

# PART I

## READING, REVIEWING AND REFLECTING

### Introduction

This part of the book is designed to provide a reference point to reading Parts II to VIII. The Introduction to this book is a 'must read' (unlike in many other books) because it answers key questions like, What is special about this book? How is the book as a whole organized? and How are the chapters organized? Coming immediately after the Introduction, Part I includes three chapters that provide essential information for every social science researcher.

The first chapter gives a readable but scholarly introduction to the history and development of social science research, including a general overview and six sub-sections focused on individual disciplines. As well as the 'core' disciplines of psychology and sociology, these include education, health, social work and business/management.

This is followed by a chapter on Literature Reviewing which places this daunting task – often the first that a new researcher embarks upon – in the context of mapping the field, and learning to identify the core texts in the area and engage in debate with them. This

chapter provides examples of literature review draft texts and tracks their improvement after dialogue between graduate student and tutor. Rather than presenting literature reviewing as a monolith, the authors suggest that it can become identity work that moves a new researcher from the position of novice to that of an authority capable of working with texts reflexively.

The third chapter, on Ethical Issues in Generating Public Knowledge, should be read alongside whatever other chapters from Parts II – VIII readers choose as their special focus. All research methods and methodologies have ethical implications which have an impact on the quality of research data (e.g. interviewees are strongly influenced in what they say by the extent to which they trust the interviewer). In addition, these matters are covered by legislation, in most countries, with the result that seeking approval from an IRB (institutional review board) or ethics committee may be one of the first formal tasks that new researchers are asked to undertake.

# Research in the Social Sciences

Bridget Somekh, Education and Social Research Institute,  
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, and the University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Erica Burman, Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology,  
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

Sara Delamont, Department of Sociology, University of Cardiff, UK

Julienne Meyer, School of Community & Health Sciences, City University London, UK

Malcolm Payne, St Christopher's Hospice, London, UK

Richard Thorpe, Leeds University Business School, UK

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## Summary

- Distinguishing features of social science research
- Variety of research traditions across disciplines
  - Diversification of methods
  - New theoretical understandings emerging from key theorists
  - History and current developments in six disciplines: psychology, sociology, education, health, social policy and management and business studies

relating to the nature of knowledge and truth (epistemology), values (axiology) and being (ontology) which underpin human judgements and activities. It differs from research in the natural sciences as a result of this focus on people – individuals and groups – and their behaviour within cultures and organizations that vary widely socially and historically. There is an unpredictability in the behaviour of human beings. Medical research is able to use probability theories to develop therapeutic drugs because bodily systems function relatively autonomously from the mind (though it is increasingly recognized that bodies do not all respond to treatment in identical ways). Social science research cannot develop similarly powerful solutions to social problems because people take decisions that vary, based on different cultural assumptions and purposes. Human experience is characterized by complexity, and social science researchers need to work with theories and methods that take account of this.

Empirical social science research – that is research which involves the collection of data about people

## Key features of research in the social sciences

*Bridget Somekh*

Social science research is concerned with people and their life contexts, and with philosophical questions

and their social contexts by a range of methods – draws heavily upon the traditions and practices of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, history and the creative arts. Anthropology contributes a tradition of participant observation and interviews, field note-taking and heuristic interpretation of culture. For example, from Geertz we learn the importance of reading the cultural meanings in details of behaviour such as winks, and writing about research using ‘thick description’ to give readers the experience of ‘being there’ (Geertz, 1973). From sociology, we learn how social relations are formed and reproduced. Psychology provides us with an understanding of human behaviour. History contributes a tradition of document analysis (the weighing of evidence in the light of the likely biases of the informant) and accords importance to contemporary records including personal testimony in letters and note books. The creative arts contribute a tradition of aesthetics (discernment and judgement of worth) and accord importance to creativity and imagination in interpretation. The notion of the social scientist creating knowledge by bringing vision to the interpretation of evidence was central to the work of Mills (1959) and more recently researchers such as Eisner (1998: 63) have emphasized the importance of the social scientist as a connoisseur, who is able to ‘appreciate’ empirical data through a process of ‘artistry’.

The social science disciplines, which categorize and operationalize social knowledge and its production, have their origins in the emergence of the nation-state with its political demands for the classification and analysis of individuals and populations. Anthropology, for example, emerged in the service of colonialism. During the twentieth-century, the certainties of nineteenth century expansionism were challenged and gave way to new ways of conceptualizing politics and human identity. Social scientists such as Marx (1818–83) and Freud (1856–1939) fundamentally influenced the development of theoretical understandings of the human condition and social formations. Marx’s historical materialism turned attention to the oppressive power of capitalism that appropriated and commoditized the labour power of individuals; and to the ideologies that privileged the upper classes and created the false consciousness whereby working people colluded in their own oppression (McLellen, 1977). These ideas provided analytical tools for researching the processes of social class and economic power. Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis, although it was highly contentious, was inspirational among

artists and stimulated the development of new ways of exploring human consciousness in the social sciences (Freud, 1986). Other specialist branches of the social sciences have provided a range of concepts and theories for the study of people. For example, in anthropology Benedict (1935: 161–201) explored the way in which individuals are shaped by their society, while at the same time reconstructing and shaping society itself. In cultural psychology, Wertsch (1998) built on the work of Vygotsky to explore the ways human activity is ‘mediated’ by cultural tools and artefacts so that human agency is constantly enabled or constrained by cultural and current contexts.

