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Ryan Hanlon

Module: BMPF7005

Critically evaluate a range of methodological approaches, research designs, and research methods appropriate to gather data from complex work-based settings, with due consideration to research ethics and issues of insider research.

Introduction

This paper gives preparation to module 3 (BMPF7008) of my M Cert in Voice Pedagogy as well as my future research. The purpose of this essay is to become conscious of how my future research will be planned, executed, and organised, exploring a range of different methodologies, designs, methods that align with my ontological and epistemological position. I will discuss three paradigms: positivism, constructivist and pragmatic, considering which I believe affiliates with my ontology and epistemology. I will then outline two umbrella methodologies: qualitative and quantitative capture. I will draw upon research designs that perhaps could fit within my paradigm. I will then seek methods that support my chosen methodology(ies) and then finally consider my insider research approach with respect to validity. This essay will conclude the approach I may take for module 3 (BMPF7008).

Ontology and Epistemology

Moving forward with postgraduate research, there is a responsibility as a researcher to align my ontological and epistemological viewpoints and employ these conscious findings to a paradigm.

The term ontology belongs to the “study of being”, structuring what we believe as reality (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Our ontological position determines how we recognise reality; truth.

Epistemology is the act of studying knowledge and scrutinising the truth. Epistemology governs the route of methodology that the researcher takes to carry out a study. This includes qualitative (inductive), quantitative (deductive) and the option of mixing both methodologies.

Speaking personally, I have the ontological view of reality being constantly reconsidered and renegotiated. Epistemologically, I find it difficult to categorise my position so would respect this as a mixed approach.

Paradigm

The positivistic population have the ontological position of one reality and epistemically believe that knowledge can be measured, and conclusions are made upon mathematical means, with the intervention of instrument/ tools imperative to the result. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To have the viewpoint of positivism, we approach reality ontologically as one truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). “Positivists may differ in terms of detailed approach. Some would claim, for example, that hypothesised regularities can be verified by an adequate experimental research programme. Others would maintain that hypotheses can only be falsified and never demonstrated to be ‘true’” (Burrell and Morgan, 2017 p. 5).

Turning to the opposing view, the paradigm social constructivist allows the inductive researcher to conduct studies through the means of observation, working with the premise that hypothesis is not needed (Herring, 2018). Instead, a social constructivist believes that reality is less singular than the positivistic population. Seeking findings through qualitative reasoning, I resonate with social constructivists and can see the benefit of using a more holistic approach to my work-based research (Poplin, 1988) than the positivistic opposite. There is more opportunity to create a close relationship with the sample (my students and/or colleagues) (Charmaz, 2006). With methods such as observations and focus groups, there is more scope to uncover behavioural characteristics (Schwandt, 1994). Conducting research in such a manner permits the sample to think critically on reflection of their practice (Palincsar, 1998) than the quantitative counterpart.

Pragmatic paradigm has a fluid attitude to research with a purposeful detachment from any one ontology and epistemology. Pioneering this alternative viewpoint, Dewey (1916) gives thought into a new way of researching that allows the researcher to conduct a study with “a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder” (1916 p. 115). Having the ability to renegotiate and change depending upon the situation at hand, I feel, would complement the singing practitioner. Speaking personally, I would classify myself as pragmatic, which seems ironic to categorise myself, being that this paradigm has been built upon having no one reality viewpoint or philosophy (Loan Nguyen, 2019).

Methodologies

I will outline the two most common methodologies, qualitative and quantitative capture, though these two perspectives can become interchangeable. For the purpose of this paper, I will form some conclusion whether I think my work-based research would warrant qualitative or quantitative reasoning, or a mixed approach.

Both concepts are distinctively different in their approach to securing data. Qualitative reasoning has an inductive nature, contrarily, quantitative data adopts deductive methodology to aid its primary findings. In addition to the brief comparison above, to conduct research with a quantitative outcome, researchers have a predetermined hypothesis on assumption, on which a statistical conclusion is made (Cresswell, 2014). Research in the voice science field benefits from such design when working with, for example, the degree in which the laryngeal height is presented in voice qualities. In such a study, quantitative data will be produced in the form of distance from laryngeal point A to B (Perta, Bae and Obert, 2020). In my future research, quantitative reasoning is a pathway that I can see favouring my work with its deductive result.

