

Chapter 16

Denouement: Untying the Knot

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ABSTRACT

Research is generally regarded as falling within the scholarship of discovery. However, here authors and editors also explore the application of the paradigms to the scholarships more broadly, including the application of the paradigms to the scholarships of integration, application, teaching, and engagement. We have closely linked the concept of scholarship to policy directions in universities and in other bodies and agencies that influence or govern them. We conclude that the range of paradigms and scholarships available to academics provides a rich array of possibilities for the creation of new understandings and new approaches to scholarly work. The challenge we pose, however, is to encourage academics to be bold enough to work in different paradigms and scholarships from those that are “traditionally” associated with specific disciplines. We also discuss forces that militate against academics daring to be different.

PARADIGMS OF EDUCATION RESEARCH: PATTERNS AND INTERPRETATIONS

We have focused attention in this book on six paradigms of scholarship and research – the positivist, neo-positivist, interpretivist, pragmatic, transformative and supercomplexity. In Chapters 1 and 2 of this book, we have provided detailed descriptions and discussions about each of the paradigms proposed. Such detailed descriptions are frequently missing in research texts and research methods courses, and here we set out to explicitly fill that gap and showcase the paradigm as the central determining element in research and in scholarship of all kinds. Such understandings, we claim, are critical for academics, research scholars and their supervisors, leaders and managers in higher education, and also for editors and editorial boards when determining the worth of submitted articles for publication.

A number of authors have advanced understandings of prevailing research paradigms in education and the social sciences (see Table 1). If we set aside classifications based on the distinction between

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Table 1. Recent portrayals of paradigms in education and the social sciences

Morgan (2006)					
Quantitative	Qualitative	Complementary			
Guba & Lincoln (2005)					
Positivist	Post-Positivism	Constructivist	Critical Theories	Participatory	
Mertens (2010)					
[Positivist Superseded]	Post-Positivist	Pragmatic	Constructivist	Transformative	
Teddlie & Tashakkore (2009)					
Positivist	Post-Positivist	Pragmatic	Constructivist	Transformative	
Ling & Ling (2017)					
Positivist	Neo-Positivist	Pragmatic	Interpretivist	Transformative	Supercomplexity

quantitative and qualitative research (as we have done in Chapter 1, seeing quantitative and qualitative as relating to the nature of the data and data analysis tools rather than as the ontological underpinnings of research) then, while there are important conceptual distinctions reflected in the differing nomenclature employed, there is similarity in the range of research paradigms identified. Supercomplexity is a research paradigm that we have added, drawing on the work of Barnett (Barnett, 1990; see also Chapter 13). We have illustrated how each research paradigm reflects a particular ontology, epistemology, axiology, intent or motivation and related outcome. It has been shown that paradigms, as well as being organizational and analytical devices used to categorize research undertakings, can be concepts that transform thinking about oneself as a scholar, a teacher or a learner.

Reflecting on the five established research paradigms, the first listed is the positivist paradigm. The applicability of the positivist paradigm to education research in the current era may be challenged. It is included here for two reasons. With its ontological underpinning of a discoverable reality, it serves as a conceptual base for distinguishing other paradigms. In addition, for some reported current education research, the structure of the research and the ontology implicit continues to be positivist. In Section 2, “Constants and Patterns”, the neo-positivist paradigm is reflected. It is usually referred to as “post-positivist” in the sense of being adopted as an alternative to the positivist paradigm but we have labelled it “neo-positivist” because it shares something of the ontology of the positivist paradigm – the existence of an ordered reality – but is distinguished from the positivist position by an understanding that reality may be patterned, local and subject to change over time and by a recognition of the limitations of researchers. A researcher working in the neo-positivist paradigm may explore and test existing understandings, which we have labelled the deductive mode, or may seek to fill a gap in present knowledge, which we have labelled the inductive mode. Other post-positivist paradigms addressed are the interpretivist and transformative. These two paradigms share the ontological understanding that, whatever the reality of the social world, all that is available to us is what we can apprehend with our human limitations. Hence the outcomes of research are evidenced interpretations of the researcher working with the researched. Multiple defensible interpretations of a research subject can be available simultaneously. The transformative paradigm is distinguished by a concern with human rights and social justice and the endeavour to produce an evidenced, socially-constructed understanding with potential to support empowered action. We have included a pragmatic paradigm in our framework as an approach to research, driven by the

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