The very term social science indicates its emergence in relation to, sometimes in opposition to, natural science. Early twentieth-century social scientists struggled to extricate themselves from the accusations made by logical positivism that research which lacked the solid foundation of measurement was no better than fancy and invention. They sought to develop methods which conformed to the methodology of the natural sciences, and researchers such as Homans (1950) (‘general theory’) focused on seeking generalizable laws governing the behaviour of human groups. Today there is a strong tradition of social science research using quantitative methods, such as surveys which provide decision-makers with statistical information on uptake of resources and the impact of reforms. Sometimes these data are collected by the researchers but often analysis is carried out on large-scale databases already existing in the public record. Research of this kind needs to be large scale to provide a sufficient number of records to carry out analyses of correlations between variables, for example when using randomized controlled trials to measure the impact of something new (a ‘treatment’). It is in the use of quantification and statistical analysis that social science methods come closest to natural science methods and their strength lies in answering What? How many? and When? questions. To use these data to answer Why? and How? questions, it is usually essential to collect additional qualitative data.

The early twentieth century was also the time when social science was diversifying and growing in both confidence and status. In the political turmoil of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, a group of philosophers and social scientists, known as ‘The Frankfurt School’, developed an interdisciplinary social science method, ‘critical theory’, that focused on critiquing the assumptions springing from powerful ideologies. Rather than seeking to confirm and strengthen the

existing order, for them social science should be concerned with critiquing and changing society. Influenced by Marx, they sought to understand the cultural factors that produced social conformity. They used a dialectic method to critique the assumptions of fashionable ideologies, including Marxism. During the period 1934–51, due to the political turmoil in Europe, the group were based in New York and California where their ideas were confronted by the celebrity culture of Hollywood. From 1956 onwards, after their return to Frankfurt, Habermas became a leading figure, focusing on ways in which language can empower and transform human interactions (Habermas, 1984). Another influential thinker of those years was the German Jewish political theorist, Arendt, who had escaped from Europe to New York in 1941. Much of her work focuses on human freedom and responsibility, challenging accepted orthodoxies, most famously in her book on the war trial of the Nazi war criminal, Eichmann, where she used the term ‘the banality of evil’ to describe the tendency in ordinary people to commit evil thoughtlessly because of a failure to think critically (Arendt, 1963). The work of Arendt and critical theorists, such as Habermas, illustrates the political dimension to being a social science researcher, pursuing knowledge and understanding of individuals, social groups and organizations, in a world where status is not accorded equally and researchers feel a responsibility to make a difference.

Since around 1970 social science research methods have considerably diversified, due largely to the influence of feminist theories that challenged many assumptions – such as the personal/political dichotomy – on the grounds that they derived from masculine hegemonies. The work of Harding (1987) was particularly important in challenging the concept of methodology as a set of theories, within a well-defined epistemology, with rules to which researchers must adhere. For Harding, a method is a technique or process for data collection, methodology incorporates both theory and the analytical process that guides the research, and epistemology incorporates ‘strategies for justifying beliefs’ (1987: 3). Partly due to Harding’s concept of ‘standpoint’ theories, the period since 1970 has seen enormous growth in research into areas such as gender and race (Harding, 1991). Researchers working in areas where there is systemic disadvantage have a responsibility to adopt a standpoint that will counter the bias ingrained in society. Butler’s work (1990) made another important contribution by challenging the notion that categories,

such as ‘woman’, can be used as stable or abiding terms, pointing out that the category ‘woman’ contains within it multiple variables, for example to name just three: ‘black’, ‘lesbian’ or ‘abused’. Feminist research ‘puts social construction of gender at the center of one’s inquiry’ (Lather, 1991: 71), reconstructing the process of research at all levels from the chosen focus of study, to relationships with participants, methods of data collection, choice of analytical concepts and approaches to reporting. In terms of research on race, the founding of the Du Bois Review in 2004 has provided a platform for scholars across the social sciences to share their work and cross-fertilize their ideas. It has also given a public voice to work that was previously silenced or marginalized (Bobo and Dawson, 2004).

As a result of its focus on people, ethical issues are centrally important in social science research. Knowledge confers power, so in collecting data researchers need to be sensitive to the possible ways in which participation in the research may have an impact on participants. Drawing on moral and ethical principles, social science researchers vary considerably in terms of the kinds of relationship they establish with participants, as indicated by the terms they use to describe them – ‘subjects’, ‘informants’ or ‘co-researchers’. These different ‘namings’ all imply different ways of distributing power within the relationship, but whatever stance is adopted power differentials are never entirely within the researcher’s control and can never be excised. This in turn has an impact on the quality and reliability of the data that can be collected. Social science researchers typically emphasize the need to establish a relationship of trust with the participants, as the necessary condition for carrying out high quality research. However, since relationships are organic rather than static, trust is a slippery concept, human beings (can) never reveal all that is in their minds and with this realization has come an increasing emphasis on the negotiation of the research contract, whether implicit or explicit.

