Researcher positionality

Barbara Class

MAS & DAS Education in Emergencies
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Synopsis

Paradigm
Purpose of education research
Research cycle for empirical studies
Positionality statement

Where do you stand? What do you think?

Please go the padlet and say what positionality means for you!

https://unige.padlet.org/barbaraclass/mas-das-education-in-emergencies-f1xuywx11mq8409l

Education: foundation disciplines

- Philosophy
- History
- Psychology
- Sociology

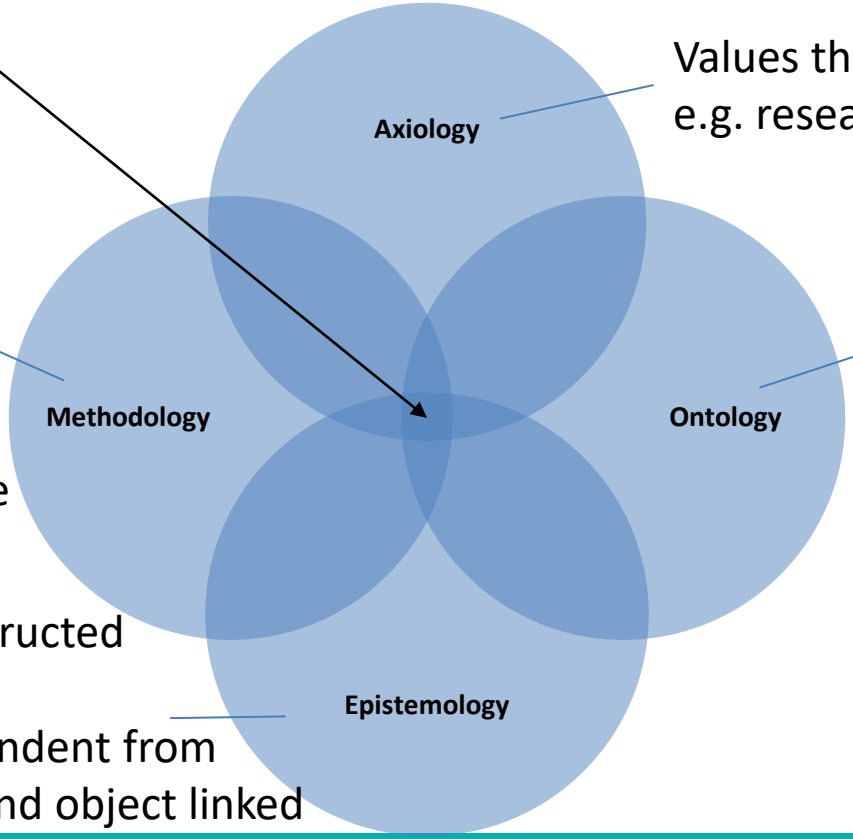
Today, researchers in education are unanimous: there is a dearth in philosophical thinking in education that needs to be adressed, e.g. Tesar et al., 2022

Research in education

- Research is fundamentally a «disciplined, balanced enquiry, conducted in a critical spirit (Thomas, 2013, cited by Coe, 2021)»
- Where to start: axiology, ontology, epistemology, methodology, method?

Coe, 2021

Paradigm



Values that underpin the research
e.g. research *on;* reasearch *with*

What procedure to follow for the investigation
e.g. positivist-quantitative; interpretivist-qualitative

Views on the nature of reality
e.g. single objective reality existing independently from individuals; multiple realities constructed by individuals

How knowledge is constructed to know about reality
e.g., investigator independent from its object; investigator and object linked

Coe, 2021

Paradigm

- “Paradigm refers to the underlying set of perceptions, assumptions, values, and concepts which have internal consistency”
- Paradigm, worldviews: used interchangeably
- In education, a dominant paradigm influences how educational realities - purposes, policies, practices - are viewed and, consequently, how these are shaped and manifested

Sterling, 2021

Two major paradigms

- Mechanisitic: focus on parts; prediction, i.e. the future is seen as a continuum of the present
- Holistic: focus on the whole; prospection, i.e. the future breaks from the present and explores all possible scenarios

Salonen et al, 2023

Some examples (1)

There is truth and objective knowledge about the world

All knowledge is subjective and socially constructed

The kinds of objective knowledge and facts discovered by research are not dependent on the values and beliefs of particular researchers

Understanding the values and beliefs of researchers is crucial to understanding their claims

Coe, 2021

Some examples (2)

Power relationships are not relevant to the truth

Power, and particularly imbalances of power, are central to understanding social phenomena. A key purpose of research is to emancipate and transform

The world is fundamentally mechanistic and deterministic, in which human behaviour is governed by general laws and is capable of manipulation

Human beings are active participants in the researched world, interacting with rather than reacting to their environment, constructing situations by bringing their own meanings and acting freely

