

## **Objectivity, Subjectivity, and Relativism: The Case for Qualitative Methodologies in Educational Research**

**Peter Trifonas**

*University of British Columbia*

In recent decades, the innovative approaches of qualitative modes of inquiry advocating the use of naturalistic and/or critical ethnographic techniques for the narratologically driven study of phenomena in pedagogical contexts have succeeded in beckoning for a reexamination of traditional views of research methodologies based upon the foundationalism of empiricist science within the dominant paradigm of quantitative forms of analysis. Reframing the discourse of the debate around the key issue of objectivity, and by implication subjectivity and relativism also, this essay addresses epistemological questions about the nature of ontology, theoretical questions concerning the knowledge of sense perception(s), and methodological questions regarding the scientific *truth-effect* of procedure(s) integral to arguments for and against the use of qualitative forms of analysis as a viable and effective means for conducting educational research.

Dans les dernières décennies, les nouvelles approches de recherche qualitative qui utilisent des techniques naturalistes ou ethnographiques pour étudier des phénomènes dans des contextes pédagogiques, ont réussi à exiger une reconsidération des positions traditionnelles de méthodologies de la recherche. Ces dernières sont d'avantage basées sur des fondements empiriques de la science dans le contexte d'une paradigme où l'analyse quantitative est privilégiée. Il s'agit ici de re-situer le débat autour des éléments essentiels comme l'objectivité, la subjectivité et le relativisme. Cet article pose des questions épistémologiques à propos de la nature de l'ontologie, de la connaissance du sens de la perception et des méthodologies pour parvenir aux procédures dites scientifiques de la "vérite-effet." Cela est de nature à élaborer des arguments pour et contre l'utilisation de la méthode qualitative comme moyen viable de faire de la recherche en éducation.

### *Introduction*

In recent decades, proponents of naturalistic and/or critical modes of inquiry advocating the use of ethnographic techniques for the narratological-based study of phenomena within pedagogical contexts have

challenged the central methodological paradigm of educational research, that is, the tendency among its practitioners to adhere to quantitative forms of analysis (Anderson, 1994; Eisner, 1992). The innovativeness of approaches currently subsumed under the cumulative rubric of qualitative methodologies has succeeded in beckoning for a reevaluation of traditionally quantitative solutions to educational research problems within the dominant paradigm (Guba, 1990b; Eisner & Peshkin, 1990). In this instance of its deployment, the concept of paradigm introduced by the neologism Kuhn (1970) originally coined — in a path-breaking gesture to illuminate the historicity of science as loosely configured sets of endlessly shifting assumptions with respect to our understandings of the world — is defined from the proliferation of emergent patterns of ideological programs or agendas that serve to convene actual research praxis. The engendering logic of a paradigmatic conception of the socio-epistemological dividing points of the methodological basis of knowledge creations in pedagogical research rests, in theory, upon the actualization of what is, in fact, an unrealistic expectation: the existence of clearly identifiable and discretely homogeneous "totalities of science" (Hammersley, 1992; Derrida, 1982). Therefore, a paradigm cannot be but a mental construct or an intellectual tool that furnishes the metalanguage with which to tame the diversity of styles available for investigating the institutionalization of pedagogical *techné*. The partial incommensurability of quantitative and qualitative accounts of science conveys the overdetermined structure of the educational research paradigm itself by forefronting the divergence of rivaling premises to occasion the objectification of methodological points of difference (Eisner, 1991; Kuhn, 1977). Ensuing is a binary schematization of research science that places quantitative/qualitative, experimental/ethnographic, and numerological/narrative methodologies in a hierarchical relation of ideal opposition to each other (Derrida, 1976). Nevertheless, there has been a well-documented propensity among the supporters of both research schools, quantitative and qualitative respectively, to articulate viewpoints relating to objectivity, subjectivity, and relativism in the nonsophisticate rigidity of a paradigmatic dualism, despite the reductive nature of its initializing terms. On the one hand, quantitative positions have sanctioned the formulizability of noninterventionist strategies for the numerical ratiocination of the surveying of subject behaviors through the quasi-experimental vale of procedural constraints; while, on the other, qualitative positions have endorsed what has been called after the much celebrated 'linguistic turn' of poststructural-postmodern philosophizing of research science the blurred

genres of the poetics of educational ethnography. These are, for example, "narrative inquiry, new journalism, educational criticism, portraiture, experiential analysis, interpretive biography, cultural studies, or impressionistic tales" (Anderson, 1994, p. 230), critical ethnographies of feminist, neo-Marxist, postcolonialist, or other socio-politically invested researches of the ideological orientations of subjectivity, and naturalistic ethnography proper (Cherryholmes, 1988; Lather, 1991). This essay will attempt to reframe the discourse of the debate upon the disciplinary effects of the paradigmatic transition of educational research science from the almost undisputed primacy of quantitative methodologies to the gradual acceptance of qualitative forms of analysis. The implications of arguments for and against qualitative inquiry as a valid and reliable means for conducting pedagogical research will be addressed through a discussion of epistemological questions about the nature of ontology, theoretical questions concerning the knowledge of sense perception, and methodological questions regarding the scientific truth-effect of procedure.

