Ding, Huiping, Lan, Jie, Yao, Shuo, Zhang, Dahai, Han, Bin, Pan, Gang ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0920-3018 and Li, Xianguo (2022) Evolution of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in the surface sediment of southern Jiaozhou Bay in northern China after an accident of oil pipeline explosion. Marine pollution bulletin, 183. p. 114039.

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Methodological pragmatism– freedom from the squeeze?

This paper discusses how combining and integrating a range of traditional qualitative methodologies under the umbrella of methodological pragmatism supported and challenged an early career researcher (ECR). It will consider how methodological pragmatism is defined from a purely qualitative rather than mixed methods perspective, and how it fed into and shaped each stage of the research process. Some of the issues encountered in finding a methodology which supported study in an area where no specific previous research existed will be discussed, and the opportunities that pragmatism offered shared. The paper will then focus on the standpoint and the perspectives of an ECR; specifically my own experiences of what I termed the *methodological squeeze*, and how a pragmatic methodology can be effective in countering this. This will further the discussion of what has previously been described as the acrobatics required to ensure research fits within the boundaries of traditional qualitative methodological approaches. The paper will conclude with some of the key advantages of utilising a pragmatic methodology, both on the research process but also on the skills it can develop in an ECR. I argue that, rather than being disadvantageous, working beyond and between the boundaries of traditional and pure methodological approaches as an ECR encourages a distinctly different perspective on research and specifically promotes active engagement in reflexive decisions about research.

Key words: pragmatism, methodology, qualitative, methodolotry

Introduction

This paper reflects on my stakeholder perspective as an early career researcher (ECR) and the challenges I encountered when researching an area where no specific extant research had been located. I will consider the difficulties I experienced in finding a methodology which afforded a focus on *why* rather than *how* when researching, as well as how combining and integrating of a range of qualitative methodologies and methods was achieved. The implications of what I have termed the *methodological squeeze* I faced during the research process, and how this provided a range of both challenges and opportunities, will also be discussed. The paper aims to provide an overview of how I used a pragmatic methodology to

frame my research and provide a case for utilising pragmatism, particularly for ECRs. I will use descriptions from my own research to offer an argument for the benefits of moving away from the constraints, or *squeeze,* that some traditional methodologies can impose and reflect on how the freedom afforded by a pragmatic methodology in my own study supported my research as well as my own development as a researcher. To conclude, the paper will offer a summary of how methodological pragmatism and the prospects for innovatively mixing, combining, and integrating methods could provide emerging and multidisciplinary researchers with a new, and specifically reflexive, perspective

The term 'mixed' when discussing research is often considered as a fusion of quantitative and qualitative perspectives, however it is also possible to apply it to the blending of purely qualitative approaches. Under a pragmatic research umbrella, it is possible to combine different approaches by mixing more than one approach with another (Frost, Nolas, Brooks-Gordon, Esin, Holt, Mehdizadeh and Shinebourne, 2010) and this paper considers pragmatism as a way of purposefully integrating and combining a range of methodological approaches in purely qualitative research. Pragmatism can be applied to research both in its philosophical tradition or it can be used a-paradigmatically, as within this research, with no ineluctable association between philosophical or research pragmatic orientations (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). The lack of automatic synonymy is due to pragmatism, as Rorty defined it, not requiring an ontology (as cited in Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013, p. 60).

What is pragmatism(s)?

Pragmatism is both a philosophical position and a methodological approach, with its philosophical standpoint often being the most familiar and, despite differences in their works (Joas, 1993), Dewey, Pierce and James are collectively recognised as the founders of classical

pragmatism (Biesta and Burbules, 2003; Quay, 2013). As a philosophy, pragmatism is concerned with the practical understanding of knowledge and of seeking connections between knowledge and action (Goldkuhl, 2012; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Whipps, 2004). Biesta and Burbules (2003) noted that there was not just one form of pragmatism but that there were many, with classical pragmatism developing into numerous different forms over the years. A minimum of thirteen different forms of pragmatism have been identified, with suggestions that, within the last hundred years of thought and writing, definitions were still opaque at best (Lovejoy, 1963 as cited in Biesta and Burbules, 2003). This philosophical multiplicity is problematic when attempting to categorically define pragmatism - a facet that mirrors its methodological counterpart.

Considering pragmatism as a methodological approach, the range of pragmatism(s) and the possibility to combine aspects from a range of different methodologies make it difficult to define as a discrete entity (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). This may account for reports that it is widely used (Caelli, Ray and Mill, 2003; Sandelowski, 2000) but remains "misunderstood and ill-defined" (Dillon, O'Brien and Heilman, 2000, p. 17). Rather than ceding to a distinct and agreed definition, methodological pragmatism has been described as a continuum between the subjective and the objective (Joas, 1993; Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). At the subjective end of the continuum, it has been labelled as non-categorical and interpretative, where theoretical and analytical frameworks are acknowledged and utilised (Thorne, Kirkham and MacDonald-Emes, 1997), whilst at the other end of the continuum, it has been described as less abstract, more descriptive, and not relying on any conceptual engagement with data (Sandelowski, 2000).

This shift away from clear boundaries, and even clear definitions, has led to pragmatic approaches being pejoratively accused of methodological "slurring" (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 243). However, Sandelowski (2000, p. 337) argued that no qualitative research is the product

of any pure method, but instead is a range of different approaches which are "variously textured, toned and hued". This perspective of understanding the differing tones and textures of a range of approaches and how these can be used together reflects Savin-Baden and Howell Major's (2013, p.172) description of pragmatic methodologies as blending approaches and having "casts or overtones of traditional methodologies". The definition of pragmatism used in this paper is taken from Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), who described it as a unique methodology with a practical orientation that focuses on answering a question. From this perspective, methodological pragmatism occupies a middle ground in the subjective/objective continuum and is the "meeting point of description and interpretation, in which description involves presentation of facts, feelings and experiences in the everyday language of participants" (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013, p. 172).

Why consider methodological pragmatism?

Morgan (2014) highlighted that using a pragmatic methodology shifted the focus within the research process, emphasising the *why*, rather than simply the *how,* of research. Biesta and Burbules (2003, p. 14) concomitantly asserted pragmatism eschewed any ideas of a recipe for conducting research, arguing instead that it moved the researcher away from prescriptions and assumptions and offered possibilities for "*un*-thinking", presenting researchers with opportunities for opening up new "possibilities for thought". These possibilities can include innovative mixes of methods, methodologies, and epistemologies. However this does not suggest that anything goes, rather that where connections and reciprocities can be found there is the possibility to investigate these and to work both beyond and between the boundaries of traditional methodologies.

