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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, EDUCATION AND THEORETICAL FASHIONS:
CONSTRUCTING A METHODOLOGY COURSE IN AN ERA OF DECONSTRUCTION

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Abstract

In this article a case is made both for the utility of deconstructive questions, and also for the danger of taking such questions as a sole or over-riding methodological agenda in education. The discussion is mounted by attention to grounded contexts and dilemmas rather than by a commitment to abstract concerns about 'power' or 'Other' or 'polyphony of voices'. The framing dilemma is how one might construct a research methodology course that is neither positivist, relativist, nor reifying of current theory as an enduring answer for students. The article takes two substantive fields of inquiry in education (inequality and access in education, and research on gender and education) to argue that following through some substantive issues for educational research can provide ways of thinking about the relative merits, power, pertinence and relationships between quantitative, qualitative and deconstructive agendas. Finally, the article outlines a research methodology course constructed by the author to attempt to put in practical form the assumptions about education and research methodology which are argued in this article.

The origins of this article are twofold. For many years I have been trying to teach a graduate course in Qualitative Research Methodology and have been confronting the problem of how, if you have a critical and non-positivist view of methodology, you should structure and teach a course on research methodology.¹ If

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a general course in methodology is offered, as it is in most Schools, the course designer faces a number of problems. What should be in it? How should different methods and different methodologies be presented relative to each other? Should a course in qualitative education research methodology be different from a course in politics or social theory? (This is a question prompted by certain approaches to the task which favour 'critical theory' or 'poststructural theory' as the over-riding framework.) Can you prevent methodology being taken up by the students as a reified set of prescriptions? Later in this article I will discuss some common approaches to this task of structuring a course, and what I think are problems with these, and will also briefly set out my own approach.

The second set of circumstances which are the background of this discussion arose from a recent conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education². In a section of the conference designed to draw papers on critical research methodology, the organizers asked researchers to address the question of the debate between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and whether, today, we should aim to 'transcend' this altogether³. Simultaneously, both in this methodology section and throughout the very large program of the conference, I noted that one particular type of theory and methodology was being taken up as the contemporary answer to how to do educational research. Paper after paper signalled its allegiance to post-structural theory and to methodologies of deconstruction and ongoing reflexive suspicion about any

research, any methods used by the researcher, any 'claims to truth' in the writing up of research. Similar moves are apparent in recent issues of this journal (most recently, Scheurich, 1996).

These matters again brought me back to the problems I had been grappling with in relation to teaching a course on research methodology. What are the criteria by which you (the methodology teacher, the research community, the students, the examiners, the journals) judge different methodologies? On what basis do you decide the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative methods? And, if the theory which is widely fashionable today is asking us to be suspicious of any particular claims to truth, should not that also be applied to the theory that makes that claim?

So, how does one judge the worth of a methodology?

And, if one is a 'research methodologist', what practice does one see oneself as engaged in and contributing to?

And again, how, in a course, do we lead students to address these issues?

In this article I want to make a case for answering these questions by saying that the assessment of different types of educational research methodology should have some regard to the field of education, and to furthering progressive and critical development within that field. This is, of course not a new argument in the field of education; it was particularly raised

as part of the move to proselytize case-study and qualitative rather than quantitative methods in Britain and Australia in the 1970s and early 1980s. But today's context is different, and the issue warrants a new hearing in the face of those various developments I mentioned in my introduction. (In today's context we have become highly conscious that 'progressive' is a contested term and itself a claim to power. The argument I outline here does not assume that it is not.)

I am going to address the questions about judging different research methodologies, and constructing a course in the area, in four ways. Firstly, I will sketch some contemporary approaches by non-positivist methodologists to giving an overview of methodology, and will describe what I see as some problems with those. Secondly, I will discuss some substantive fields of research in education in which I have been engaged to show what I draw from them about the merits of quantitative, qualitative and deconstructive approaches to research in education. Thirdly, I want to raise a number of specific questions about the most recent candidate for 'the' progressive approach to research, deconstruction, and show some problems of taking this as an over-riding meta-theory. And, finally, I describe the course I developed to attempt to teach research methodology as simultaneously a wide-ranging theoretical reflection yet also a field whose legitimation is grounded in some concrete concerns and contributions.