Coe, 2021

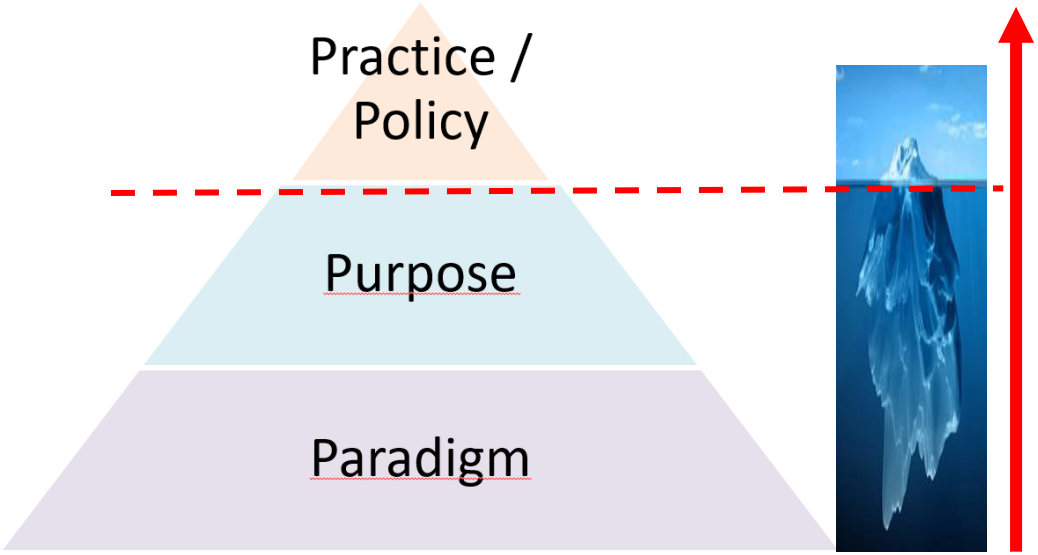
Some examples (3)

Phenomena can be understood by analysis of their component parts

Social phenomena are more than the sum of their parts and can be understood only holistically

Coe, 2021

Why is paradigm important?



Paradigm **determines** purpose and **shapes** practice and policy

Sterling, 2021

Purpose of research in education

- Applied vs basic
- Empirical vs theoretical
- Nomothetic vs idiographic
- Intervention vs descriptive

One possible classification!

Coe, 2021

Applied vs basic

- Applied educational research is focused on questions of **practice** or **policy**, with the intention of informing or improving some aspect of them and often containing **explicit recommendations for action**
- Basic educational research is conducted for the **advancement of knowledge**, with no concern about whether the research is directly or immediately useful in any way

Coe, 2021

Empirical vs theoretical

- Empirical educational research is grounded in **observation**. It takes **phenomena** (things that exist or happen) as its starting point and attempts to represent them as **data** which can then be analysed. It also entails a theoretical part
- Theoretical educational research focuses on **ideas**, **theories**, philosophical thinking, rather than phenomena

Coe, 2021

Nomothetic vs idiographic

- Nomothetic educational research seeks to understand the **general case** (nomos, "the law" in Greek). It aims to discover general explanations for phenomena and to make generalisable **predictions** to further cases
- Idiographic educational research focuses on the **individual case** (idios, "belonging to an individual" in Greek). It aims to describe and understand what is **unique** and **distinctive** about a particular context, case or individual