The methodological squeeze

Thomas (2007, p. 20) has ambitiously and contentiously called for methodological "anarchy", and although my research could not be described as anarchic, it did aim to move towards freedom from the restraints of methodolotry. Separating my research from what Frost and Nolas (2011, p. 115) described as "silos" of mono-theoretical approaches was fuelled by my unwillingness to force my research to fit within the confines of traditional methodologies. I became concerned that this squeeze to classify my research as a pure methodology would change its focus. My understanding of what I experienced, and have termed the *methodological squeeze*, differs from others' discussions of a "dance" (Janesick, 1994) or "acrobatics" (Sandelowski, 2000), which suggest researchers may feel some form of embarrassment from not conforming to traditional methodological boundaries. However, I made the conscious and active choice to avoid what I viewed as this squeeze, where traditional methodologies would contort my research into something I did not want it to become rather than attempting to pass my study off as a pure methodology due to some aerobic semantics or omissions. This transparency about intentionally selecting pragmatism, as opposed to being opaque or obfuscating the choices I had made, offered me an alternative to the methodological squeeze.

The rebellion Thomas (2007) called for, and the possibilities for a "revolutionary break in thinking" (Dillon et al., 2000, p. 18) pragmatism can offer were, in some (very) small ways, borne out in my research. For me, the break in thinking was evident through not being guided by the prescriptions of a methodology, but rather having to consider each step in the process, including data collection methods, data analysis and the write up. Breaking away from traditional methodological thinking enabled my research to be as reflexive, flexible, and interconnected as possible, focusing on what best answered the question within the challenging context I was researching, whilst remaining steadfast to the feminist and constructionist epistemology. As such, hierarchical notions were challenged, disorder was accepted, and the authority of traditional qualitative methods was questioned.

As an ECR, I found that choosing a pragmatic methodology forced me to develop a reflective and critical view of research in general, and of my study in particular. Mason (2006, p. 13) proposed that some researchers might be "inclined towards conservatism…because their methodological repertoire or tradition limits their view". However, pragmatism developed my understanding of the impact a methodology can have on research and how it shapes and defines the endeavour. Dillon et al. (2000, p. 24) noted how rare it is that there is a thorough methodological critique of research when a traditional methodology is utilised, and yet this is exactly what is demanded when applying a pragmatic methodology - to justify the choices that have been made and, as a result, improve the quality of the research. An overview of my research will now follow, with consideration given to the specific environment in which the research was conducted and how and why I arrived at the decision to utilise a pragmatic methodology and avoid the *squeeze*. Initially some context will be provided, and I will follow this with an examination of each phase of the research and how and why pragmatism was, as Johnson et al. (2008, p. 243) argued, a "sensible and inevitable" choice.

Pragmatism in context

I will briefly offer a description of my own research to provide context for the methodological discussion and to illustrate some of the challenges I encountered. My own educational research was undertaken while I was a part-time PhD student and still working as a primary school teacher in England. It aimed to answer the following questions:

- How do Teaching Assistants (TAs) view their role in managing behaviour in relation to a whole school behaviour policy?
- What are their points of tension in fulfilling this role?

There is a growing body of research into the work TAs do to support children academically, both nationally and internationally (Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown and Martin, 2009; 2016; Giangreco, 2010, 2013; Trent, 2014), but it is surprisingly rare to find research which includes TAs' role in managing behaviour, and none had been found where this was an explicit focus. This is despite an historic deficit, as well as more recent calls for further research into how TAs support pupil's soft skills in school (Clarke, 2019; Clarke and Visser, 2017; Graves, 2013; Sharples, Webster and Blatchford, 2015). The lack of research is problematic considering that TAs often assume responsibilities for managing behaviour, and that these expectations have been explicit in government publications in England (DfES, 2002; 2003; 2006; DfE, 2013; 2016). The lack of specific research was also a challenge for me, as it was not possible to conduct a straightforward literature review or to draw on previous work in the area to guide my choice of methodology or method. The context I was researching in also resulted in a range of methodological difficulties that I needed to negotiate, and which added additional layers of complexity to my approach to the study.

The research I undertook involved two discrete groups of TAs, and group one were all employed at the same primary school where I worked as a teacher. When working with participants in group one, I possessed both insider and outsider research identities which Mercer (2007, p. 5) suggested was like "wielding a double-edged sword". Morse (1994) noted the key tensions in this dichotomy; outsiders were able to notice quotidian aspects of practice and therefore possess greater objectivity, whilst insiders were able to establish and maintain trust, and therefore enhance the research. This presented both difficulties I needed to ameliorate where possible, and opportunities I was keen to capitalise on.

The dynamics of working with participants who were not only employed in the same school as me but were also almost entirely female (group 1=100%, group 2=88%) produced yet another layer of challenges, with issues related to gender stereotyping of the TA role cited

in a range of research (Butt and Lowe, 2011; Graves, 2013; Ofsted, 2008; Mackenzie, 2011). In England the TA role is almost entirely female, with the percentage of women working as TAs in primary schools has rising (from 92% in 2014 [DfE, 2014] to 95% in 2017 [DfE, 2017]. The average TA is reported to be aged between 41 and 50, have a lower level of formal education than teachers and have family responsibilities (Bach et al., 2006; DfE, 2014). A recurring theme in research on TAs is its synonymy with women - specifically mothers (Barkham, 2008; Watson, Bayliss and Pratchett, 2013) and framing the role in this way connotes issues with status and power (Mansaray, 2006) with Graves (2013, p. 26) arguing that maternal associations make TAs' work "invisible and peripheral". Armstrong (2008) noted marginalisation existed both in schools and research, with devaluing or instrumental language often used to describe the work of TAs, and gaps in extant research which provided a focus on TAs' voice and perspective highlighted by other researchers (including but not only; Ball, 1987; Lehane, 2016; Trent, 2014; Watson, Bayliss and Pratchett, 2013). This range of factors required careful engagement with the process of research to ensure I was not entrenching issues related to TA voice or marginalisation, and that I was sensitive to my own positionality, as both an insider and outsider researcher in an area where there was no explicit research to support me. I will now discuss how pragmatism supported and challenged me in doing this, reflecting on its impact at each stage of the research process.

