

Defining Indigenous Pedagogy through Research in Education

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Many a teacher has moaned that they have little or no time to spare for research, which is perceived as an activity reserved exclusively for academicians ensconced in the ivory towers of institutions of higher learning. Research is also deemed better suited for these academicians' supervisees or tutees who have to jump through the necessary hoops in order to earn themselves a higher degree. For teachers at the chalkface, however, research activity is a burden that distracts them from their core business of delivering their lessons. These perceptions pose a challenge to any attempt to advance a research-driven reconstruction of teaching in our schools as proposed in the theme for today's symposium. The theme is underpinned by the following assumptions:

Assumption One – There is a need, perceived or otherwise, for an indigenous pedagogy.

The flip-side of this assumption suggests that there are weaknesses in our current approach to teaching and these could be attributed to its lack of indigenous status.

If we look at the developments in the curriculum for teaching English as Second Language (TESL) in our country, particularly in the area of grammar teaching, the above assumption seems valid. Whether we chose to adopt the audio-lingual, grammar-focused approach in the Sixties or the communicative approach in the mid-Seventies to English language teaching, the decision was influenced more by the pedagogical innovations advanced in countries where English was the native language than any insights or empirical evidence gathered about how local learners actually learned the second language. Even when it was judged necessary to re-introduce the teaching of grammar in the KBSM English Curriculum, teachers were repeatedly reminded not to teach grammar in isolation or overtly.

Numerous letters to newspaper editors expressed concern over the decline in the standard of English among students from primary to tertiary levels. Many of them observed that students were not able to grasp basic grammar and called for more explicit teaching of grammar in ESL classrooms. The continuing debate on the role of grammatical competence in language learning can be construed as attempts to shape our own approach and method of language teaching (our indigenous pedagogy?) to meet our local needs.

Assumption Two – An indigenous pedagogy can be defined through research in education

The above example about the place of grammar in the language curriculum illustrates an attempt by practitioners as well as other stakeholders to influence the direction of curriculum development; albeit only one specific aspect of it. However, pedagogical

innovations and changes need a more substantial basis than intuition or personal perceptions. The impact of a curricular change cannot be overstated. Every change ripples through the whole educational system affecting assessment, evaluation, material production, teacher preparation, school management and classroom lives. Hence, any proposal to innovate or change must be framed by clear and systematic procedures for problem-setting and problem solving where *due diligence* and *de rigueur* are the norm, not the exception.

I believe that research as a systematic act of inquiry can provide the substance in pedagogical decision-making. The pursuit of verisimilitude/veracity in research and its attendant criteria of validity and reliability spotlights issues such as accountability and responsibility which are key ingredients for any successful professional undertaking.

An indigenous pedagogy reaches far beyond a simple question of whether to teach grammar overtly or covertly. It is reflected in school leadership, teachers' actions, learners' behaviour, material selection and exploitation, modes of assessment and interpretation of its scores, school-community relationships, and pastoral systems. And in every one of these aspects, choices and decisions are guided by a set of consistent and coherent ontological and epistemological beliefs, worldviews, and experiences. The depth and breadth needed to inform the making of such choices and decisions can be more reliably sourced from sound research into relevant areas.

I would now like to examine each assumption further by discussing two key concepts in our discussion today; namely, indigenous pedagogy and research.

An Indigenous Pedagogy

The word "indigenous" means "native" or "local". So an "indigenous pedagogy" in our context means pedagogy *a la Malaysia* or a pedagogy that has emerged from the local context of practice. The principles that underpin an indigenous pedagogy are postulated from experiences, observations and studies of the teaching-learning activities in our classrooms.

So the question is, "*Do we have an indigenous pedagogy?*"

The answer to this question depends on what we consider as "native" and what is not. If we subscribe to the view that an indigenous pedagogy must reflect only native culture, worldview and beliefs, then a pedagogy that is formed in accordance to Eurocentric thinking would not warrant such a label. Those are the two extreme ends of the spectrum – one end, pure, unadulterated, native-bred pedagogy and the other framed by non-native, more often Eurocentric constructs. The acceptance of the former definition would suggest that our existing pedagogies are non-indigenous since our teacher education, school systems and curricular models are based on Western models. Such a narrow definition is not helpful. I am inclined to believe that an indigenous pedagogy is one that emerges out of the local context of practice and more significantly, among those who use it, there is a sense of ownership – it is their pedagogy because they have shaped it to suit their needs. It is immaterial if the initial ideas were borrowed or taken from other cultures; what is important is that these ideas had been tested in a local setting, adapted, adjusted or refined and then adopted as their own.

Related to the notion of ownership, is empowerment. The claim to indigenous pedagogy is an act of self-empowerment. It gives voice to the practitioners, allowing them to have a say in the development of their approach to teaching. More emphasis is placed on the cultural, social and economic circumstances under which they operate. Their pedagogy is not perceived as merely a reflection of an acquired Western model of teaching but as one that has evolved through experience, experimentation and adaptation in real classrooms. It is a product of an act of pedagogical self-determination, where methodologies that are more responsive to local needs emerge from borrowed models.