Quality in social science research rests upon the persuasive power of its outcomes and therefore, fundamentally, upon how it uses language to construct and represent meaning. A key development in social science theory, that builds on the idea of the centrality of language in meaning making, is often referred to as ‘the linguistic turn’. Since language can only ever be a representation, the ‘meaning’ of any statement is a linguistic construction. Using Foucault’s concept of ‘discourse’ the focus of inquiry should,

therefore, be on the relations of power contained in the language rather than an attempt to use reason to establish its meaning (Foucault, 1980: 114–15). For Derrida (1967), texts are ‘fabrications’ whose meanings cannot finally be pinned down. The focus of research is therefore to deconstruct: i.e. to uncover the workings of *différance* (both difference and deferral) through which truth and meaning are produced (see Burman and MacLure, in this volume).

Post-structuralists, building on the work of Foucault and Derrida, have challenged the whole idea that social science research should generate coherent meaning, accusing researchers of imposing an unwarranted order on data in order to present an – often formulaic – ‘grand narrative’. Haraway (1991: 187) makes explicit the dilemmas that face social science researchers as a result of these new epistemologies, arguing that we need ‘*simultaneously* ... a critical practice for recognizing our own “semiotic technologies” for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a “real” world’.

In recent years, globalization has raised new questions about the nature of identity, culture and social relations, as well as power configurations. Following both large-scale movement of people across the globe and the recognition of global interrelations, the issues of difference and diversity have come to occupy a central place within the social sciences, not only in anthropology and sociology but other disciplinary and policy fields as well. Thus, for example, theorists have begun to focus on global sociology, rather than national ones (Giddens, 2003). The issues of post-coloniality in a globalizing world raise a whole range of questions that can no longer be ignored. Appadurai (2001), drawing on his experience of working with researchers within an impoverished community in Mumbai, has called for ‘the right to research’ as a means of empowering the disadvantaged. In this way, his research supports the development of a counter-hegemonic movement that he calls ‘globalization from below’.

## Principles of research in six social science disciplines

The rest of Chapter 1, divided into six sub-sections, introduces the culture, values and politics that frame and influence research practice and underpinning methodologies within each of six disciplines of the social sciences. They are intended to illustrate the

processes of history and tradition by which research in each discipline is shaped. There are, of course, a large number of social science disciplines from which these are only a selection. We have included the two major underpinning disciplines, Psychology and Sociology, from which we believe that all other social sciences draw models and theories. These are followed by four disciplines, Education, Health, Social policy, and Management and Business, which have been particularly strongly influenced by political fashions and ideologies in many countries during the last half century, and which are illustrative of the constraining and shaping processes of the sociology of knowledge. They have been chosen because of their fundamental importance in influencing social organization in a civil society. In choosing these six disciplines we have been influenced by the need to provide support and guidance for researchers working in fields in which the inter-relationship between theory and practice is critically important, and where there is often a need for researchers to become involved in researching the process of innovation and development. Many other social science disciplines, for example Anthropology and Economics, could make a stronger claim than some of these for their significance and impact in the social sciences as a whole, and we have ensured that many chapters of the book draw upon them for inspiration.

### One: Psychology

*Erica Burman*

The origins of the modern psychology of western societies lie in political demands of the nation-state ranging from how the introduction of compulsory primary level schooling led to the ‘need’ to distinguish educational levels, to assessing the mental and physical ‘abilities’ of soldiers recruited for imperial wars. Hence notwithstanding its concern with the seemingly private or personal worlds of individual minds, family relationships and (usually small) group activity, psychology is far from being separate from broader social interests. The current popularity of psychology merely continues a longstanding strategy to shape appropriate forms of citizenship through interventions at the level of the individual.

Contemporary psychology has many sub-disciplinary divisions: for example, developmental, social, cognitive, educational, clinical – and more recently forensic, health and community, counselling and sports psychology. Some are now accorded distinct

professional status, while others are considered more 'academic' specialisms. Most have been subject to shifting sets of methodological and theoretical paradigms: behaviourist, cognitive, humanist, deconstructionist. They all elaborate their own model of their subject as well as corresponding procedures for the investigation of its qualities.

Yet the early psychologists were both theoretical and applied in their concerns, and took an integrated approach to their investigations. Their methods combined observation, experimentation and interpretation. Notwithstanding the current focus of mainstream psychology on experimental techniques and statistical analyses, early key psychological studies were based on case studies with small sample sizes that were frequently accompanied by wide-ranging political, philosophical and social commentary and speculation.

Hence while psychology may have emerged to fulfil a political need for a science of the individual, its apparently specialist knowledge belies the ways it is imbued by its own cultural conditions. Its influence extends far beyond psychological 'laboratories' or elite academic settings. Psychological theories profoundly infect a whole range of practices dealing with the assessment and evaluation of our lives: in schools, in work, in hospitals, in prisons – and even (or especially?) in our kitchens and bedrooms. Foucault (1981) aptly described psychoanalysis as a secular confessional and we increasingly look to psychological and psychotherapeutic ideas for advice. This 'psy complex' (Ingleby, 1985; Rose, 1985) invites us to construct a sense of interiority, or self-hood, through subscription to some – now secularized – authority. In this sense Foucault's analyses are particularly relevant as psychology plays a key role in forms of self-regulation or 'governmentality' by which liberal democracies define and limit 'normality', alongside informing how we experience ourselves as freely choosing the norms we live with and by (Rose, 1985, 1990).

