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Giving voices a chance

In search of self-reflexivity and reciprocity in research

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Giving voices a chance
In search of self-reflexivity and reciprocity in research

(Michael Schratz)

Research tribes, territories and other academic domains

The word 'voice' has been chosen for the title of this paper to throw light on aspects which are often faded out in educational research. They play an important part in social research with a particular view to the informants who provide what is generally called 'the data' in the research process. However, I do not understand the term in its formal use, when it might be regarded as a mere sound formed in larynx etc. and uttered by mouth esp. human utterance in speaking, shouting, singing, etc. as The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English states. This

explanatory phrase from a dictionary only forms the largest denominator in defining the term for general reference. Definitions offer a very sterile view of the world because they define reality as part of a social convention where a defined term has to account for all the other occurrences in any setting and situation where it may also occur. In everyday behaviour people's voices depend on the individual interpretation of a given role within specific contexts. Traditional research approaches, however, try to standardize their findings in order to make the results seem objective and thus comparable with other samples and transferable to any situation of a similar kind. They have their origin in applied science, which used to be the model for other 'scientific' disciplines. That is why in its beginning educational research also 'borrowed' its methods from the so-called 'harder' sciences, which then helped the so-called 'softer' sciences to find a place in the privileged sphere of academia.

The attractions of placing educational theory and research on scientific foundations are obvious enough. Over the last few centuries science has provided a corpus of knowledge about the natural world which has enabled the environment to be controlled with ever-greater sophistication and has allowed for a range of practical problems that were once considered insurmountable to be successfully resolved. If the methods of science are enlisted by educational research, then the seemingly intransigent problems of education can be overcome and practical progress achieved. Just as science allows us to control the natural world, so it will allow us to control education and make it more congruent with the needs of society and its members. (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, 51-52)

In order to be accepted in the conventional standard of academic discourse, researchers in the field of education had to use their informants' voices in the same way as members in 'established' research areas. Therefore, although the researchers seem to represent different 'tribes' in the disciplinary 'territories' of a university setting (cf. Becher, 1989), which occupy different spaces on the scale of social reproduction (cf. Bourdieu, 1985; Huber, 1990), they usually show little difference in their research approaches. The common view of social scientific enquiries as an applied science built upon the positivistic view of the aims, concepts and methods in the natural sciences has been based on the assumption that society represents an equally 'objective' basis for research as nature. By introducing the quality criteria of objectivity, validity and reliability, attempts have been made by their advocates to 'standardise' the differences inherent to human interaction in any segment of society.

Accordingly, educational research based on quantitative measurement, variables, experimentation and operationalization transfers the original 'voices' of its research subjects into statistical data, mathematical relations or other abstract parameters. Therefore very little is left of the social context in which educational practices occur. What is left over represents the 'noise' in the transmission of data and is reduced to its minimal disturbance in the research process. Thus the original voices from the field become the 'disembodied' voices in the discourse of quantitative research presented through reports, articles and books. Research methods, however, cannot simply be 'borrowed' from one domain and 'applied' in

another. The main reason for this lies in the fundamental difference between the areas of application in the natural and social sciences, which Giddens explains in the following way:

The difference between society and nature is that nature is not man-made, is not produced by man. Human beings, of course, transform nature, and such transformation is both the condition of social existence and a driving force of cultural development. But nature is not a human production; society is. While not made by any single person, society is created and recreated afresh, if not ex nihilo, by the participants in every social encounter. The production of society is a skilled performance, sustained and 'made to happen' by human beings. It is indeed only made possible because every (competent) member of society is a practical social theorist; in sustaining any sort of encounter he draws upon his knowledge and theories, normally in an unforced and routine way, and the use of these practical resources is precisely the condition of the production of the encounter at all. Such resources (which I shall later call generically 'mutual knowledge') as such are not corrigible in the light of the theories of social scientists, but are routinely drawn upon by them in the course of any researches they may prosecute. That is to say, a grasp of the resources used by members of society to generate social interaction is a condition of the social scientist's understanding of their conduct in just the same way as it is for those members themselves. While this is easily appreciated by an anthropologist who visits an alien culture, and who seeks to describe the conduct he observes, it is not as transparent to anyone studying conduct within a familiar cultural frame, who tends to take the mutual knowledge he shares with his subjects for granted. (Giddens, 1976, 15-16)