*The Epistemological Evolution of British Empiricism: A Historical Overview of the Origins of Foundationalism*

Empiricism evolved in Britain during the 17th and 18th centuries independently of Cartesianist rationalism that flourished on continental Europe from its Baconian precursors of the later Middle Ages who had attributed the errors of Aristotelian-inflected philosophies of science to an overreliance upon reason. The juxtaposition of the foundations of empiricist and rationalist methodologies (e.g., sensory experience pitted against medi[a]tative rationalism) illustrates the major sources of epistemic or theoretical antithesis. Empiricism, in general, sought to construct indubitable knowledge from the undeniable elementalism of experientially gleaned sense perceptions; rationalism, in general, relied upon provisional or methodic doubt to discover incontrovertible knowledge from the deduction of primary certainties reasoned via the self-questioning consciousness of an epistemological form of subjectivity, or the *cogito*. In the empirical research process, the faculty of reason did fulfill a role, albeit a minor one, as a catalyst of inductive inference, excepting that, it was much less valorized than was the foundational precept of the *truthfulness* of sensory perceptions of experience (Lauden, 1990; Apple, 1975). The quasi-marginalization of the methodological function of reason secured the means for developing a procedural type of objectivity by establishing the

empirical boundaries acceptable of scientific research. In accordance with empiricist perspectives, the epistemologico-theoretical framework for a *new science* could only be built from the self-assuredness of a methodological edifice grounded upon the infallibility of sense experience. The rules of induction could then operate, in fundamental ways befitting the sense-data gathered thereof, to restrain and to reinforce knowledge claims by the sheer apodicticity of "generalizable truth(s)" (Bechtel, 1988). Research outcomes were achievable, it was posited, from the tangible effects of sensory proofs upon the perceptions then authenticating the empirical origins of transcriptions of experimental observations of the world external to the subject (Lakatos, 1978; Guba, 1990a). The attainment of ontological objectivity thus depended upon a theory of representation — encompassing the interaction of subject and object, signifier and signified, sign and referent, and so on — that presupposes a logical conformity between the mirroring of the phenomena of nature in the reflexive structures of consciousness — to adopt Rorty's (1979) phraseology — and the intellectualization of perceptions of sensory experience in the conceptual structures of the writing of the mind (Derrida, 1978, 1982). A brief historical outline of the rise of British empiricism will serve to pinpoint the main epistemological issues, theoretical problems, and methodological questions at stake for pursuing educational research while referring to objectivity, and by implication, subjectivity and relativism.

John Locke (1632-1704) is credited with setting the epistemological bedrock for empiricism by endeavoring to follow the progressivity of all knowledge claims and subsequent pronouncements of the truthfulness of sensory perception to degrees of certainty actualizable from conscious reflexion upon experience. To show how sense experience stimulates the generation of ideas from the nominal classifiability of objects in *reality*, Bechtel (1988) notes:

He [Locke] also set out to analyze how the mind would associate ideas of particular objects to form complex ideas as well as general and abstract ideas needed for science. The principle that the mind operates chiefly by associating simple ideas from experience provided the basis for a long-enduring tradition that cognitive scientists recognize as Associationism. (p. 12)

Locke's theory manifest the fundamental elements of a Newtonianist viewpoint by exemplifying a mechanistic, or "clockwork-like," retypification

of a universe that could then ultimately branch out from sensory experience(s) through language, vis-à-vis associational or causal relationships, to encompass the totality of other forms of knowledge (intuitive, demonstrative, and sensitive).

George Berkeley (1685-1753), in reaction against Locke's conceptualization of a universe, that essentially excluded probabilities for any form of divine intervention in it, denied the existence of the physical world as a concrete and objectifiable entity outside the subjective being of consciousness. Maintaining the corporeality of objects external to the cognitive processes inculcating subjectivity was nothing but the inducement of untenable conjecture, since "our thoughts could never inform us about anything but our ideas" (Bechtel, 1988, p. 12), Berkeley called unto the unified perception of an omniscient God to explicate the epiphenomenal continuity of disclosed reality. A faithful appeal to the power of providence that is the preternatural guidance of God as an ordering influence upon the chaos of the cosmos, is to give a rationale for

the regularities and coherence among the ideas we acquire from sensory experience. Even when we did not have ideas of things, God could have them and the objects would therefore exist in the mind of God. Thus, although denying the existence of an external physical world, he [Berkeley] did not deny the existence of objects and the legitimacy of scientific investigation. (Bechtel, 1988, p. 12)

The onto-theo-logical verifiability of the truthfulness of science, for Berkeley, did not transpire as the feigning of a contiguous attachment of mind to the autonomy of a physical world detached from the realms of consciousness — regardless of Locke's theory of the priority of nonempirical universals that had intimated the contrary for the eradication of epistemological or theological skepticism (Bennington, 1994); it was the projection of a belief in the feasibility of recreations of subjective worlds from the ideas of minds that perceived the structures of reality as corollary to nonabsolute inceptions of sense experience. One could never ascertain the *truth* about the consistency of perceptions of the materiality of objects exterior to the self-insulating devices of subjectivity, but only as the fragmentary reserves of sensory relations rendered oblique from a multiplicity of factors informing the circumstances consolidating the veracity of the moment of apperception during the act of interiorizing the experience of phenomena within the self.