Figure 1 shows the iterative reflexive spiral of my research which focused on ensuring a match between my epistemology, methodology, methods, data analysis and the final write up. For me, a pragmatic methodology connected the constructivist and feminist epistemological perspective with data collection techniques that enabled a focus on hearing and maintaining the participants' voice and their own understanding of the tensions experienced. The necessity within the pragmatic stance to acknowledge the researcher's own

influence on the data allied to the feminist epistemology, where "personal history, social

background and cultural assumptions" all influence research (Morgan, 2007, p. 69).
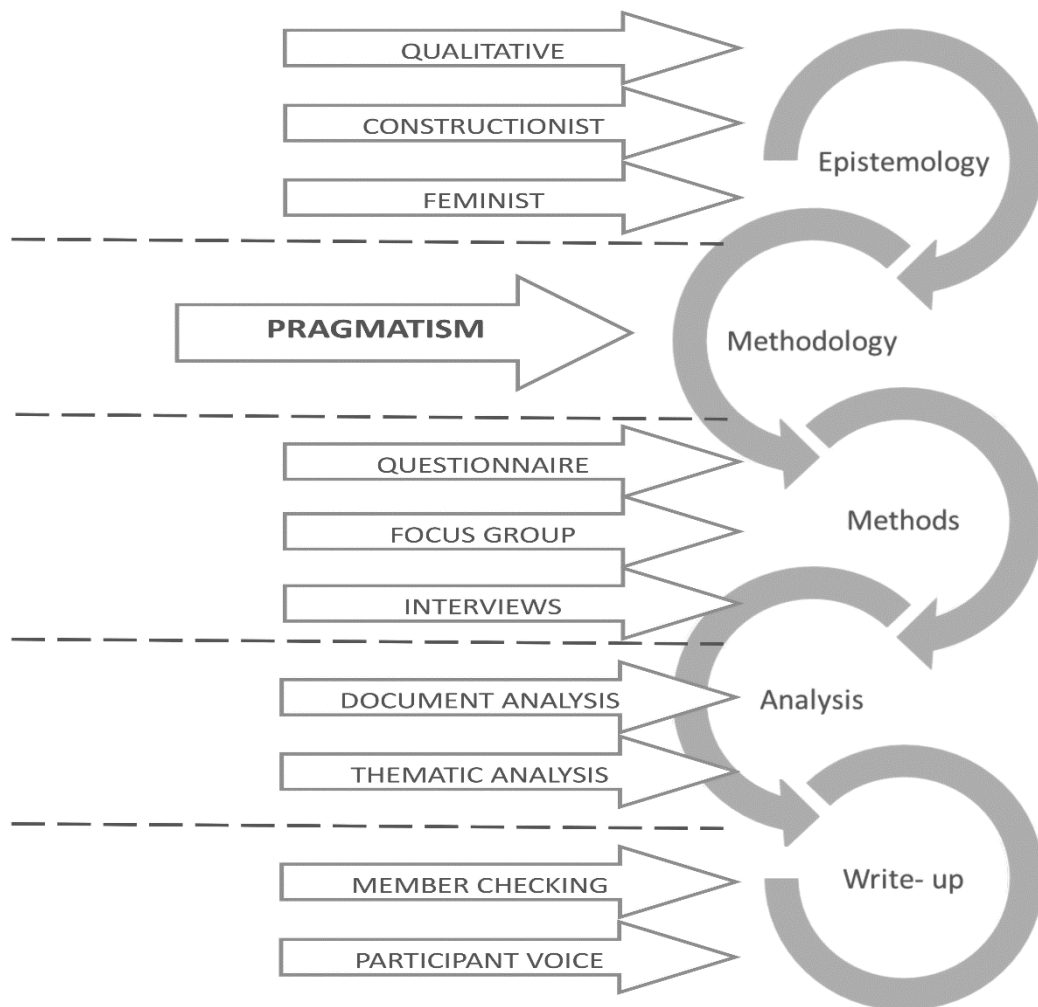

Figure 1: The iterative process of my research illustrating how methodological pragmatism

linked epistemology and methods, as well as analysis and write up.

Following on from Figure 1, I will now discuss how methodological pragmatism bridged

epistemology and method and also influenced other stages of the research process.

Epistemology and pragmatism

Goodbody and Burns (2011) noted the challenges they faced in finding a methodology that was a clear match with the aims of their research, both epistemologically and ontologically – something I also struggled with. To answer my research question, I needed to consider TAs' views and perspectives, acknowledge that there was more than one version of knowledge with multiple versions of reality, even for the same person (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Research with the TAs in sample one took place in the employing school, where I relied on participant involvement to generate the verbal data required (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). These features and the value bound emic, as opposed to etic, nature of the research framed it with qualitative characteristics (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). The choice of a qualitative paradigm as best suited to answering the research question was therefore relatively straightforward one.

A key aspect of my research question focused on the outward display or visible facets of managing behaviour, and the external aspects of relationships that influenced TAs' behaviour management. As a result, I needed to consider of the multiple realities of those involved (Cresswell, 2014; Robson, 2011; Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013), the shared visions of knowledge that were constructed (Burr, 2003) and how these affect understanding. It was suggested by Cresswell (2014, p. 14), that the multiplicity of individual's views from the constructionist viewpoint called for research which looked for "complexity, and the view of knowledge as context based and relativist". This led to the constructionist epistemology that underpinned the research. From Papert and Harel's (1991) perspective, constructionism was the external expression of internal constructivist processes, and a central aspect of my research was how these internal processes were externally acted-out.

Due to almost all my participants being female, my research aimed to adopt a position that did not add women in, but instead focused wholly on their perspective (Letherby, 2003). Usher (1996) and Atkinson, Delamont and Hammersley (2003) have acknowledged that

feminism is not a method per se, but rather a perspective or guide that can permeated into a range of qualitative methods. The aims of feminist research have been defined as being "contextual, inclusive, involved and socially relevant" (Nielsen, 1990, p. 4), whilst providing "the means to gather more complete evidence, to warrant more inclusive, more accurate, more accountable descriptions and explanations of the world" (Kohli and Burbules, 2013, p. 44). This was important, as much of the published research on TAs excludes their perspective (Clarke, 2019; Lehane, 2016; Trent, 2014; Watson, Bayliss and Pratchett, 2013). Blatchford et al. (2012) justified the overshadowing of TAs' voice from their "formidably extensive" (Fletcher-Campbell, 2010, p. 339) study by suggesting their aim was to build a dialogue, not with TAs, but about them. This clashes with feminist research perspectives which advocate a movement towards the democratisation of the research relationship between researcher(s) and participant(s) (Burr, 2003; Oakley, 2000; Letherby, 2003) enabling the movement from being a subject in research to being a "knower and agent" (Kohli and Burbules, 2013, p. 36).