Hence, by recognizing our methodologies as uniquely Malaysian (i.e. pedagogy *a la Malaysia*), we are taking the first steps towards empowering ourselves as professional practitioners in our own right. However, there is a need to maintain and further develop our indigenous pedagogy through continuous adjustment and adaptation. Its efficacy is dependant on its ability to meet the challenges of the local conditions. This calls for continuous experimentation and investigation of methods and techniques of teaching. I believe this is where research can play a relevant role by providing the tools and procedures for a systematic examination of our indigenous pedagogy.

As shown in Figure 1.0 below, research helps to mediate between theories of teaching that we have acquired through training and our theories in action that have emerged from our classroom practice.

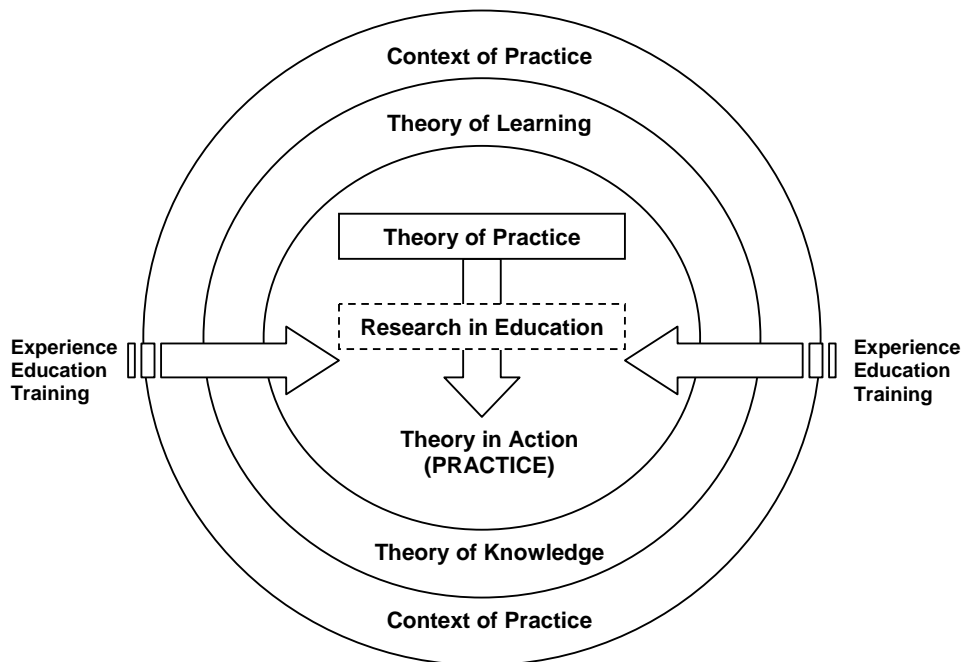


Figure 1.0 : Research-mediated Practice

The process of mediation is impinged upon by the theories of learning and knowledge that we have acquired through experience, education and training as well as the context of our practice.

Research

If we expect research to play an effective mediating role, we have to ensure that the research carried out is appropriate to our aims. Used effectively, research has the potential of clarifying our experience and helping us understand it better and deal with it more intelligently. Before we begin any inquiry, we need to clarify our own research orientations – our own beliefs and assumptions about research.

I would like to discuss the following aspects of research in some detail as I believe that our understanding of these aspects will determine how we can use research to define our indigenous pedagogy.

Research stance

A researcher's stance is analogous to the lenses through which he focuses on a particular phenomenon. The clarity of his apprehension is, therefore, in no small measure determined by the suitability of the lenses he has chosen, the way he uses them to focus on the phenomenon. His stance represents the researcher's ontological and epistemological orientation which constitutes and is constituted by a set of beliefs, assumptions and "postulates" (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:10) about human nature and society, about reality, meaning and knowledge and values and norms that he embraces. A researcher's stance may also be seen as the perspective from which he apprehends the phenomena (Reason, 1981; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Hammersley, 1993). The upshot of adopting a certain stance is the selection of particular techniques for researching a particular subject to the exclusion of others. Researcher's and respondents' roles, data collection and interpretation procedures, and the presentation of the research knowledge gains are naturally influenced by the stance that the researcher has adopted.

One would expect to find differences in the research methods and purposes between a researcher who sees social phenomena as "shot through with indeterminacy and openendedness"(Bohman, 1991: vii) and another researcher who holds that there exists "a neutral world of facts"(*ibid.*: viii). While the latter seeks a "logical implication of a conclusion by its premises specified by some basic inferential rule or set of rules or pattern"(*ibid.*: 16) and aims to provide rule-based, rational causal explanations and predict the relationships between antecedent conditions and actions, the former pursues a "pluralistic, multi-dimensional approach to the explanation of action (which) may find perfectly good explanatory patterns that involve neither probabilistic nor deductive rules"(*ibid.*: 56). The "assumptions about human nature and society, foci of the study and methodology"(Jacob, 1987: 2) of both these researchers will place them in competing research traditions or "paradigms"(Kuhn, 1970). These paradigmatic distinctions in the research landscape correspond with the positivist-interpretive divide that separate the "objective old paradigm" from the "subjective naive inquiry"(Rowan & Reason, 1981: xii).