I Giving an 'overview' of methodology: some contemporary practices

When in the late 1970s and early 1980s there began a wave of writing, activity and conference presentations promoting the value of case-study and qualitative methodology rather than quantitative and quasi-experimental procedures, the justification advanced was not primarily methodological, but was educational and social. The basis for improving the practice of teachers, for developing innovation in curriculum, and for according educational practitioners a status as subjects and not just objects in educational research, it was said, was to deal in more qualitative, small-scale, 'illuminative' procedures (Hamilton et.al., 1977; Simons, 1980; Deakin University, 1982). The more strictly methodological justification for this approach was, as in science, a second-order task, to explain the validity of the procedures, particularly vis a vis traditional ones (Kemmis, 1980). But the impetus of that movement has been lost in the way the discussion of quantitative and qualitative methodologies is now taken up in many textbooks and courses.

A common approach in contemporary courses and books to giving an overview of different methodologies is to show these differences in a relativist taxonomy, one which sets out definitions, techniques, assumptions (sometimes) of different approaches, with the suggestion that students should choose whatever they feel comfortable with. Another and alternative approach is to develop an account of the differences around what I will call a

'teleological' taxonomy. In this, approaches are categorized to reveal the inadequacies of certain previous methods, and to show the reader why a particular contemporary approach ('naturalistic' inquiry; or 'critical' inquiry, or post-structuralism) has surpassed those earlier frameworks.

In the relativist taxonomies found in textbooks (such as Gay, 1987; Bell, 1987; Borg and Gall, 1989; Burns, 1990), different approaches to research methodology are presented as if they are packages of techniques available for the student consumer who might choose between them in the same way that they might make decisions to use Word Perfect rather than Word to type up the finished result. Certainly, these days, some comments are usually included about the differing assumptions regarding the nature of research inherent in quantitative/qualitative or postivist/post-positivist modes, and the books will often point to types of questions a particular package is designed to answer. But the smorgasbord is abstracted from education as a socially-located developing context of all this methodology, and the principle of selection between approaches implicitly gives highest regard to individual preferences.

In the second approach (found, to some extent, in Lather, 1991; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the taxonomy is supposedly related to a historical progression in enlightenment, and moves from positivist to post-positivist or critical, to, in some cases, post-structuralist. King observed of such taxonomizing in another field that its intent is not so much one

of categorization as the promotion of a particular position: 'to make one's own political tendencies appear to be the telos of the whole' (quoted in Haraway, 1991, p. 198). Certainly, at least in some texts, the historical accounts present post-positivism as succeeding positivism in a way that does scant justice to the long-standing history of forms of interpretive inquiry, as well as being highly US-centric in telling the story of styles of research.⁴ Because in taxonomies of this kind, the succession of approaches is presented as a historical progression of increasingly more adequate approaches, there are also, as Lather (1991) has suggested, some interesting anomalies if one wants to have some reservation about whether the final column is entirely the most progressive approach.

Research methodology is, of course, a practice (or set of practices) and a discourse (or set of discourses). But, to get back to my opening questions, how does one make judgements about that discourse: how does one not take for granted ('naturalize') that the current enthusiasm (in this case, a form of high scepticism) is the most obviously progressive?

The text-book approaches, I have suggested, effectively give either relativist or 'teleological' answers to these questions. In many cases they address methodology as an abstracted field of study, in which the discussion focusses on what is done and discussed by those who see themselves as research methodologists. Or they address methodology by reference to the most general conclusions of contemporary social theory (or one's

favoured political strand of that). I want to consider a different approach, one which takes a field of educational inquiry, or a socio-critical project within education, and looks at research methodology from that basis.⁵

II Research Methods and Issues in Education Research:

Some Examples

Often, when writers argue for the merits of a particular approach to methodology, they do so as if the answer can be a timeless one. Use case-study or life-history approaches because these valorize the lives and interests of the powerless; use deconstruction because only that can expose the power inherent in how policy and research agendas are set; do not use quantitative techniques because these contribute only to the interests of governance, and so on. But if one takes a socio-critical project in education and considers its historically changing form, including historical changes in research related to it, the question of different research methodologies is seen in a different light. To illustrate this, I want to take two fields of research with which I have been concerned. The first is inequality, and specifically policies on access and participation in schools. The second is the contemporary field of research on gender and education.