Quantitative research allows for a rich and flexible study (Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie, 2017), which would suit an inquiry where instrumentation is required to conduct the study.

An area of interest with regards to my future research lies within the twang voice quality. Though substantial developments have been made throughout the last fifty years, there are still gaps in the knowledge (Perta, Bae and Obert, 2020), which would rely on quantifying data. Contrasting to quantitative capture, qualitative research holds value to studies with no preordained hypothesis (Burnard et al., 2008). With qualitative analysis, primary research can take advantage of its narrative behaviour; papers have taken advantage from this style and authors explicitly credit this within their work (Lingler et al., 2006). Qualitative studies focus on the feelings, impressions and opinions of an individual (FitzPatrick, 2019), which I

feel would benefit the social scientist in the voice pedagogy industry. There is a personal approach to this form of study, which my students may respond better to.

Action Research

Action research has taken its place within education as a collaborative tool for social scientists within this setting (Mills, 2011). Action research allows participants the opportunity to join forces with the researcher to shape the study. As a researcher I can see the benefit from incorporating the sample into the study as it gives in-depth insight into the community/organisation (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). The authors add to the topic "Within an action research project, communities of inquiry and action evolve and address questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co researchers. Typically such communities engage in more or less systematic cycles of action and reflection: in action phases co researchers test practices and gather evidence" (Reason and Bradbury, 2008 p. 1). I am a voice teacher that is not attached to one institution; I visit four different educational settings each week. Though I work alongside colleagues within these sites, I'm not a fixed academic and feel I could use action research to gain a comprehensive awareness of the problems at hand within the institutions. (Reason and Bradbury, 2008).

Ethnology

"Coined as a derivation of the Greek word 'ethnos,' meaning 'a people,' the term 'ethnology' in its most general meaning indicates a scholarly interest in how aggregations of human beings are distinct from each other in terms of material culture, language, religion, moral ideas, or social institutions" (Welz, 2001 p. 4862). This is quite an inspiring mode of observation as it's multifaceted in itself, with the integration into the community to uncover findings (Fetterman, 2010). Hoey, (2014) adds "ethnographers generate understandings of culture through representation of what we call an emic perspective, or what might be described as the "insider's point of view." The emphasis in this representation is thus on allowing critical categories and meanings to emerge from the ethnographic encounter rather than imposing these from existing models. An etic perspective, by contrast, refers to a more distant, analytical orientation to experience." (2014, p. 2). With ethnology having benefits of integration, I can see room for bias in the voice teacher profession. Building a strong rapport with the student is important with the exposing nature of learning to sing, though this might impair results with potential bias. Hammersley, (2006) suggests some resolution to my thoughts on bias "For me, the ethnographer must neither be in the service of some political establishment or profession nor an organic intellectual seeking to further the interests of marginalised, exploited, or dominated groups. Both of these orientations greatly increase the danger of systematic bias" (2006 p. 11).

Grounded theory

Ground theory has an inductive agenda to research and is used to generate new theory (Charmaz, 2008). This bold avenue, founded by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) is used when very little is known about a topic. In its purest form, Glaser and Strauss voice: "Our basic position is that generating grounded theory is a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 3), with recent input from authors adding to "reach a thorough and theoretically relevant analysis of a topic" (Wolfswinkel, Furtmueller and Wilderom, 2013 p. 1). Grounded theory could add value to my research with its flexible nature. As the name suggests, ground theory study is taken with no prior reading, literature review or theoretical framework (Willig, 2014). Having the pragmatic view, I feel grounded theory could suitably work with my paradigm to uncover new phenomena, albeit at a potentially time-exhausting cost. This clause of time consumption

comes in response to its thorough coding process. As a work-based researcher, grounded theory could work with my studies, should I wish to inquire with no preconceptions.