David Hume (1711-1776) also departed from a Newtonianist schematic of the cosmos by posing a skeptical challenge to a melange of, as then, uncontested claims to knowledge. Arguing against the potentially nonempirical effects of a theory of causality, Hume insisted that experience could never reveal to the sensory capacities of human perception the metaphysical field of forces structuring the system of relations holding together cause and effect, for example, the innate connectability inspiring a series of two or more events, one following another in sequence (Quine, 1969). This endeavor to undermine the epistemological-theoretical assumptions of the fundamental principle of Newtonian science by offering philosophical explanations for the lack of empirical evidence to sustain a belief in causality, the absence of the certitude of sense experience notwithstanding, allowed Hume to assert the opinion that it is

a natural disposition of human beings to form associations between events that are regularly conjoined in experience .... Our beliefs about causal relations are not something about the world that can be inferred by reasoning about our sensory experience, but are simply reflections of our basic character and the way we experience nature. (Bechtel, 1988, p. 13)

Berkeley and Hume reached similar philosophical resolutions by way of drastically divergent epistemological formulations. Yet, as Empiricists, both held that greater restrictions could and should be placed upon what can be perceived and is knowable about a world beyond subjective realms of consciousness through the tracing of truth claims back to the sometime extralogical circularity of empirical sources of evidence, simply because, not all phenomena can be grasped from recourse to sensory experience (e.g., cognition and other neuro-psychological-based performances).

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), the main figure of 19th century empiricism, gave a chiefly phenomenalist account of the knowledge gained from experiential contact with the outer world of reality by persisting in the opinion that objects are merely the permanent displays of eidetic sensation(s) (e.g., imagistic projections of figure, form, shape, contour, and line stored in the enduring gestalt of long-term memory). The psychologistic concentration of Mill's theorizing followed closely in convention to Hume's, but for the exemption of one important and characterizing feature: it elaborated what proved to be an extreme dispersion of the case for the applicability of induction, specifically to

scientific problems. Impressed by the prospects for knowledge expansion through the implication of inductive inference to circumstances considered outside of its domain, Mill proposed, for example, that the veridicality of certain mathematical expressions demonstrating the unequivocality of equations was the effect of very highly confirmed generalizations affirmable from the determinative sense of sensory experience(s) rather than from the syllogistic movements of pure reason. There was certainly no space in the philosophy of Mill for knowledge abstractions linking truth to a capricious coupling of ideas other than the psychological exigencies for conceding to the obviousness of a proposition from the prospect of its intrinsic logicity or its common sensicalness (Bechtel, 1988).

To summarize the "gist" of philosophical dispositions detailed in the historical review of British empiricism presented above, it is possible to sustain a generally empiricist thesis that all knowledge is educable from sense experience by supporting any or all of the following statements: (a) all knowledge is immediately dependent upon sense experience or derivable from it in clearly empirical ways (e.g., induction, association, or education); or (b) all knowledge requires material elements as the circumstances preconditioning its derivation from sensory experience (e.g., "states of affairs," subject contact with objects, and so); or (c) all knowledge is directly subordinate to the sources of sensory perception (e.g., even though the knowledge of some things can be intuited a priori actual experience, this is only the relativistic intelligibility of a true knowing that demands the having of the experience itself).

*Empiricism and the Quantitative Tradition of Educational Research:  
Constructing the Numerology of Scientific Methodologies*

The epistemological roots of a methodological matrix utilized for educational research to deal with the threat of subjectivity to the ontological objectivity of experimental findings can be distinguished in the translation from the core tenets of empiricist theories of knowledge to quantitative rites of praxis (Eisner, 1979; Lather, 1991). The canon of scientism in educational research is attributable to the formative influence of empiricism upon quantitative methodologies that, until recently, had regulated the normativity of pedagogical inquiry by privileging the employment of numerological methods of analysis to assess and to scale the mental variance between individuals within teaching-learning contexts

