

Developing Research Skills: Methodological and Proposal Writing Workshop

A Collaborative Initiative between
Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) &
Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS)

Venue: Nepal Administrative Staff College, Diksha Sadan, 2nd Floor Malika Hall

Date: 2073/7/7 to 8 (23-24 Oct 2016)

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Introduction

- The traditional questions for the philosophy of social science reflect the importance of the choices of research questions and of methods of tackling them.
- * How are researchers' ontological and epistemological assumptions related to the quality of their research?
- * The presence of a basic system of ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions with which researchers approach their research is widely accepted (Guba & Lincoln 1994; p.105; Cresswell 1998; pp.74-77; Cresswell, Hanson, Clark Plano & Morales, 2007, p.238; Patton, 2002, p.266; Savage,2006, p.386).

Ontology

- * Ontology refers to ‘what constitutes reality and how can we understand existence?’
- * Baikie (1993) defines ontology as “the science or study of being” and it deals with the nature of reality. Ontology is a system of belief that reflects an interpretation of an individual about what constitutes a fact.
- * In simple terms, ontology is associated with a central question of whether social entities need to be perceived as objective or subjective. Accordingly, objectivism (or positivism) and subjectivism can be specified as two important aspects of ontology.
- * Objectivism “portrays the position that social entities exist in reality external to social actors concerned with their existence” (Saunders et. al., 2009). Alternatively, objectivism “is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors” (Bryman, 2003, p.22).

- * Subjectivism (also known as constructionism or interpretivism) on the contrary, perceives that social phenomena is created from perceptions and consequent actions of those social actors concerned with their existence.
- * Formally, constructionism can be defined as “ontological position which asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman, 2003, p.23)
- * Identification of ontology at the start of the research process is critically important as it determines the choice of the research design.
- * For example, the choice of objectivism ontology leads to **positivism (or even post-positivism) epistemology**, which is associated with a deductive research approach and accordingly, quantitative research methods would need to be employed.

- * Alternatively, the choice of constructivism ontology leads to the selection of **post-positivism or interpretivism epistemology**, therefore, **inductive approach** is going to be used with the application of qualitative methods of data collection and analysis.
- * You can address ontology part of methodology chapter of your research in the following manner:
 - * Firstly, you can provide a formal definition of ontology, followed by explanation of ontology in simple terms.
 - * Secondly, you have to specify whether you are adopting **objectivism or constructivism view**. This should be followed by explanation of rationale for your choice.
 - * Thirdly, you have to discuss **implications of your ontological choice on the choice of epistemology**, research approach, and research strategy and data collection methods.

Epistemology

- * Epistemology is the study of knowledge and justified belief and it is concerned with the following questions:
- * What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge?
- * What are its sources?
- * What is its structure, and what are its limits?
- * As the study of justified belief, epistemology aims to answer questions such as:
- * How we are to understand the concept of justification? What makes justified beliefs justified?
- * Is justification internal or external to one's own mind?
- * Understood more broadly, epistemology is about issues having to do with the **creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry.**
- * Chandru Pandey What constitutes valid knowledge and how can we obtain it?

- * *Epistemology* considers the nature, extent, and justification of knowledge:
- * Are all claims to knowledge justified in the same way, by appeal to broadly the same kind of evidence, or are some theories—say, those of mathematics, the social sciences, or the humanities—warranted by considerations different from those natural scientists demand?
- * Epistemology as a branch of philosophy deals with the sources of knowledge. Specifically, epistemology is concerned with possibilities, nature, sources and limitations of knowledge.
- * Guba & Lincoln (1994) claim that orthodox science, because of its belief in a "real" world that can be known, requires the knower to adopt a posture of objective detachment in order "to discover how things really are" (p.108).

- * Epistemology refers to the nature of the relationship between the knower and the what can be known.
- * There is a presumption that the knower and the known are separate and independent entities that do not influence one another.
- * There is a search for the "truth"; for the facts in objective and quantifiable terms which holds empirical data in the highest esteem.
- * In contrast, community-based research rests on **an extended epistemology** that endorses the primacy of practical knowing.
- * In community-based research, the knower participates in the known and that evidence is generated in at least four interdependent ways – experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical (Heron & Reason, 1997; Heron, 1996).

* **According to epistemologists there are at least four different sources of knowledge:**

- * **Intuitive knowledge** is based on intuition, faith, beliefs etc. Human feelings plays greater role in intuitive knowledge compared to reliance on facts.
- * **Authoritarian knowledge** relies on information that has been obtained from books, research papers, experts, supreme powers etc.
- * **Logical knowledge** is a creation of new knowledge through the application of logical reasoning.
- * **Empirical knowledge** relies on objective facts that have been established and can be demonstrated.

