In Dialogue

Methodological Pluralism

This issue's In Dialogue centers around questions of methodology: How do we come to know about literacy, schooling, and teaching through research? How might we expand our research paradigms to understand multiple ways of knowing that reflect our contemporary world? We asked three researchers to ponder these questions and are delighted to feature short essays on methodology by Leigh Patel, Peter Smagorinsky, and Ezekiel Dixon-Román. In the first essay, Leigh Patel, the Associate Dean of Equity and Justice at the University of Pittsburgh, questions the logics of qualitative research that seek to quantify and simplify experience to a set of codes, themes, and categories, advocating for a return to story. Drawing on critical paradigms of knowledge production, Patel argues that a focus on story foregrounds context and relationships in research and pushes back against colonial framings that position the researcher as the central producer of knowledge. In the next essay, Peter Smagorinsky, Distinguished Research Professor of English Education at the University of Georgia, proposes that researchers focus more fully on developing warrants in their writing, rooting the claims and evidence they present in the theoretical and methodological frameworks they bring to bear. Smagorinsky builds on insights from his now-classic 2008 article about the centrality of methods in academic writing, contending here that the practice of warranting requires clearly developed methods of data collection and analysis that cohere with one's conceptual framework and theory of knowledge production. In the section's concluding essay, Ezekiel Dixon-Román, Associate Professor of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania, explores the multiple meanings and forms of empiricism, arguing that researchers' efforts to observe, measure, experiment, and experience the world are always fundamentally entangled in their material, discursive, and bodily engagement in/with the world. Such entanglements, Dixon-Román suggests, involve grappling with colonial legacies that "haunt" new forms of empiricism, requiring researchers to address and redress those complex histories in order to move toward justice. These three pieces are in dialogue with broader conversations in the field about the need for clarifying and broadening our methodological commitments in scholarship.

Turning Away from Logarithms to Return to Story
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"I know I want to do qualitative research."

I am not sure how many students, often new to doctoral studies, have seen my (hopefully mostly) internal cringe. It is a statement that often comes from seeking a place, an anchor, to define oneself and establish that thing they call "a research agenda." Let us not be confused; our students hear loudly that they must find a "problem" and a research approach to that problem. For all of the writings of DuBois, Neale Hurston, Hill Collins, Diamond, Woodson, and Davies, symptom reduction remains the focus, and out of that falls a desire to find a methodological stance toward producing knowledge.

This statement, like so many of our other utterances, has a long and complicated history. To this day, departments of education research are typically top-heavy with many courses in quantitative inferential statistics and a smattering of qualitative research courses, typically taught by faculty outside the department of educational research and measurement. To be fair, there are many programs in which this trend does not exist, but there are many, many more in which qualitative research is siphoned off into a different department, symbolically and materially making qualitative research an offshoot, reinstantiating what is seen to be "legitimate," objective research. This pattern in education cannot be understood without situating it within the history of university-based teacher training schools (mostly for young white women) that gave way to now-established schools of education that seek their foothold to compete among other schools within university budgets and priorities.

I have used qualitative research extensively in my work as a public intellectual. I am drawn to stories and even more fascinated by the structural impacts that relate to how we narrate ourselves and the worlds around us. This was my training ground as a long-form features journalist. And yet, in the world of euro-descendant social science, objectivity and systematicity must be created and used for the "data" to be more—or perhaps less—than mere stories. This, to me, is anathema. Stories are what link us to ourselves, to each other, to the lands we've come from, go to, and return to. They take on lives of their own: we often create the version that we want rather than the version that took place. The nuanced, emergent, and roving nature of how we talk about ourselves presents a delible challenge to research which, stemming from categorical logics (Wynter, 2003), imagines not only that the response to a research question is a static statement, but even more so, that it can be deciphered, coded, and categorized by a researcher.

Qualitative research has encouraged (and still does) doctoral students and emerging researchers to "code" qualitative research, in such ways that if more of X code "emerges" then it becomes a category. Somehow, ironically, by trying to listen to people, the project has doubled back on itself, with an implicit theory that what is said the most is what must be most important. However, communication is far more quixotic, elusive, revealing, and resistant than how many times X code was uttered by how many people. As Tuck and Yang (2014) put it:

> Who gets to know? Who gets known? Where is knowledge kept, and kept legitimated? What knowledge is desirable? Who profits? Who loses/pays/gives something away?

Who is coerced, empowered, appointed to give away knowledge? These are the analytic questions that drive beyond coding.

In my own work, which is never my own but linked to many people, it has never been enough to ask an interview question, record it, code it, and report what I perceive to be the meaning underneath what is said. That sequence should smack of individualized hubris; it does to me. Listening to people and talking with them is just one part of what I strive to do as a person seeking to both understand the sociopolitical histories that exalt whiteness and white rage in schools (Love, 2019) and simultaneously make schools into places of enclosure (Sojoyner, 2016). We must know context, always.

For researchers of language, this is not only our arena. It is our legacy. The work of Jessie Little Doe Baird, Geneva Smitherman, Carol Lee, Arnetha Ball, and Theresa Perry is made stronger by the unshakeable grounding their work has in context, history, and political economy. You can't get all that from a transcription unless you know what came before the interview took place, maybe before either the interviewer or interviewee was birthed.