To address the feminist aims of my research I needed a methodology that would allow me to foreground women's perspectives and tailor the data collection methods to include participants' voices, feelings and perspectives. Kohli and Burbules (2013, p.38) saw commonalties between constructionism and feminism suggesting that social constructionism supported feminists in "communicating the problem of womanhood" (for a detailed consideration see [Clarke and Visser, 2017; 2018; Clarke, 2019]). Birch, Miller, Mauthner and Jessop (2008, p. 5) asserted that feminist research should not simply focus on rules and principles but on what they termed "contextualised reasoning". This, they stated, should be key and should be developed by the researcher by re-examining and challenging assumptions and ensuring not only reflection but reflexivity throughout the research process. For me, contextualised reasoning demanded the flexibility and diversity to accommodate the range of challenges and opportunities my research afforded. These included the lack of specific

published research in my area of study, my dual researcher positionality (as an insider, where I worked with my participants in the same school with sample one, yet as an outsider in relation to role, as a I was a teacher not a TA) and a largely female and voiceless group of participants where it was essential to consider power issues. I was also researching an atypical setting where two separate schools had recently amalgamated. The concept of contextualised reasoning from a feminist perspective has clear connections with pragmatism, as both encourage (or even force) the researcher to actively examine and challenge their own and others' beliefs and ideas around research, and how best to answer a research question. Both feminist and pragmatic approaches require a conscious move from reflection to reflexivity and a careful examination of why they have chosen to research in the way they have.

Sandelowski (2000, p. 337) suggested that when investigating the "who, what, and where of events" with questions relating to practice, such as the ones in my research, pragmatic approaches were well suited. This was reflected by Whipp's (2004, p. 127) assertion that pragmatism allowed an understanding of the multiple perspectives which she argued were essential to the process of philosophical epistemology, and Frost and Nolas's (2011, p. 116) concomitant view of the importance of "multiplicity and multidimensionality" both ontologically and epistemologically, as key to understanding complexity. My research was focused on investigating complex systems and interactions and it was important to consider the range of polyvalent views and voices. Frost and Nolas (2011) discussed how a pragmatic approach could address some of these issues by allowing them to utilise a blend of different, but complementary ontological perspectives. Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009, p. 701) asserted that pragmatism offered a way out of what they saw as an "epistemological deadlock" enabling them to negate a possible clash between ontology and epistemology through their alignment with the aims of the research (Chamberlain, Cain, Sheridan, and Dupuis, 2011).

Despite suggestions that pragmatism can transcend epistemology (Biesta and Burbules, 2003) in my study, methodological pragmatism was rooted in feminist and constructivist epistemologies. This followed an understanding that pragmatism could be used to connect a range of issues and challenges at the "abstract" level of epistemology as well as the "mechanical" levels of methods (Morgan, 2007, p. 68). Pragmatic research approaches were strongly allied with the pluralistic meanings of my constructionist epistemology which was not concerned with a "grand Either/Or" (Teddlie, 2005, p. 214) but accepted a focus on plurality and closely associated with feminist perspectives which Usher (1996, p. 134) suggested, valued "inclusiveness as opposed to orthodoxy". Whipps (2004, p. 122) also highlighted the recognition within pragmatism, like feminism, that enabling and understanding the range of different voices was the only way to come to what she termed a "shared truth".

Methodology and pragmatism

The dynamic range of factors I was working within – including but not only, a paucity of research, insider and outsider research positions, researching a feminised workforce - required a methodology, range of data collection methods and analysis that could all be flexible and responsive. At the start of my research, it was not clear what tensions my participants would report, or how successful the data collection methods would be in supporting them to do so. As a result, at the outset there was only a draft plan that was purposefully flexible and open to change depending on what data were uncovered at each stage of the research. Due to this, some of the pure, traditional and prescriptive methodologies with rigid procedures would not have afforded me the sensitivity required to the contexts I was researching in, or to account for the feelings and emotions of my participants (Birch et al., 2008) which were central to answering my research questions. With this in mind, I began searching for a methodology that would allow me to draw on contextualised reasoning and actively embrace, as opposed to

overlooking the grey areas I was working in. As a result, eclectic (Sandelowski, 2000) and multimethodological (Nielsen, 1990) methodologies were sought.

Initially, I relied on methodology textbooks, many of which tried to compartmentalise the endeavour of research into simple and at times reductive categories and none came close to acknowledging the tensions and complexities of my research environment, or gave me the freedom to use the contextualised reasoning my feminist stance required. The reading identified aspects of a range of different methodologies that could help answer my research question, but which also had features that would be difficult to fulfil in my circumstances. Table 1 and figure 2 begin to show the features of the range of methodologies considered and how aspects of each were combined under a pragmatic umbrella. The strengths and limitations that the range of individual and traditional methodologies had, in relation to answering my research question, will now be briefly considered.

Phenomenology offered much that would be helpful, including the possibility of expressing insight and understanding, emphasising perceptions, feelings and emotions, with the data collected being interpretivist and subjectivist (Denscombe, 2010; Symes and Humphrey, 2011). Despite these aspects, it necessitated bracketed preconceptions (Thorne, 2011) which were not possible due to my personal connection with the research, or desirable from a feminist perspective (Letherby, 2003). This aspect marked the research as unable to be purely phenomenological (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009; Thorne, 2011).

From phenomenology I began investigating whether I could use an ethnographic approach. My research aimed to create an understanding of those studied (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013) and to discover cultural norms, with a focus on naturalist everyday experiences - in line with the feminist and constructionist approaches discussed. However, data collection methods in ethnography often rely on being unstructured and in the field. These may have provided thick description but would not have produced the required data to answer the

research question. Additional aspects which mark research as ethnographic, such as immersion in the setting, did not take place as although I worked with TAs in sample one it was as a teacher rather than a TA. Thomas (2007) stated a "self-consciously" ethnographic approach was unnecessary for teacher-researchers who are naturally immersed in the life and processes of the school.

As defined by Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), my research could also have been a case study. It was grounded in a real-life context, affording access to the perspectives of those in the field with the flexibility necessary to gather data (Datnow and Castellano, 2000). Despite having features in common with case studies, the research could not be defined as a case study due to the two different groups of TAs sampled, and as noted, my pre-existing sensitising concepts which could not be bracketed. The inclusion of different groups of participants and the wide range of settings the participants in group two worked in would have made it problematic to define how the case was bounded and as a result, define the project as a case study.

