

Journal of Research Practice
Volume 2, Issue 1, Article E1, 2006



Editorial:

Immaculateness and Research Practice

D. P. Dash

Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar 751013, INDIA
professor_dash@yahoo.co.uk

Héctor R. Ponce

Universidad de Santiago de Chile, Facultad de Administración y Economía, Av. L.B.
O'Higgins 3363 Estación Central, Santiago, CHILE
hponce@pegaso.usach.cl

Gerard de Zeeuw

Faculty of Business and Law, University of Lincoln, UK
Address for correspondence: Glebe Farm, Brattleby LN1 2SQ, UK
zeeuw@science.uva.nl

Suggested Citation: Dash, D. P., Ponce, H. R., & Zeeuw, G. de. (2006).
Immaculateness and research practice [Editorial]. *Journal of Research Practice*, 2(1),
Article E1. Retrieved [date of access], from
<http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/27/64>

1. Quality Creation within Research

Notions of purity, perfection, or immaculateness have powered our imagination over the ages. Various images of perfection have held sway in their hallowed times, providing secure streams for channelling human energy. Unfortunately, with the unfolding of the human drama on the world stage, all the images of perfection have suffered damage, epoch on epoch.

Different responses have emerged to attempt a restoration. Revival of some of the old images is one such response. Production of new images to serve as worthwhile anchors of value and meaning is another common response. For reasons possibly known only to philosophers and historians, the enterprise called modern science has got thickly embroiled in this civilisational process--first, as the culprit behind the decline of some of the established images, then as the producer of new images, and now, perhaps, as a constant reminder of the perpetual lack of purity and immaculateness in all things human.

In contemporary understanding, science does not relate to some world of absolutes. For any phenomenon under investigation, typically a multiplicity of theories exists at any one point in time. Individual researchers, depending upon their specific research tools and methods, research designs, their socialisation in research communities, and their personal preferences, leave a multiplicity of tracts. For every particular tract explored, there remain other tracts unexplored.

It is like climbing a tree. At the first fork, we choose--or, [rather] 'nature' or the experimental outcome chooses--to go to the right branch or the left; at the next fork, to left or right; and so on. There are similar branch points in a 'conditional computer program,' where the next move depends on the result of the last calculation. (Platt, 1964, p. 347)

Every scientific progress opens up new tracts, all of which may not be equally interesting to researchers, and their customers and employers--not to mention their financial sponsors. Only a few tracts succeed in attracting researchers' attention. Evidently, uncertainty remains a permanent feature of scientific results.

This uncertainty of science, or more particularly of *research practice* (using the term to embrace a broader domain, including most forms of organised inquiry), challenges us to question any notion of quality we adopt within research. On the one hand, research favours scepticism, i.e., researchers can question anything perceived or conceived earlier; on the other hand, research cannot justify itself without claiming some quality for its results that transcends researchers' time and place. How can a process of inquiry sustain itself by using ingredients perceived or conceived by humans, ingredients which are inherently biased, imperfect, and questionable, and yet arrive at results that at least remind us of things immaculate and pure? We think the place to look for answers to this paradox is precisely in the middle of research practice, which this journal aims to explore.

As might be expected, such answers depend upon our creativity as much as they do on the way things, ideas, or even people come together. Sometimes the additional quality is due to the very biasedness of the participants, for example by bringing to the fore some neglected perspective or by encouraging them to switch between perspectives. Sometimes, the lack of biasedness, i.e., lack of diversity, may help us point in a direction, but that direction may not guarantee any transcendental quality. In any case, what appears to have been achieved through research may or may not last.

The articles in this issue provide an impressive display of the scope and potential of research practice. All authors, each in his or her own way, aim to shed light on how they think quality is created in their research work--thereby highlighting the vitality of research practice and, of course, its frailties.

The authors come from many different disciplinary backgrounds, such as anthropology, architecture and planning, behavioural science, business economics, communication studies, education, information history, innovation studies, management, practical philosophy, social systems design, social work, sociolinguistics, tourism studies, and

translation studies. They are from different parts of the world: Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, Switzerland, UK, and USA. The referees who collaborated in the review process show an even wider spread of disciplinary and geographical backgrounds. Still, each article touches on difficulties that stem from a common theme: *doing research*. Thus, we think the present issue reflects the transdisciplinary and global aspirations of JRP rather well.

