**Identifying Research Paradigms – Discussion**

Exercise 1.3 in Chapter 1 of the book by Opie and Brown (2019) asks you to identify the two research paradigms the chapter has presented and then decide which would be most appropriate in trying to answer some research questions. You can also find the questions in the file **Identifying research paradigms**. These personal views are aimed at helping you to get to grips with basic initial educational research issues. Try not to look at them until you have carried out the exercise and, if you are able to, discussed your thoughts with others.

**Note:** these are personal views of the editors; you are free to disagree with them, but, as with any critique, you need to be prepared to offer reasons why you do so.

|  |
| --- |
| **Question 1** *Does* *more frequent use of textbooks increase student achievement?* |
| **A suitable research paradigm would be ‒** Positivism |
| **Comments on the practicality of undertaking this research. If practical, what sample size might you choose? What evidence might you be looking for to try and answer the research question? What research procedures might be most appropriate?**  The question is seeking to see if there is a correlation between the frequency of use of textbooks and achievement. Whilst it might seem ‘doable’, exploring the question in a little more detail should start to highlight how problematic it is. Controlling the frequency of use will be impractical. How will you control reading in other settings e.g. at home, a library, all of which are likely to impact on what achievement you might measure. On this latter point, what measure of achievement will you use? Any correlation is only likely to appear, if at all, from studying many groups over a long period of time – something you don’t have luxury of.  In short, whilst the research question might, at a first glance, seem ‘doable’, this is far from the case and you would be advised to steer clear. |
|  |
| **Question 2** *How are texts used by teachers and students in the classroom?* |
| **A suitable research paradigm would be ‒** Constructivism/interpretivism |
| **Comments on the practicality of undertaking this research. If practical, what sample size might you choose? What evidence might you be looking for to try and answer the research question? What research procedures might be most appropriate?**  Here there is simply an interest in observing how texts are used. From a practical point of view, it is ‘doable’, however the question is not altogether straightforward. Why teachers and students? They are both likely to use textbooks in quite different ways, so you need to ask yourself the purpose of looking at both groups? Have you anything specific you want to look out for, or are you collecting general observations? If you go ahead you will need to think carefully about which classes you want to look at, remembering the time you have for your research. Will you look at all classes in one-year group or a class across each year group? What reasons have you for your choice? Perhaps there is a need to take a step back and ask yourself what is the purpose of this research?    So far it sounds like any research question is just fraught with problems. In some sense this is often the case, but what you need to do is clarify whether there is in fact a piece of research which can be completed in terms of its aim and is ‘doable’ within your time constraints. Despite the issues raised here the suggestion is that this research has some merit to it, but it just needs to be thought about carefully, and perhaps amended a little to make it more ‘doable’. |

|  |
| --- |
| **Question 3** *How do students and teachers view the instructional value and context of specific texts?* |
| **A suitable research paradigm would be ‒** Constructivism/interpretivism |
| **Comments on the practicality of undertaking this research. If practical, what sample size might you choose? What evidence might you be looking for to try and answer the research question? What research procedures might be most appropriate?**  In terms of being ‘doable’ this is like the previous question. Here, of course, you would undertake interviews to gather any information and you would need to think carefully about what you want to find out. Will you look for some specific things or are you happy just to get general views, perhaps to see if any common or contradicting themes arises. The former option is potentially easier to carry out as with the second you are likely to run out of time if your sample size is too large. Unlike the first question, working with students and teachers has merit. Once again, perhaps there is a need to take a step back and clarify what the purpose of this research is? |
|  |
| **Question 4** *Are textbooks more effective than other instructional resources in promoting on-task behaviour of students?* |
| **A suitable research paradigm would be ‒** this depends on what you might be aiming to measure |
| **Comments on the practicality of undertaking this research. If practical, what sample size might you choose? What evidence might you be looking for to try and answer the research question? What research procedures might be most appropriate?**  It is worth starting by saying this is a poor research question. What do you mean by effective? What other instructional resources are you thinking of? What do you mean by on-task behaviour? So, in short, this research, it is suggested, is not ‘doable’. However, it is offered as an example of how, if you change it, it might have research potential. What if you were to ask:  *Is the use of textbooks of value in promoting on-task behaviour of students?*  First, it does not require you to compare the use of textbooks with any other instructional material. If you define what you mean by ‘on-task behaviour’, and it is something that can be easily observed, then there might be some merit in this research although again, first clarifying its purpose will undoubtedly be helpful. Consideration of the number of classes you look at, in order to cater for the time, you have to carry out your research, will increase how ‘doable’ it is. The rewritten question would also use a constructivist/interpretivist research paradigm – arguably much more appropriate for the kind of project you might undertake. |

Opie, C. and Brown, D. (eds) (2019)*Getting Started in Your Educational Research: A Student’s Guide to Design, Data Production and Analysis*. London: Sage.