Another methodology researched was grounded theory, which Suddaby (2006) suggested originated to be pragmatic and Smith et al. (2009, p. 192) argued was able to exist between "slippery epistemological boundaries" and as such had a strong "trans-disciplinary identity". Grounded theory's focus on naturalistic research and reviewing documents would have been supportive in answering the research question however, Glaser (1999) stated that research could only claim to be grounded theory when it followed the full methodological package. My study could not adhere to that, as it was too inflexible to meet the aims of my emergent research. Grounded theory provides a recipe of steps, dictating analysis methods that would not have allowed me to follow up emerging themes, work flexibly, or employ contextualised reasoning which I saw as important. Letherby (2003) acknowledged there were problems with an unquestioning adherence to grounded theory, highlighting the importance of

acknowledging the researchers' personal and intellectual presence - which are not foregrounded in grounded theory approaches. These were key considerations from my insider research perspective which I felt could not be separated from the research process. The lack of personal disclosure would have been challenging and claiming the research was conducted without aspects of an insider positionality would have resulted in issues in the reliability and trustworthiness of my findings.

Table 1 shows how the methodologies I have discussed only partially met the needs of my research question, epistemology and participants. My research had elements of a range of methodologies, but these approaches did not enable the research question to be fully answered.

Table 1: Table to show key features of methodologies critiqued

METHODOLOGY	KEY FEATURE	IN MY RESERACH
Phenomenology (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013)	Understanding the concept or phenomenon under study	Yes
	Pragmatism	Yes
	Constructionism	No
	Emphasis on philosophy	No
	Data collected through unstructured interviews	No
	Observations	No
	Interpretive or phenomenological analysis for data	No
	Study of concepts and how individuals experienced them	Yes
	Understanding how individuals collectively experienced a phenomenon	Yes
	Thorough literature review	Yes
	No theoretical framework	Yes
	Working with participants in context	Yes
	Review of documents	Yes
Ethnography (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013)	Deep description of group experiences	No
	Pragmatism	Yes
	Constructionism	Yes
	Research in the field	Yes
	Focus on groups of individuals	Yes
	No theoretical framework imposed	Yes
	Comprehensive literature review	Yes
	Review of documents	Yes
	Unstructured observations	No

	Use of coding systems	No
	High level of inference from data collected	No
	Description of data to tell a story	No
	Long duration in the field	No
Grounded theory (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013)	Development of theory about the case	No
	Pragmatism	Yes
	Constructivism	No
	Study of concepts, structures and processes	Yes
	Research in natural environment	Yes
	Review of documents	Yes
	Little personal disclosure in writing	No
	Often an outsider looking in	No
	Theory generation	No
	Partial/incomplete prior literature review	No
	Purposeful sampling	No
	Extensive field notes taken	No
	Axial, open and selective coding used to analyse data	No
Case study method (Cohen et al., 2011)	'Exploration in depth bounded by time and activity' (Cresswell, 2014)	Yes
	Pragmatism	Yes
	Constructionism	Yes
	A range of data collection methods	Yes
	Focused, intensive and narrow	Yes
	Cause and effect	Yes
	'Particularistic' rather than general	Yes
	Context bound	Yes
	Subjective creation of meaning	Yes
	Data from documents and interviews	Yes
	Data from direct and participant observation	No
	'Holistic', describes the whole 'case'	No
	Rich and vivid description	No
	Chronological narrative of related events	No

Prolonged reading about a range of traditional methodologies left me concerned that none supported me in answering my research question. I saw the research question as paramount and believed it should dictate my methodology, as opposed to the methodology being prime. This perspective was also noted by others who highlighted the centrality of the research question (Bryman, 2006; Chamberlain et al., 2011; Clarke and Visser, 2018; Feilzer,

2010). As I was unwilling to change my research question to fit the boundaries of the methodologies I had read about, I sought out a paradigm which recognised the complexity - or what Letherby (2003) termed the "messiness" - and lack of linearity in my research, For these reasons, I felt that working within the methodologies I had spent time considering and evaluating would have necessitated changing the research question - either radically for some of the methodologies, or at least partially for others (for a more detailed discussion of these issues see: [Clarke and Visser, 2018, 2019; Clarke, 2019]). As a result, being driven by the research question forced me to consider working between methodologies and drawing from a range of complementary approaches that would align when used in combination. Figure 2 builds on Table 1 and begins to show which aspects from other methodologies were combined within the pragmatic methodology used, and how the aspects complemented, rather than contradicted each other.
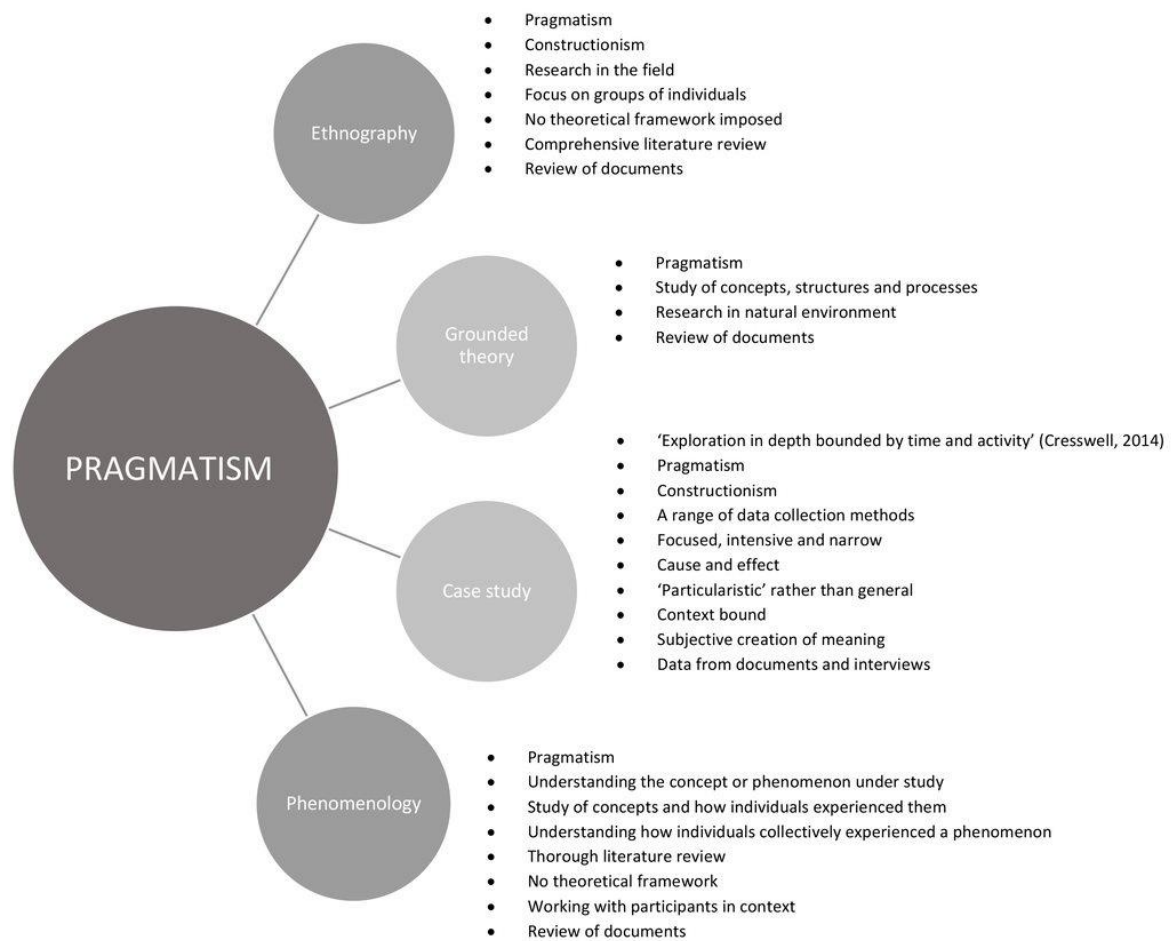
- Pragmatism
- Constructionism
- Research in the field
- Focus on groups of individuals
- No theoretical framework imposed
- Comprehensive literature review
- Review of documents