A few years ago, I was commissioned to provide an overview of a Australian policy and research on access and participation in

schools.⁶ After spending a year reading up on various historical, statistical and qualitative research accounts, and after considering changing policy documents on these issues, I began that overview of research and policy on access and participation in the following way:

Access and participation in schooling looks like a factual matter and one which can be addressed straightforwardly by tables of statistical comparisons, but it is not. What we want such tables to tell us is constructed against assumptions about what a good and fair pattern for schooling would look like. Such assumptions in Australia have clearly changed over time. They have changed as different groups in the community have raised claims to have their experiences of schooling assessed as inadequate. They have changed as the task of 'fairness' in the schooling system has been associated not with preparing different groups appropriately for different future roles in life, but with having all students remain to the final years of secondary schooling, and with having different groups similarly successful in gaining the common certificates of those final years. And they have changed as new questions have been raised as to whether 'participation and access' can be assessed simply by counting who is in school, or whether these relate also to the experiences of students in schooling: in one sense a qualitative matter, but a matter whose existence is demonstrated in measurable differences in the post-school careers of different groups.

The idea that what we set out to research changes in historically-specific ways is scarcely news to most educational researchers. What was of interest to me was that my attempt to see and interpret the nature of these changes made considerable use of quantitative research and quantitative agendas. Being aware of quantitative research on inputs and outputs enabled one to raise questions about what was being silenced in periods when the emphasis (of both governments and researchers) turned to qualitative issues of 'participation' or 'inclusiveness' or decentralized 'diversity'. And the work of quantitative researchers was one source to draw on in order to interpret differences in the forms of inequality experienced by different groups (for example, that gender-based inequalities, unlike class- or race-related inequalities, were not primarily related to or addressed by projects concerned with school retention).

Quantitative research for example, might monitor and attribute relations between class or sex or school type, and patterns of retention in schools. Quantitative research too is important in showing that, in broad terms, the relation between educational achievement and income is markedly different for women as compared with men. But quantitative research cannot answer other questions important to those concerned with inequality: why has the inequality of girls, who do so well in schools⁷, received such high priority in recent years, while issues of class inequality, so apparent in any statistical studies of retention, have been so little addressed? Where certification is equal,

what does schooling do to produce the different patterns in employment of women and men?

Some literacy in reading quantitative research is important, and not simply to be dismissed by students who feel more comfortable doing qualitative research themselves: it can be a necessary background to framing qualitative inquiries, at least in so far as these are part of a socio-critical project. That is, in relation to the 'relativist' answer to overviews of methodology, I would argue from this that quantitative research approaches are not simply optional for researchers interested in inequality.

To go back to my overview of access and participation in education in Australia, I began with an insight that is a commonplace of contemporary theorists: that the questions policy-makers set up construct truths in particular ways, and that we need to de-naturalize the terms of the inquiry: 'Access and participation in schools looks like a factual matter ... but it is not'. Yet to explore, or demonstrate, or make sense of this contemporary insight requires more than an acquaintance with Foucault. Deconstruction is not a content-free process: it needs existing knowledge, existing documents, existing assumptions against which, but also on the basis of which, the deconstructive reading can proceed. Just as the quantitative research questions and findings helped frame new qualitative agendas for researchers, to 'de-naturalize' the current agendas requires some substantive knowledge and concepts drawn from

outside the present.

As well, my assessment of this field of inquiry and action suggested, different questions need to be addressed by different research methodologies. One of the strengths of the wave of qualitative research advocates of the late 1970s and early 1980s was in explaining the inappropriateness of some traditional quantitative approaches to address many of the questions with which teachers were concerned (that is, the big comparative surveys might provide answers and directions for system-organizers, but could not deal with teachers' problems of how to deal with that particular child in that particular classroom, see for example, Hamilton, 1980). What the example I have been discussing here also reminds us, is that similar critical reflection needs to be addressed to all forms of research enthusiasm.

