

Member-checking about member-checking: Youth agency in identity studies



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CONTEXT

Youth employment

The Teen Science Research & Communication Program—led by the Museum of Science, Boston and Boston University—hires high school students to contribute to experimental psychology research, produce science communication, engage in science education, receive mentorship from scientists and museum staff, and become part of scientific communities.

Exploring science identities

The project's developmental evaluation explores teens' science identities over the course of the year-long program.

Expanding youth agency

Recognizing that identities are personal, and wishing to support the project's approach of immersing teens in STEM practices, the evaluation team wanted program participants involved in telling their own stories of how their science identities have changed over time. We chose to do this through a member-checking approach.

APPROACHES TO MEMBER CHECKING

Member-checking for validation

Member checking is traditionally seen as a research validation tool. For instance, many studies return interview transcripts to participants so that they can correct and redact their words (Carlson, 2010).

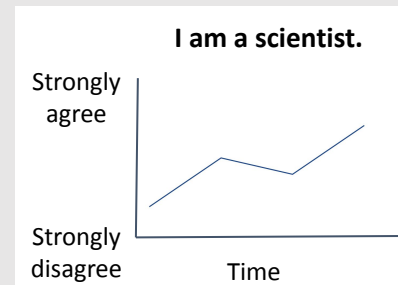
Member-checking for co-analysis

Our philosophy has been for evaluators and participants to *collaboratively interpret* data rather than having evaluators draw conclusions alone.

Evaluators share data from participants' surveys and interviews (as in the graph to the right) and ask youth to reflect on how they would make sense of the data and what it means for their identities.

Member-checking for change

Others see member-checking as a form of intervention. For instance, some researchers use a member-checking interview to produce meaningful change among research subjects (Cho & Trent, 2006; Koelsch, 2013).



TAKE-AWAYS

Reflection

To further inform our member checking efforts, we (evaluators, participants, and a program leader) met to:

- Discuss the member-checking methods we have used
- Consider how to use member-checking for our final report

Conclusions



For identity research, participant involvement in meaning-making is important for validity, even if it challenges norms of evaluator independence.



Participants valued how member-checking could help articulate goals, make sense of program experiences, and know how to advocate for change.



Participants appreciated the opportunity to provide context for quantitative data, reflecting on whether changes were meaningful or measurement error.



Participants varied in their desired level of involvement in final reporting, ranging from teens writing auto-ethnographic case studies to reviewing and discussing a draft case study written by an evaluator.

References

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