Ethnography

- Pragmatism
- Study of concepts, structures and processes
- Research in natural environment
- Review of documents

Grounded theory

- 'Exploration in depth bounded by time and activity' (Cresswell, 2014)
- Pragmatism
- Constructionism
- A range of data collection methods
- Focused, intensive and narrow
- Cause and effect
- 'Particularistic' rather than general
- Context bound
- Subjective creation of meaning
- Data from documents and interviews

Case study

PRAGMATISM

- Pragmatism
- Understanding the concept or phenomenon under study
- Study of concepts and how individuals experienced them
- Understanding how individuals collectively experienced a phenomenon
- Thorough literature review
- No theoretical framework
- Working with participants in context
- Review of documents

Phenomenology

Figure 2: Aspects from the range of methodologies considered blended under the pragmatic perspective.

Frost and Nolas (2011, p. 116) noted that unlike a single methodological approach, pragmatism enabled access to "actions, feelings and thoughts…issues of power, identity, meaning-making practices and interpretation, and practical, material challenges, all at the same time". These initially appeared to be aspects that were required in my research, or that may be required as the research developed. This encouraged me to proceeded with a pragmatic methodology that allowed me to embrace the tensions and uncertainties in my research, whilst providing what Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 18) described as a practical solution in the "middle ground between philosophical dogmatisms and scepticism".

Methods and pragmatism

Pragmatism provides the freedom to combine perspectives and methods of data collection, but only in so far as there is congruence to produce an holistic approach. Morgan (2007) noted the requirement for a close match in pragmatism between the data collection methods and the overarching epistemology which could be achieved through looking for associations, rather than unnaturally separating perceptions and understandings about the nature of knowledge from how it is collected.

Using a range of different methods was necessary to address my research question which focused on experiences and relationships. Figure 3 shows the process of data collection and the iterative pattern some stages took.
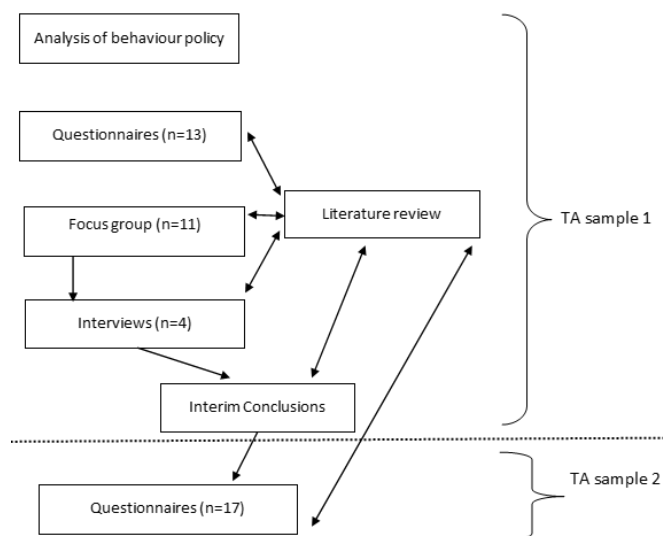
Figure 3: Stages of data collection

Initially, a document analysis of the school's behaviour policy was undertaken, including a consideration of the underlying assumptions of its authors (Cohen et al., 2011). Information from this policy document provided a comparison between TAs' day-to-day experiences with those set out in formal documentation where, as Charmaz (2014, p.76) proposed that "rhetoric may pale in the face of observed worlds". Document analysis was in

line with the phenomenological, ethnographic, grounded theory and case study methodologies previously discussed.

I then took approximately a month to review the initial notes I made from the analysis of the behaviour policy and to look more specifically at the themes from the literature review for similarities and differences. From this, I began to construct the questionnaire which followed. I used the same questionnaire with participants in sample one (n=13) and six months later with participants in sample two (n=17). I tabulated the responses and sought emerging themes from the open-answer questions and used contextual information from the closed-answer questions to make judgements about how similar participants were to the 'average' TA population described by literature. Again, a prolonged period of engaging with the data followed (4 weeks), where I considered responses in relation to the document analysis of the behaviour policy, ongoing literature review and the re-reading of previously considered literature. The use of questionnaires aligned with some case study and grounded theory approaches but was less well suited to phenomenological and ethnographic perspectives.

A focus group then followed which enabled me to flesh out and amplify understandings from the initial set of questionnaires (Kidd and Parshall, 2000; Robson, 2011). Wilkinson, (1998) noted that focus groups were particularly suited to exploratory, interpretive research questions - such as those in my research - which associated them more closely with phenomenology, ethnography and case studies than with grounded theory approaches.