It is not my intention to engage in a polemical discourse on the comparative merits or demerits of either research tradition - an exercise that is, I believe, otiose and tautological for the simple fact that touting of one paradigm as superior presupposes one's allegiance to one and not the other paradigm. Besides, I concur with Hammersley (1992: 43) who

opines that “philosophical discussion and debate can easily become a distraction; a swapping of one set of problems for another, probably even less tractable, set”. However, I am not suggesting that philosophical assumptions and beliefs are irrelevant in considering research. I am inclined, instead, to think that philosophical assumptions and beliefs help to orient a researcher’s stance. They define the perspective from which he apprehends the object of his research. And it is only with the explication of these assumptions and beliefs that one may better understand the researcher’s work.

Teaching is a socio-cultural artefact. It is part of “the realities of society and culture (that) are a function of passion and of judgment and without passion and judgment they cannot be apprehended in their true nature” (Bittner, 1973: 115). Dehumanising a human enterprise by statistical means will not help the researcher to achieve validity or veracity, only travesty. This belief has persuaded me to be more qualitative than quantitative in my research approach.

Reality

In the first place it is unacceptable that there is no fundamental difference between the study of inanimate objects and human beings. However, that would be the inevitable conclusion if one accepted an externalist view of reality as singular, stable, external and unaffected by the intentional states of its observers (Putnam, 1981). And to accept such a conclusion would be tantamount to ignoring a logical paradox contained in the above assertion - that is, to be true, the assertion would have to deny the ‘human-ness’ of the observers. Putnam’s (1981: 49) “brains in a vat” illustrates the point. Clearly, if one follows the realist’s argument, it is not objective for a ‘brain in a vat’ to study other ‘brains in a vat’. Hence one who observes other ‘brains in a vat’ has to be anything but ‘a brain in a vat’. If that were possible, it “presupposes from the outset a God’s eye view of truth ..”(ibid.: 50). It is indeed arrogant, if not ridiculous, to assume such a stance. As Bittner (1973: 120) opines, as “the perceiving subject who faces the world knowingly, knows that as an object among objects I enjoy no special privilege”.

So what is my view on the nature of reality?

Firstly, I am inclined to believe the constructivist-relativist view that “there exist (not one but) multiple, socially constructed realities ungoverned by natural laws, causal or otherwise”(Guba & Lincoln, 1991: 161). These social realities are constructed by interacting individuals who invest meanings in social situations. This view is inherent in Winch’s (1958: 23) claim that “a man’s social relations with his fellows are permeated with his ideas about reality. Indeed, ‘permeated’ is hardly a strong enough word: social relations are expressions of ideas about reality”. I am also reminded of Blumer’s (1969) remark that

human beings face their world as organisations of selves .. allowing each to make indications to himself; human action is constructed by the actor on the basis of what he notes, interprets and assesses; and the linking of such on-going action constitutes organisations, institutions and vast complexes of interdependent relations.

Reality is therefore interactively and intersubjectively constructed by individuals engaged in meaning-making in social situations.

Secondly, I eschew the idea of a Cartesian world where the state of human affairs is envisaged as similar to the law-governed motion of particles. If this were true, it would be possible to study its pattern(s) and describe with a high degree of certainty the

relationships among its participants. It would also be possible to predict what its next state would be but one of the chief characteristics of social reality is its indeterminacy. Shotter (1975: 108) avers that

... the world cannot have an eternally fixed character, it must be a world that can be developed in a direction 'pointing' from a certain past, through the moment of action in the present, to a more or less uncertain future - with it being really possible at the present time for the world to be developed in any one of a number different possible ways in the future by the actions of agents.

The indeterminate nature of social reality is explained in terms of agency, intentionality of agents and the inextricable interconnectedness of the different parts of that reality (Shotter, 1975:111). According to Shotter, in this indeterminate scheme of reality, every individual's actions are either voluntary or involuntary, intentional or intuitive. And by their action or lack of action, they may change the course of events which in itself might be intended or unintended. I am not attempting to portray a world plagued by an unfathomable state of chaos. Social action is rule-governed (Winch, 1958, Schutz, 1976, Shotter, 1975, Bohman, 1991) but this does not imply that all actions can be understood as regulated by rules. An argument against such a conclusion is found in the indeterminacy implied in the Wittgensteinian Paradox: "no course of action can be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out in accord with the rule" (cf. Bohman, 1991: 58). So any attempt to establish a causal link between an action and a rule(s) would be, at its best, a gross act of oversimplification, or at its worst, a distortion of reality. Bohman (1991: 96) argues against any suggestion of rule-induced "systematic regularity" in the interpretation of behaviour. He says (*ibid.*: 96):

Rules do not simply regulate behaviour, ... but provide interpretive frameworks in which meaningful behaviour takes place. ... Rules are not "conformed to" but instead elaborated upon, interpreted, and transformed; we can indeed change the rules and reconstitute the situation of which we are part. Rules represent frameworks in which skilful actors negotiate and maintain their common understandings.