The history of psychology is not a pretty one. Cyril Burt was the first person in Britain to be officially employed as a 'psychologist' – by London County Council in 1913. Other early psychologists were explicit advocates of eugenics (Richards, 1997), and their legacies remain in the statistical tests they invented. Burt's impact remains on the tripartite structure of the schooling system, as well as founding and editing the *British Journal of Statistical Psychology*. This is alongside having fabricated results (and research personnel) to support his claims of the heritability of intelligence (Kamin, 1977). Despite

repudiating his 'data', the discipline of psychology has continued to benefit from his achievement in inscribing its place within social policy. In this, claims to 'science' were part of a legitimization strategy to build a credible arena of theory and practice.

Thus far from being 'scientific', in the usually accepted sense of being value-free or neutral, psychological research has from its inception been imbued with distinct policy (and personal) agendas. Psychology is the reflexive discipline par excellence – since it is about people studying people. Addressing this has made psychology rather a self-preoccupied discipline, endlessly exploring the methodological artefacts of its own (sometimes rather bizarre) interventions. Much psychological literature discusses conceptual devices that have been elaborated to try to describe and then screen out researcher effects: documenting how research participants (or 'subjects') are sensitive to particular contextual conditions (such as: primacy, recency or halo 'effects', and other demand and volunteer 'characteristics'). These analyses remain relevant within quantitative psychology, particularly experimental or survey design.

From the late 1970s the turn to qualitative and interpretive approaches ushered in more participative and humanist psychological research, positioning those who are studied as active constructors and expert interpreters of their own psychologies. Feminist critiques imported an attention to the ways social structural differences – such as gender – enter into research relationships and to more subtle ways that gendered representations and assumptions structure theoretical and methodological paradigms. Rather than being something to be screened out in the pursuit of accurate measurement, subjectivity – whether of the researcher or the researched – emerges as vital to include and address in generating rigorous and relevant analyses.

Hence psychology highlights starkly a key conundrum posed by power/knowledge relations within the social sciences. Is method theory? If it is not – or not only – this, what theory has psychology generated that is not merely recycled commonsense dressed up in jargon or poached from other disciplines? Rose (1985) persuasively argued that the emerging discipline of psychology gained its distinctive role through the generation of methods that masquerade as theory. That is, psychological expertise resides only in controlling and applying (i.e. the administration of) technologies of assessment: testing, measurement and classification. Linked to this interest in power/

knowledge relations, psychology has, in recent years, also witnessed a 'psychoanalytical turn', including an emphasis on clinical methods, designed to unearth fundamental assumptions in identity formations, underlining the importance of reflexivity.

Thus psychology's complicity within strategies of social regulation makes it a prime arena for the study of both oppression and resistance. Contemporary critical, constructionist and feminist researchers focus on psychological practices as a way of studying ideology in action (Parker, 2007). Here discursive and other critical interpretive frameworks work both to engage with psychological methods and theories, and to maintain some critical distance from them.

## Two: Sociology

*Sara Delamont*

Sociology began in the nineteenth century, as thinkers in the industrializing countries puzzled over the social upheavals caused by the industrial revolution, the rapid growth of cities, and their accompanying social changes. Three internal disputes characterized sociology then, and continue to divide it today, about: (1) epistemologies and theories; (2) intellectual politics; and (3) methods. A more nuanced version of this very brief summary can be found in Delamont (2003).

One dispute is between those who prioritize thinking (theorizing) over empirical research. A second is between those who wish to harness sociology to political causes versus those who wish it to be a non-political academic discipline. The third, within the empiricists, is between those who want research to emulate the natural sciences (called positivists) and those who argue that because sociology investigates humans, who are reflexive beings, the methods must take account of that (called interpretivists). Positivists use both quantitative and qualitative methods, while interpretivists use only qualitative ones whether their data collection takes place in the 'real' world or in virtual worlds. This century all types of empirical research are regularly carried out in cyberspace (Robinson and Schulz, 2009).

The perennial debates between those who want sociological research to be scientific and objective, treating the humans studied as objects, and the interpretivists (Atkinson and Housley, 2004) – like the tensions between those who want sociology to be harnessed to political campaigns versus those who eschew causes – were central to the most famous sociology department of them all: Chicago in the

Golden Age (1893–1933) and in the Second Silver Age (1945–65) (Fine, 1995).

The leading figures in the development of sociology have been German, French and American. Many world leaders in sociology, such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, are primarily desk-bound. Theorizing has higher status than empirical work. In the Anglophone world, theorists from continental Europe are often revered for their ideas (Foucault, Habermas and Bourdieu for example) but the agenda setters for empirical research (qualitative and quantitative) are mainly American (Scott, 2007). Advances in multi-dimensional scaling, in telephone interviewing, in CAQDAS, in autoethnography and in visual methods are led from the USA.

The second and third disputes are fundamental to empirical sociology, and are complicated by controversies over gender, race and sexuality. James Davis (1994: 188), for example, is a positivist who wants American sociology to eschew all political issues, and writes furiously that the discipline's 'weak immune system' has allowed it to be contaminated by 'humanistic sociology', 'critical theory', 'grounded theory', 'ethnomethodology', 'postmodernism', 'ethnic studies' and 'feminist methodology'. His objects of hatred are a mixture of interpretivist perspectives and explicitly politically engaged stances such as anti-racism and anti-sexism. The sociology Davis wants is, in essence, the discipline as it was in the USA before 1968. That sociology was predominantly quantitative, positivist and used functional theories. There were qualitative researchers, but they were relatively unfashionable. Then, when the USA and other capitalist countries went through political upheavals, sociology diversified. In the USA the anti-war movement, Black Power, and the rise of Women's movements and Gay Liberation disrupted social sciences. In Europe the events of May 1968, with working-class and student protest, had a similar effect. The overthrow of functionalist sociology was predicted by Gouldner (1971) in *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*. After 1968 four perspectives became briefly fashionable (Giddens, 1973): neo-Marxism, conflict theories, the sociology of knowledge, and interactionist approaches (symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology). None of these is still as influential in 2010 as the post-structuralism and postmodernism of Lyotard (1984) and Foucault (1979) and the social science ideas from the black, gay and women's movements, namely critical race theory, queer theory and feminism.