The 'democratic', micro-level qualitative research interest that so engaged Australian researchers in the early 1980s sat very neatly with a government policy discourse which valorized process rather than outcomes as the truths about inequality in schooling (see Yates, 1987). And the deconstructive questions that engage researchers today may work against an adequate project for school-level pedagogy: they may provide answers that are satisfying and of interest to other researchers (or university teachers who work with adults), but may fail to engage with what interests younger students or with what is possible for teachers in schools (see Kenway, 1993; Yates, 1992,

1993b).

Next, consider the field of research on gender and education. When Alison Kelly, a British researcher, summed up her experiences of a decade of work on girls and science education, she noted the following:

The changes in research on girls and science over the past few years are not confined to an expansion of interest. There has also been a marked shift in the type of research being carried out. In The Missing Half most of us approached the topic from a broadly psychologicistic angle. We wanted to know why girls avoided physical science, and we looked for the answer in individual attitudes and personality traits, based on survey methods. This type of work is still popular, and certainly has much to offer. But it has a tendency to blame the victim.[...] The alternative approach which has developed recently is more sociological and structural. It locates the fault at least partially within science, within schools or within society at large.[...] Based on this type of thinking, a number of researchers have begun to study the historical construction of science as we know it today, to observe the processes taking place in classrooms, and to analyse curricula. Equally important, we have begun to explore the possibilities for action to remedy the situation. (Kelly, 1987, pp.1-2)

And, when Willis (1990) engaged in a similar reflection regarding girls and mathematics, she noted that there had been some changes over a decade or so of intensive work on the area from addressing the question 'why can't girls do well in mathematics?' to considering 'why don't girls do well?' to another 'why won't girls do well?', and the types of research methods being taken up indicated some related shifts.

A number of things are being said in these reflections on research methodology in a substantive area of research (and within a social project of reform). One is that the definition of the problem for research changes, or, in other words, that the adequacy of research methodology is intrinsically related to the substantive literature of a field.

A second is that, in the development in both of these fields (fields which have seen some of the largest amounts of research activity in recent years) there is no transcending commitment to particular methodological frameworks (quantitative, qualitative or deconstructionist) as necessarily valuable, or as inherently irrelevant. Some careful quantitative work was useful in demonstrating that the initial framing of a problem (girls' biological inadequacy) was based on poorly controlled comparisons (not controlled for previous learning in mathematics); some questions ('why won't girls continue with mathematics') inherently cannot be addressed by quantitative and quasi-experimental procedures; and it is arguable that some deconstructive research (that girls' 'failure' is related to the

discursive construction of mathematics and of femininity, Walkerdine, 1987) is meaningful, and indeed possible, only because there has been a body of non-deconstructionist research which disposed of other explanations of girls' inequality in mathematics, and which made the deconstructionist question recognizable.

There are other examples too within research on gender and education which cast a different light on criteria for good research than that traditionally found within courses on methodology. In Australia, a form of quantitative research was supremely important in legitimizing sexual inequality as an area of research for schooling. It was the quite crude school-based monitoring of 'who does the talking?', and 'who uses the space?', popularized by Dale Spender and promoted by equal opportunity consultants (Yates, 1993a). The projects here used no sophisticated controls, or research training of observers, or theoretical refinement of the observation categories. But these research projects were powerful in schools and to policy-makers because counting was accepted by those involved as 'non-ideological', as objectively proving a claim which many had wanted to dismiss as political, and which had not previously been obvious to commonsense interpretations of the classroom reality.⁸

In the preceding section I have been attempting to illustrate by examples why different types of research have made a contribution to movements concerned with critical changes in

education; to show that particular historical context is relevant; and to suggest that both doing certain types of research and trying to address what is being produced and what silenced by the research approach being favoured will have some point.

III Attending to Educational Projects versus Deconstruction as Meta-Methodology

The foregoing discussion of examples has clearly been influenced by the post-structuralist acceptance of multiple discourses rather than a single truth, and by its interest in silences and the discourses whereby truths are produced. But it is by no means an argument for constructing a methodology course around deconstruction as a project or as the central metatheory which students should be taught. Attention to projects and to educational issues as in this last section, enables us to reflect on some questions about post-structuralism.

