

Main Approaches to Educational Research

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Abstract – The purpose of this paper is to discuss three approaches to educational research. First, I will start with a discussion of the research paradigm, providing its definition and its role in conducting research. Then I will discuss positivism, interpretivism and the critical theory approach to research in terms of their underpinning assumptions, quality standards and limitations. I will follow that with my own position regarding research.

Keywords – Critical Theory, Interpretivism, Paradigm, Positivism.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term paradigm was first termed by Thomas Kuhn who introduced it as an overall historical research framework (Crotty, 1998). The term paradigm receives varied attention in research texts. In some texts, the paradigm is introduced at the beginning, whereas others may touch on it slightly at the end or have no discussion around the notion of paradigm at all (Mackenzie & Knip, 2006; Grix, 2004). Thus, the paradigm's meaning, its role in research and where it fits appear to be essentially ambiguous, especially for novice researchers.

A paradigm can be defined as "a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, as cited in Mackenzie & Knip, 2006). Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 108) identify three questions that help define a paradigm. That is, the ontological, the epistemological and the methodological:

1. The ontological question asks, what is the nature of the "knowable"? Or what is the nature of reality?
2. The epistemological question asks, what is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known or the (knowledge)?
3. The methodological question asks, how can the knower go about obtaining the knowledge?

But the question is why does one's view of reality and knowledge affect the research? In fact, the researcher's intentions, goals and philosophical assumptions are inseparably linked with the research s/he conducts. Grix (2004) suggests that if a person wants to conduct clear and precise research, he needs first to understand the philosophical underpinnings that inform his choice of research questions, methodology and methods. Thus, how social reality and knowledge is viewed will lead one to how to go and uncover knowledge of a certain social phenomenon. Crotty (1998) argues that researchers can choose which stage to begin at, whether they be based on ontological, epistemological or methodological assumptions. However, other authors like Grix (2004) suggest that the ideal way to start research is by identifying the ontological assumptions which will inform the epistemology, which, in turn, will inform the methodology. All of these will determine which data

collection method needs to be implemented. Such arguments among textbook writers show the inconsistency with which a paradigm appears in the stages of conducting research, even though they agree on its importance. However, I agree with Guba (1990, p. 17), who notes the ambiguity of the meaning of a paradigm, and points out that where one stands in the process of conducting research is considered to be beneficial since such ambiguity makes it possible for researchers to reshape their research as their understanding progresses. In addition, I noticed through looking at different research articles that researchers are more explicit about their epistemology and methods than their ontological and epistemological assumptions. This may be due to the fact that the lines between ontological and epistemological assumptions are not clear in theory or in practice.

Trying to classify all educational research into a few paradigms is a complex task. It can be also very challenging and confusing process, especially where some research textbooks use the terms 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' to describe various types of research. Such a classification is not helpful because it implies that the main difference between research is in the type of data collected only, whereas the main difference, in fact, is at the level of ontological and epistemological assumptions (Crotty, 1998). This paper focuses on three of the most popular paradigms today: positivism, interpretivism and critical theory.

II. POSITIVISM

Positivism, which is also known as the "scientific method", gives emphasis to the position that the social world should be studied the way that physical phenomenon are studied. Positivism is based on a realist ontology, which postulates that "there exists a reality out there, driven by immutable natural laws" (Guba, 1990, p. 19). Thus, positivism addresses causal relationships and basic regularities between different components of the world. Positivists have an objectivist epistemology, which requires for the researcher that, in order to discover the real world, he must "put questions directly to nature and allow nature to answer back" (Guba, 1990, p. 19). In addition, the researcher should maintain a detached, objective view in order to understand the facts (Duffy, 1986). Values and other biasing factors are excluded so as not to influence the outcomes of the research.

Based on its ontological and epistemological assumptions, positivist research uses experimental and quasi-experimental methodologies (Creswell, 2007). Experimental designs make causal inferences about the relationship between an independent variable and one or more dependent variables. In experimental designs, the researcher aims to maximize the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable and

Decisionoriented Educational Research

Anna J. McLee



Decisionoriented Educational Research:

Decision-Oriented Educational Research William Cooley,William Bickel,2012-12-06 Decision Oriented Educational Research considers a form of educational research that is designed to be directly relevant to the current information requirements of those who are shaping educational policy or managing educational systems It was written for those who plan to conduct such research as well as for policy makers and educational administrators who might have such research conducted for them The book is divided into three main parts Part I is background Chapter 1 describes some of the basic themes that are woven throughout subsequent chapters on decision oriented research These themes include the importance of taking a systems view of educational research of understanding the nature of decision and policy processes and how these influence system research of integrating research activities into the larger systems processes of the role of management in the research process of researchers and managers sharing a sense of educational purposes and of emphasizing system improvement as a basic goal of research process Chapter 2 is a discussion of the background of the research activities that form the bases of this book Our collaboration with the Pittsburgh public school system is described as are the methods and structure we used to build the case histories of our work with the district Part II encompassing chapters 3 through 9 addresses basic generalizations about decision oriented educational research that we have derived from our experiences

The Implementation and Evaluation of the Decision-Oriented Educational Research (DOER) Paradigm in a Non-traditional University Academic Program Lynn A. Wild,1986 *The Implementation and Evaluation of the Decision-Oriented Educational Research Model (DOER) in an Adult Vocational Training Center* Anna J. McLee,1986

Educational Research and Development in the United States National Center for Educational Research and Development (U.S.),1969 Study prepared for the OECD on the present status and future growth of research and development in respect of educational research in the USA covers the organization of primary education secondary education and higher education examines economic resources management technique and impact of educational policy and practice and concludes that the absence of an overall strategy inadequate financial support labour shortage and imperfect statistical tables are the main obstacles to educational development IJER Vol 1-N3 International Journal of Educational Reform,1992-07-01 The mission of the International Journal of Educational Reform IJER is to keep readers up to date with worldwide developments in education reform by providing scholarly information and practical analysis from recognized international authorities As the only peer reviewed scholarly publication that combines authors voices without regard for the political affiliations perspectives or research methodologies IJER provides readers with a balanced view of all sides of the political and educational mainstream To this end IJER includes but is not limited to inquiry based and opinion pieces on developments in such areas as policy administration curriculum instruction law and research IJER should thus be of interest to professional educators with decision making roles and policymakers at all levels turn since it provides a broad based conversation

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and recommended readings included and more direct the practical professional message that is the book's main message is more clearly articulated

Educational Research Irvin J. Lehmann, William A. Mehrens, 1979 **Surveys and Experiments in Educational Research** James F. McNamara, 1994 Methodology for educational surveys and educational research

Decision-oriented Research in an Educational Communications Organization Lewis Miller, Educational Resources Information Center (U.S.), 1976 Philosophy of Educational Research Leonard I. Krimerman, 1973 *World Yearbook of Education 1980* Eric Hoyle, Jacquetta Megarry, 2012-11-12 Published in 2005 World Yearbook of Education 1980 is an important contribution to the Major Works Series

Quality Management System Registration Michael Eugene Henkel, 2000 The International Encyclopedia of Education Torsten Husén, T. Neville Postlethwaite, 1994 **Methods of Educational Research** Max Dissette Engelhart, 1971 *Educational Research* George J. Mouly, 1978 Educational Research in Europe Today and Tomorrow Eve Malmquist, Hans U. Grundin, 1975 *Research in Educational Settings* Geoffrey M. Maruyama, Stanley Deno, 1992-05-30 With a frank and discursive style the authors address both the problems of access and the problems of researcher control The result is a readable but realistic guide to the strategies required for valid investigations in educational settings The book is practical and useable It gives a case study at the start provides exercises after each chapter and is clearly written School Psychology International To date little material has been written about the pitfalls of conducting research in schools until now Research in Educational Settings helps prospective educational researchers plan their research more carefully in K 12 schools This welcome addition to the research field focuses on the following issues access and credibility in the school traditional issues of designing research questions that emerge as the design is imposed on the school culture and setting particularly in regards to school staff and student assessment the length of interventions and whether or not to schedule follow up studies and how to interpret and communicate findings to schools and policymakers Using personal experiences from their field research to illustrate key concepts the authors also include a research project to clarify the practical issues of school research Professionals and students of research methods evaluation education psychology and sociology will readily welcome this much awaited volume

The International Encyclopedia of Educational Evaluation Herbert J. Walberg, G.D. Haertel, 1990-01-31 The International Encyclopedia of Educational Evaluation provides a current and comprehensive treatment of the major evaluation approaches and methods used in educational research focusing on themes such as educational needs assessment measurement evaluating design decision making and educational policy This single volume is an up to date reference work for the beginning student as well as the advanced practitioner and offers educational evaluators access to the range of techniques and disciplines pertinent to good evaluation practice

Field Study Methods for Educational Researchers Harry F. Wolcott, 1972 **The Study of Education** University of California (System). Academic Program Review Committee for Education, 1976

Decisionoriented Educational Research Book Review: Unveiling the Power of Words

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