

# RESEARCH EPISTEMOLOGIES, METHODOLOGIES, AND POLITICS

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# OUTLINE

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1. Linking epistemology and methodology
2. Methodological perspectives in critical education theory
3. The politics of research

# 1. LINKING EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

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- ❑ Epistemology is “the study of the nature of knowledge and justification”, in short - “justification of knowledge”.
- ❑ Methodology is “a theory and analysis of how research should proceed” “of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry”.
- ❑ Methods are “techniques for gathering evidence”, “practical procedures, tools and techniques of research”.

(Carter & Little, 2007)

# EPISTEMOLOGY INFLUENCES...

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- methodology, the preferred pathways to true knowledge
- the relation between the researcher and research participant
- understandings of research quality, e.g. data- and analysis quality
- form, 'voice' and representation of research

(Carter & Little, 2007)

# EXAMPLE: SUPERVISION - ANNA'S PHD.-PROJECT

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## Pr. Jeffery

- joint production of knowledge with participants
- include both her own and participants subjectivity
- results will be specific for this place and time

## Pr. Rose

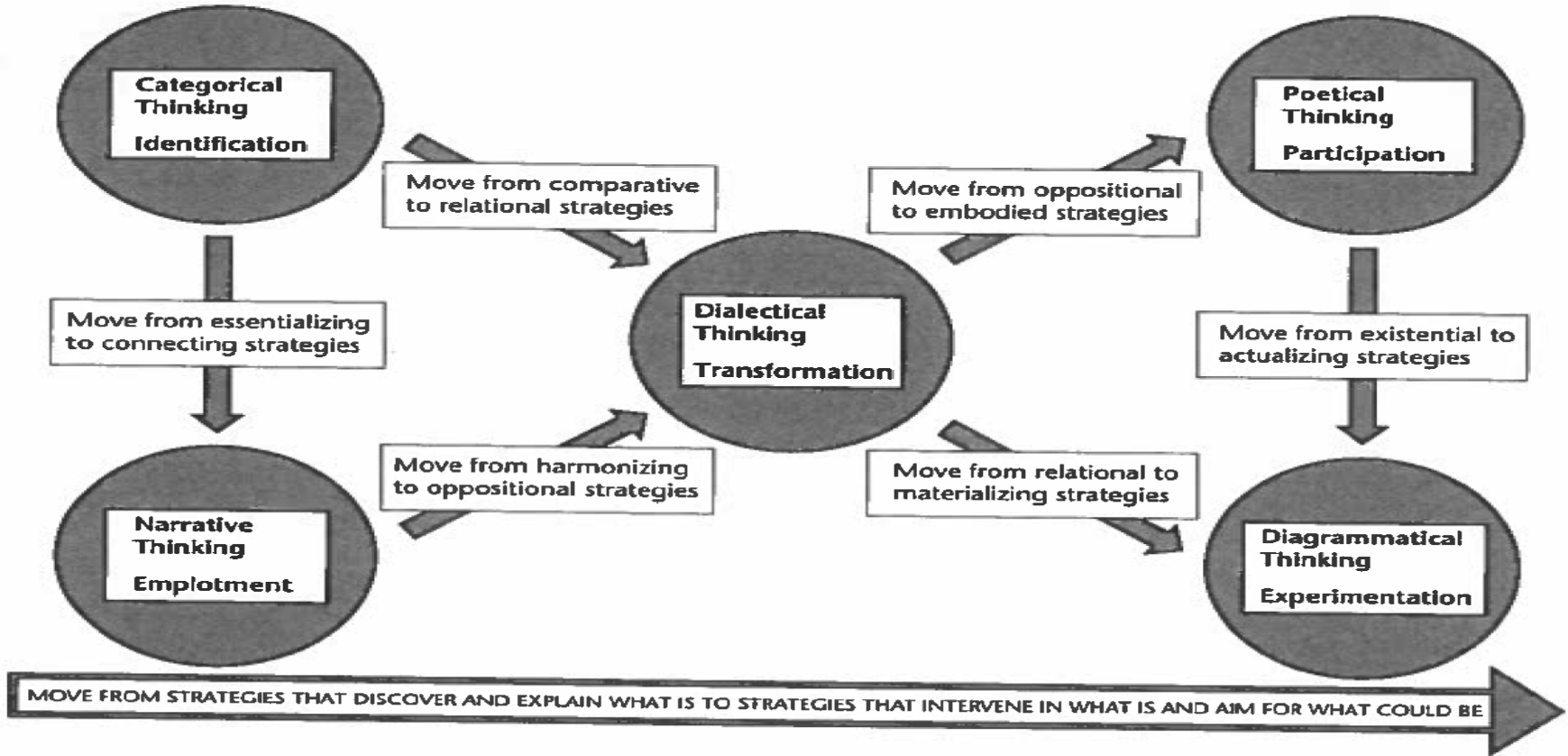
- to understand the topic in a way that is generalizable (across time and place)
- researcher's subjectivity – exclude
  - is a bias
- another researcher should be able to approximate Annas results in a similar setting

# MODES OF THINKING FOR QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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- ❑ Categorical thinking (identifying, grouping, sorting, comparing)
- ❑ Narrative thinking (examining human meaning-making)
- ❑ Dialectical thinking (identifying and critiquing, constructing counter-stories)
- ❑ Poetical thinking (listening to meanings, creating expressions)
- ❑ Diagrammatical thinking (dissolving boundaries, materializing new agential relations)

(Freeman 2017)



# EXAMPLE: MODES OF THINKING IN ANALYSIS

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	<b>“Constructing teacher agency in response to the constraints of education policy: adoption and adaptation” (Robinson 2012)</b>
Aim	The construction of teacher agency – how is it made possible or hindered by the demands in policy?
Field-studies	1 school, 3 months - includes participatory observations and interviews
Analytical focus and thinking	The teachers’ practices are to a certain extent shaped by the demands in the national policy ( <u>adoption</u> ), but they have negotiated and <u>adapted</u> the demands to the school’s policy.



