

Research Method as Crucible: A Transpersonal Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

TRANSPERSONAL RESEARCH PARADIGM

■ A. Research is 'engaged as a transformative process' (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p.147) and proceeds 'imaginatively' through defined stages and operations (methodology).

1. The transpersonal paradigm can be defined as a 'synthesis of spiritual and psychological perspectives'. The 'spiritual' relates to a unifying, interconnected, all-encompassing consciousness or Dynamic Ground (Washburn, 1995). This synthesis can be experienced as the realisation of Self in the world. Jung (1959/1991) refers to Kircher's concise description of this synthesis: "*Everything perceived by the senses must therefore be elevated to reason or to the intelligence or to absolute unity*" (p.263). Kircher neatly describes the process for us: "...*the perceiving senses go back to reason, and reason to intelligence, and intelligence to God...*" (p.263). This process of becoming Self parallels that of research where "*The universal becomes known through the deep and intensive study of the particular...*" (Braud & Anderson, 1998).

The research process goes through defined stages and operations in search of a truth or 'absolute unity' that will emerge from raw inputs. It will often be the response to a question held close to the heart of the researcher. It can be paralleled to the ancient practices of alchemy which also focused on uncovering the absolute Unity in the shape of the Philosopher's Stone. The honest pursuit of this process will likely transform the researcher.

2. The journey of human transformation has been described as individuation (Jung, 1959), self-actualisation (Maslow, 1968) or self-realisation (Ramana Maharshi, 1972/1998). Jung was one of the first western psychologists to draw parallels between the ancient alchemical texts and the process of individuation (1953/1989). The research process is thus similarly analogous – it could even be the 21st century equivalent of alchemy. The conscious and dedicated application of the researcher to the operations of the study will directly effect its outcome. "*Especially in the study of complex human phenomenon, the most robust research methods follow the ontogeny of the researcher's own experience of the phenomenon studied. Ontogeny, derived from the pr.*"

part. of einai (Gk.) meaning “to be” and from genes (Gk.) meaning “born”, signifies a course of development. The researcher positions the inquiry from within her or his unique and personal experience.”
(Anderson, 2000, p.6)

Research can be a dry, intellectual and lifeless pursuit or it can be the very transformative and energising process of Life itself. For the alchemist, chemistry was the secularisation of a sacred science (Eliade, 1956). Perhaps transpersonal research is the resacralisation of the psychologically scientific approaches of recent centuries?

■ **B. Researcher/question/observations/method are all equal parts of the Work.**

1. The transpersonal research paradigm very much recognizes the interconnectedness of all these elements. It differs in perspective from the rationalist notion of objectivity and sees research as more closely aligned to emergent quantum theory (sub-atomic physics) which acknowledges that ‘...the constituents of matter and the basic phenomena involving them are all interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent; that they cannot be understood as isolated entities...’ (Capra, 2000, p.131)
2. Braud & Anderson (1998) distinguish between a *separateness science* and a *wholeness science* – feeling that the latter is better suited to honouring the complex phenomenon of human experience. They define an expanded view of research that reflects an integrated role of research and researcher. This view emphasises the conscious engagement of all aspects of research.
3. When viewing a research project holistically in this way one needs to engage consciously with each of the known aspects of the Work (research) especially ourselves. “...continual, dynamic interplay among research, practical application, and personal development loosens and dissolves the boundaries among these three areas. The states of being that develop in one area allow particular types of knowing to occur in other areas, and sensitivities mold being and being molds sensitivities in an endless cocreative, dialogical dance.” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p.22). “We behold that which we are” (Underhill 1911/1969, p.436).

■ **C. The process of transformation (and research) involves tumultuous and challenging operations and stages well defined within the alchemical framework**

1. Given the open, integral and interconnected nature of research as characterised here one can see the potential for overwhelming experience. Arguably, change *must* overwhelm. The phases of work defined in Arabian Western alchemy (Eliade, 1978) as nigredo, albedo, citrinitas, rubedo etc. all involve a breaking down to and reforming of *prima materia*. Other traditions describe processes in terms of death, chaos and resurrection. The alchemists understood that the undertaking of these processes upon matter (research questions and data) meant their *own* initiation and transformation.
2. As the quantum physicists would remind us, the observation of a phenomenon will possibly change it. Psychology tells us that the observation or perception of a phenomenon will change a subject's relationship to it – and thus change the subject. It is easy to conceive how much change in perception might occur with the in-depth study and contemplation of a question close to a researcher's heart.
3. Capturing as much as possible of the insight and experience generated from these operations and stages must be desirable. Good use of method enables the journey or process to be captured as much as the final conclusions or outputs. The process as a whole leads to the *Lapis Philosophorum* – in this case the most meaningful of theses and personal reward.
4. This paper proposes that 'containment' at all the stages of the research process facilitates and possibly enables the operations and transformations to occur. There are many different types of containment depending on the aspect of the research process in question. The researcher will be contained by his/her own ego strength, by a therapist, by a tutor, by destiny. The Work will, to some extent be contained by the Masters programme, by the Centre etc. That said, a significant container of the process, the crucible itself even, is the research method.
5. The defined stages of the research study need containment; researcher preparation, gathering and collection of data, analysis and integration of data, collation of findings and hypotheses/theories, reporting and presentation of findings etc. Further reflection could be given as to how this might be undertaken.
6. For today we concern ourselves with the meta-container. Your thesis will require your thought and reflection on a methodology that will set the overall approach for your research study. Our discussion will endeavour to make some of these reflections conscious – to flesh out the elements you might consider in making this choice - and thus engage consciously with the building of a Crucible.