(Guba, 1990a, 1992). For example, the psychological tests and measures of student intelligences strive to adequately control for the contaminating effect(s) of researcher intervention in the operation of data collection by attempting to reduce or to eliminate the threat of subjectivity to the interior dynamics of experimental, or construct, validity. The deployment of standardized designs to pedagogical environments methodologically facilitate the material conditions that would not otherwise allow for an experimental adaptation of potentially mutable research sites. These procedural constraints are intended to curb the interpretative play of inductive inferences produced from researcher readings of accumulated sense-data by deeming it a prerequisite of empirical science to portray the truthfulness of claims to knowledge as the effectivity of an associationally, correlationally, or causally structured logic of experimental science(s) (Scriven, 1972; see also Laudén, 1981). The *holistic* purpose(s) of study is drawn from theoretically self-supporting sets of testable hypotheses that enable the researcher to narrow the focus of the problem of inquiry upon the relation(s) of dependent and independent variables garnered from amidst the visible behaviors of randomly sampled research populations. Ultimately, the foremost epistemological-theoretical aim of quantitative methodologies as "positive science" is to measure the statistical degree of correspondence between the initial statement(s) of prediction and the behavior(s) of the phenomena under scrutiny to compute the reliability coefficient of the internal test consistency of the experiment. The scientific emphasis of numerological methodologies is to rationalize the calculable significance of the cause-effect relationship(s) from the arithmetical recording of the interaction of the dissimilar phenomena studied to assert, in a foundational sense, the ontological objectivity of research results by the a posteriori justification of the intransitoriness of first presumptions. To this end, the resolution of quantitative forms of experimental research entails either the confirmation, the modification, or the rejection of original postulations by accommodating for the trustworthiness of final summations in the discursive transformation of the representational foundation of sense experience to a series of truth-bearing propositions (Eisner, 1985; Quine, 1969). The course of an adamant resistance to the methodological experimentalism of empiricist science has been that of an ongoing critique of foundationalist *epistémè* sustained by the nonfoundationalism of relativist theorists, within and without the discipline(s) of pedagogy, for the hoped rejuvenation of research praxis.

*The Nonfoundationalism of Relativist Science: Of Objectivity, Subjectivity, and Truth*

Whereas 20th century empiricists have generally reverted to, more or less, radical distinctions between the "necessary truths" of logic or mathematics and the "empirical truths" of sense-data (e.g., Russell, 1940; Ayer, 1946), contemporary relativists have rejected outright the plausibility of discerning the accuracy of claims to knowledge in any absolutely objective ontological or methodological sense (e.g., Foucault, 1970; Jameson, 1984). The relativist standpoints of poststructuralist-postmodernist thinkers such as Feyerabend (1975), Derrida (1976), Lyotard (1984), Spivak (1987), Giroux (1988) — to name but a few representatives of nonfoundationalism from a broad spectrum of disciplines — have severely shaken the credibility of foundational theories upholding the phenomenological contingency of research methods to the conceptual immediacy of sense experience. For relativists, to expect ontological objectivity as a methodological consequence of the work of research science is unthinkable: foundationalist exegesis neglects to acknowledge the variable effects of differing cognitive schemata upon perception stemming from the discursive nature of a subjective desire to access a reality, not as it is, but as it appears to be (Foucault, 1972). Cherryholmes (cited in Pinar & Reynolds, 1992) succinctly spells out the epistemological aftermath of what a relativist inversion and nonfoundational displacement of the unity of subjectivity entails for negotiating the post-metaphysical relations of language, consciousness, and reality:

Phenomenology reconstituted the subject/object distinction so central to positivism-empiricism, thus providing more insights into the social-and lived-nature of social knowledge. Society and the knowledge we produce about it are complex texts that have no beginning, center, or end. These arguments, in turn, toppled the hypothesized centeredness of the subject in phenomenology. (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992, pp. 245-246)

Logical empiricism, in passing through speculative metaphysics to positivist science, could do no other than to ignore the natural predeliction of the subject for its gradual dissolution from the presence of Being charged as unchanging human spirit to the absence of identity marked as arbitrary signs in a language of becoming (Derrida, 1982). To methodologically secure the ontological objectivity of discursive representations of reality, it

is anticipated that the ideality of phenomenological perceptions of "being-in-the-world" is a psychological necessity for communicating perceptions of experience (Heidegger, 1977). To try to impart a conceptualization of the vicissitudes of one's real-life experiences that give rise to a world vision, to the self or to the Other, is futile without recourse to the semiotic mechanisms of consciousness that permit the cognitive, affective, and aesthetic responses of a subject to be filtered through and with the flux of language to codify knowledge constructions in the archive of the mind (Trifonas, 1992, 1993). The means and technicity of perception are now relational to the discursivization of sense experience(s), from which, the production of a possible world is the ideational consummation of nonobjective acts of meaning-making imposed upon existential structures incurred in reality by the subject (Eco, 1979, 1984; Jameson, 1972).