Firstly, taking post-structuralism in its own terms (and accepting that this is not a single theory, but a body of shifts in theory and research assumptions), we might ask what produces this as a truth and what are its truth-effects? Noting when poststructuralism begins to be taken up in relation to gender and schooling, considering its positioning relative to other research approaches, and indeed seeing it as a discourse itself is one means of preventing the reification of deconstruction as

a new transcendent framework.

Secondly, we might ask, what are the methodological rules for deconstructionists? My discussion of 'access and participation' issues in educational research drew attention to the substantive knowledge and concepts that give the deconstructive orientation force. As Barrett noted about Foucault:

there is a sense in which Foucault's own achievements when 'skimming along' and selecting some statements rather than others remain unexplained by the formal method he outlines [...] [but also] there is a world of difference between the detailed historical researches that Foucault himself undertook when seeking to recast our understanding of particular discourses (medical, penal, sexual etc.) and the extremely superficial relabelling that often goes on in which, for example, sociology becomes 'sociological discourse' without any substantive elaboration of what the discursive ordering and regularities might be.
(Barrett, 1991, p. 127)

In other words, deconstruction is not a content-free exercise. For students of research methodology in education, it is relevant then to address the reality that within this new paradigm, judgements are still made (certainly by thesis examiners and journal editors) of what counts as successful work in this framework. The background knowledge of education and

education research, I am suggesting, is relevant to the task of reading against.

Thirdly, we might ask, how truths are produced is an interesting question, but is it the only question? In feminist theory, contemporary debates about the politics of post-structuralism concern the issue of at what point and in what ways the intellectual inquiry begins to become the unbounded indulgence of a privileged elite which talks about but not to or with those in whose interests it claims to develop (for example, Hirsch & Fox Keller, 1990; Modleski, 1991; Bordo, 1993; Spivak, 1993; hooks, 1994). In a course on research methodology for education we should be wary of typologies which reify one type of question as the only appropriate agenda for research.

IV Constructing a Methodology Course

In the preceding parts of this discussion, I have raised a number of suggestions, and also a number of problems in relation to the teaching of a course on methodology. In the first section, I criticized overviews which simply presented different methodologies for the student to take their pick, as not having sufficient regard to education as a field of social practice; and I also criticized typologies which gave Whig accounts of research methodology as tending to reify the field for students and to suggest a universal answer about good research rather than one which was contextual.

In the second section of the article, I argued that working through developments in two fields of research was a useful way of thinking about the problem of developing a course in research methodology. Some substantive knowledge about education and some basic consideration of quantitative approaches provided a basis from which new questions might be posed; understanding the state of development of a particular field of research was relevant to assessing whether and how a particular approach might be of value and whether it would be deemed legitimate; the Foucauldian attention to what is not being asked (what is being 'naturalized') was an important tool, but relied on substantive knowledge in order for that to be seen.

In the third part of the paper, I argued that tools of reflexive suspicion have an important part in methodology courses, but students even in this area have to think about what counts as acceptable or inferior research, and should think about whether questions about regulation are the only ones worth pursuing.

How does one put all this together as a course? Earlier in my attempts to develop a course I noted some of the problems:

When research is seen as a humanly constructed enterprise and validity not as the Q.E.D. of an equation but as a subtle judgement on the interplay of technique and substantive analysis in relation to a particular problem, the temptation can be to turn the discussion on methodology

into a discourse on epistemology and social theory which leaves out techniques altogether. On the other hand, if the writer does try to mess with the real world of research and discuss substantive examples, there is the problem of from which perspective the various studies can be put together...How, too, do they balance the practical advice (which is likely to appear as a series of messy hints from experience, compared with the more formal instructions for survey methods) with the discussions of validity, which by their nature must be complex? (Yates,1984,p.436)

My way through these dilemmas has been to teach a course that begins with and is framed by an attempt to address substantive educational issues. This enables attention to the big issues of methodology (how the project is being constructed, what makes it reliable or trustworthy or acceptable, or unacceptable, etc) and to do so in a way which gives attention to methodological decisions being taken and judged in a context, a context both of the existing literature on that particular area, and also of movements in the field of education (and social) policy and practice. What I want students to avoid is a blanket rejection of quantification or of non-quantification as a means of useful educational research. What I want too is that they should not see the options as an individual and relativist decision, of finding an approach and following its formula, but one in which particular types of research will arise and/or be useful to projects at particular points, and in which the framing of educational questions is treated as seriously as the empirical

attempts to answer these.

