



Reviews / Comptes rendus

Paradigms of Research for the 21st Century: Perspectives and Examples from Practice

Edited by Antonina Lukenchuk
(New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2013, 274 pages)

Thinking back to the first classes of my grad school days, I am reminded of a professor who shook up his eager class of neophytes in an interesting way. Seated in a horseshoe with the professor in the centre, we dispensed with the pleasantries, the welcomes, and the introductions, and settled in with pens poised to take notes on that first lecture in our first class in PhD studies.

But the professor had another idea. He passed out a sheet with two columns. On one side he had listed about 25 terms; research orientations, theoretical perspectives, methodologies, philosophical approaches, everything from anthropological methods to queer theory. The other column was blank. His directions were to match the term with any philosopher, researcher, theorist, scholar, or school that came to mind. Who or what could we associate with the term? “No pressure,” he said, “this is just a quiz, a way for me to see where we are and where we might begin our course. We were to do this individually. “Find a comfortable place to sit and think. We’ll meet back here in 30 minutes; place your paper on my desk on your return.”

He was a nice man. We came to know him as caring and sensitive—a true scholar. But the look of abject terror in the faces of my classmates as they filed out the door to find their “comfortable” spots told me this would be anything but a comfortable 30 minutes for most. This was in the days before Google and smartphones; no quick searches were possible.

That memory kept coming back to me as I read Antonina Lukenchuk’s book *Paradigms of Research for the 21st Century*. The book has a simple premise: it “demonstrates how the essential components of educational inquiry such as ideas, theories, philosophies, ideologies, epistemologies, value statements, and methods can be applied to conducting and implementing



robust research projects” (p. xv). Despite its future-oriented title, the book provides a survey of the fundamental paradigms, the systems of inquiry, models, and ways of knowing that have historically shaped and continue to shape educational research today. But rather than simply reiterating well-known tropes in educational research, the author seeks to recast the familiar “quantitative/qualitative” divide as something more nuanced. Those poor beleaguered students, myself included, bewildered by a seemingly random list of theoretical models, frameworks, philosophies, and methods would have been well served had they had Lukenchuk’s book to read. I would go so far as to say the book could be considered a grad school primer for anyone setting out on an academic path of scholarly inquiry.

Lukenchuk is writing with beginning graduate students in mind. She starts by situating the book in her experiences teaching an introductory research methods course and seeing “how ill prepared some of our doctoral candidates are to conduct dissertation research projects, even after taking a number of research courses” (p. xxiv). The author’s goal is to anchor educational inquiry in the larger questions: What is inquiry? What are the values reflected in different ways of knowing and conducting inquiry? What constitutes data? Lukenchuk carefully defines *paradigm* as an umbrella term, encompassing a range of methodological possibilities for undertaking research. The book considers six such possibilities: empirical analytic, pragmatic, interpretive, critical, poststructuralist, and transcendental paradigms.

The book is divided into two parts: Part 1 serves as an excellent overview of the philosophical, historical, and cultural perspectives that underpin different ways of knowing and paradigms of inquiry. It situates and contextualizes the development of the practices of inquiry by succinctly and accessibly providing a history of inquiry. It is refreshing to see Lukenchuk’s inclusion of an article on ancient classical traditions arising from Hindu and Buddhist beliefs to augment classic Western philosophies. Other chapters in Part 1 give a detailed overview of the dominant paradigms in educational research by carefully linking research orientations with major systems of inquiry, models and ways of knowing, and how these are reflected in corresponding methodologies, epistemologies, and selected methods.

Part 2 contains chapters illustrating how the six different methodological possibilities are employed to explore questions and lines of inquiry that reflect examples from practice. Each chapter represents research and scholarly projects conducted within the traditions of the alternative paradigms. Readers can readily see how certain methods lend themselves to corresponding questions and problems.

One area that Lukenchuk largely omits and is foundational to any discussion of educational research is the interdisciplinary nature of the study of educational processes and practices. Research in education relies heavily on theoretical and methodological input from a range of disciplines. So much so, that the establishment of education as an academic discipline in its own right has been and continues to be somewhat of a struggle. I do not believe any discussion of educational research can be complete without addressing the tension between education and its four “parent” disciplines: sociology, psychology, history, and philosophy (Biesta, 2011). Also, the two dominant and sometimes competing orientations in educational research—namely the Anglo-American and Continental traditions—have had huge



implications for the development of educational research in the English-speaking world. Lukenchuk's book does not consider this in any substantive way.

Despite this, Lukenchuk has crafted a valuable contribution to the field of education research methods. It is a worthwhile introductory text that would be well placed on the bookshelf of anyone teaching or taking a graduate-level education methods course. Someday, it could alleviate the stress caused by an unanticipated quiz.

References

Biesta, G. (2011). Disciplines and theory in the academic study of education: A comparative analysis of the Anglo-American and Continental construction of the field. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 2(19). 175–192.

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