Tying the issue of subjectivity to research methodology, Eisner (1992) expresses the crux of the problem of ontological objectivity and the truth of perception as a philosophical conundrum:

Consider, for example, the correspondence theory of truth upon which ontological objectivity rests. How can we ever know if our views of reality match or correspond to it? To know that we have a correspondence between our views of reality and reality itself, we would need to know reality, as well as our views of it. But, if we know reality as it is, we would not need to have a view of it. Conversely, since we cannot have knowledge of reality as it is, we cannot know if our view corresponds to it. (p. 11)

Elsewhere, Eisner (1979, 1985, 1991) has identified the research process with hermeneutical forms of knowing containing the undecidability of meaning-making always already within reflexivity that relativism must admit to and submit to. Interpretative conclusions effectuated as the transactional embodiment of an object or of an event are fully evident in the subjective manifestations of perceptions of sensory experiences and are metacognitively confirmed by the range of responses to sensory stimuli. The subject is thought to incur psycho-physical transformations that promulgate periods of intensified reflexivity from the relative immanence of the experiencing of natural phenomena. The notion is unmistakably Deweyan (1925), if we keep in mind that the philosophico-methodological convictions of pragmatic experimentalism welcome the nonobjective

repercussions of a transactional economy of knowing, whereby subject and object are independently verified by the instrumentalism of mutual contact. To be more precise, knowing is transactional because the overall inner and outer states of the subject are irreversibly altered during the experiencing of what is received through the senses at conscious, unconscious, or subconscious levels; the subjective qualities of perception are shaped through past encounter(s) and the present purpose(s) or value(s) is resolved in reflexion upon the being of experience. The methodology is both pragmatic and experimentalist because in approaching the problem of the known, the knower, and the knowing of experience the method of investigation is comparable to that of a scientific experiment where various hypotheses are tried. The ontologies of real-world objects or the meanings of sense phenomena are decided from intersubjective agreement(s) between discourses of knowing among subjects reconciling the differences of perception by reasoned discussion (Eisner, 1985; Eco, 1976, 1984, 1990). What are the implications of nonfoundationalist theories of knowing for qualitative educational research?

*Reconceptualizations of Validity in Educational Research: From Quantitative to Qualitative Conceptions of Science*

Qualitative methodologies involve actively interpretative meaning-making for the dissemination of (e)valuative judgements from subjective perceptions of sense experience exacted through the closeness of research site observations. The extent to which the content(s) of such interpretative undertakings is ontologically objective to the traits of the phenomena studied must be of major concern for the educational researcher and for the discipline, at large, insofar as the methodology is purported to have aspirations to science. A likely criticism of theory-ladenness, or relativistic explanations of knowing, is that the chance for objectivity is at once dismissed, if it is taken for granted that there can be no value-free correspondence between what is exacted upon the structures of being in the subjective interpolation of reality to object and the ontological truth of the natural phenomena referred to in the production of subsequent knowledge propositions (Davidson, 1984). The pristine observational base of foundationalist science soon vanishes and the sudden proliferation of interpretative possibilities denies the truthfulness of sensory evidence by citing, as cause or effect, the underdetermination of the adequate testability of research hypotheses. But whether or not the

subjectivity of interpretation is incited solely by the methodological effects of researcher bias still remains in question. An etymological study of the denotative meanings signified by the lexical forms of the family of words revolving around the root signifier of 'interpret' (e.g., reinterpret, misinterpret, interpellate, interpolate, interpose, and so forth) would seem to bear out that which is not "true-to-the-facts" must surely be the production of personally significant retranslations of the subjective differences coming between perception and experience. In embracing the impossible epistemological-theoretical challenges of ontological objectivity, the ethical discourse of foundationalist science has undone the openness of subjective forms of knowing by connotatively equating interpretation with an idiosyncratic irrationalism as suggested by the covertly inspired pejorative force of bias (Lauden, 1990; Hammersley, 1992). The misleading guises of bias in the recording of observations can be detected when the deconstruction of the discursive forms of narrated research (e.g., case studies, field-work reports, interviews, and so on) readily distinguishes conceptual flaws in the structural unfolding of interpretations of sense experience integral to the cohesiveness of the logic underlying the telling of results. When inconsistencies or contradictions are unearthed and related to the discursive presentation of the pertinent data referred to, then one can ascertain the constructed validity of judgements arrived at in the transcriptions of observations of sense experience to check for researcher bias (Eisner, 1991). It has been shown that research data reports often couched in the impersonal rhetoric of numericalological methodologies are no more truthful representations of observed phenomena than conclusions abstracted from the dialogues of nonexperimental analyses (Guba, 1990b, 1992). Quantitative methodologies stringently enforcing the suppression of researcher intervention in the process of data collection (e.g., through the use of psychological tests and measurements, population surveys and questionnaires, and the like) may also be examined for bias, but the focus turns to concerns for validity and reliability in instrument construction. For example, the discourse of a research instrument can be interrogated to reveal the subtext of a guiding logic in the conceptual interstices of its lexical forms that is the self-validation of its formal construction: Does it implement terminology favorable or specific to a given culture, race, or sex? Does the register or the stylistic elements of language structures promote comprehensibility? and, What are the built-in researcher assumptions that structure the questioning? (Walcott, 1994; Stanfield & Rutledge, 1993). Assuming that research instruments contain transparent

codes of language that reify the uninhibited transfer of meanings from the body of a written text to the mind of a research subject cannot guarantee the ontological objectivity of results. Ratcliffe (1983) has observed that "all data are theory-, method-, and measurement-dependent. That is, 'facts' are determined by the theories and methods that generate their collection" (p. 148). If this thesis is admissible, then epistemological motivation would also be a factor determining research outcomes because, in and of itself, epistemology promotes theoretical speculation and leads to self-validating methods of inquiry by reinforcing the perpetuation of tradition as the socio-historical effect(s) of an ideological conception of science — or a scientific paradigm (Kuhn, 1970; Bové, 1992). There can be no ideal of objectivity within the ideological framework of a paradigm, not even one purporting to be scientific, without an exposition of the valuative biases that construct the metanarratives for the legitimization of its logic, creation, and function in the first place (Lyotard, 1984; Wittgenstein, 1958).

