can violate privacy" and could "… cause mental, legal, social, and financial hurt and harm" (p. 3). Early in Stefinee's career she worked on a piece in which she and a group of women (reference intentionally omitted here) shared stories of experiences in mothering. They used the actual names of their children in the work. Sometimes in public forums, people recount these stories shifting the interpretation, reopening the story. While we have apologized and reconciled this with our children, Stefinee

has since realized that it wasn't merely the initial representation, but because of the characteristic of openness of interpretation, there are issues of publicness and reinterpretation that have the potential to result in injury to those involved.

Josselson (1996) argued further that as a result how can we take account of the fact that our work will have effects beyond our intentions in doing it. Here we assert this is exacerbated in S-STEP research. In many ways this dilemma is one that must be considered carefully and resolved as fully as possible in the initial work. Stefinee does not have the luxury of retracting or rewriting or republishing the work recalled here removing the children's names.

8.3.5   Ethical Dilemmas of Interpretation Through Dialogue

In S-STEP research the process of interpretation is dialogue (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, Hamilton & Pinnegar 2015). S-STEP research embraces a relational epistemology where meaning can be varied, multiple, and partial and is connected to a particular place and time. In contrast, most current research relies on a modernist epistemology which is oriented toward a singular and certain meaning. We make sense of and engage in S-STEP work on our practice through interaction, with collaboration and critical friends. We seek alternative ways our data and our thinking could be articulated. Relying on dialogue as our process for coming to know situates us in ethical dilemmas of interpretation.

One ethical dilemma of interpretation involves accurately accounting for and benefitting from the process of dialogue in coming to know. The Arizona Group (2004) and Hamilton and Pinnegar (2009) articulated the process of dialogue in coming to know. As we engage in dialogue as an interpretive process we attempt to record the process through notes or tape recording, but frequently the interpretive process full of turns and spaces where insight suddenly emerges leaves S-STEP scholars in a space of surety of their assertions for action and understanding but the process of coming to that knowing is fraught with twists, turns, and the development of implicit understandings. The researchers turn back to the data collected and seek to trace the dialogue, but even when they can apply the understanding as residing in considered events, story fragments, pieces of data, or fragmented notes, they may be unsure of the exact spot of emergence of the knowing in dialogue. Their dilemma is how to settle their worry about the reality of what they have come to understand in a trustworthy way.

Another ethical dilemma which is related to ethical dilemmas of ontology is grounded in our understanding in the S-STEP community that our studies often seek to understand simultaneously the context and process of our practice and our research. This is a shifting ground. We design studies. We make commitments to data collection and interaction. But our work shifts and our design and interpretation alters and we must make decisions about these shifts in the process of the work. Modernist researchers also experience some shifting, but because of their use of standardized instruments, specified research protocols, and procedures, the shift may either be not recognizable to them or it may not raise itself to an ethical concern. But as LaBoskey

(2004) cogently argued interactions (collaboration, interrogation from alternative perspectives, critical friends) are essential elements of our work. Hasting (2010) explored the shifts in the process and ethical dilemmas as these shifts occurred and said:

> I would argue that research is a highly reflexive endeavour and with that reflexivity are related ethical dilemmas—dilemmas associated with viewing the data (and even the research process itself) through a different lens, with the potential for different readings. (p. 309)

In our research process, the obligations to others in these interactions shift and we feel concern over ethics in our relationship with others, with the larger research community, and with ourselves and our data. Further, we confront the ethical dilemmas we feel as S-STEP researchers that any interpretation we provide no matter how rigorous the dialogue will always be personal, partial, changing, and responsive.

Another dilemma of ethics in relationship to interpretation relates to the data we use in our study. The data we collect carries within it our understanding of the meaning resident in the data and our decisions about which data to collect to uncover and reveal our knowing. We recognize Hymes' (1972) notion of speech act theory in that we see speech as an action that captures and communicates what people know and value. In addition, since we also believe that knowledge is revealed and constructed in interaction even within our inner dialogue with self, then data must emerge from such interactions. What we came to understand in exploring ethical dilemmas is that in addition to having an ethical relationship to the humans in our research we have an ethical relationship to the data they produce. We design research that enables our knowing to emerge in the conversations and interactions that produce the data and so interpretation must attend to the ethical not just in relationship to us and the others represented in the data but in our interactions with the data itself. If we accept Crites' (2001) notion of sacred stories and mundane stories, we must hold ourselves in ethical relationship with both. This can be difficult if we believe that there is dissonance between us, the other, and the data.

