Case Study of Ed 451: The Reporting Structure

Even "small" studies deserve "good" reporting. As you'll see next semester, the *report* becomes the means by which your effort is communicated to the client and the larger community. Following is the structure each of your reports will follow.

A word to the wise: structure *does not* imply length. I'm not asking you to write a lengthy narrative. Rather, the challenge is to write **succinctly** … to stay on-point and avoid over-elaboration.

Overview

A research report necessarily begins with an overview of the *problem(s)* or *issues(s)* that you studied/investigated. So, each Case Study Group is charged with writing a general description of the *object* of the case study, its particular area of focus, and the section with which it's affiliated.

Close this section by briefly characterizing the process in which we're engaged as a class, i.e., a concise, individually-conducted review of the literature followed by three distinct data collection strategies completed in small groups/teams).

The *Overview* may be only 1/2 to 3/4 of a page, but it nonetheless "tells" the reader why the study is important *from an evaluative perspective*.

Evaluation Purpose

Each of the three reports you'll generate features a *purpose* statement that details the group's specific charge.

Be careful not to confuse the *strategy* you've employed (content analysis, observation, interview) with the evaluative intent that the strategy enables or promotes. In other words, the narrative you develop in this section needs to seamlessly weave *what you investigated* with the technique you employed. You want the reader to see at first glance that the method was a good fit given the ideas you wanted to explore.

Impact of the Literature Review

Each of the three reports features a section that briefly explains how the lit review you wrote influenced your data gathering effort—from issues to investigate to data interpretation.

Contextual Factors

Note any contextual factors—generally constraints such as access to people or materials, time factors, or political issues—that influenced the design of your brief study, how your instrument was deployed/implemented/administered, or analysis/interpretation of the results.

The driving question here is: What are limitations of the study of which the reader should be aware?

Methodology

Here you'll describe your tool/protocol in some detail. Among the specifics to cover are its *general format/organization*, the *structure of specific items or sections*, *how it was administered or used*, and any *pilot testing* you conducted (to iron out the kinks).

Findings

Even when the report is brief, skilled researchers and evaluators always outline/brainstorm this section before they begin to write. The idea is to present a coherent explanation of the data you've collected. There are many ways to organize or structure this section; for our purposes, thematic or topical may work best.

Remember that a *findings* section details two distinct processes: analysis and interpretation. You must be able to articulate *what you think the results mean*. Don't be disappointed if the data fail to suggest hard-and-fast conclusions. It's just fine if they point to *more issues* to explore or *specific issues where extended study is warranted* (certainly the case with the *content analysis*)

Use tables, charts, and graphs *as necessary* to clarify the data -- or any complex points you're trying to make. Engage the reader with descriptive language; allow him or her to "see" the importance/value of what you've done.