Sociology in the nineteenth century was male

dominated, although since the 1890s there were female sociologists, especially in empirical research. There have been, and are, women positivists and interpretivists, women opposed to politically engaged sociology and those who espouse it. Scott (2007) lists 10 women in his directory of key theorists. However, the work of women sociologists is frequently forgotten, and left out of the histories of the subject (Delamont, 2003).

It is easy to be misled by the high profile authors such as Denzin (2008) who are relentlessly innovative and passionate about the cultural turn and post post modernism, and to think the whole discipline is suffused with wild ideas. In fact much of the research remains very conventional and is not at methodological frontiers. Most sociologists in the world, especially in America, are positivists in practice, who conduct traditional surveys by interview and questionnaire, analyse the data using statistical analysis software (SPSS/PASW), and present the results in journals and reports to sponsors written in a conventional hypothetical-deductive format and deploying essentially functionalist theories.

In research methods the biggest changes are due to more sophisticated computing, and the increased acceptability of qualitative methods. Analysis is more elaborate (Hardy and Bryman, 2004). Computing advances have revolutionized quantitative research: techniques that once took weeks now take seconds. The increased use of elaborate statistics makes much research hard to understand for a non-specialist. In qualitative research software to handle text (CAQ-DAS) has transformed analysis (Fielding, 2007). The distinction between academic and commercial research may change sociology in the next 50 years (Savage and Burrows, 2007). However, the core concerns of serious scholars have not changed over a century. Researchers need to pick sensible research questions, design their investigations carefully, collect data honestly, analyse them imaginatively, write them up accessibly, and generalize from them cautiously, all the time engaging in ruthless self-scrutiny to avoid bias, selective blindness and negligence, and to be their own toughest critics. Few sociologists live up to that ideal – but we should all strive to.

### Three: Educational research

#### *Bridget Somekh*

There are differences of opinion about the purposes of education, based on ideological factors. Some see

education as primarily for the benefit of the individual and others see it as the means of producing the human resources necessary to maintain the economy. Research has to work within and around these different conceptions of education. Inevitably, therefore, educational research has a political dimension. Key philosophers of education include Dewey (1944), who conceived of education as a child-centred process that underpinned democracy, and Greene (1988) who saw education as a means of personal growth.

An important and continuing struggle in educational research has been carried out between policy-makers for national and state governments, on the one hand, who look to research to evaluate the impact of schooling, using quantitative measures, and those – often professional educators – on the other hand, who argue that research of this kind fails to take account of the complex variables in the social context of schooling (family, classroom, and the wider culture). Cronbach's work spans the best of both traditions. In 1951 he developed the 'Cronbach's alpha' statistical method for ensuring the consistency of test scores, but 30 years later was to demonstrate the unreliability of narrowly focused quantitative studies as the basis for decision-making: 'The evaluator [of an educational programme] should almost never sacrifice breadth of information for the sake of giving a definite answer to one narrow question' (Cronbach, 1982: xii).

Key organizing concepts for education are those of curriculum and pedagogy. These terms are not always used with the same meanings. For example, curriculum can be taken to mean the specified learning set out in policy documents, or the actual learning which results from students' experiences in the classroom. Stenhouse, who took the latter view, believed that curriculum specifications should be 'open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice (Stenhouse, 1975: 4). Their worth should be judged in relation to what was actually enacted in the classroom. An important contribution to curriculum planning, not necessarily incompatible with the views of Stenhouse, was made by the educational philosopher Hirst (1974) who argued that there were seven forms of knowledge ('logically discrete forms of rational understanding') into which all students should be initiated by education. Pedagogy, rather than curriculum, has been the central focus of classroom research in recent years. Bruner (1996) describes how pedagogy is shaped by teachers' intuitive assumptions about students' learning, and argues for the import-



ance of giving teachers deeper understanding of the learning process to take them beyond these 'folk pedagogies'. Alexander (2000), in a comparative study of classrooms in five countries, shows how pedagogy derives from national and local culture, which overlays the assumptions about classroom layout and the roles and behaviour of students and teachers that tend to be common to all cultures.

