Research paradigms and conceptual frameworks

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Outline

Paradigm proliferation

Recognition that science is not the same in all paradigms in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology

The following are visual representations of paradigm mapping and can assist the student to recognise their ontological and epistemological 'home'

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Paradigm

The following tables provide a visual representation in a linear sense the mapping of paradigms

They deliberately hold together the necessary incompatibilities in order to provide visualisation of the variety of approaches to research

When a proliferation of research approaches within multiple paradigms are proposed the result can be a communication breakdown in relation to epistemic incommensurability (i.e. a fatal flaw in your ontological approach that flows into your epistemological and methodological design leading to use of inappropriate methods)

Be mindful of disciplinary paradigmatic approaches that are historically structuring your thoughts (or your supervisors) and be aware they are increasingly being displaced by greater differentiation out of the shifting forces

The following tables are a good starting point to have a conversation with your supervisor on where they, and you locate yourselves. You might be surprised at how different seemingly similar paradigmatic viewpoints can be
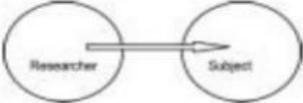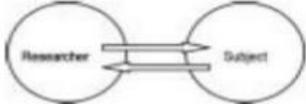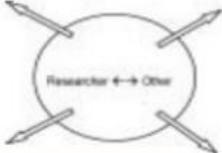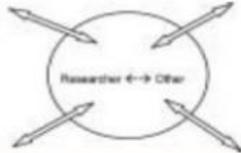
Paradigms

Table 1. Revised paradigm chart

Predict	Understand	Emancipate	Brk	Deconstruct	Next?
*Positivist Mixed methods	*Interpretive Naturalistic	*Critical Neo–Marxist		Poststructural Postmodern	Neo-positivism
	Constructivist Phenomenological	< Feminist > Critical race theory Praxis–oriented		Queer theory < Discourse analysis	
	Ethnographic	Freirian participatory < action research			
	Symbolic/ interaction			Postcolonial	Post–theory
				Post–Fordism	Neo–pragmatism
	Interpretive mixed methods			Post–humanist	Citizen inquiry
				Post–critical	Participatory/ dialogic Policy analysis
		Gay and lesbian theory			
				Postparadigmatic diaspora (John Caputo)	
		Critical ethnography		Post everything (Fred Erickson)	Post-post

(Patti Lather & Bettie St Pierre, 2005)

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POSITIVIST	Interpretivist	CRITICAL THEORY	Deconstructivist
Reality is objective and "found"	Reality is subjective and constructed	Reality is subjective and constructed on the basis of issues of power	Reality is ultimately unknowable; attempts to understand it subvert themselves
Truth is one	Truth is many	Truth is many, and constitutes a system of socio-political power	"Truths" are socially constructed systems of signs which contain the seeds of their own contradiction
Discourse is structured and transparent, reflecting reality	Discourse is dialogic and creates reality	Discourse is embedded in (and controlled by) rhetorical and political purpose	Discourse is by nature inseparable from its subject, and is radically contingent and vulnerable
What is true?	What is heuristic?	What is just?	Is there a truth?
What can we know?	What can we understand?	What can we do?	What constitutes truth?
Knowing the world	Understanding the world	Changing the world	Critiquing the world
Communication as transmission	Communication as transaction	Communication as decision-making	Communication as challenging the nature of communication

If this research paradigm were a color, it would be:

blue (cool, "scientific," objective)	**green** (natural, symbolic of organic growth)	**red** (dynamic, action-oriented)	**black** (absence or denial of color)

If this research paradigm were a public event, it would be:

a marching band or **classical ballet** (precise, rule-dominated)	**community picnic** (cooperative, interactive, humanistic)	**a March of Dimes telethon** (active, purposeful, concerned with marginal groups)	**a circus, amusement park, or carnival** (multiplicity of perspectives and stimuli; no single reference point