2. Articles in this Issue

There are three *Main Articles*. In the first main article, “Auto-Photography as Research Practice: Identity and Self-Esteem Research” (Article M1), **Carey M. Noland** introduces the readers to an innovative solution to the problems of researching identity and self-esteem. Photography is introduced as providing a new language in which people can express their notions of self. Moreover, Noland’s approach also ensures that the research process has a liberating and enabling effect on the participants--in her case, school-going Latina girls and immigrant Indian women in the US.

In the next article, “Being Bilingual: Issues for Cross-Language Research” (Article M2), **Bogusia Temple** draws upon the fields of sociolinguistics and translation studies to explore the world of bilingual researchers and the issues surrounding their roles and capacities. Temple argues against the stereotypes concerning linguistic minorities in a host country, highlighting the complexities involved in doing research on their social experiences. This indirectly calls upon social researchers to be reflective about their own processes of constitution of self and how these might influence the outcomes of their research.

The third main article, “A Continuation of Paul Grobstein’s Theory of Science as Story Telling and Story Revising: A Discussion of its Relevance to History” (Article, M3), by **Toni Weller**, is an interesting development based on an article by Paul Grobstein published earlier in the inaugural issue of JRP (Volume 1, Issue 1, 2005). Building on her background in information history, Weller uses Grobstein’s metaphor of “story”--originally used by Grobstein to talk about scientific theories, for her purpose of exploring the process of historical research. Accordingly, she postulates significant parallels among these two broad domains of inquiry: science and history. To some extent, this paves the path for researchers to explore the possibilities of learning from each other--irrespective of our disciplinary affiliations.

There are three articles in the *Research Design* section. **Tracey Crosbie’s** “Using Activity Diaries: Some Methodological Lessons” (Article D1) should interest those who study how people use their time in their day-to-day lives. Her discussion focuses on the users of information and communication technologies.

Bodil Stilling Blichfeldt and Jesper Rank Andersen call for some cross-fertilisation between two forms of research practice in their article, “Creating a Wider Audience for Action Research: Learning from Case-Study Research” (Article D2).

Anne Probert takes us through an interesting journey of her search for a methodological basis for her own doctoral research, in her article, “Searching for an Appropriate Research Design: A Personal Journey” (Article D3).

There is one *Provocative Idea* from **Zvi Bekerman**, “It’s We, the Researchers, Who are in Need of Renovation” (Article P1). He focuses on the dimensions of power and identity as they shape our educational and research practice. He calls upon researchers and educators to seek methods of engagement that sensitise students to the processes that construct and maintain various positions of power.

Finally, there is a *Review* article by **Werner Ulrich**, “The Art of Observation: Understanding Pattern Languages” (Article R1). It reflects on Christopher Alexander’s 1979 book, *The Timeless Way of Building*, which has recently been rediscovered and has become a cult book among researchers in information technology and other fields. Having identified the essence of Alexander’s *pattern language* in its capacity for linking high-quality observations and design, he postulates the general relevance of this kind of capacity for researchers in different realms.

To us, these articles speak of processes that extend the worlds of their protagonists. For instance school-going Latina girls, immigrant Indian women, bilingual researchers, historians, technology users, action researchers, doctoral scholars, teachers, and designers of built environments, all appear to try and “immaculatise” their perceptions in some way or other--while taking care not to lose their diversity and real-lifeness (De Zeeuw, 2006). Of course, we clearly value remaining aware that looking for the pure does not necessarily mean finding or imposing it.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Anupam Saraph (anupamsaraph@gmail.com), Claudia Krenz (cloudk@gsi.net), and Mike Metcalfe (mike.metcalfe@unisa.edu.au) for the interesting discussion we had on “Talking about Research” in the *Research_Practice* online discussion group, in January 2006. Some of the ideas presented in this editorial were triggered by that discussion.

References

- Zeeuw, G. de. (2006, January 17). Talking about research [Msg 153]. Message posted to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Research_Practice/message/153
- Platt, J. R. (1964). Strong inference. *Science*, 146, 347-353. Retrieved February 24, 2006, from http://www.krisweb.com/biblio/gen_science_platt_1964_stronginference.pdf