Pragmatism and Public Administration Research Methodology

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We Argue:

Philosophical pragmatism provides a robust basis for research methodology in PA
Focus:

• Problems of the public

• Connection between theory and practice

• Logic of Inquiry >>>>> resolution of public problems
Simultaneously objective and subjective
1980s-1990s Dismal status of dissertation research in PA

“Courses and textbooks on research methods deal mostly w/ methodism And fail to .. Address philosophy of science”

Missing:
• Causal Relationships
• Connection to theory
• Research design
• Clear purpose

PA research “requires a type of practical reasoning that justifies the method and purpose.”

J. White (1986)
• Mindless empiricism
• Research question ignored
• Missing explicit framework
• Theoretical Wasteland
NASPAA
Weak
• Lit Reviews
• Conceptual Frameworks

Admit
-- I did not know the answer
Pragmatism

1. Problematic Situation – relevancy to practice
2. Experimental notion of inquiry
   – unify logic & experience >> theory
3. Focus construction of tools resolve conceptual & empirical issues
4. Theory and method pluralism
5. Community of Inquiry
Problematic Situation

- Public Administrators always facing problems
- Independent of scale
Inquiry is
the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinant in its constituent distinctions and relations to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole. (Dewey, 1938, 104)
As scholar confronts the unexpected while doing the reading- confusion-doubt

Equilibrium with greater complexity

Unexpected doubt and reflective thought
• Primary Experience
  Habits honed to skill
  (writing, computer, library statistical...)

• Secondary Experience
  Creative insights to use skills
  (often overlooked in methods courses)

Emphasizes
Doing & Making
Tools of Inquiry

Transforms writing a paper into organizing a project

Organizing
- Materials
- Time
- Ideas

Primary experience
Build:
- Organizing skills (stuff & ideas)
- Reading comprehension
- Writing skills
- Critical thinking skills

Making and Doing
Notebook is a tool to manage the ‘doubt and confusion’ stage

Step notebook is a tool that brings order to the outer world while the inner world changes

Equilibrium

Reflective Thought
Mindful analysis

Secondary Experience
– Surprise, connections, reflection

Transformations of Inquiry
Theory as tool - Map

Theory helps
- Navigate a problem
- Achieve purpose

Theory pluralism

Theories connected to
- Resolving problem
- Achieving purpose.
Blinded to their Confusion

Admit
-- I did not know the answer

Dr. Shields: What is a Conceptual Framework?
BEGAN
Earl Babbie’s
*Practice of Social Research*

Three Research Purposes

Exploration
Description
Explanation

Description - Categories
Explanation - Hypotheses
Exploration

Use literature to build frameworks
Pairing purpose and framework

Research Purposes
1. Exploration
2. Description
3. Gauging
4. Decision Making
5. Explanation/Prediction

Conceptual Frameworks
1. Working Hypotheses
2. Descriptive Categories
3. Practical Ideal Type
5. Formal Hypotheses
Long or short yardage

Play ideas that organize player actions

How men move on ground

Movement of players on ground

Results

Actual yardage gained
Research Process Taking into account Traditional Research notions of Theory

Conceptual framework – close to the data theory
Combines Quantitative and Qualitative data collection and Data analysis techniques

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.2. Linking Purpose, Framework, and Methods</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Research purpose</strong></td>
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<td>Decision making</td>
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Basic Frameworks -- Like Middle School Football

• Different Frameworks
• Grounded Theory – Develop frameworks after data collection
Experiences with Students

Texas State PA Applied Research Projects

Texas State University Master of Public Administration Program is known for the quality of its student research. Five student papers have won the prestigious national Phi Alpha Alpha (best master’s student paper in Public Affairs and Administration) award. These awar... more

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References


References (cont.)


