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Book Report

**Object Medleys: Interpretive Possibilities for Educational Research
by D. Pillay, K. Pithouse-Morgan, and I. Naicker (Eds.).**

Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense, 2017. 229 pp. ISBN: 978-94-6351-192-6 (paperback)

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The focus of this book is on providing insights into how objects can be used for the purposes of educational research. Although many scholars have used objects for research in areas such as anthropology (Miller, 1998), museum studies (Wood & Latham, 2014), and archaeology (Daston, 2004), it is a relatively novel approach in educational research in that it questions traditional approaches to research and what counts as data for the research process. According to Miller (2010), objects play a pivotal role in people's lives because "the whole system of things, with their internal order, makes us the people we are" (p. 53). Furthermore, objects represent the promise for more in-depth interrogation and engagement with both sociocultural and autobiographical issues relating to educational research.

In *Object Medleys: Interpretive Possibilities for Educational Research*, 37 researchers engage with their respective objects, and reflect on their understandings of the objects from various vantage points, both literally and metaphorically, and in relation to their roles as researchers and educators in a range of South African and international higher education institutions. The array of objects, representing medleys and nuances of meaning, are interpreted from multiple perspectives. In this way, the researchers are able to illustrate how lived experiences—through connections with, between, and through objects—can be re-imagined and re-visioned in their roles as change agents.

The book is carefully and meticulously crafted and collated to ensure that the reader is provided with a succinct background to how the book was conceptualised, a general theoretical engagement with objects for research purposes, and, lastly, with education researchers' accounts of their lived experiences with selected objects that represent a deeper engagement with educational practice for social change.

In the prelude to the book, "Composing Object Medleys," the editors (Daisy Pillay, Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, and Inbanathan Naicker) explain how the book was conceptualised, provide a brief summary of each of the following chapters, and describe the book's peer review process. Part 1 of the book, entitled "Object Memoirs" and comprising three chapters, provides insights into three established researchers' theoretical interpretations of self-reflexive object inquiry from various perspectives. These insights range from an exploration of how engaging with commonplace objects can enhance educational research, to object pedagogies that challenge hierarchical educational processes by

providing young people with a voice and a focus on how domestic objects can have important implications for exploring epistemological vantages in postcolonial thinking.

Part 2, "Object Beginnings," presents novel opportunities for working with objects in educational settings, sharing researchers' accounts of their personal engagements with specific objects and how these relate to their lived experiences on literal and deeper, figurative levels—to establish how the objects are connected to their roles as change agents. As the researchers, supported by the editors, explore the connections between objects, lived education experiences, and wider social and cultural concerns, they come to a deeper understanding and awareness of the significance of the interpretive possibilities of object medleys for education research with a focus on social change.

In the second part of the book, which consists of nine chapters (Chapters 5 to 13), the authors also use objects to reflect on their roles as teachers and researchers in higher education institutions. Chapter 5 focuses on how objects—a vanda (orchid), a rose, and a baobab—can inspire optimism among teacher researchers in higher education in their roles as agents of hope for self-transformation. The second chapter of the section demonstrates through reflections on objects (a stove, a flask and a photograph) how educational researchers, who often work independently, engage in collective object inquiry and how collaborative learning could lead to the development of new insights. In Chapter 7, with the objects a crutch and a bus, the researchers show how knowing in educational leadership research and practice can be enhanced through object inquiry. Chapter 8, which focuses on object self-dialogue, demonstrates how dialogue with different domestic objects (a bath, cooking pot and pencil holder) can shed new light on social constructions of the researcher self, developing multiple perspectives of reality that can contribute towards education for social change.

Chapter 9 demonstrates how through the objects, spontaneous shrines and the studio desk, arts-based approaches can be both innovative and pedagogical. In Chapter 10, drawing on the concept of object practice, the authors show how, through object inquiry, teaching practices can be understood as teacher leadership in higher education. Chapter 11's researchers reflect on how working with photographs can provide voice to silent voices, and how the multiple stories of the self provide deeper insights into how researchers would like to be perceived by others. In Chapter 12, with a focus on shoes, suitcases, and stones, the authors demonstrate in an imaginative way through the use of dramaturgy how objects can become points of departure for creative engagement with the self in educational research in the field of arts and design. Finally, in Chapter 13, the researcher reflects on how her religious object medley enabled her to examine her values, beliefs, and practices against the servant leaders Christ, Mother Theresa, and Pope John Paul II.

Using objects for educational research is not an area that has been extensively explored, and there is a general paucity of studies in the field. Hence, this book provides novel insights into how educational researchers could theorise about abstract concepts in a grounded manner, using objects. The range of objects identified and studied by the researchers, and their deeper interpretation of them as representing abstract concepts, demonstrates how educational researchers can engage with objects on more abstract levels, thereby illustrating how the scholarship of object inquiry could be enhanced and promoted.

The book opens up a new space for deepening our understanding of how object inquiry could be applied to educational themes within the realms of research. Given that this type of research falls within the terrain of self-reflexive practice (and there is a measure of rigour in the research process as the researchers reflect deeply on the rich nuances of meaning the objects convey to their own education conceptualisations) object inquiry has the potential to deepen insights and stimulate more in-depth reflection on education-related issues. The chapters provide groundbreaking insights into

how educational research could be undertaken in creative and imaginative ways through the study of objects—and conform to scholarly conventions in the qualitative research tradition.

This book is recommended for researchers who are interested in exploring new ways of conducting educational research, using object inquiry to enable them to reflect on education-related issues and themes. It is an invaluable source for gaining a deeper understanding of alternative, postcolonial research paradigms because it guides the novice researcher interested in this approach to an understanding of the processes involved in conducting this self-reflexive inquiry, and to gaining insights into how such object inquiry research is constructed and articulated in a scholarly manner.

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