The significance of the above reflexive view of social action is its suggestion that the locus of action and interpretation is self. The act of investing meaning in social actions is subjective and does not follow a regulatory set of rules. Perhaps, a more significant suggestion is that actors are inextricably linked to each other in the meaning-making process. As Shotter (1975: 110) asserts, "to be me, I need you: I need you to respond to my movements for me to appreciate that my movements have consequences in you; I need you to respond to the meaning in my action for me to be able to appreciate that my action does in fact have a meaning. It is only in the course of on-going practical exchanges that meaning emerges". Thus actors are linked not in a determinate causal sense, but are instead interactively and reciprocally engaged in shaping and re-shaping their own realities.

What implications does a configuration of social reality, as subjective and consisting of multiple realities, have for the notion of truth?

If there are multiple realities which are formed by individual actors, there must also be more than one 'truth'. And since an independent and objective reality is denied, the correspondence theory of truth is therefore disavowed. In the absence of an independent reality, there cannot be any knowledge of an external objective account which is valid and which can be used to assess the truth status of any account or interpretation of reality.

So what is the truth? Given the indeterminacy of social reality, it will be incongruous to think of truth as certain and absolute. In fact, it seems that within the constructivist-relativist world-view it is ironical to think of truth but in doing research the notion of truth cannot be ignored. Within the positivist research tradition truth and validity are Siamese Twins - the denial of one risks the annulment of the other. construal of truth is premised on the existence of an untainted, untouchable body of knowledge of reality which the interpretive-constructivist debunks. Some advocates of interpretivism appeal to consensus to resolve the conundrum. For example, to Guba and Lincoln (1991: 162) "truth", in constructivist terms, is "that most informed and sophisticated construction on which there is consensus among individuals most competent (not necessarily most powerful) to form such a construction". And Eisner (1991:112) defines consensual validation as "at base, agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics of an education situation are right". Both Guba and Lincoln and Eisner are careful to point out that there may be multiple consensually accepted and overlapping constructions which "can exist side by side" (Guba & Lincoln, 1991: 162). However, they claim there is "a moral imperative" (*ibid.*: 162) for the constructivist to "seek out challenging constructions with which to challenge their own". Bittner (1973) echoes a similar opinion when he urges caution against "the myth of the more the merrier" and insists that instead of consensus, perhaps researchers ought to adopt a critical path to an objective view - that is, by opening up the view "to scrutiny, to vigorous examination, to challenge"(p.66).

Validity

It is perhaps appropriate now to re-examine the question of validity in research in the light of the above reconfiguration of reality as indeterminate, subjective and an embodiment of multiple individually constructed realities. As mentioned earlier, validity is bound to one's view of what truth is.

Validity or the lack of it has been used to deride many interpretive and naturalistic studies that saw it necessary within their theoretical framework to accommodate subjectivity and disregard empirical and statistical instruments of validation. 'Validity' is like a conceptual hangover that would not go away, even with the emergence of a new paradigm (Kuhn, 1970).

Hammersley (1987) provides a sample of definitions of validity and reliability. The latter concept which is related to the replicability or reproducibility of studies has no relevance in the interpretive-naturalistic paradigm. How can one replicate the study of social reality - a phenomenon so infinitely variable and indeterminate?

In all the definitions of validity, the thrust is on "the extent to which an instrument measures the property it is intended to measure". (Hammersley, 1987: 75). Kincheloe (1991) disagrees with the positivist's association of validity with verifiability. The aim of research, in the positivist tradition, is the pursuit of statistically and empirically verifiable knowledge. All constructs must therefore be operationalised by explicating procedures for their measurement. For example, intelligence can be measured by I.Q. tests and scored as intelligence quotients (IQ). This reliance on verifiability seems to be prompted by the positivist's declared desire to protect 'knowledge' against relativism. The impulse seems to be "if what counts as knowledge is perpetually determined by values and interests and if objectivity is always socially agreed upon, what is left to protect us from relativism"

(Kincheloe,1991: 128) . Kerlinger (1969) urges that research be divorced from the researcher's predisposition, attitudes and beliefs.