In my first years teaching the methodology course, I began with two research publications that ostensibly address the same question, 'How do schools make a difference?', yet adopt different methodologies, different types of samples, different concepts, and in fact address quite different questions in doing so. (Connell et.al., 1982; Rutter et.al., 1979) Taken together, they allowed questions to be raised about silences in each (in the case of Making the Difference (Connell et.al., 1982), questions about 'school effectiveness', about what might be achieved differently by schools with a like clientele; in the case of Fifteen Thousand Hours (Rutter et.al., 1979), questions about what did the 'inequalities' between closely matched schools actually signify in the broader social pattern?) Did either study provide a convincing way of investigating processes in schooling? How well were their conclusions related to what they produced as evidence? How trustworthy was the methodology of each both within its own framing assumptions and in terms of broader interests in research in inequality?

In another year I have taken four article-length studies of different approaches to research on gender and education. One article was a quantitative, survey-based attempt to compare single-sex and co-educational settings (Carpenter, 1985); a second, a phenomenological study of teacher thinking and classroom practices (Evans, 1982); a third was a quasi-experimental attempt to assess science teachers' expectations

according to the gender of pupils (Spear,1987); and a fourth a deconstructive unpicking of what gets counted as mathematical success and as evidence of ability (Walkerdine,1987). Again, the point is to appreciate what each study was considering as its research agenda and why; and what each was contributing in the context of a broader social project in education. Beginning the course with these substantive examples is a basis for introducing the questions that frame the course: of how and why research is produced in a particular way; of how we (and others) judge the quality of research; of how we might develop projects of inquiry in the present context. These examples also serve as some common ground for students in the course when we look at literature on methodology.

After the initial discussion of some contemporary research in education, and of the way some different researchers try to frame their research questions and to carry out their inquiries, the course spends a number of sessions on the broader field of the 'history and philosophy of inquiry'. These introduce students to the literature of philosophy of science, and to a consideration of science, quantification and control in relation to educational questions; to the history and philosophy of interpretive traditions of inquiry; and to the post-structuralist radical critique of the search for reliable or trustworthy knowledge. Following this, some sessions take up the specific literature of educational research methodology, in relation to issues such as case-study, ethnography, interviewing, ethics and so on. In another session, students are

asked to take a particular area of their own field of interest, to investigate by a literature review how the framing and methodology of research in that area have developed, and to discuss in class silences and general patterns emerging when they consider their various overviews.

In some sessions too, other staff in the School of Education discuss with students their own research and their own beliefs about methodology. These are intended to extend the repertoire of examples available to the students, to elaborate the discussion of particular issues, to provide a sense of the research project as lived dilemma rather than simply as the neat achievement presented in the published report, and also to present philosophies of methodology which challenge my own. For example, one session is given by a colleague who is prepared to call himself a positivist, who is not only committed to quantitative methodologies, but makes much use of attitude-scaling, a form of methodology which I find worthless. The impetus in including these different voices is not to encourage a belief in relativism on the part of the students, but to encourage among students a non-reified taking up of the 'answers' I implicitly and explicitly give in this course to questions about methodology and about education.

In the second half of the year, the substantive focus to the methodological discussion comes from the students who discuss their own projects. Interspersed with this we return to various particular methodological issues and the discussion of these in

the literature of methodology.

Final comments

I discussed earlier in this article why, in my own areas of research, I would argue that there is not one overridingly valuable methodological framework that transcends all others. At times quite simple, naive research is compelling: at other times quite sophisticated research seems to contribute to little outside its own inquiry. I also argued that for those working in education, teaching and writing about methodology should have some regard to the field of education, and to what was being furthered by research projects in it. The latter question, I suggested, has been given prominence by research projects associated with poststructuralism, but it is also an appropriate issue to address in relation to that framework itself.