Learning theories are also contested. For example, Piaget suggests that learning is dependent upon the child's development through fairly well-recognized stages, whereas Vygotsky suggests that the key factor in the development of the mind is the process of interaction between the child and adults or peers. However, Bruner (1997) points to important commonalities between their theories. In the last 20 years there has been considerable consensus about the 'situated' nature of learning, which is consequently strongly influenced by the extent to which the context of learning is 'authentic' and therefore supports learning (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Many educational researchers focus their attention on the processes whereby the power relations in society privilege some students at the expense of others. Bourdieu's (1977) theory of 'cultural capital' provides a framework for understanding how factors such as social class and parental education reproduce both social privilege and exclusion. Bowles and Gintis (1976) exemplified the operation of these theories in practice. Gilligan (1982) showed how social systems, including schooling and theory development, systematically discriminated against girls. Ladson-Billings (1995) has argued for the need to make the theories underpinning educational research explicit, especially when research is concerned with issues of race. Her theory of 'relevant pedagogy' takes account of the 'inherent subjectivity of educational research' and requires teachers to place questions about student culture (specifically urban poor African American culture) at the heart of their own classroom practice.

A considerable body of research, internationally, has focused on the means of improving schools, building on earlier school effectiveness research that sought to establish the features that characterized good schools. School improvement research always includes a central focus on teacher professional development and the ways that student learning can be supported by changes in teaching methods and school organization (Day and Sachs, 2005). A key problem in this work relates to how policies for action might emerge from empirical investigations, and even

more crucially how these might transform practice. Action research by teachers is recognized as a powerful strategy for bringing about improvements in teaching and learning and professional development (Elliott, 2007). This has been acknowledged and extended by policy-makers to include the larger notion of 'user involvement' of stakeholders in the implementation of research and – where possible – with its design. 'Systematic reviews' of research literature have been funded by the UK government to identify evidence of good practice and teachers have been encouraged to read this and other research and implement its findings.

Education research is often seen as *educational* in its processes as well as its effects. For example, researchers who acknowledge the educative nature of carrying out research are likely to adopt more participatory methods and may place less emphasis on seeking objective data and more on feeding back preliminary findings to enable practitioners to learn from research knowledge as it is generated. Constructing research as 'educative' has ethical implications and has effects in terms of the quality of outcomes, for example through its ability to fine-tune findings to the field of study and increase their impact on practice, perhaps with less emphasis on producing generalizable findings.

#### Four: Health research

##### *Julienne Meyer*

Health research is concerned with the health of individuals, the care they receive and the services that are delivered to them. The activity of health research is informed by a number of different disciplines, for example, medicine, nursing, allied health, social work, health economics, health management, medical sociology, health psychology, health and social care policy. However, historically health research has been dominated by the single discipline of medicine, which has tended to draw on positivist notions of science. In the past, medicine has held considerable power in shaping the research agenda, and its prestige continues to influence the practice and governance of research today. This can be seen in the disproportionate funding still spent on medical research, its dominant presence in funding bodies and research committees and the tendency, until more recently, for systems and paperwork (e.g. ethical approval) to primarily meet the needs of large-scale quantitative medical research (e.g. randomized control trials), as

opposed to more in-depth smaller-scale qualitative studies. Researchers should be mindful of this historical legacy when applying for funding for health research, seeking ethical approval for their studies, dealing with gatekeepers to access research participants and seeking to publish their findings in more traditional academic journals.

More recently, medicine's authority over health research has been challenged. This is partly because the idea of health itself is a highly contested one, especially so in cross-cultural contexts. There is now more emphasis on involving actual and potential users of health services in research, in order to make research more responsive to and appropriate for the needs of the population. In the UK, this culture of being inclusive is being driven directly by government strategy, which is also encouraging use of a wider range of methods, a richer mix of multidisciplinary perspectives and better quality control mechanisms for research and its implementation. These changes are part of a wider societal shift towards replacing or reforming established research institutions, disciplines, practices and policies. Gibbons et al. (1994), focusing on research and development in science and technology, argue the need for a new mode of research that emphasizes reflexivity, transdisciplinarity and heterogeneity. They suggest that research should not be set within a particular disciplinary framework (e.g. medicine), but should be undertaken in the context of its application (e.g. health and social care settings) and involve the close interaction of many actors throughout the process of knowledge production (e.g. different academic disciplines, multidisciplinary practitioners and users of health services). These changes are further supported by the emphasis on 'impact' of the proposed Research Excellence Framework (HEFCE, 2009) which requires excellent research to deliver demonstrable benefits to the economy, society, public policy, culture and quality of life.

However, these developments need to be set in the context of the simultaneous emergence of evidence-based healthcare internationally. Evidence-based practice is concerned with the implementation of best available external clinical evidence from systematic research. International networks now exist to support the development of evidence-based medicine in the form of the Cochrane Collaboration, which has centres in the UK and continental Europe, North and South America, Africa, Asia and Australasia. To ensure better co-ordination from the centre, structures have been put in place to systematically review

the quality of research findings and to disseminate good practice across a variety of health and social care disciplines. Researchers are expected to produce the evidence for best practice and practitioners are required to implement it. This linear approach to research and development has been challenged over time (Trinder and Reynolds, 2000) and more recently, the importance of creating a Community of Practice as a means to deliver multidisciplinary evidence-based healthcare has been demonstrated (Kilbride, 2007; Kilbride et al., 2005). Kilbride (2007) argues that internationally, whilst much emphasis is placed on expert knowledge (in her example, evidence-based stroke guidelines), not enough attention is paid to the collaborative processes that lead to the delivery of good care.