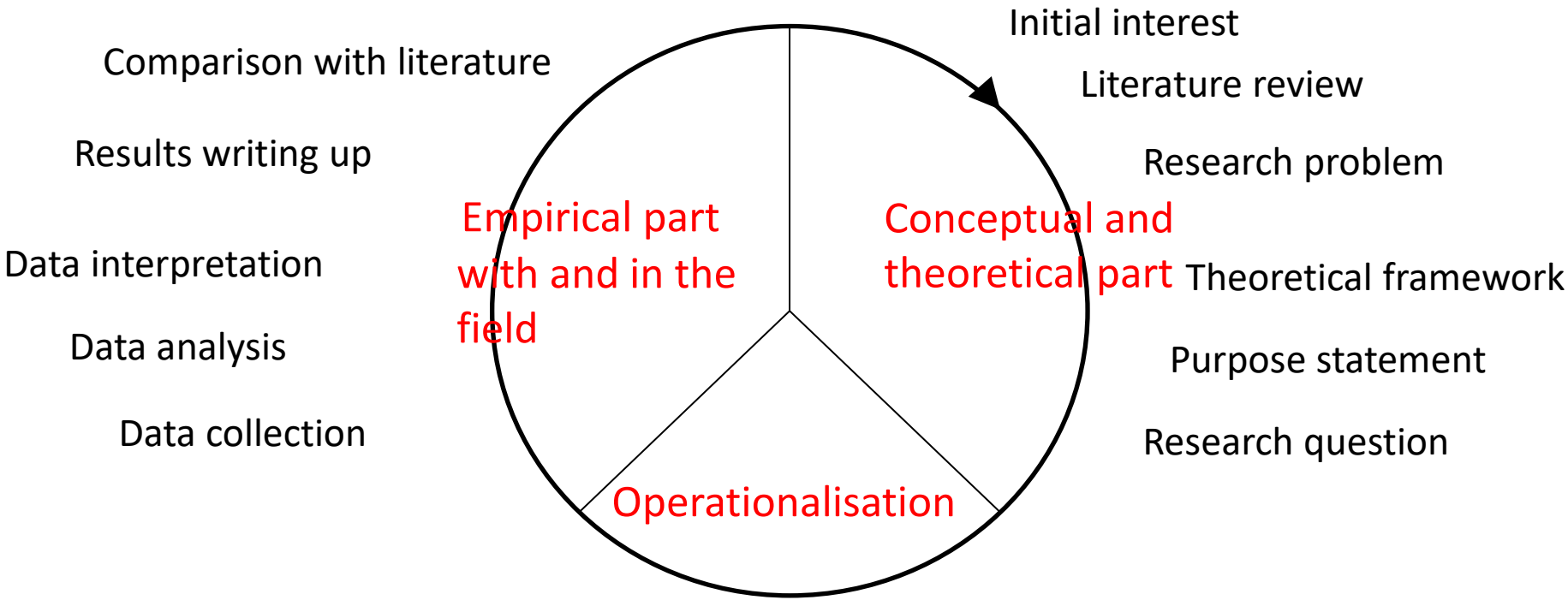
Coe, 2021

Intervention vs descriptive

- Intervention educational research actively sets out to introduce some **change** into the educational world, then studies the reaction. This view considers that we can really only fully understand the world if we understand how to change it
- Descriptive educational research **describes** what is, without directly attempting to change it even if there can be an underlying support to provoke changes

Coe, 2021

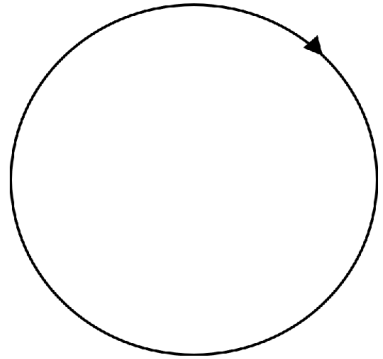
Research cycle for an empirical research



Methodology (sampling, data collection and data analysis)

https://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Methodology_tutorial_-_empirical_research_principles

Caution



Linearity:

- Research in the making is not linear!

The different components are interconnected and require numerous iterations

- Research is reported and written up in a linear manner

What is theory in social research?

Theory is, first and foremost, a **means of making sense of what we know**. It can be defined as a **set of logically related propositions** that frame a greater or lesser number of **observed facts** and form a network of generalisations from which we can derive **explanations** for a certain number of **social phenomena**.

«La théorie est avant tout un moyen de donner un sens à nos connaissances. On peut la définir comme un ensemble de propositions logiquement reliées, encadrant un plus ou moins grand nombre de faits observés et formant un réseau de généralisations dont on peut dériver des explications pour un certain nombre de phénomènes sociaux.» (p. 112)

Gingras et Côté, 2009

Example of use of theory

Table 3.1 Comparing Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Induction **Purposes** • Generates theory from observations. • Oriented to discovery, exploration. **Procedures** • Emergent design. • Merges data collection and analysis.	**Deduction** **Purposes** • Tests theory through observations. • Oriented to cause and effect. **Procedures** • Predetermined design. • Separates data collection and analysis.
Subjectivity **Purposes** • Emphasizes meanings, interpretation. • Tries to understand others' perspectives. **Procedures** • Researcher is involved, close to the data. • Researcher is the "research instrument."	**Objectivity** **Purposes** • Emphasizes things that can be measured. • Results do not depend on beliefs. **Procedures** • Researcher is detached, distant from the data. • Relies on standardized protocols.
Context **Purposes** • Emphasizes specific depth and detail. • Analyzes holistic systems. **Procedures** • Uses a naturalistic approach. • Relies on a few purposively chosen cases.	**Generality** **Purposes** • Emphasizes generalization and replication. • Analyzes variables. **Procedures** • Uses experimental and statistical controls. • Works across a larger number of cases.

Morgan, 2014

Back to positionality

“The term positionality both describes an individual’s world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context”

“Positionality “reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 p.71)

It concerns:

- Ontological assumptions
- Epistemological assumptions
- Assumptions about human nature and agency

Darwin Holmes, 2020

Writing a positionality statement

- Acknowledge personal positions that have the potential to influence your research
- Locate yourself about the participants, i.e. how you see them and how they may see you
- Locate yourself about the research context and process
- “Soul reaching" and time needed to write a positionality statement

Savin-Baden & Major, 2013
Darwin Holmes, 2020

Tips - write about:

- Your lenses as a researcher, e.g. your philosophical, personal, theoretical beliefs and perspective through which you view the research process
- Potential influences on the research, e.g. age, political beliefs, social class, race, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, previous career
- Your chosen or pre-determined position as a researcher about the participants in the project, e.g. research with, for, on participants
- The research-project context and an explanation as to how, where, when and in what way the preceding elements might, may, or have, influenced the research process

Savin-Baden & Major, 2013
Darwin Holmes, 2020

Let’s write!

Take 10 mn to jot down first thoughts!

Joint discussion :)

Références (1)

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