ROLE OF THE RESEARCH METHOD AS CONTAINER/CRUCIBLE

- A. *Stable foundation for operations (process)*
 - 1.. The qualities of the container are critical to ensuring stability and groundedness in the Work. Conscious use of methodology in all its stages provides rigour in observation and perception, clarity of communication (participants, researcher, tutor, reviewer), review of existing ideas etc. The more stable the container, the more stable the operations that take place therein. Importantly good use of method can help the researcher maintain his/her stability during a tumultuous process.
 2. Detailed research creates a volume of data and findings that can be overwhelming (*massa confusa*). Method provides a way through the overwhelming mass. It can provide signposts and roadmaps for ways of perceiving and interpreting that help to refine and consolidate the messages arising. Properly contained, “...nothing can compare to the joy that comes from discovery.” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.14)
- B. *Defines area for examination and sets out stall for recording and processing data (operations)*
 1. In order for examination to be effective it helps to define appropriately the area of interest. Good use of method will encourage a thorough discussion of what material or phenomena are under study. This may in turn be refined as part of the process but these movements will be made more consciously if the original intentions have been made clear. All of this will contribute to greater insight into, and understanding of, the question at hand. “*Methods extend and magnify our view of studied life and thus broaden and deepen what we learn of it and know about it.*” (Charnaz, 2006, p.14)
 2. Questions may change for many reasons. Making changes consciously allows the researcher to clearly understand her/his reasons for making them. The reasons for making them are always part of the Work itself. “*We can add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure entire new puzzles – while we gather data...*” (Charnaz, 2006, p.14). That said loosely defined ‘territory’ at the outset will obfuscate the processes taking place within the research process itself and make for weaker conclusions. One needs to understand what is happening within the research process since it is inherently linked to the subject under study. If you understand clearly the point you are at when you start you are more easily able to see why and how you wander from it.
- C. *Enables close and precise study of phenomena/effects*

1. As previously mentioned, the research generates an overwhelming volume of data. For example, within an interview; words, tone, silences, body language, intuitions, inter-psychic and intra-psychic phenomena, non-spoken sounds, silences, external dynamics etc. Beyond the interview there are still more dynamics at play; parallel processes, handling of data, researcher experience, tutorial inputs and process etc.
2. A rigorous approach to method will help the researcher to draw out the inputs most relevant to his/her inquiry. It will provide guidance as to where to focus attention in order to draw out the finding and it will keep this approach consistent through the Work. Consistency helps to improve the quality of insight that emerges – I can't reasonably compare the effect of a particular flour for baking if I vary the recipe each time. I can know that various effects are possible using the flour but do not gain much insight into its role.

“Choose methods that help you answer your research question with ingenuity and incisiveness. How you collect you data affects which phenomena you will see, how, where and when you will view them, and what sense you will make of them.” (Charnaz, 2006, p.15)



CONSIDERATIONS IN SELECTING METHOD AND PREPARING CRUCIBLE

- A. *Attributes of research question/inquiry:*
 1. What is your interest? What are you trying to learn?
e.g. problem-solving, curiosity/wonder, appreciation or nomothetic (control) to ideographic (understand) (Braud & Anderson)
 2. What is your purpose? What do you want to do with the research?
 3. Individual or general? Sole or participative?
 4. Phenomenological or interpretative?
 5. Inner world or outer world?
 6. Who is your audience?

“Let your research problem shape the methods you choose.” (Charnaz, 2006)
- B. *Attributes of researcher:*
 1. Motivation for research?
 2. Personality type? What complements? Tolerance for ambiguity vs. control and certitude?
 3. What 'edge' is currently surrounding your personal

process?

4. What do you know about your own container/boundaries? Where do you need help?
5. What methods are you averse/attached to? Why?

A study by Mitroff & Kilman (1978) looked at possible congruencies between research interests and styles and personalities; sensing-thinking type = Analytical Scientist, intuitive-thinking type = Conceptual Theorist, intuitive-feeling type = Conceptual Humanist, sensing-feeling type = Particular Humanist.

“We are not passive receptacles into which data are poured.” (Charnaz, 2006)

“Characteristics such as the researcher’s background, training, skills, sensitivities, biases, expectations, judgements, and temperament can affect, and potentially distort, any and all phase of a research project...” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p.16)

■ C. *Attributes of Research Method:*

1. Qualitative/quantitative
2. Phenomenological/experimental
3. Intuitive/analytical
4. Co-operative/personal
5. Role of self/other
6. Open/hypothesised

- D. Much of this ‘container’ consciousness can be applied to many other decisions you face regarding your research. “As within, so without. As above, so below”. The extent to which you engage with the containment and operations of your Work will directly relate to your feeling about its benefit.

IV DISCUSSION

- A. What questions are you considering? What do you observe about their relevance to you?
- B. What insight strikes you when you consider the research as a transformative process?
- C. What methods are you drawn to or averse to? Do you know why?
- D. What qualities do you feel your process might benefit from if you were looking for balance (thinking elementally perhaps)?

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