Out of the positivists' concern for statistical measurements and verification and their rejection of relativism, emerge two important notions that are definitive of their tradition; *viz.* internal and external validity. The former notion refers to the extent to which observations and measurements are true representations of what they purported to describe or measure. The latter refers to the generalisability of the conclusions of a study. Positivist researchers see generalisability as the *raison d'être* for research. However, the ambiguity, complexity, indeterminacy and irreducibility of human experience and the social reality within which it exists make the quest for generalisability, and hence external validity, analogous to Icarus' flight of fancy. For any research conclusion about human experience to be 'externally valid', it will have to be accompanied by either the caveat '*ceteris paribus*', i.e. if all things remained equal then the statement is true and verifiable or '*mutatis mutandis*', i.e. given all the necessary changes. But things are never and would never remain equal and there can never be an adequate account or reliable prediction of future changes. Inconstancy and indeterminacy are unequivocal empirical facts about the real world (Bohman, 1991) and the outcomes of social research, including educational research, would always be susceptible to fallibility. As Kincheloe (1991: 131) commented:

The inability of a research orientation to produce infallible research outcomes is not a mark of failure; it reflects the inherent properties of the reality under scrutiny and the types of complex questions that the (disciples) of ask about the meaning of the complex reality.

In the case of internal validity, the positivist insists that there is only one way of verifying truth - in terms of statistical significance derived from statistical measures applied to operationalised phenomena. The problem, however, is that which cannot be seen, cannot be measured. How can one measure the abstract? Is it not a contradiction of terms to speak of measuring knowledge, if knowledge is, by definition, tacit and irreducible? I believe that if we insist on the positivist's definition of validity in research on human experience, we are more than likely to commit all the three orders of mistake that Kincheloe (1991) described; *viz.*:

- 1st order mistake** : drawing conclusions which are not supported by the evidence
- 2nd order mistake** : stating research propositions in a language that is inappropriate for the purpose
- 3rd order mistake** : having inadequate research purposes

In all the definitions, the emphasis is on the rejection of the idea that research procedures lead to an objective and therefore valid representation of reality. The focus, instead, is on the congruence between what is being represented and its representation. More significant is the relinquishment of the observer's power to unilaterally interpret and judge what is true or valid. In the final analysis, the congruence between representation and the represented can only be achieved by the observer in collaboration with the represented subjects. Buchmann (1993: 115) in her definition of "reasonableness" cautions that "it is no mere extension of scientific data or personal experience". She (*ibid.*) further explains that

Reasonableness is hence associated with circumspection, due caution and concern for others, skill and know-how, vision, rationality, effectiveness, responsibility, the exercise of will, common sense and good feeling, and the avoidance of harm and evil.

Buchmann (1993) has added an ethical dimension to her definition of what she considers to be sound research conclusions - the pursuit of edification must be accompanied by responsibility for the research. I agree that ethical concerns cannot be ignored in the research process. However, ethical questions pose another dilemma to researchers. Does being "ethical" necessarily mean being "circumspect"? Does "avoidance of harm and evil" impute avoiding conclusions, propositions or postulations which are potentially controversial and sensitive even when they are true? How does "reasonableness" sit with rigour and honesty in research? Is the former a compromise of the latter? There are no ready answers to this ethical conundrum.

Buchmann (1993: 118) argues that "in ordinary life, most people know that unreserved declarations are not always helpful" and that "while secrecy is bad, sincerity may be a form of hypocrisy". However, to suspect a researcher's sincerity is to misunderstand the disclosure approach. Researchers' disclosure of their beliefs and values should not be seen merely as an attempt to persuade their audience of their sincerity. The disclosure should be seen as an explication of the researchers' perspective which places the onus of interpretation - of validation of conclusions - on the shoulders of their audience as well as their own. Researchers' values and beliefs define their perspectives on research subjects. An audience will be able to judge the reasonableness and trustworthiness of researchers' conclusions only when they have been duly informed of the latter's perspectives. Otherwise the researchers would have to assume that they have got their audience's trust and that, I believe, would be a presumptuous position to take. Trust is not built merely on rhetorical and communicative clarity. As Buchmann (1993: 122) concedes, "lies, truth, and half-truths can equally be gilded with happy terms or remain incredible and inaccessible". Trust is enhanced through acquaintance. Unless the audience knows the researchers, how can they begin to appreciate the reasonableness, authenticity or veracity of the researchers' interpretations? How can the audience and the researchers even begin to share the "mutual reliance (that) people who differ by knowledge, skills, and interests (need when they) come together - in reality or in postulating an audience in research writing?" (*ibid.*: 123).

I am not convinced that researchers' "frankness about (their) interests and values is a reduction of explanation and examination to sincerity" (*ibid.*: 119). Neither do I accept that frankness is a vapid and vacuous ritual which "asserts (the researchers') privileged knowledge and status" (*ibid.*). On the contrary, the researchers' frankness or sincerity is offered from a position of humility. Their disclosure can be interpreted as (a) an admission that their interpretation of the observed phenomenon represents one of a number of competing perspectives and (b) a submission to the audience's judgement of the reasonableness or validity of their research conclusions from that perspective.