In other parts of the paper, I raised some additional problems for mounting a course on research methodology. In taking methodology seriously, we do want to address how we come to know and what status that knowledge has, and to do this potentially calls on vast fields of epistemology, of history and philosophy of science and social science, of social and cultural theory. At the same time, the students are not there to dwell indefinitely on the nature of the universe; they need to be able to construct and carry out a project which meets the standards of coherence, rigour and knowledge of the field set out in guidelines to

thesis examiners.

My response to these problems is the course I have described. It is not a linear course, but one in which students are asked to reflect on issues of reliability, rigour, educational worthwhileness, context, ethics and so on, as we move back and forth between various types of discussions (of Australian educational research, of literatures of methodology, etc) and various voices of educational researchers.

In constructing a course in research methodology, we are explicitly or implicitly constructing an answer to the question 'how does one judge the worth of a methodology?' We teach students our own vision of this answer, and also something about how we understand others ('the field', editors, examiners) to answer this question. In the present age and state of theory, the task of the methodology overview course constructor seems fraught with irony. There is no perfect course, and 'everything is dangerous'. This article is one proposition about how to proceed, a proposition grounded in a particular autobiographical experience of particular contexts and particular fields of research. The case I have proposed is that education courses in research methodology should have some regard to the broader field of education and that they should have regard to projects and politics in education as practices and constructions extending beyond the present moment.

1. Whether you should have a separate course in 'research methodology' is also a question worth pursuing and has been the subject of some vigorous debates in my own School. That is, is it desirable to detach questions about methods and methodology from particular substantive fields of inquiry,

2. 'Recent' in fact refers to a 1992 conference and to the time when this paper was written. Due to a series of mishaps with the manuscript during the refereeing process, there has been an unusually lengthy time-lag before publication.

3. The theme of this section of AARE was advertized as follows, (the proliferation of quotation marks in the instructions signalling the poststructuralist, deconstructive allegiances of the organizers): 'To specifically address the following question/ problem/ dilemma: how can "we" bring together the "qualitative" and "quantitative" in and for socially-critical policy studies and educational research? Is it a matter of refusing these terms altogether, or somehow "transcending" them?' The original version of this article, originally presented at that conference, was entitled, 'Against transcendent methodology - and that includes deconstruction', AARE/NZARE Annual Conference Papers, Deakin University, December 1992.

4. British and Australian work on qualitative research has been, I would suggest, more likely to acknowledge substantive theories (of resistance, for example) as part of the guiding agendas of ethnographic work; or to be explicitly related to movements concerned with teachers as researchers. Until recently, many American references to ethnography and 'naturalistic' inquiry in education seemed to imply a concern with the blank-slate, inductive inquirer, and what that inquirer needs to do to get the stories of the various participants to be adequately told.

5. Despite what I have said earlier, it is clear that Carr, Kemmis and Lather, as well as methodology textbook writers such as Popkewitz, Hamilton, Biklen and others do have an interest in methodology as related to particular socio-critical projects in education. However their various arguments on this take a rather different form than the approach I am proposing in this paper.

6. This was developed as a paper for a government (NBEET)-sponsored national conference and publication on Australian education. It was commissioned as one of a series of 'expert' perspectives over-viewing Australian education but remains unpublished as NBEET (a government department) decided not to proceed with the intended publication when it found that the perspectives it had commissioned insufficiently supported its own story of the superiority of the present policy directions.

7. See Yates (1993) for a more extensive discussion of the evidence of statistical inequality and gender issues. There, and

here, I am not arguing against the legitimacy of gender as an issue of inequality and concern for schools, but drawing attention to the fact that the case is not made on the basis of some of the statistical patterns of inequality familiar in relation to class or poverty, or race. Some parallel discussion is found in the US context in the AAUW report, How Schools Shortchange Girls (1992).

8. In answer to a question raised by a reviewer as to my evidence for these comments, the assessments are based on sixteen years' experience of visiting schools, attending conferences and in-service teacher training, teaching teachers and reading reports of school-based research in local periodicals. More detail about the impact of this style of research in the context of other research and policy shifts is given in Yates, 1993a.

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