Bricolage

“Typically understood to involve the process of employing these methodological strategies as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation” (Kincheloe and Berry, 2007 p. 1). The notion of being able to mix multiple methodologies allows for a larger method strategy to conduct the study, though mixing unjustified methods creates an unorganised study. Kellner, (1999) explains the benefit of using bricolage: “The more perspectives one can bring to their analysis and critique, the better grasp of the phenomena one will have and the better one will be at developing alternative readings and oppositional practices” (1999 p. xii). This path aligns within my paradigm and if mixing methods supports my research then I would be confident in using a mixed approach.

Hermeneutics and phenomenology

Hermeneutics and phenomenology work collectively, though there are aspects of these titles in which they differ from one another. Phenomenology is the act of finding the purest form of something. Edmund Husserl founded the term phenomenology in the 20th century (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio, 2019) and pioneered the term ‘intersubjectively’ (Costello, 2016), giving the notion that our personal feelings and experiences are fluid. Ontologically, phenomenology has the characteristics of reality being “internal to the knower; what appears in their consciousness” (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio, 2019 p. 92) This ontological assumption resonates with me personally. Before embarking on the Masters in Voice Pedagogy I had this exact viewpoint, and until now, I haven’t been able to fully understand the philosophy behind my thoughts. I have the opinion that reality is subjective and that each individual sees reality through their lens. Epistemologically, when using phenomenology (bracketing), researchers detach from their surroundings, their physical being and their feelings to allow space for an unbiased study. Conducting research with this epistemological view requires the social scientist to adopt an appreciation for different perspectives. There are capabilities of using this within the voice science field, though there is a high level of effort required to fully remove oneself from their *world*, which may prove difficult in such a personal environment with a student.

The philosophical origin of hermeneutics was founded by Heidegger and Gadamer which has then been further conceptualised in recent decades (Campbell, 1978), though the conception of the ontological viewpoint being “lived experience” (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004 p. 146) is still authentic and imperative to the theory. Hermeneutics aligns with the social-constructivist and pragmatic paradigm, which, on several occasions during this paper, I have voiced my opinions on my paradigm. The epistemological viewpoint of hermeneutics means that the “observer is part of the world and not bias free; understands phenomena by interpretive means”. Regarding data collection, the researcher “reflects on essential themes of participant experience with the phenomenon while simultaneously reflection on own experience” (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio, 2019 p. 92). Managing and reflecting on the data created through the means of hermeneutics happens on a revolving, repetitive system that is continuously tested and verified through scrutinising small sections of the research, ensuring the integrity of the phenomena (the broader subject at hand) (Friston and Frith, 2015) is kept at the forefront of the writing. This meticulous process would be valuable to me as a researcher, as the cycle of scrutiny would keep the principle objective in place throughout the study.

Case studies

“Case study methods involve systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions” (Berg, 2001 p. 225).. Conducting case studies align with those that have the ontological position being that reality is constantly renegotiated and reviewed, this approach allows the researcher to shape their methods to fit their sample (Berg, 2001).

Sampling

To access my sample, I will consider three key devices: convenience, snowball and quota samples.

Convenience sampling refers to the pool being “readily available to participate in a study” (Henry, 1990, p. 18), which allows for a cost-effective research paper, with timely results (Teddle and Yu, 2007). This solution would seem predictable for the voice teacher as the sample is generally available at hand, should the pedagogist lead research with their obtainable sample. As a voice practitioner, I am fortunate enough to be present in an array of education settings, from young learners in a primary school environment to university students, studying performing arts. Researchers suggest that convenience sampling can lead to compromised outcomes as a result of potential bias (Mackey and Gass, 2011; Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie, 2017). Snowball sampling gives scope for the researcher to network with their pool of participants. Initial respondents are then able to recruit contributors to join the sample (Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie, 2017). Though snowball sampling can be cost-effective and allow for depth of sample from the initial pool, it offers a more time-consuming solution than convenience sampling. Quota sampling is conducted by way of the researcher selecting a pool that has specific parameters (Acharya et al., 2013). Targeting a particular pool of samples would seem relevant with my future research, with one area of my interest being voice users in educational settings. With this research topic, I already understand my pool, which in this case is primary and secondary educators. I will select my sample through a matrix.

Methods

Working with qualitative data analysis, I will give attention to fitting methods that work successfully with qualitative reasoning.