POSITIVIST	*Interpretivist*	CRITICAL THEORY	Deconstructivist
If this research paradigm were a game, it would be:			
Tetris (exacting, quantitatively oriented, uses computer)	**Clue** (exchanges with other players inform decisions)	**Monopoly** (a world constituted by economic struggles)	**Candyland** (unconcerned with reality; played either by children or the extremely sophisticated)
If this research paradigm were a sport, it would be:			
golf (boring, individual, fastidious, exacting)	**tennis** (interactive, interdependent, labor intensive)	**midnight basketball** (collaborative, intended to change society; oppressed participate in self-empowerment)	**professional wrestling** (is it real? non-reality disguised as reality; simultaneous acceptance and denial of what is real)
If this research paradigm were a celebrated figure, it would be:			
Anita Bryant **Napoleon** (sure of their position; calculating)	**Florence Nightingale** **Dag Hammersjold** (receptivity to others; ability to entertain multiple viewpoints)	**Susan B. Anthony** **Karl Marx** (activists; concerned with oppressed groups)	**kd lang** **Woody Allen** (self-contradictory; quirky; they carve out their own space)
The researchers in this paradigm would drink:			
Scotch on the rocks (conventional, "hard" liquor for "hard science," hegemonic)	**Californian white wine** (natural, convivial, social, interactive)	**Vodka** (the revolutionary's drink; fiery, subversive)	**Zima** (defies categorization; neither wine, nor beer, nor hard liquor; trendy)

NON-HEGEMONIC
PARADIGMS

positivism

interpretivism

Critical theories

deconstructionism

HEGEMONIC/EUROPEAN
EPISTEMOLOGICAL
PARADIGMS

Developed by: Dafina M. L. Stewart

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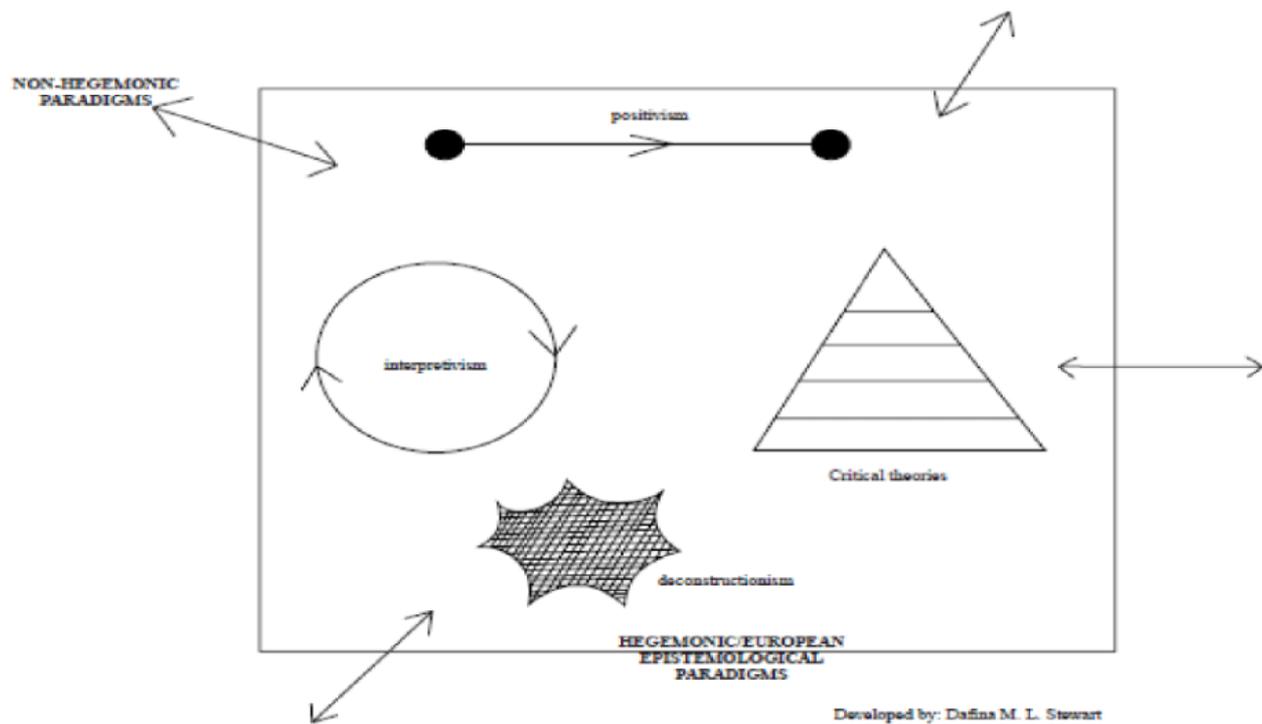
Conceptual frameworks

Miles and Huberman defined a conceptual framework as the current version of the researchers map of the territory being investigated

Conceptual frameworks may evolve as the research evolves

- Accommodates purpose (boundaries) with flexibility (Evolution) and coherence of the research (plan/analysis/conclusion)

Understandings	Misunderstandings	Consequences
Clarifying the research issue(s)	Omitting paradigm(s) which locate, and critique, research issues	Focus upon research methods at the expense of concepts
Identifying concepts from a 'survey of the literature'	Not visualising linkages between various concepts	A framework was not devised nor its function appreciated
Designing research, and explaining methodology	Overlooking strategic and guiding roles for conceptual	Lack of explicit and cohesive relationships throughout the

Why do you need a conceptual framework?