The dilemma that Buchmann (1993) poses can be resolved by looking at research communication and the research itself as two separate interpretive processes that involve different relationships. In research communication, the researchers' concern is one of presentation and persuasion. Its purpose is to convince the audience of the reasonableness of the research conclusions presented. Here the interpretation of the reasonableness of those conclusions rests with the audience who base their judgement on information provided by the researcher

In the research process itself, the researchers' concern is one of access and warranted interpretation (Bittner, 1973). Judgement of reasonableness, warrant and soundness of research conclusions is the onus of the researchers and it has to be based on available

data on the studied phenomenon as well as an awareness of their own, often limited, perspective. The researchers' disclosure about their own beliefs, interests and values may then be seen as a plea for re-claiming subjectivity in the audience's judgement of their conclusions. The two interpretive processes are therefore complementary. The audience's interpretation depends on the researchers' full disclosure and the researchers' interpretation is done with an awareness of the audience's need for information.

Perhaps a way to resolve the dilemma is to re-configure 'validity' as **veracity** or, as suggested by Kincheloe (1991), 'trustworthiness'. Veracity may be defined as the degree to which the interpretation and conclusions of a research approximate the true or authentic nature of the researched phenomenon. Veracity, so defined, cannot be empirically or statistically verified. An interpretation can be said to have veracity if it resonates as true or authentic to those who confront it. For example, if I postulate a certain congruity between a teacher's concept of teaching and her classroom practice in a particular and specified context, that postulation can only be valid if it resonates as having veracity to the audience. I can not realistically hope to generalise and apply the conclusion to all teachers or to all contexts. I am not prepared to include the 'ceteris paribus' caveat because it would not fit my view of human experience. The issue here is not verification to prove validity. In interpretive research the researcher's responsibility, I believe, is to ensure a high degree of veracity, not to prove validity through verification. This is done in the following ways:

- Contextualisation: locating the research in a specified context. According to Bittner (1973: 116), "the ties of accounts to settings is unavoidable and irremediable because accounts derive their sensibility and warrant from it". He refers to the dependence of accounts on context as "indexicality" (*ibid.*). He further imputes that without indexicality all accounts are rendered fictitious or suspect.
- Collaboration: establishing a collaborative and dialectical relationship between the researcher and the researched. This implies an appreciation of the contribution of the researched, not only in terms of the data that they provide but also in terms of their involvement in the interpretation of the data.

Subjectivity

The foregoing discussion of reality as socially constructed and the re-configuration of validity as mediated between the observer and the observed begs for a re-evaluation of subjectivity in research.

In accepting the constructivist's reality, it is logical to conclude that it is not possible to separate the knower from the known. An abstract body of knowledge that is universally true is a myth. The ability to gain knowledge by maintaining "an objective, 'exteriorised' posture" to the exclusion of "the values held by the inquirer or other individuals" (Guba & Lincoln, 1991: 163) becomes a fallacy. To acquire that kind of knowledge and to have that kind of ability just mentioned, one would have to be the Greek shaman, Tiresias. Without the divine gift of Universal Experience how could researchers hope to see and feel as the researched sees and feels their world of practice? It is only logical that researchers should accept that apprehension is subjective. To deny that subjectivity is part and parcel of reality is to embrace the paradox of "brains in a vat" being observed by another brain in a vat.

These antithetical notions of subjectivity and objectivity had challenged my early beliefs about doing research. Prior to this study I had held that objectivity was an obvious

measure of the quality of any research, whether in natural or social science. Objectivity was regarded as the cornerstone of sound valid research while subjectivity was shunned as an extraneous influence, more bothersome than helpful. I subscribed to the definition of "objective" as "impartial, factual, uncontaminated, scientific and true". "Subjective" had the dubious meaning of "biased, idiosyncratic, half-truth, unscientific or false and arbitrary". The view I held towards these two notions was, perhaps, better reflected in Longman's (1992) dictionary definition of "subjective" as "*often derog.* influenced by personal feelings and therefore perhaps unfair: ... opposite objective" (p.1322). However, I did not see the need to alter my views. I felt "comfortable" with them as they corresponded with my own perception of reality, in general, and of research, in particular. Research should be devoted to the pursuit of truth: raw, unadulterated Truth. To entertain subjectivity was to be self-indulgent and narcissistic and that, I believed, threatened the Truth and should rightly be dismissed.

I still believe that all research should pursue truth. It is my perception of what is the truth that has undergone transformation. As hinted in the above discussions on reality and validity, I no longer find resonance in a disembodied, objective, universal truth that is out there somewhere, waiting to be uncovered by the researcher with the right tools and techniques. At the heart of this struggle are the needling doubts I have about a researcher's role in the interpretive process. How can researchers, especially social researchers, in the name of objectivity, write themselves out of their accounts of what is essentially their interpretation of what is apprehended? Only an absolute faith in the infallibility of a researcher's judgement could guarantee that sought-after objectivity. And therein, I believe, lies the irony of social research in the positivist tradition - a purportedly objective portrayal of human social endeavour is achieved through a systematic process of impersonalising and dehumanising the researcher and researched. I am convinced that only by reclaiming subjectivity can social or educational research paradoxically achieve veracity in every sense of the word; that is, an accurate and truthful portrayal of the observed.