Interview

“In most forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 116). With this quote in mind, it would seem appropriate to discuss this method first. Interviews are most widely recognised in three tiers, ranging from informality: unstructured, semi-structured and structured (Bolderston, 2012).

To have an unstructured approach to interviewing, the researcher should conduct the interview with the view of openness. “The interviewer tries to remain open to new and unforeseen phenomenon rather than imposing ready-made frameworks or categories. Although the interview is unstructured, it focuses on particular themes.” (Qu and Dumay, 2011, p. 243) I was particularly inspired by this quote and I feel I could draw upon this in my research with my young learners. There is a sense of candidness with this approach to data collection. I can appreciate the challenge with managing this stream of data and I am mindful

with the prospect of unstructured interviews becoming time consuming, as (Gill et al., 2008) cautiously suggest, also adding that the lack of direction can hinder the interview. The authors of this paper credit the abilities of unstructured interviews “Their use is, therefore, generally only considered where significant ‘depth’ is required, or where virtually nothing is known about the subject area (or a different perspective of a known subject area is required)” (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). Semi-structured interviews take guidance from both sides of the interview spectrum and allow for more flexibility with questioning than structured. Merriam and Tisdell differentiate this and suggest that there is an element of “specific data required from all respondents” and the “largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, pp. 118-119). For my future research I would find that semi-structured interviewing would allow me to give the sample guidance with regards to the topic area, whilst permitting further discussion that could reveal unexpected responses. Finally, the structured interview or “*standardized*” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 118) method collects data from a more robust organisation of questions. In addition to this, structured interviewing is designed for samples where knowledge is common throughout the pool. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree recognise this and add “whatever the focus of the study, the basic research question needs to be sufficiently focused so that a relatively homogenous group will have shared experiences about the topic” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). I have a significant interest in the vocal health of primary and secondary school teachers and within future research I would like to explore this avenue. With this in mind, structured interviewing would be suitable as there is common ground with the subject matter.

Focus groups

Focus groups are successful where there is a small sample required. With this method becoming a growing area to conduct research in the education field (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2008), there are advantages of using such methods in my future research. Should I choose to research the effects on voice users in the education field, conducting a focus group may suit the sample needed. With authors suggesting that focus groups should have around seven participants (Krueger and Mary Anne Casey, 1994), which allows enough space for further discussion and for the participants to fully share their experiences, without an exhausting amount of input. Keeping the sample to this suggestion of seven members allows the researcher to moderate comfortably. As a researcher with a compatible ontology and epistemology, this would seem fitting to my future work with working with voice users in the educational setting.

Observations

“Observation offers the social researcher a distinct way of collecting data. It does not rely on what people say they do, or what they say they think. It is more direct than that. Instead, it draws on the direct evidence of the eye to witness events first hand. It is based on the premise that, for certain purposes, it is best to observe what actually happens” (Martyn Denscombe, 2003 p. 192). Conducting observations collects in-depth data that may not be possible with other methods. Researchers have the ability to generate data that might not have come to light during an interview or through a focus group. As written previously, an area of interest of mine are voice users in the educational field. It has become apparent that primary and secondary educators suffer with voice loss as a direct result of their profession and this is evident in historical research (Roy et al., 2004), agreeing that educators suffer with voice loss and other voice injuries, more so than the nonteacher population. Through observing educators, the researcher can note potential problems not otherwise present in other methods. The researcher has the ability to observe how the voice user is using their voice in their day-to-day environment. Using other methods could compliment observations

and using mixed methods might be suitable for my research. To formally assess a voice user, it would prove beneficial for the researcher to observe the voice user's practice as the user may find it difficult to articulate how they are using their voice in their workplace.

Surveys

This written method is more practical for the researcher, should they need a large sample for the study. With technology advancing, the ability to deliver the survey/ questionnaire, capture and return the data has become rapid in comparison to previous decades. With new-age technology, researchers can distribute surveys via URL (uniform resource locator) and QR (quick response) codes and the survey will arrive almost instantly, which in contrast to delivering paper copies via post allows for a much faster turnaround. Having all typed information readily available under one system makes organising the data more convenient, compared to a verbal method, such as an interview or focus group where all data is transcribed. Surveying a sample aligns with my ontological and epistemological viewpoint and would work with some aspect of my research, though I feel the drawback to survey with my future work-based research is the inability for the participant to fully describe themselves. I will be conscious of this when deciding my sample. I would be reluctant to use this with my young learners, though my older students may respond well to this.