The concept of internal validity in educational research has traditionally been defined as the extent to which the conclusions of inquiry, brought about from the analysis of a given set of data, accurately reflect the actual behaviors of the phenomena studied and has almost exclusively referred to the employment of testing and measurement procedures of quantitative experiment design(s). As has been stated previously, this implies the procedural detachment of the researcher(s) in order to lay "reasonable" claims to ontological objectivity or the achievement of a mimetic correspondence between what has been collected and recorded, the data, and the reality of what was observed, the phenomena. This is the experimentalist definition of "scientific truth" (Guba, 1990b; Phillips, 1990). Grumet (1990) explains the uneasy relationship of qualitative-based methodologies and the construction of experimental validity as an epistemological bifurcation of the time-honored truth-effect of science versus the less structured expressionistic freedom of art:

For some time many of us have been arguing that qualitative inquiry is an art rather than a science. Having made that assertion, we quickly crawl into it for comfort. No longer radically disassociated from the object of our inquiry and subjugated by the epistemological loneliness that plagues the scientist, we bring together that which science has separated and declare our connectedness, our continuity with our world. The problem of validity — ascertaining a concept's adequacy to the phenomenon to

which it corresponds — is relegated, we think, to the skepticism of the Cartesians who must struggle to assert connections they have denied. (Grumet, 1990, p. 101)

Externally projected sources of influence acting as ideological constraints abetting perception lead to ultrasubjective assertions for conciliating personal beliefs, ethics, and ideals with interpretative meanings. Quite often, though, the paradigmatic nature of polemical positions within disciplines prohibits the ascendance of certain unwanted perspectives that demonstrate dangerous precedence for subverting the legitimacy of established epistemological-theoretical axioms dictating methodology, while encouraging more desirable ones (Feyerabend, 1975). This is a larger-scale phenomenon. The ideological emphasis lies latent in the epistemological trappings of theory beneath the well-polished surface of a dominant method, be it qualitative or quantitative, and it conceals as it reveals. Apropos the selection of determinant criteria for validity or reliability in qualitative inquiry, it would not be an overstatement to declare that the choice of such criteria would most certainly reflect and be sympathetic to the attitudes of the researchers who defined and refined them (Grumet, 1992; Wexler, 1987). In itself, this is not a negative aspect in light of the high standards of rigor and the "self-policing" of the disciplines in academia (Donmoyer, 1990).

The arguments put forward in the discussion, thus far, have questioned the feasibility of a *detached perception* leading from procedural exclusions of researcher subjectivity to the prospect of ontologically objective representations of reality, but rather, to the simultaneous diffusion of multiple realities. There are serious difficulties with invoking the highly technicized terms of objectivity, validity, and reliability as benchmarks of science across the specialized disciplinary milieus of differing educational research formats animated by unique epistemological, theoretical, and methodological premises. If procedural detachment is to be rejected as an expected alternative of pedagogical research methodologies, it becomes unavoidable to question if the quest for objectivity is even an advantageous goal of educational inquiry and what criteria short of solipsism are constitutive of validity or reliability in qualitative analysis. For Grumet (1990, 1992) and Eisner (1979, 1985, 1992), the quantitative definition of scientific validity is too limiting of scope for carrying out educational research or pedagogical criticism because it reduces teaching-learning to an

input-output model purporting to the surety of its features for portraying the phenomena of knowledge transferences accurately. The seriousness of this censure originates from a concern about the complex difficulties of crafting pedagogical environments responsive to both pedagogical institutions and personal meanings alike. The socio-situational aspects of the *naturalistic* environment of a classroom setting is a major focus of educational analysis when we as researchers or as teachers seek to isolate, to identify, and to recognize the effects of learning upon the psychological states occurring within individual learners. When numerical intensiveness and observational aloofness are replaced by the critical discourse of evaluative interpretations engaging in *thick descriptions* of an ethnographic kind, the self-conscious immersion of the researcher in the "lived-through-experience" of the research is demanded by the act of educational research of itself (Geertz, 1973; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). The reflexive temperament of the subjectivity inherent to the self-assessing discourse and writing of qualitative research, be it of a *naturalistic* or *critical* mien therefore is methodologically delimited by Eisner (1979, 1985) in the concept of educational connoisseurship. The phrase denotes the expert-wisdom of knowing how to discriminate between the contradictions of inferior/superior, genuine/masked, and original/reproductive attributes of experience permeating what is perceived from the sensibilities of consciousness in educational environments. This tacit dimension of a "qualified knowledge" is indispensable for the possibility of accessing critically evaluative understandings of pedagogical situations. The image of the educational critic substantiates the archetype of researcher as an active meaning-maker by embodying expectations of a subjective well-versedness that would allow for more perspicacious considerations of the institutional implementation of education:

The test of criticism is empirical in the sense that one asks of the criticism whether the referents it claims to describe, interpret and evaluate can be found in the phenomena to which it attends .... The referential adequacy of educational criticism is determined by looking at the phenomena with the aid of criticism. If the criticism is referentially adequate one will find what the critic has described. (Eisner, 1985, p. 101)

The forthright subjectivity of the hermeneutic revelations of pedagogical research as connoisseurship is validated by the finely-tuned sensibilities of an experienced or mature critical perspective showing an appreciation of

the phenomena transpiring within the teaching and the learning of knowledge. It is the discursive performance of an enlightened eye that is public by right that serves to intuitively edify the less experienced toward an enriched knowing of how to nurture the ability to yield similarly effective forms of evaluative research, the ends of which, will better the state of the art (Eisner, 1991; Anderson, 1994). The lack, if not absence, of procedural constraints in the texts of educational criticism may be contested as not fostering ontological objectivity, but this is a truly parochial, if not a naive expectation. Effective evaluative judgements of educational contexts are achievable only through the total immersion of researcher subjectivity with the complex phenomenology of involved experience, from which, knowledge is reaped as the extemporaneous moments of a fleeting reality, wherein its interpretative validity lies (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992; Grumet, 1992). The critically evaluative nature of educational research is wholly dependent upon the self-concentrated consciousness of a reflexivity of thought that entails the subtle probing of the discursive rendering from perceptual effects constituting the subjectivity of experience. The consequent production of a discursive representation, or symbolic re-creation, of animately subjective readings of the meaning(s) of experience can then be dialogically related to those of others for the intersubjectivization of the world through an intertextual exchange of perspectives.

Due to the deficit of experimental control structures in qualitative field-work set-ups, result variability negates the absolute generalizability of outcomes that instructs what we have come to expect as the external validity of hypothetico-deductive methodologies. The law of generalizability needs to be rewritten in the discourse of empirico-inductive analysis to account for the undecidable effects of nonabsolute phenomena upon perceptions of reality (Daignault, 1992). A research consensus is simply a self-inclusive settlement for the appropriation of differences of perception so as to reach agreement on common ground. It is not a recognition of the undisputable truthfulness of observations regarding ontological objectivity. Even in the strict sense of quantitative scientism, having been built upon the testing of a predetermined measurement of an error free correlation of the statistically significant interaction of natural phenomena, the numerical correlation of data does not in itself prove causation without the corroboration of research results over a longitudinal time frame (Stake, 1978). The aptness of a naturalistic generalizability to the

epistemological-methodological ambitions of qualitative inquiry has been adequately addressed by only a handful of educational researchers, in theory and in praxis; in short, the line of thought still remains ripe for argumentation (Hammersley, 1992; Anderson, 1994). Anderson (1994) asks a question in the right direction:

What are the implications when educational practitioners begin to create an alternative knowledge base founded on a combination of their rich store of tacit knowledge, their insider understanding of the contexts of teaching and learning, and intentionally and systematically gathered and analyzed data? (p. 229)

Inasmuch as qualitative methodology is hypothesis generating, it is important to provide a vicarious experience for the stimulation of the reader, if it is hoped that the research will have any practicable generalizability to the everyday realities of teachers and learners. The main purpose here would be to make the texts of research reports of the study of pedagogy-related phenomena, less specialized and more accessible to the cognitive schemata of the lay reader by discursively accommodating for imaginative recreations of the details of educational experience(s) into the narrative structures of critical ethnographies. It is in this broader sense of pedagogical practice that Guba and Lincoln (1985) also shift the accent of methods of educational research science to the fittingness of a nontransferability of factors between educational environments by questioning whether generalizability is indeed an issue for qualitative inquiry at all, since the aspirations of ethnography, naturalistic or critical, is to detail or comment upon social forms of interaction in the field, the contexts of which, cannot be reduplicated in identity, in logic, in structure, in order, or in meaning (Hammersley, 1992).

### *Endnotes for a Conclusion*

Despite the fact that paradigmatic conceptions of educational research science may still stand, so to speak, the steady proliferation and grudging acceptance of qualitative modes of analysis, as either naturalistic inquiry or critical ethnographies, has shown the promise of effectivity in fulfilling the need for initiating more subtle and responsive ways through which to explore contemporary socio-cultural contexts of pedagogy. The definitive end of educational research — if indeed there is only one — is to better educational practices, and to this end, should our methodologies, qualitative

or quantitative alike, push the limits of theory and praxis to unselfishly facilitate this purpose. We can no longer justify prolonging the paradigmatic course of this debate.