- * **Research process may integrate all of these sources of knowledge within a single study.**

For example, intuitive knowledge can be used in order to select a specific problem to be explored within a selected research area, whereas authoritative knowledge is gained during the process of literature review.

- * Moreover, logical knowledge is generated as a result of analyzing primary data findings, and conclusions of the research can be perceived as empirical knowledge.
- * The most noteworthy branches in epistemology include essentialism, historical perspective, progressivism, empiricism, idealism, rationalism, constructivism etc.
- * Empiricism accepts personal experiences associated with observation, feelings and senses as a valid source of knowledge, whereas according to rationalism relies on empirical findings gained through valid and reliable measures as a source of knowledge.

Axiological

Axiology is the philosophical study of the nature of value.

- * Axiology deals with the nature of value and captures the value question of what is intrinsically worthwhile?
- * Axiology' is a translation of the German Axiologie, which simply means 'theory of value'. Axiology is the branch of practical philosophy which seeks to provide a theoretical account of the nature of values, whether moral, prudential or aesthetic (Smith & Thomas 1998).
- * Axiology is one of the defining characteristics of a research paradigm, which puts in issue "values of being, about what human states are to be valued simply because of what they are (Heron & Reason 1997, p. 287).

- * Traditional epistemologies like empiricism, rationalism and positivism describe research as a neutral process, that does not involve value-judgments on behalf of the researcher.
- * Pragmatic, critical and feminist epistemologies, on the other hand, describe research activities and knowledge as something which supports some human goals, while relatively suppresses other goals.
- * From such perspectives are axiological considerations the most important part of research methodology.
- * The problems and issues axiology investigates have been with us from the moment humans began to reflect upon conditions of humans' life, the structure of reality, the order of nature and man's place in it.
- * A mere glance at the history of philosophy shows how deeply humans have been preoccupied with the nature of values. The notions of good and bad, right and wrong beautiful and ugly are as old as the real and apparent.

Methodological

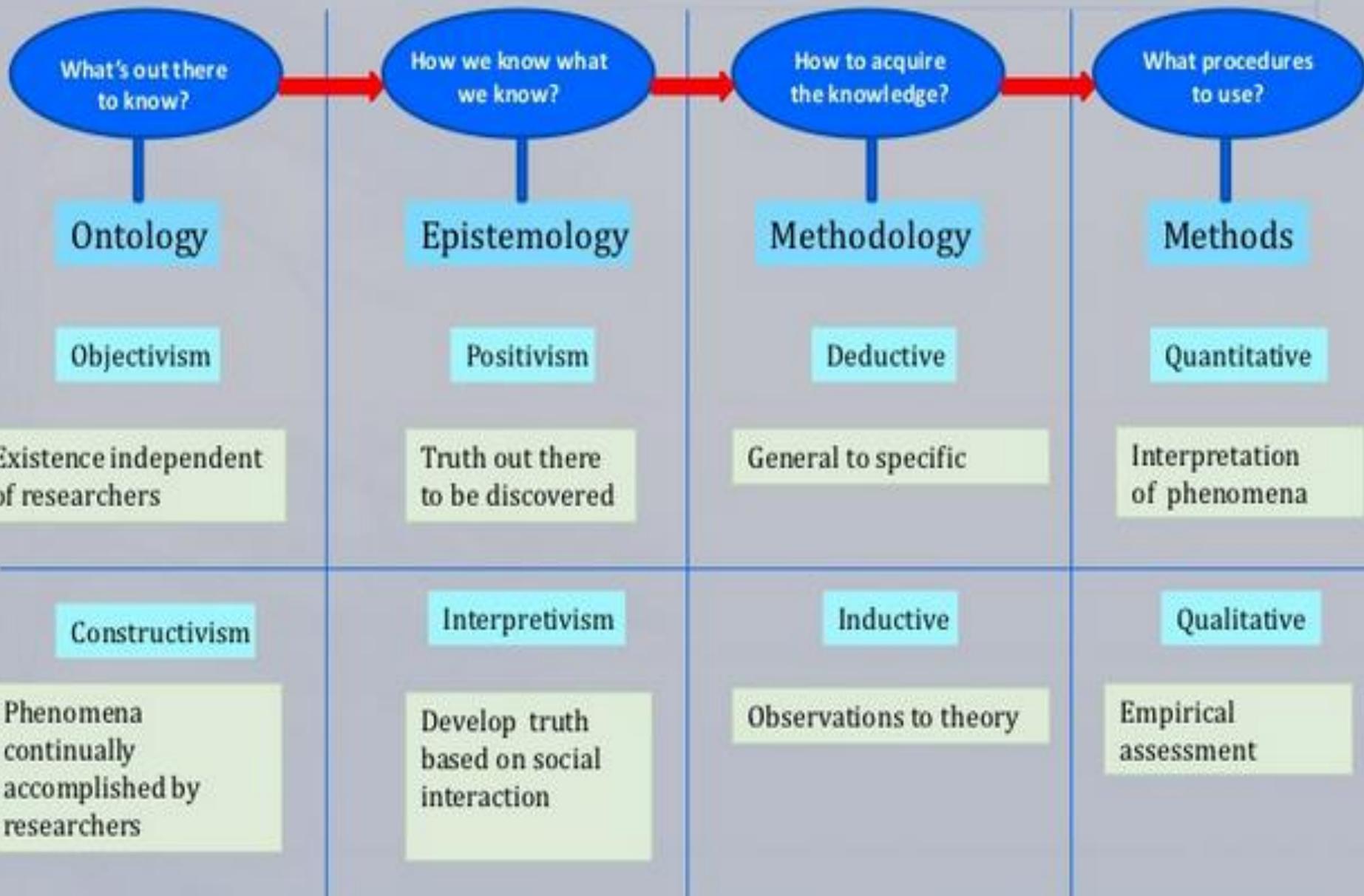
- * What is the process of research (Creswell 1998, p. 75)?
- * Researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design.
- * Researcher works with particulars (details) before generalizations, describes in detail the context of the study, and continually revises questions from experiences in the field.
- * From the distinctions about reality, the relationship between the researcher and the subject being researched, the role of values and the rhetoric of the study emerges the methodological assumption, how one conceptualizes the entire research process.