In the quantitative positivist research tradition or in "the language of orthodox science"(Rowan, 1981: 114) objectivity can be achieved by "statistical control through partial correlation and the calculation and interpretation of the individual and joint contributions of individual variables to the variance of the dependent variables" (Kerlinger and Pedhazur, 1973: 81). Essentially it means that an objective portrayal of a phenomenon - usually operationalised as the relationship between dependent and independent variables - should be devoid of contamination from extraneous variables, including researcher or respondent bias. The quantitative researcher aims to demonstrate the causal link between two variables by adopting a design that will "maximise systematic variance, minimise error variance and control extraneous variance" (*ibid.*: 81). Thus it is assumed that procedural objectivity which will eliminate subjective judgements and produce ontological objectivity that offers an unadulterated, undistorted view of reality (Eisner, 1993).

In order to subscribe to the above tradition, one will have to accept the correspondence theory of truth - that is, a proposition is true only if it matched, reflected or is isomorphic with reality (Bruner, 1986 and 1990, Eisner, 1991 and 1993, Feyerabend, 1975, Reason, 1981, Vulliamy *et al*, 1990). Truth then will be analogous to a mirror that reflects an independent, coherent and external reality. If this premise were valid then it is possible to verify the truth of any proposition by referring to reality but how can one do so if the only reality one knows is one's view of it? How can one check if one's view of reality corresponds with it?

The protagonist in the episode related in the prologue of this story would not have been so distressed if he could be assured that his views about teaching were true. Besides those were views formed during his training. Obviously no assurance was forthcoming from the other teachers, his students' parents or the principal who seemed to hold a radically different view of teaching - while the protagonist felt it was important to apply the practical knowledge he had, the others believed in examination results as a measure of a teacher's worth. What is more important is the fact that no one in the situation could claim to have monopoly over truth. The protagonist had his reasons for believing in the theories he was exposed to during training. Perhaps he felt that it did not make sense to practise without recourse to some form of theoretical wisdom. The other teachers had their own reasons too. And the parents and the principal had good reasons to believe they were right because the status of a school depended largely on the level of achievement in the examinations. Every point of view was meaningful and reasonable to its owner.

So whose view should a researcher, particularly an outsider-researcher, accept? Surely, the answer lies in the researcher's own view on teaching. If he/she shared the same ideals as the protagonist then he/she might display sympathy or empathy but if he/she did not, then it would not be unlikely that he/she would be critical of the protagonist's practice.

Reality is thus subjectively and non-subjectively apprehended. To unravel puzzles in social reality by ignoring subjectivity is analogous to breaking the mirrors in order to uncover the mystery of a hall of mirrors. The result is distortion, not edification. In the study of any socio-cultural phenomenon such as teaching, the researcher, I believe, should recognise subjectivity as an integral part of its reality. I recall an interview I heard over the radio. The guest was a producer of wildlife documentaries for television. At one point, the interviewer asked her why these documentaries were so full of violence and sex which some viewers had found objectionable. The guest replied that violence and sex, together with food, were the main concerns of wildlife. At first that comment seemed common-sensical because I happened to agree with its content. Then I was struck by its incongruity. How could the guest have known what the concerns of animals were? That comment could only be her interpretation of what wildlife was all about, scientific or non-scientific observations notwithstanding, since there was no way she could have known for a fact that those were indeed the only concerns of animals. Unless she had the Universal Experience of Tiresias, she could not possibly fathom exactly what any of those three concerns meant to the animals. Her interpretation was premised on the meanings that humankind attached to sex, violence and food. The viewers' objections to excessive sex and violence, which the interviewee obviously did not share, might also be attributed to their own socially-derived prejudices about these two activities. A public display of sexual acts, even of animals, was perhaps an affront to the viewers' sense of decency while to the producer of the documentaries, and probably to the animals too, it was simply a matter of procreation and survival. Both subjective viewpoints, the guest's as well as the viewers', were meaningful and noteworthy, not as indubitable facts, but as valid considerations for making decisions on the future directions for wildlife documentaries.

Field relations

In a socially constructed reality where "acts of meaning" (Bruner, 1990) are interactively and intersubjectively enacted and interpreted, researchers find themselves having to re-configure their relationships with the researched. The "objective", "unintrusive", "neutral", and "authoritative" outsider-researchers find themselves under intense and increasingly

critical scrutiny. Their act of effacing themselves from their accounts of observed social phenomena is no longer accepted at face value as the sign of objectivity - only as a symptom of detachment. What roles do the subjects play in data collection and data interpretation? Obviously, the notion that researchers can enter a research site and collect the data they need without establishing any form of relationship with their subjects is no longer tenable. If reality is an interconnection of multiple socio-psychological constructions, it is important that researchers recognise the significance of subjects' voice in research. To deny this would be to deny a principal postulate put forward in the foregoing arguments; that is, only through interacting, collaborating and negotiating with the researched, can researchers hope to have a purchase on the real world of the researched. In other words, instead of reducing the researched to measurements of means, standard deviation or correlation, it is incumbent on the researchers to give the researched a voice in the study.