In 2006, the British government introduced a new National Health Research Strategy 'Best Research for Best Health' (DH, 2006: 5) which aimed 'to create a health research system in which the NHS supports outstanding individuals, working in world-class facilities, conducting leading-edge research, focused on the needs of patients and the public'. Whilst laudable in its aims, this strategy continues to reinforce some of the pre-existing problems in health related research, namely the dominance of research by medicine and the continuing emphasis on traditional methods of research. For instance, linked to the National Research Strategy, the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) has been established to commission and fund NHS and social care research. Their role is to develop research evidence to support decision-making by professionals, policy-makers and patients, make this evidence available, and encourage its uptake and use, for example, through 'NHS Evidence', which provides clinical and non-clinical evidence and best practice, so that informed decisions can be made. Other organizations in the UK, such as the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, provide national guidance on promoting good health and preventing and treating ill health. However, NIHR funds research, not implementation or service development. This separation of research from action is not helpful, as it promotes an elitist model of research that assumes researchers are expert, a top-down linear model of evidence-based practice, and does not fund research that focuses on the learning that can be gained from attempts to improve practice in real-time contexts.

The split can also be seen in the NIHR-funded Clinical Academic Training Pathway for Nurses,

Midwives and Allied Health Professions. This research capacity-building scheme will only fund the more traditional PhD by research and not the Professional Doctorate, which enables practitioners to research their own practice thus linking research to action. The UKCRC Sub-committee for Nurses in Clinical Research (2007) in its Report *Developing the Best Research Professionals* clearly included both the PhD and the Professional Doctorate in its recommendations. However, it is interesting to note that following this report, the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR, 2008) went on to exclude the Professional Doctorate in its own recommendations to boost clinical academic training for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals. At the Royal College of Nursing International Research Conference, where this topic was debated, Meyer (2009) argued that research is inherently a political process and that the exclusion of Professional Doctorates from NIHR funding was due to medical dominance, suggesting that an opportunity had been missed to promote a more appropriate form of research training for clinical nurses: namely action research.

Hence, an interesting paradox has emerged in the early twenty-first century. As political forces encourage health researchers to become more inclusive and use a wider range of methods, the same forces have imposed structures (e.g. research funding bodies) which limit research training opportunities. The health researcher needs not only to be skilled, but also politically aware and prepared to challenge.

### Five: Social policy research

#### *Malcolm Payne*

Social policy, in the British tradition, studies both the political and social debate within which policy is formed about the allocation outside the market of resources to develop citizens' well-being and local and interpersonal effects of policy implementation. In the USA, the focus of public policy studies is more directly on government policy-formation and work concerned with welfare policy is treated in many countries as an aspect of the academic study of social work. Comparative work on the effect of international trends in different systems of provision, from bodies such as OECD, UNICEF and UNESCO, has also had an impact on the limited assumptions of much nationally based research.

This wide range of research topics relies on many of the well-established techniques of social science

research such as attitude and opinion surveys or observational and interview studies. However, social policy has a particular focus on analysis of official data and documents, and placing official and informal policies in relation to how social resources are distributed in a broad historical, philosophical and social context.

For example, Jones's work (e.g. 1993) over 30 years on the history of mental health services in the UK involved detailed analysis of historical documents, government reports and contemporary research and comment to establish the importance of the continuing discourse between medical, legal and social conceptualizations of mental health. Martin's (1984) analysis of scandals in long-stay hospitals in the 1960s used detailed documentary and historical analysis to explore how scandals emerged and official investigations led to political action. Reith's (1998) study of the official reports on 28 community care scandals in the 1990s points to how the policy effects of the scandals studied by Martin led to the discharge of many long-stay patients into the community in the 1980s, and thus to failings in community services in the 1990s. She analyses the failings exposed in mental health inquiries to show how social work practice during the 1990s changed and draws lessons for future practice.

Social policy studies are often actively engaged in the political process, through the influence of 'think tanks' and government initiatives. Social policy researchers carry out studies of how policy is implemented, the impact of policy changes and the evaluation of possible alternative patterns of service. For example, a recent development in the UK is personalization policy in the social services. Experiments with providing disabled service users with budgets so that they could purchase and manage care services provided for them allowed them to have more control of their lives. Political support was strengthened by reports from a left-leaning think tank, Demos, with influence on the Labour government of the early twenty-first century (Leadbetter and Lownsborough, 2005). A report on cross-government strategy for disabled people from the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (DH, 2005) promoted the idea further, and the Department of Health (2005) made this a centrepiece in a programme for the transformation of adult social services. To understand the formation of policy, the interaction of a range of sources like this needs to be evaluated.

Any major service development is likely to be the product of research or to be evaluated. Experiments

in personalization were developed in a number of local authorities and a process for exchanging information and sharing experience was managed by a specialist body. Alongside this, a major evaluation of the programme was undertaken on behalf of the Department of Health (Glendinning et al., 2008). Individual academics and practitioners also published research. Ellis (2007) for example, showed that there were a number of practical problems in managing payments, using the concept of the street-level bureaucrat who appears insignificant in policy-making but whose decisions can redirect policy initiatives. She found that some client groups, particularly older people, were less helped by the process. There were also academic discussions of theoretical and ideological problems, for example the loss of a sense of collective responsibility for people with social needs (Scourfield, 2007).

Such research has usually focused on a specific area of service or social problem, such as housing, health or poverty. However, social policy has also been concerned with generalizing about the process by which policy is formed. Levin (1997) identifies the three main processes to be researched as the formulation of policy, its adaptation in political and social processes and its implementation. Research may focus on powerful stakeholders, participants (such as politicians or service users), interests (such as the conflict between provider and consumer interests) and processes, such as participants' actions and decisions, and the outcomes of these.