Insider Researcher and Validity

The term insider research refers to the study which has taken place within the scientist's environment/ organisation/ community (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Costley, 2006; Heslop, Burns and Lobo, 2018). There is merit to insider research as the researcher is firmly situated with their own research, "the unique perspective of the researcher inevitably makes a difference to the research" (Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs, 2010 p. 1). Having built a good rapport with my potential pool of participants, this should give the sample a more confident experience with knowing the researcher. Though this may come at a biased outcome due to its hyper-subjective nature (Cho and Trent, 2006). Sensitively handling and interpreting the data will be key to relieve the bias outcomes. The opportunity to progress within an organisation as a result of insider research is an empowering motivator and benefits the organisation as well as the researcher's career and knowledge development (Scheurich, 1996). Validity has been controversially spoken about with regards to qualitative research (Cho and Trent, 2006), though through the means of hermeneutics, as the researcher, we have a duty over the integrity of the study so referring back to the title and then honing into small areas of the study creates some justification over the overall integrity.

Ethical Practice

There will be an essence of ethics underpinned from the planning stages, ensuring that the research that I want to conduct is harmless and morally ethical. Once I have designed the study, I will apply for clearance from my institution. Whilst completing the ethics document I will refer to the institution's 'Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice'. I will respect:

Consent

There is a duty of care as the researcher to conduct the study with transparency, ensuring that the pool of participants are satisfied with their position within the research and they are happy to proceed as part of the sample (Bracken-Roche et al., 2017).

Safeguarding and Protection

Whilst under the guardianship of the participant, I acknowledge that I am responsible for all processes that are undergone in order to collect data from the participant. I adhere to safeguarding laws and will make myself aware of the current safeguarding guidelines. If required by the institution(s), I will refresh my safeguarding certificate.

Confidentiality

Throughout the process of my future study and once executed, I will be mindful of the attention to confidentiality regarding my pool of participants. Unless otherwise explicitly consented to (such as focus groups), all names, ages and other sensitive data will remain confidential to the nominated people and organisations. Before consenting to the study, the participants will understand how their data is obtained and shared.

Conclusion

I conclude this essay with a positive outlook on my future research. This module has grounded my research design knowledge and has opened opportunities and strategies to work from. My position within the voice pedagogy industry differs from a fixed member of staff. Instead, I work alongside several institutions, generally teaching between the ages of 10 and university undergraduates. 40% of my timetable is taken privately in my studio. I am fortunate enough to be well respected within these settings and I am able to access a readily available sample, which includes learners and members of staff. In my private setting, I have built up a team of fifteen members of staff that I work closely with.

I found this module very holistic and it has made me consciously reflect on my ontological and epistemological position within society – something I have never particularly questioned before. This essay has made me think about how I interpret reality internally and how this is projected out, externally. I identify mostly with the pragmatic approach, and I feel my paradigm has shifted to this in recent years. After finishing my degree in 2016, open to the opportunity of studying a postgraduate degree, I would have categorised myself as a positivist. I find grounded theory a liberating design and can see value adding this to my research to uncover new findings.

A challenge I found with this essay was understanding the concept of hermeneutics and phenomenology. Reflecting back, I feel my time was consumed with this section than any other within this essay. Hermeneutics and phenomenology are two aspects of this paper that I will use in future work. Once I had understood the theory, I was met with a sense of triumph. Having discussed my paradigm, I wanted to outline methods that resonate with me and my ontological and epistemological viewpoints. I feel that these methods fit firmly within my goals as a researcher. I would like to inquire into the vocal demands of educators within primary and secondary school settings. I am intrigued to investigate the effects that COVID-19 has had on teachers that are working from home. With teachers being away from their *normal* teaching setting, I wonder what effect this has had on their voices as *normally* they would use their voice to speak over 20-35 classroom children.

I am aware of the potential challenges that I may face as an insider researcher in order to create a truthful study. Though using these research designs, I am confident that I will be able to achieve meaningful research.

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