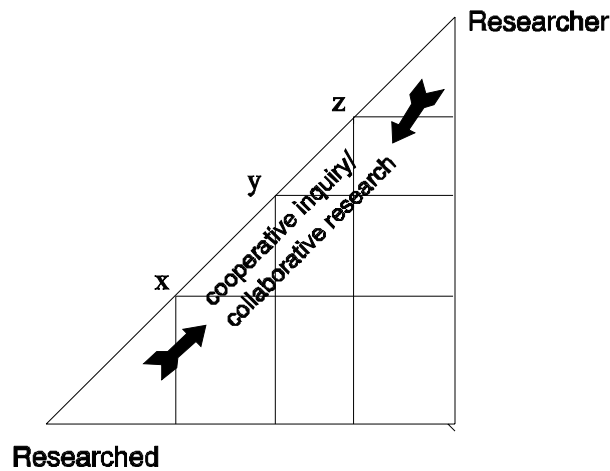


Figure 2.0 Voice in the Research Process

At point z on the cline in the above figure, the researcher's voice is more prominent than the researched. At point x, it is the researched's voice that has prominence. Point y depicts equality in either voice, with both researcher and researched having equal say in the research process. It is a situation of truly collaborative or collective research. However, I believe, perfect equal representation in research is more idealised than real or feasible. The decision to signify a particular voice over others lies with the researcher with her world view, her conceptualisation of knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge and her belief of who should have the power and control over research. Thus, which voice should be 'louder' or more prominent is as much an ontological and epistemological question as it is a philosophical one.

The recent interest in the concept of voice in research is instigated by the interpretive impulse to allow more say to the researched, who is felt to be largely silent in the positivist tradition. There is concern that in quantitative research, where everything is reduced to statistical entities of averages, significant differences and normally distributed variables, voice representation is firmly locked at the top-end of the voice cline (Fig. 3.1); i.e. researcher-controlled. Individual perspectives are more often than not overlooked or ignored. Thus in qualitative research literature the concept of voice is often linked to the notion of empowerment (*cf.* Carr and Kemmis, 1993) - empowering those who have so far been deprived of a voice to speak up for themselves. However, the term

'empowerment' has its own litany of problems. Its ethical and moral entanglements render it quite problematic to use in educational research. Its connotation reeks of arrogance and pomposity for who are we as researchers to empower? The most we could offer, as practitioner-researchers, is not power but an invitation to share an exploratory experience which would, hopefully, benefit all involved. There is every possibility, however, that involvement in research might enable the researched to empower herself but the decision to do so is strictly hers and hers alone.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the above discussions.

1. Outcomes of research on social reality can only be 'valid' if they are true to the nature of that reality. Since social reality is infinitely variable and indeterminate, infallibility of outcome is not a goal. Neither is generalisability. A proposition does not have to be generalisable in order to be true or valid. Instead, propositions ought to "create a social synthesis which lead to higher level of understanding" (Kincheloe, 1991: 134) of not just the aetiology of a social phenomenon but all aspects that would help to enhance its potential worth in our social enterprise. It is an understanding that stems from working and interacting closely with the researched not by claiming objectivity through impersonalisation and distancing.
2. There are more ways than one to look at reality; empirical and statistical validation is but one of the many ways that can give us purchase on reality. Of course, it does not mean I am discarding rationality; like Kincheloe (1991: 128), I am only suggesting that we drop "logocentrism". Kincheloe (ibid.) says there has to be a built-in 'anticipatory accommodation' in validity to allow for the recognition of the unexpected, exceptions, and diversity in any attempt to intimate understanding of the human experience.
3. Subjectivity has to be recognised and accommodated in a definition of validity in any research on human experience. Subjectivity here refers to the researcher's as well as the researched's. In order to validate and verify an observation or interpretation, the researcher should not seek to protect herself from subjectivity. Instead, she ought to recognise her own subjectivity and seek congruencies between her subjective interpretation and that of the researched. To Currie's (1993) question whether objectivity as an invariance of judgement has application within the discipline of interpretation, my answer is a resounding 'no'.
4. The re-configuration of 'validity' as 'veracity' underlines the importance of research subjects' involvement in the research process. It also spotlights the indispensibility of accounting for the research setting or context.

Qualitative Research and Indigenous Pedagogy

I have gone to some length to reveal my own research stance which is qualitative because I am convinced that the notions of indigenous pedagogy and qualitative research resonate with the constructivist view of reality. Both recognise the subjective indeterminate realities of individuals and the importance of context in interpretation. An attempt to define an indigenous pedagogy is preceded by the rejection of the idea that there can be one all-serving, universally applicable methodology that can fit into any context of practice. Therein lies the empowering mechanism in qualitative research and indigenous pedagogy. While qualitative research gives **voice** to the researched, indigenous pedagogy **empowers** the "native" practitioner to define his own methodology.

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