Some examples illustrate the range of methods. Hall's (1976) study of the Seebohm reorganization of the social services and Nesbitt's (1995) account of the social security reforms of the 1980s used interviews with influential policy-makers, as well as documentary sources. Policy process analysis (Hill, 1997) looks at how services are managed and organized to implement policies. Sometimes, this is done by observational studies of organizations, such as Lipsky's (1980) work, the origins of the idea of street-level bureaucracy. Much of this work has links with management and public administration studies. Pithouse's (1998) ethnographic study of how workers managed child care work in a local social services office involved both observation and interviews with professionals to show how they interpreted and managed complex work implementing official policy.

## Six: Research in management and business studies

*Richard Thorpe*

Social science as applied to management and industrial organization began from the 'scientific' approach adopted by managers such as F.W. Taylor, Gantt and Gilbreth (Lupton, 1983). Taylor (1947) maintained that the functions managers should perform were planning, organizing, co-ordinating, controlling, and standardizing. He stressed the systematic study of work, focusing on such aspects as poor tools, organization and management. The research methods of this early period were based on natural science principles and adopted experimental designs in order to investigate effectively management activities. After 1945 business schools sought greater academic respectability and disciplines such as finance, marketing, operations research and organizational behaviour strengthened greatly. During the 1960s a view developed that the key to effective management was the ability to take decisions, particularly under conditions of uncertainty (Cyert and March, 1992). As a consequence, the study of cognitive patterns associated with subjective judgement and decision-making, the use of quantitative methods of analysis, and model building still dominate the curricula of many business schools, especially in the USA.

However, in a parallel development, some researchers moved their attention to the psychological and sociological aspects of work. With this shift in focus came new and different methods, such as the study of groups and relationships at work using participant observers (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). These studies demonstrated the importance of informal leaders and showed that satisfaction came from the quality of supervision and the social relationships formed as well as from monetary reward. This was in contrast to Taylor's solutions which essentially traded emotional and social welfare for supposed efficiency. Early contingency theorists, as they became known, undertook careful diagnosis of key variables on a case-by-case basis, focusing on a range of organizational issues, including the type of technology within a firm's organizational structure (Woodward, 1970) and the impact of market volatility on management systems (Burns and Stalker, 1994). Adopting a 'best fit' approach, the methods used in these investigations were both quantitative and qualitative. There was a gradual recognition that positivistic methods,

with an emphasis on isolation and classification of elementary parts or variables and objectivity, were not always the most appropriate. As globalization increased, the focus shifted further to the ways in which management is practised from international and cross-cultural perspectives (Hofstede, 2001). It continues to be the case that different countries value different methodological approaches to research: these too are culturally bound.

During the last two decades 'classical' theory (namely Taylor) and 'decisions' theory (namely Cyert and March) have come under attack. Both are 'normative' theories which have implications for the questions that are worth researching and the methods to be employed. However, in both there is some confusion between what management is and what it ought to be. This has led to critiques which suggest that approaches to management research should adapt to meet the challenges of the future (French and Grey, 1996; Porter and McKibbin, 1988). There is also more or less universal recognition that managers need to be concerned with the application of theories in the workplace as opposed to simply the ideas themselves. The 1990s saw the emergence of a postmodern debate in management which queried beliefs in 'one world' with 'one truth', and began to develop a radical relativism that conceived of a world where no consensus exists and 'no rigorous evaluative criteria remain' (Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982). Key assumptions concerning new forms of capitalism have also been a major strand in critical management studies.

### *Forms of research*

The main classifications of research that have emerged from the management tradition described above are pure, applied and action research.

Pure research, which is sometimes referred to as domain driven, is intended to lead to theoretical development: there may, or may not, be any practical implications of this. Results are disseminated merely through academic media. Applied research is intended to lead to the solution of specific problems and usually involves working with clients who identify the problems. In these studies it is important, apart from reporting the specific problems, to try to explain what is happening. Phillips and Pugh (2005) stress that genuine research must include consideration of 'why' questions as well as 'what' questions.

Action research studies start from the view that research should converse with the researched in some

way and should lead to change, and therefore that change should be incorporated into the research process itself. This questions the simplistic linear model of diffusion of findings into practice only after the completion of research, as traditionally found in management studies. Classical action research starts from the idea that if you want to understand something well you should try changing it, and this is most frequently adopted in organization development (French and Bell, 1999). The collaborative features of action research mean that participants are likely to learn a lot from the process itself by implementing the findings, and their interest may be on what happens next rather than on any formal account of research findings. Within the action research tradition, Gibbons et al. (1994) introduced an important debate on the nature of knowledge and approaches to knowledge generation in management. Mode 1 knowledge generation occurs within the context of existing institutions and academic disciplines. In contrast, mode 2 is transdisciplinary and created in context by those who combine their tacit/practitioner understandings with those of academics. The key aspect of mode 2 knowledge production is that it occurs as a result of the interaction that takes place between theory and practice. Management also requires both thought and action. Not only do most managers feel that research should lead to practical consequences, they are also quite capable of taking action themselves in the light of research results. As a result, the use of action research findings by managers needs to be undertaken with care, paying attention to how the research was conducted and whether new knowledge has been validated by testing it out in practice.

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