The final set of data collected were individual interviews. These followed five weeks after the focus group with questions drawn from the new themes and issues arising from the focus group, existing ones from the behaviour policy, and aspects from the questionnaire that the focus group had either not touched on or not made clear. The time between each set of data collection allowed for reflexivity and constant engagement with the data, considering it from the perspective of the other sources collected, as well as published literature. It also gave me

space to consider how I was addressing, or needed to address, specific feminist research principles such as power, collaboration and being inclusive of a range of data (Cresswell, 2014; Usher, 1996). Utilising a variety of data collection methods to answer the research question rather than just to comply with specific methodological rules was important. If pure or traditional methodological approaches were adhered to, valuable sources of data may have been missed (Frost et al., 2010), "excluded, or silenced," (Morse and Chung, 2003, p. 15).

Analysis and pragmatism

The influence of methodological pragmatism was seen in my research findings through the ability to make my own existing biases and positionality clear, which would have been limited by some of the traditional approaches. It also enabled me to follow-up any themes which had not emerged from the comprehensive but tangential (due to no specific research being found in this area) literature review undertaken before the active phase of the research. Pragmatic methodologies do not prescribe data analysis and freedom is afforded in the choice of the best method. Due to the values I brought – both to the research and its subsequent interpretation from a social constructivist viewpoint (Cresswell, 2014) - analysis enabling the use of intuition and sensing (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013) was required. It was also necessary to utilise a technique that acknowledged an understanding of prior research, whilst being able to account for, as opposed to discounting, any findings that did not match with previous studies (Joffe, 2012). A method was required that provided flexibility as opposed to a unified entity (Gibson, 2010) and for these reasons, thematic analysis was used. Braun and Clarke (2013) defined thematic analysis as a method which afforded opportunities to identify and analyse patterns and assisted in "highlighting the most salient constellations of meaning" (Joffe, 2012, p. 214). The ability to identify patterns also began to address some of the limitations of existing research into TAs which do not currently do this (Giangreco, Suter and Doyle, 2010). This analysis, accepted by some as a method in its own right, was allied to the

constructionist epistemology of the research with a focus on the complexity of perspectives, rather than artificially restricting meanings into a few (possibly pre-defined) categories or themes (Cresswell, 2014; Joffe, 2012). Thematic analysis also allowed for the themes drawn out to emerge naturally, rather than using theoretically derived themes to support (or challenge) existing studies (Joffe, 2012).

Write-up and pragmatism

Ensuring the research is trustworthy can require additional justification when writing up and presenting findings which have been generated without the almost automatic guarantee of legitimacy some traditional methodologies can provide. When adhering to a traditional mono-methodology, reflexively considering the fit between methods and methodology - or even methodology, research question and epistemology - is not always an explicit stage. In practice, this means methodology and methods sections are much more detailed and clear than may usually be the case in order to explain and justify the congruence between epistemology, methodologies and methods. Providing a transparent account of how and why these decisions were made and which approaches have been blended is not always evident in write-ups where traditional methodologies have been used.

I will now reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of utilising a pragmatic approach, specifically as an ECR, sharing my own stakeholder perspective as well as how pragmatic approaches may support the communities of emerging researchers as well as those confident in blending methodologies. However, it must not be mistakenly assumed that blending in research is novel or new. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 22) note;

> Mixed research has a long history in research practice because practicing
>
> researchers frequently ignore what is written by methodologists when they feel

a mixed approach will best help them to answer their research questions. It is time that methodologists catch up with practicing researchers!

Limitations of pragmatism for an ERC

Proceeding from a pragmatic perspective did have limitations for my research and findings. Although the pragmatic methodology allowed for freedom and an eclectic approach, following a set of methodological rules or guidelines may have provided an objective or dispassionate reading of data, or even prescribed different forms of data collection. For example, observations could have been conducted to collect data on how TAs managed behaviour. Additionally, teachers could have been interviewed, invited to take part in a focus group, or completed questionnaires to elicit their views on TAs' management of behaviour. Although these methods were not chosen, as they did not foreground TAs' views and perspectives, they might have provided a useful counterview enabling comparisons to be drawn and to produce a more holistic perspective.

One of the key struggles for me as an ECR was that of credibility - both for my research and myself as a researcher. Any move away from the structure of traditional methodologies can, as Johnson et al. (2008) asserted, be mistaken for a lack of understanding of what they entail. Hammersley's (2000, p. 116) previous argument mirrors this, suggesting "methodological purism" is construed as meeting superior standards, whereas deviation from them results in research that is somewhat inferior. Chamberlain et al. (2011, p. 152) also perceived an implicit demand to follow specific, defined methods of researching and for the researcher to "be bound by whatever constraints this imposes". As a result, it is easy for ECRs to be attracted to the security of traditional, well-established methodologies and their procedures (Johnson, Long and White, 2008; Maggs-Rapport, 2000), even if they are not the

best fit for their research. Thomas and James (2006, p. 791) proposed traditional methodologies acted as a map and compass to help researchers "navigate the open terrain of qualitative enquiry", avoiding becoming trapped in what has variously been referred to as the "quagmire" (Chamberlain, 2000, p. 290) or "swamp" (Finlay, 2002, p. 212). This metaphorical narrative could be suggested to dissuade ECRs from considering anything other than traditional methodologies and thus avoid "perilous paths" (Finlay, 2002, p. 227).

Concerns for ECRs of doing research the right way (Thomas and James, 2006) can compel them to remain within the frameworks of well-known methodologies. This pressure can encourage ECRs to engage in an artificial form of methodological "acrobatics" (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 335) or "dances" (Janesick, 1994, p. 209) by striving to ensure, or even to force their research to conform to specific, categorical methodologies. This mirrors arguments about the "posturing" (Wolcott, 1992, as cited in Dillon et al., 2000, p. 19) qualitative researchers engaged in to assure their research is perceived as credible (Thorne et al., 1997) and echoes much older concerns over "methodolotry" (Gouldner 1967, as cited in Hammersley, 2000, p. 127) and the "fetishism of method" (Hills, 1959, as cited in Hammersley, 2000, p. 127). These issues are still current, with Thomas and James's (2006, p. 791) assertion that by adhering to a specific methodology a form of "alchemy" took place where research is automatically converted into something unquestionably safe and reliable. This "tyranny of method" as Sandelowski (2000, p. 335) termed it, may encourage ECRs to be gymnastic with their research, unnaturally forcing studies into the boundaries of conventional methodologies, following what Thomas and James (2006, p. 791) suggested was the "mirage of reliable knowing" that they represented. Although strictly following a prescribed methodology, or even methodolotry is able to provide researchers with security, Chamberlain (2000, p. 294) cautioned that this was a false security.