# THINK AND BUZZ QUESTION

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- Do you recognize any of the 'modes of thinking' in your own analytical work (whether its planned work or work in progress)?

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES IN CRITICAL EDUCATION THEORY

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3 different traditions – contributing with different perspectives:

1. "Critical but not explicitly political" (Schwandt's distinction between a technical-oriented and a value-based approach)
2. "Critical (neo)Marxist" (Apple, focusing on power and inequality (politics of distribution and politics of recognition))
3. "Critical post-structural" (Denzin et al., focusing on uncovering technocratic interests marginalizing eg. race and feminist perspectives)

## 2.1. "CRITICAL BUT NOT EXPLICITLY POLITICAL"

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Understandings of the use of research in practice:

- In a technical-oriented approach: practice should be able to use research-based knowledge directly
- In a value-based approach: research need to support reflexive action, and opportunities to asses the value of different possible actions in practice

(Schwandt 2005)

	Technical-oriented approach	Value-based approach
Aim of inquiry	to enlighten and improve practice	to support practical deliberation of means and ends
Practice	Instrumental and scientifically managed	Contingent and socially enacted
Knowledge	Declarative, to be applied	Embodied in action, 'wise judgment'
Learning	A cognitive matter	Situated, activist
Normative position	Certainty, lack of ambiguity and order	Disorder, ambiguity, uncertainty

## 2.2. "CRITICAL (NEO)MARXIST"

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Two dynamics underpinning power and inequality:

- 'politics of redistribution' (economical processes/struggles)
- 'politics of recognition' (culture- and identity processes/struggles)

Two methodological principles:

- "to think relational (institutions, social relations, identities)
  - "to see the world through the eyes of 'the others' and to act on oppression
- (Apple 2016)

# ”AN ETHICAL MANIFEST”

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1-2: ‘bear witness to negativity’ + ‘point to contradictions, spaces of possible action’

3-4: ‘acting as critical secretaries’ + reconstruct knowledge so it can serve progressive social needs

5-6: keep alive, develop and challenge radical critical pedagogical work

7-8: participate and support social movements, act as a mentor and an engaged participant in society

(Apple 2016)

## 2.3. "CRITICAL POST-STRUCTURAL"

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Critique of university teaching on research:

- Too much focus on datageneration methods – not enough on theory of science (eg. what is 'data', 'evidence')
- We educate the next generation so that they can navigate in relation to 'evidence based' research ideas about the 'golden standard'
- We need to give tools for thinking through theories on ontological, epistemological, methodologiske, ethical, practical and political issues

(Denzin & Giardina 2016)

# TIME TO TURN AWAY FROM "METHODOLOGY"?

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- ... turn away from the idea that a research approach to a certain topic needs to be formalized, precise and method driven
- methods delimits thoughts and practices, controls and disciplines,
- methoddriven research tends to repeat what we already know and hinder opportunities to see something new

(Denzin & Giardina 2016)



# 3. THE POLITICS OF RESEARCH

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- How to act without being 'run over' by market thinking?
- How to navigate between different rooms and demands in research?
- How to understand these rooms - which positions to take?
- How to maintain a critical edge in research in a conservative context?

(Cheek, 2007)

# THE RESEARCH MARKETPLACE

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- Highly valued inputs: resources gained externally for research
  - Highly valued outputs: refereed journal articles in high-impact-factor journals
  - Currency can be used to buy goods such as promotion, tenure etc.
- The paradox of the 'free market' in neoliberal thinking

(Cheek 2017)

# A CASE – REVIEW OF A MANUSCRIPT TO JOURNAL

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”I am not an expert at qualitative research, but the methods used in this manuscript do not appear to be rigorously based on any standard qualitative methodology.”

- *”I am not an expert at qualitative research, but (...)*
- Critique of methods justified in a notion of *”standard qualitative methodology”*

(Cheek 2017)

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN NEOLIBERAL TIMES

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Is qualitative research as a clearly identifiable field fundamentally challenged?

- neoliberalism is an emersion within competetion, so complete that the condition is made invisible.
- it works to make some problems visible and others not, some solutions visible, others not...
- we need to add some 'pluses' in our thinking about the problems we face as qualitative researchers in neoliberal times!

(Cheek 2017)

# ADDING SOME +S (PLUSES) INTO OUR THINKING

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- to better understand the series of and connections of problems related to neoliberalism
- offers a possibility to better manage or navigate, and even escape parts of it....
- the ability to question assumptions and to think differently....

# THINK AND BUZZ QUESTION

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- ❖ Are there any questions related to this session that has 'popped up' and that you would like to raise (and that we can come back to later in the seminar)?

# LITERATURE

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