I have taught qualitative research methods courses for almost 15 years, and I have dispensed with asking students to buy guidebooks for conducting qualitative research. I have made these decisions, in part, to disrupt the fantasy that there is a logarithm for being in relation to build knowledge, and to interrupt and refuse the colonial idea that those in a higher station (university-affiliated) simply have the right to ask a question and *can* know by doing so. As a good friend and community organizer once said to me, "Just because you can think of a research question doesn't mean you get to ask it."

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Warranting Evidence in Social Science Research Reports

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In this article, I will draw on my experiences reviewing other people's work to identify some issues that I think authors should consider when submitting their articles to social science research journals. I should be clear at the outset that I am talking about a specific form of article, the APA-style research report of the sort often published in *RTE*.

I've reviewed, as of today, 592 manuscripts for 68 scholarly journals and 15 book publishers on multiple continents. These do not include the many manuscripts I've critiqued for friends and students over the years, both for formal assignments or dissertations and in my role as colleague and mentor. I've also served on editorial boards for 19 different journals, totaling 161 cumulative years of service. These figures do not include the roughly 1,000 articles that Michael W. Smith and I vetted during our *RTE* editorial term from 1996 to 2003. And I've reviewed 109 tenure/promotion cases for other universities, a task that typically involves reading and evaluating three or more manuscripts from the candidate's oeuvre.

A decade ago, I drew on my reviewing experiences to write an article about the importance of the Method section in organizing and reporting social science research (Smagorinsky, 2008), which was well-received by editors if not always authors. At least three journals (*RTE, Written Communication*, and *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*) list it on their websites as recommended reading for authors prior to submitting manuscripts, and I'm sure at least three thousand authors have complained that editors have told them they need to read it. In that essay, I positioned the Method section as the "conceptual epicenter" of articles, around which everything should be organized and aligned. In this much briefer piece, I will build on that essay to address an issue I didn't include there, that being the manner in which argumentative claims are *warranted* (Toulmin, 1958; Weyland, Goff, & Newell, 2018) by examples to play a clear evidentiary role.

The APA-style social science research report is a logical argument. A theoretical framework provides the perspective and terms of the inquiry, all aligned with the author's chosen research questions; the Method section explains how a data corpus is reduced to a manageable size and then analyzed according to the concepts articulated in the framework in order to answer the research questions; a Context section might situate the research in a time and place and detail its participants and the author's subjectivity; the Findings answer the research questions in an organized, appropriate sequence; and the Discussion closes the investigation by drawing conclusions about what the study has to offer.

Many students have learned elements of argumentation as far back as primary school (McCann, 1989), and so the notions of a claim and example are familiar to many in academia. The critical role of the warrant, however, often escapes people's attention. The warrant is where an author explains how an example serves as evidence for a claim. What I consistently find in the articles I review is that the warranting is problematic in at least two ways:

1. It might be nonexistent, leaving authors with simple juxtapositions of claims and examples under the assumption that their proximity serves to advance the example into an evidentiary role (but it doesn't).
2. The warranting does not proceed from the author's own analytic method, but instead involves the author *outsourcing the warrant* (as I call it) to someone who has studied something else in another time and place, without accounting for those differences theoretically or analytically.

In my view, both of these problems originate in weak Method sections. If the author had clearly explained the method for collecting and, more importantly, analyzing the data, responsible warranting would be available. Method sections ought to clearly link the framing theory to the research method. If you claim in the theoretical framework to be employing principles from postcolonialism, or Marxism, or an activity theory, or information processing, or actor-network theory, or anything else, you need to very clearly explain how your analytic method manifests that perspective and how the theory that motivates it provides it with a conceptual terminology. This terminology and analytical means should then provide the basis for subsequent warranting in the report of Findings.

Because my space here is limited, I'll focus on the problem of outsourcing the warrant. To do so, I'll adapt a review I wrote in which I critiqued an author's outsourcing of the warrant (rewritten to protect the author's identity). Here is how an author interpreted a claim in light of an example from the data:

> As has been demonstrated in other research (Smith & Jones, 2011), the participant's identification with and connection to characters in a narrative world create a sense of belonging, of becoming a part of something larger than oneself both consciously and unconsciously, leading to empathy and emotional connection.

Smith and Jones (pseudonyms), however, made these points about another situation involving other people in another time and setting. Yet the author imported their insight and applied it to their sample as if it were an entirely transferable observation. If Smith and Jones are going to be used to interpret the data, then they should be central to the opening theoretical framework, and accounted for in the Method section. They shouldn't appear out of the theoretical and analytic blue to interpret data in the middle of the Findings. Rather, all warranting should be done in the terms that the authors lay out in the Method section, itself a manifestation of the theory the author articulates to frame the research, and should be based on the current analysis, not someone else's analysis of something else.

This brief illustration, I hope, will help authors tighten up their arguments and substantiate their points within the terms that they establish to help readers understand the conduct of their research when writing APA-style reports. It's really an appeal to authors to say what they did, why they did it, and how they did it, and then stay within these confines throughout their interpretation.