For my own study, as I was investigating an area with a paucity of specific existing research, I felt it was key not to be conservative or restricted, but to find a methodology that

was flexible enough to avoid squeezing or being a "straightjacket" (Chamberlain, 2000, p. 289) for my study. My initial steps into pragmatism as a methodology drew criticisms from peers who reviewed my work, suggesting that it sounded like I had just done what I wanted, reflecting some criticisms of pragmatism as a "sloppy mishmash by self-taught researchers" (Morse, 1991, as cited in Johnson et al., 2008, p. 244) This perception of pragmatic methodology as providing free reign to conduct research in whatever way one wishes, or form a purely practical perspective is anomalous. Selecting a pragmatic approach was worrisome as an ECR, considering accusations that it is an easy method, which suggests of a lack of care or certainty from the researcher (Dillon et al., 2000; Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). Critics of pragmatism suggest that it is a fast approach (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013) and contend that is focuses on action over philosophising (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, this did not represent my experience, which became significantly protracted and mired in philosophical debate. By some degree, the most time consuming and challenging aspect of my PhD was struggling to confidently state the case for my choice of a pragmatic methodology.

Advantages of pragmatism for an ECR

From my experience, the key advantage and disadvantage of utilising a pragmatic methodology are the same. Pragmatism affords the researcher freedom which can strengthen their research by allowing them to tailor the research process to their specific context, research question(s) and to use contextualised reasoning. However, this freedom can also cause problems for both the research and the participants. Freedom to blend methodologies results in a myriad of combinations and possibilities which, as in my case, can paralyse the researcher with the sheer number of options available to them. Working outside the boundaries can also,

unless great care is taken and choices are clearly justified, result in research which lacks philosophical and/or theoretical rigor (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013, p. 176).

The prolonged periods of reading, evaluating and reflexivity required to justify my methodological stance were for me, the main advantages and disadvantages of a pragmatic methodology. Moving away from the security of traditional methodologies - false or otherwise - forced me into becoming more questioning, reflexive and challenging (Mason, 2006, p. 20). Following on from my feminist groundings, I was keen that any methodology chosen should acknowledge the messiness, and non-sequential progress of my research. This is something that is rarely made clear, or embraced by pure methodological approaches which, at least from my initial understandings, appeared to present the misnomer of research as clean and hygienic. The constant process of questioning and re-examining that guided my research made me aware of why I was doing what I was doing, and "what difference it makes" made to select one way rather than another (Morgan, 2007, p. 68). Indeed, Johnson et al. (2008, p. 248) asserted it is this ongoing reflexive critique that supports "true rigor" in research, as opposed to simply working within the boundaries of traditional methodologies. This was also highlighted by Chamberlain et al., (2011) who stated that "sound reflexive work enables researchers to be better informed about ways methodology and methods shape and constrain the knowledge generated" (p. 153).

A pragmatic methodology in my research afforded me the freedom to blend complimentary aspects from a range of qualitative methodologies and utilise a range of data collection methods, focusing specifically on selecting what was best to answer my research question. Pragmatism acknowledges no single methodology or method is wholly advantageous or disadvantageous, but may be of greater or lesser use in fulfilling the aims of the research (Sandelowski, 2000). Using it forced me to focus on the investigation at hand and be acutely aware of the impact of how research was conducted, and how the range of methodologies and

methods influenced the findings and ability to answer the research question. Pragmatism made me a more considered researcher as the steps on the journey were not mapped out but were emergent. This required constant reflexive consideration of where to go next and how best to do it within the feminist and constructionist guiding principles. This in turn resulted in much slower and more deliberate choices which needed significant additional reading to justify their use, and feel confident in their selection.

Over the course of the research, I slowly became more confident with Mason's (2006, p. 20) suggestion of thinking outside the box and of moving away from what has been portrayed as the "methodological tribalism" (Lamont and Swidler, 2014, p. 154) of pinning my colours to only one methodological mast. Morse and Chung (2003) cautioned that researchers could unintentionally and inadvertently restrict their investigations by utilising only one qualitative method, and from my perspective as an ECR moving away from the perceived correct methods and freeing my research from the squeeze of traditional methodologies developed my research as well as my own skills as a researcher.

Conclusion

Ending up with a "sloppy mish-mash" (Morse, 1991, as cited in Johnson et al., 2008, p. 244) as opposed to a coherent flow between epistemology and research can be one outcome of trialling pragmatic methodologies. However, this can be negated by explicitly and systematically considering and then articulating the elements highlighted by Caelli et al. (2003, p. 5) which include "the theoretical positioning of the researcher; the congruence between methodology and methods; the strategies to establish rigor; and the analytic lens through which data are examined." These can serve as reflexive markers and begin to provide a structure and framework to avoid accusations of carelessness ot incongruence. Perhaps the key question

anyone utilising pragmatic methodologies needs to ask and answer at each stage of the research is, as Morgan (2014) highlighted, *why* before *how*.

My experience of combining and integrating different qualitative methods and methodologies within a pragmatic approach, as an ECR, was a challenging but a positive one. Looking for connections between perspectives and paradigms as a way to avoid the methodological squeeze pushed me to develop a more thorough understanding of methodologies and methods than I would have gained by utilising a single traditional approach. Working outside the boundaries of well-established methodologies offered me a range of options and possibilities beyond what I saw as the methodological squeeze, and pressed me to be significantly more reflexive, questioning, and thoughtful than I may otherwise have been.

To conclude, the choice of a pragmatic methodology not only developed my research, but also my skills as an ECR, including that of reflexivity. Pragmatic methodologies have been suggested to not only support individual qualitative researchers - but the whole research community where "building bridges, not digging deep moats is the key to fostering a strong field" (Lamont and Swidler, 2014, p. 167). The possibilities pragmatism can offer for innovatively mixing, combining, and integrating qualitative methods can provide emerging and multidisciplinary researchers with new perspectives and ways of doing things. In education, this can include researching questions in different ways to add breadth and depth to existing research through diversifying methods rather than replicating established ways of doing things. The ability to focus on action and answering questions through a pragmatic methodology also reinforces the possibilities for research findings to affect practice in education as well as enhancing the existing bodies of research and knowledge.

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