Is a tool as opposed a totem to worship, provides a set of general signposts

Provides a structure for organising and supporting ideas, a mechanism for systematically arranging abstractions

Provides a theoretical overview of the intended research and order within that process

As opposed to a paradigm which provides establishes or defines boundaries

Provides structure for organising and supporting ideas, a mechanism for systematically arranging abstractions, sometimes revolutionary or original and usually rigid

Allows the connection of theory with practice by allowing the data observed to be tied with a conceptual framework which then leads to the elucidation of further research questions and implications for additional study

Disciplinary focus for research proposals

Conceptual frameworks often have a disciplinary focus - this is to make sense of the data and allows systematic exploration of a particular phenomena

A disciplinary focus allows a picture to develop, or a mapping to occur of the territory you wish to study, but not of the study itself, provides a visual display of the students current working theory and allows them to begin to abstract on what they think is going on with the phenomenon they are studying

Conceptual frameworks offer a general framework for developing research proposals and by implication how research maybe conducted

Can provide an answer to the 'what' questions, before the 'how'

Where to derive your conceptual framework from

1. The works of writers and researchers
2. Own experience and observations and
3. The act of reflecting on reading, experience and developing research assumptions

In unfolding inductive research the conceptual framework may appear following a critique of theoretical perspectives in the literature

Or alternatively may emerge as a conceptual model after fieldwork to provide theoretical cohesion to the evidence

Will precede the research design chapter

The type of research approach determines the location and function of the conceptual framework

What are the benefits of a conceptual framework?

Introduce explicitness with research processes by:

- modelling relationships between theories;
- reducing theoretical data into statements or models;
- explicating theories that influence the research;
- providing theoretical bases to design, or interpret, research;
- creating theoretical links between extant research, current theories, research design, interpretations of findings and conceptual conclusions

The critical tests of conceptual frameworks are for them to demonstrate:

- unity within appropriate theories;
- direction to research design and accompanying fieldwork;
- coherence between empirical observations and conceptual conclusions

Thus, conceptual frameworks offer a self-audit facility to ensure cohesion and appropriate conceptualisation for research conclusions

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How did you arrive at your conceptual framework and other examiner questions

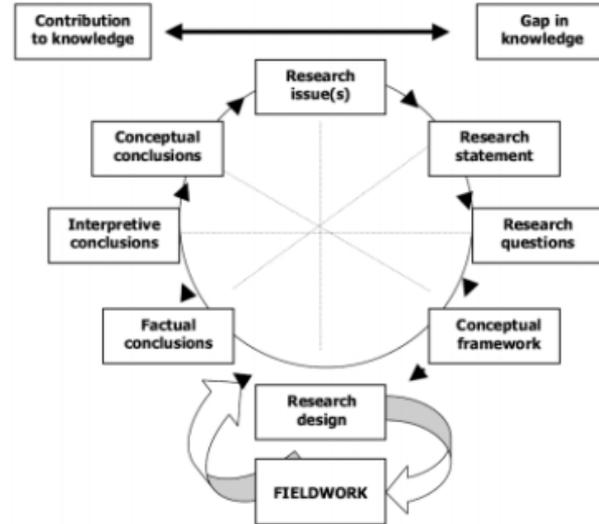Where is your conceptual framework?

What led you to select these models?

What are the theoretical components of your framework

How did you decide upon the variables to include in your conceptual framework

How did concepts assist you to visualise and explain what you intended to investigate

How did you use your conceptual framework to design your research and analyse your findings

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Conceptual frameworks provide examiner answers to questions such as:

What was the wider theoretical significance of that reading

Why was your research designed in that way?

What is the conceptual significance of the evidence

Why does this thesis make a contribution to knowledge

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References

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Leshem, S., & Trafford, V. (2007). Overlooking the conceptual framework. Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 44(1), 93-105.

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