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Empiricism, Affect, and Haunting

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Empiricism:

5a. Philosophy. A doctrine or theory that emphasizes or privileges the role of experience in knowledge, esp. claiming that sense experience or direct observation rather than abstract reasoning is the foundation of all knowledge of reality.

6. Primary reliance on evidence derived from observation, investigation, or experiment rather than on abstract reasoning, theoretical analysis, or speculation; the use of such methods in any field.

—OED Online

Observation, measurement, experiment, experience. Each of these words is part of the discourse of knowledge for what has long been known as empiricism. As a concept that emerged out of the Enlightenment, empiricism sought to displace the abstract reason of the human with the instrumental reason of its cognate, scientific method. Despite claims to disembodied, distant, and objective observation, empiricism has also been understood in philosophy as that which emphasizes and privileges sense experience or direct observation. In fact, an "essential" property of empiricism is the variety of ways of *sensing* the world. Without sense, without the human and nonhuman faculties of seeing, touching, hearing, smelling, or tasting—all forms of bodily literacies of making sense of the world—there is no observing, measuring, experimenting, and experiencing the world.

Assumed in the sense experience of empiricism is a radical separation between the body of the researcher and the body of research. This separation, both socially

and physically, is what performs ideas of objectivity and rigor, and assumes more controlled and reduced subjective influence from the discursive formations of the senses. Thus, separation is understood to allow the data to be self-evident and "speak" for itself. Yet, what's missed in this assumption are the various ways sense is employed for observing, whether through direct observation or via a sociotechnical apparatus. As Crary (1990) documents, the discursive practice of the camera obscura required that observable proof of the measureable be visible. Halpern (2014) also argues that data are a product of vision and that vision is always spatially and historically situated. Moreover, as they are materially and discursively formed, the senses are also socially constitutive of space, time, and matter. In fact, as Barad (2012) argues, the body is an ongoing process of material reconfiguring it-self with the other, the interior with the exterior, and the enfolding of *timespacematter*. When one sees or touches oneself, one is simultaneously seeing or touching the other and a nonsimple past; and, when one sees or touches the other, one is simultaneously seeing or touching oneself. Thus, in addition to the sense of observation being constitutive of power, that which is observed is inextricably tied and entangled with the body of the observer.

The sense of observation in empiricism invariably raises questions about the capacities of the body, particularly as nonuniversal, impaired, or constrained sensorial experiences. Borrowing from Spinoza, Massumi (2002) defines *capacity* as the bodily "power (or potential) to affect or be affected," where the body is conceptualized as a relation between movement and rest, a relation of transition (p. 15). In this sense, the body, as a neurophysiological assemblage, materially and discursively forms and shapes affective predispositions and bodily responses to events, situations, and arrangements, producing bodily potentialities of affect-ability. Indeed, particular bodies have been formed to have greater affect-ability under particular material conditions, and the material arrangement of space, place, and the apparatuses of empiricism constrain or disable other bodies.

Yet still, the word *empiricism* has another cognate, not in meaning but in form, and that is the word *empire*. Although *empiricism* is Latin in origin and *empire* is French in origin, where *empiria* is experience and *empire* is imperial, the English cognate form reminds us that empiricism is always-already haunted by power and empire. *Haunted* not as in absence but as in (absence of) presence and, following Avery Gordon (1997), a seething presence. Haunting, or hauntology, is a disorienting experience that results from the disjointedness and discontinuities of time, space, and matter (Barad, 2010; Derrida, 1994). As Derrida (1994) posits, all being has an inheritance and the apparition of that inheritance is often experienced as out of joint. It is through the senses and the material reconfiguring of the body that, I argue, empiricism maintains a haunting of colonial historicity.

As a way to conceptualize the haunting and embodied historicity of colonialism, Sylvia Wynter (2001) further develops Fanon's concept of the sociogenic principle. For Wynter, neurobiology theoretically explains how the historicity of racializations become part of the ontologies of the body via neurochemical processes that reconfigure (the experience of) the self. Thus, the always-already ontologies of the anatomy of the body are intra-actively reconfigured with the sociogenic code

of the racial logics of colonialism. This sociogenic code materializes in the bodies of both the researched and the researcher. As a material and discursive haunting of colonialism, the sociogenic code as the historicity of colonialism must be addressed in new forms of empiricisms.

The seething presence of the sociogenic code as ghostly matter demands address, redress, response, and response-ability. As in Tina Campt's (2017) haptic experience of listening to images or Christina Sharpe's (2016) "wake work," the inheritance and haunting of the racial logics of colonialism must be a critical and central lens of analysis in new forms of empiricisms. We must develop new ways of conjuring, addressing, redressing, and diffractively illuminating the haunting presence of the sociogenic code in social inquiry—a multimethod and multimodal form of critical literacy studies that speculatively examines and even experiments with the disjointedness within the intra-actions of bodily capacities within reconfiguring sociopolitical assemblages. More importantly, we must find ways of redressing the complex history and subjectivities of the ghosts that demand sociopolitical significance. It is only through their demanding response-ability that speculative observation, measurement, and experiment may move us toward a justice-to-come.

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