#### REFERENCES

- Anderson, G.L. (1994). The cultural politics of qualitative research in education: Confirming and contesting the canon. *Educational Theory*, 44(2), 225-237.
- Apple, M. (1975). Scientific interests and the nature of education. In W. Pinar (Ed.), *Curriculum Theorizing: For Reconceptualists* (pp. 120-130). New York: Macmillan.
- Ayer, A.J. (1946). *Language, truth and logic* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bechtel, W. (1988). *Philosophy of mind: An overview of cognitive science*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bennington, G. (1994). *Legislations: The politics of deconstruction*. London: Verso.
- Bové, P. (1992). *Mastering discourse: The politics of intellectual culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Cherryholmes, C. (1988). *Power and criticism: Poststructural investigations in education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Clifford, J. & Marcus, G. (Eds.). (1986). *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Daignault, J. (1992). Traces at work in different places. In W. Pinar & W. M. Reynolds, (Eds.), *Understanding curriculum as phenomenological deconstructed text* (pp. 195-215). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Davidson, D. (1984). *Inquiries in truth and interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology* (G.C. Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference* (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1982). *Margins of philosophy* (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1925). *The child and the curriculum and the school and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Donmoyer, R. (1990). Generalizability and the single-case study. In E. Eisner, & A. Peshkin, (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 175-200). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Eco, U. (1979). *The role of the reader: Explorations in the semiotics of texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Eco, U. (1984). *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Eco, U. (1990). *The limits of interpretation*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

- Eisner, E. (1979). *The educational imagination*. New York: Macmillan.
- Eisner, E. (1985). *The art of educational evaluation: A personal view*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Eisner, E. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New York: Macmillan.
- Eisner, E. (1992). Objectivity in educational research. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 22(1), 10-15.
- Eisner, E. & Peshkin, A. (Eds.). (1990). *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Feyerabend, P. (1975). *Against method*. London: Verso.
- Foucault, M. (1970). *The order of things: An archeology of the human sciences* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). London: Random House.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archeology of knowledge and the discourse of language* (A.M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). New York: Pantheon.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Giroux, H. (1988). Postmodernism and the discourse of education criticism. *Journal of Education*, 170(3), 162-179.
- Grumet, M. (1990). On daffodils that come before the swallow dares. In E. Eisner & A. Peshkin, (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 101-120). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Grumet, M. (1992). Existential and phenomenological foundations of autobiographical methods. In W. Pinar & W.M. Reynolds, (Eds.), *Understanding curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text* (pp. 28-43). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Guba, E. (1990a). Subjectivity and objectivity. In E. Eisner, & A. Peshkin, (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 74-91). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Guba, E. (1990b). (Ed.). *The paradigm dialogue*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage
- Guba, E. (1992). Relativism. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 22(1), 17-23.
- Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hammersley, M. (1992). *What's wrong with ethnography: Methodological explorations*. London: Routledge.
- Heidegger, M. (1977). *The question concerning technology and other essays* (W. Lovitt, Trans.). New York: Harper and Row.
- Jameson, F. (1972). *The prison house of language: A critical account of structuralism and Russian formalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jameson, F. (1984). Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism. *New Left Review*, 104, 53-93.
- Kuhn, T. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kuhn, T. (1977). *The essential tension*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Lakatos, I. (1978). *The methodology of scientific research programmes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Lauden, L. (1981). *Science and hypothesis*. Dordrecht: Reidel.

- Lauden, L. (1990). *Science and relativism: Some key controversies in the philosophy of science*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Liotard, J-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & E. Massumi, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Phillips, D.C. (1990). Subjectivity and objectivity: an objective inquiry. In E. Eisner & A. Peshkin, (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 19-37). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Pinar, W.F. & Reynolds, W.M. (Eds.). (1992) *Understanding curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Quine, W. (1969). *Ontological relativity and other essays*. New York: Columbia.
- Ratcliffe, J. (1983). Notions of validity in qualitative research methodology. *Knowledge, Creation, Diffusion, Utilization*, 5(2), 147-167.
- Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Russel, B. (1940). *Inquiry into meaning and truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scriven, M. (1972). Objectivity and subjectivity in educational research. In L. Thomas (Ed.), *Philosophical redirections of educational research* (71<sup>ST</sup> Yearbook of the N.S.S.E.; Part I, pp. 94-142). Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education.
- Spivak, G. C. (1987). *In other worlds: Essays in cultural politics*. New York: Methuen.
- Stake, R. (1978). The case study method in social inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 7, 5-8.
- Stanfield, J.H. & Rutledge, J.M. (1993). *Race and ethnicity in research methods*. London: Sage.
- Trifonas, P. (1992). *Explorations in the semiotics of text: A method for the semiotic analysis of the picturebook*. Unpublished master's thesis. University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- Trifonas, P. (1993). Conceptions of text and textuality: Critical perspectives in literary theory from structuralism to poststructuralism. *Interchange*, 24(4), 381-395.
- Walcott, H.F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. London: Sage.
- Wexler, P. (1987). *Social analysis of education: After the new sociology*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical investigations* (G.E.M. Anscombe, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.