8.3.6 Ethical Dilemmas from Ontology

S-STEP as intimate scholarship is oriented to the ontological (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009). Any scholarship within education involves humans alone or in interaction. They are situated in a context, a time, and a place and as a result their interaction is filled with choice, voice, growth, change, uncertainty, and unpredictability. The ontology in which S-STEP work is conducted is a relational ontology rather than an abstractionist one (Slife, 2004). Intimate scholarship sits uncomfortably in a positivistic framework, since inquiries from this orientation are examined and constructed from the perspective of the person directing the inquiry in relationship to others in our practice or experience. Researchers seek to create accurate accounts of what they perceive as real and seek to develop an understanding of concrete and particular experiences rather than design and implement studies that are generalizable. The S-STEP research is positioned in a space of ethical tension and our orientation to ontology means that S-STEP researchers face fundamental ethical dilemmas of ontology.

Ethical dilemmas about what is real from whose perspective and from theoretical frameworks cause tension. We feel obligated to tell what we know or come to understand and we reject providing accounts that present untruths which we see as totally unacceptable. We see ourselves as empiricists and insist that our studies and accounts of them contain evidence of our assertions for action and understanding; and concomitantly we recognize space for multiple truths. We struggle as we try to create accounts that reflect what we come to know to also honor the work of others who may account for things differently and operate from different regimes of truth.

A related ethical dilemma is an ongoing dilemma around the issue of what is. We recognize that multiple accounts of what we know can emerge from data we present, that subsequent interpretations may introduce alternative findings from those originally presented, and, finally, that the use of different theoretical frames leads to different interpretations (see Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2014). The researcher in reexamining and reconsidering data from new theoretical lenses and coming to new understandings faces the ethical dilemma of representing such work as trustworthy.

Another ethical dilemma is centered in notions of community relevant for communities grounded in a relational ontology. Slife (2004) argued that the greatest challenge for a community based in an abstractionist ontology is consensus. Such communities require bonding social capital to flourish. When community members disagree, they must be persuaded to agreement, ignored, or removed. Thus, modernist epistemological ways of knowing and claiming knowledge are essential. The ethical dilemma faced by scholars in this community is the acceptance of work produced from a wide range of disciplines, practice strategies, and techniques, but not anything goes. A community grounded in relational ontology welcomes difference and divergence but is threatened by relativism. This is especially so in S-STEP work when we have to make judgments of quality in publications and presentations. While multiple ways of knowing, of demonstrating knowing, or inquiring into problems are welcome, researchers must also demonstrate trustworthiness of their findings. As a scholar in this community, there is a felt responsibility to both pursue knowledge of practice in multiple and distinct ways and yet simultaneously to demonstrate trustworthiness of assertions for knowledge and action.

8.4   Conclusion

Thomas King (2003) wrote:

> The truth about stories is that that's all we are.
>
> The Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri says that "In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted in us knowingly or unknowingly`- in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives. (p.153)

As S-STEP researchers we are interested in changing our stories of being and our hope is that we might change our lives. Here is a cautionary note: when we change our lives is there an ethical dimension? We have taken up this wonder with attention to relationships, Schwab philosophy, the particular, the vulnerable, openness, and interpretation through dialogues and grounded our wonders in ontology. We close here with consideration of the role of memory. By necessity we construct our data sets after our teaching is done. We might make the odd jot note, but the fuller more detailed data work comes after we are done. We must remember our work, our actions, and our interactions. We only step out of the self after we teach; we cannot research ourselves in the moment. What gets lost? What gets left behind? What gets privileged? What gets highlighted? We will either capture the stories and experiences that give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness.

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