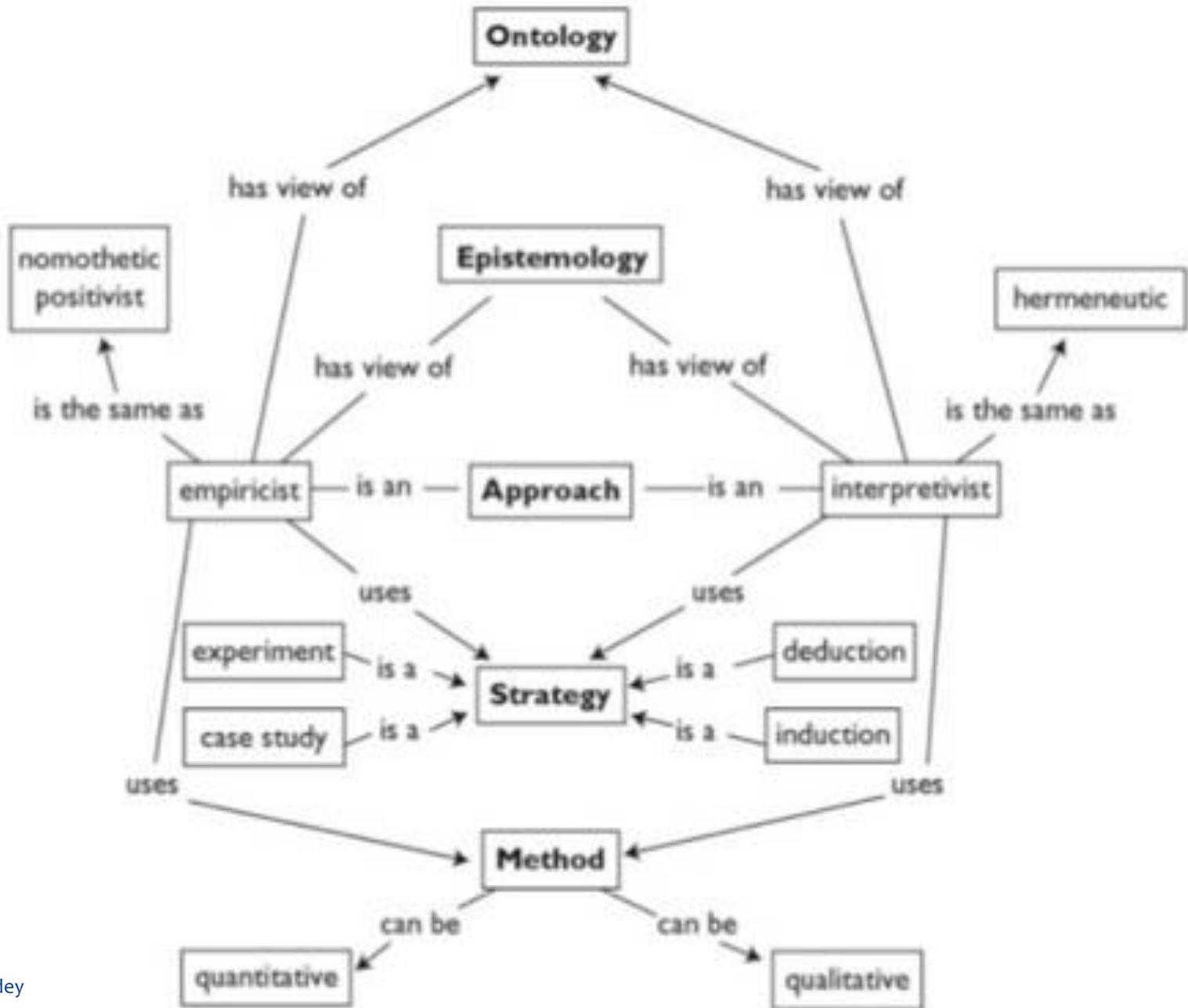
Methodological Approaches

- * Positivism
- * Post-positivism
- * Interpretivism, hermeneutics, constructionism
- * Critical research
- * The context of the qualitative case study is apparent where one describes the setting for the case from the more general description to the specific description. For example, it is like gunman study (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995), they first present the city, the campus, the building and finally the classroom and the gunman incident.

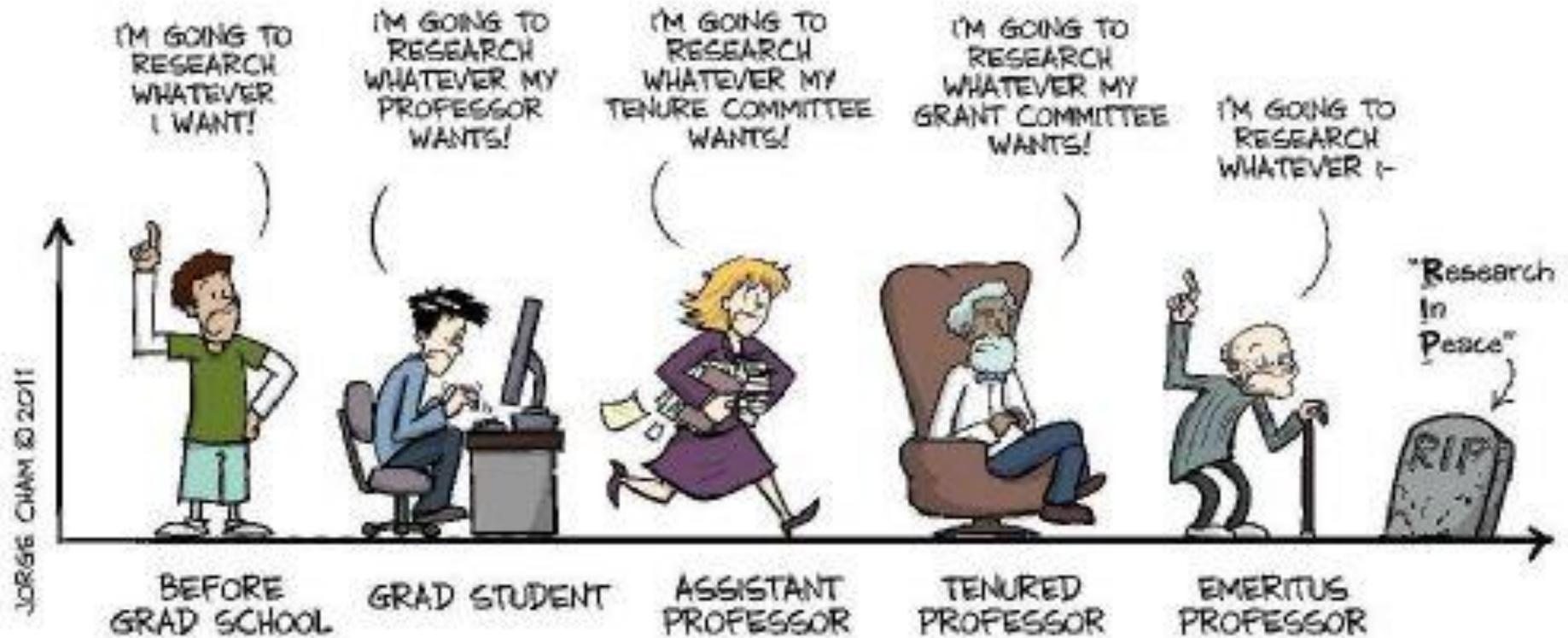
Rhetorical

- * What is the language of research (Creswell, 1998, 75)?
- * Researcher writes in a literary, informal style using the personal voice and uses qualitative terms and limited definitions.
- * Researcher uses an engaging style of narrative, may use first-person pronoun, and employs the language of qualitative research.
- * The rhetorical assumption means that the qualitative investigator uses specific terms and a personal and literary narrative in the study.
- * May choose to use these terms, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability instead of using terms such as internal validity, external validity, generalizability, and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
- * Words such as understanding, discover, and meaning form the glossary of emerging qualitative terms and are important rhetorical markers in writing purpose statements and research questions.





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