In recent years, therefore, many researchers have become increasingly disenchanted with the academic process of 'noise reduction' by suppressing the more disturbing aspects representing the individuality of human cognition in the domain of pedagogy. As a consequence, different voices of researchers have been heard within the scientific community, suggesting more or less scientifically grounded ways to understand and improve educational practices. By paying more attention to the original voices of the actors in everyday life they try to make room for a broader view of the social reality in their research. This has led researchers to break with some of the established conventions of objectivity, reliability and validity.

An account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise. Assumed here, then, is a correspondence theory of truth, but the correspondence involves selective representation rather than reproduction of reality. Furthermore, I recognise that we can never know with certainty whether (or the extent to which) an account is true; for the obvious reason that we have no independent, immediate and utterly reliable access to reality. Given this is the situation, we must judge the validity of claims on the basis of the adequacy of the evidence offered in support of them. (Hammersley, 1992, 69)

Other authors argue that the distinction between the various claims of

'reliability', 'validity', 'falsifiability', 'verifiability', 'bias' and 'objectivity' are - on the level of the existing culture - confounded with the dominant male culture of the university environment (cf. Morgan, 1986). It is not surprising that feminist research has recently become the spearhead for innovation in qualitative research (see for example Harding, 1986; Lather, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1983), since women's voices have been oppressed individually and collectively in the history of mankind. After the loss of the theoretical hegemony of positivism several new forms of inquiry have tried to break through the methodological orthodoxy in the social sciences through critical approaches, and especially feminist approaches have worked towards greater self-reflexivity and reciprocity in the research process.

Research as a self-reflexive process

Nadig and Erdheim (1984) tried to show how scientific experience is usually destroyed by the academic milieu. They argue that when we stick to academic routines emotional parts are suppressed into the subconscious, from where they destroy the liveliness of academic study and research in an uncontrolled and destructive way. In order to pay more attention to the more disturbing qualities of everyday life, we have to see research as an interactive process in its socio-cultural context. In order to pay more attention to the dynamics of social interactions in everyday activities recent developments in educational theory and research have taken place with a view towards creating

- a better understanding of what it means to do research in human settings and
- the 'invention' of appropriate methods to serve this overall understanding.

They aim at changing the nature of pedagogical knowledge by allowing the emotive and often more disturbing qualities of individuals in their culture to penetrate the research process. Therefore researchers direct their studies with a minimum of interference within the authentic situation of their field of study. To achieve this, the research instruments have to be tuned to enable the study of educational practices as closely as possible without destroying the authentic meaning for the people involved. This research perspective adopts new methods of dealing with the everyday world of education, which in the

distinctive qualities of a character's discourse always strive for a certain social significance, a social breath (Bakhtin, 1981, 333). These qualities mirror the individual's struggle for his or her identity in a world of uniformity. Vygotsky (1986, 187) called it a 'zone of proximal development', which helps people in negotiating meaning between themselves, others - or their alter egos (where others are absent) - and the issue at hand. Similarly, this meaning has to be created in educational research, where at least the following are involved:

- a research interest or question, usually based on a problem;
- one or more people under study, usually referred to as 'subjects';
- a researcher or a group of researchers;

- a socio-cultural context in which the research takes place;
- aspects of space and time.

Research only occurs if these elements are related to each other, as is indicated by the following figure.

Insert figure 1 about here

Questions are usually the starting point for research activities, but they already form the framework for inquiry. Thus, for example, a questionnaire represents an instrument which mirrors the context in which knowledge is formed and at the same time focuses on the parts of the problem the researcher(s) show(s) interest in. Therefore research questions are always embedded in this wider epistemological context, as are the researcher(s) and the research 'subject(s)'. For Popkewitz

Epistemology provides a context in which to consider the rules and standards by which knowledge about the world is formed, the distinctions and categorizations that organize perceptions, ways of responding to the world, and the conception of "self." (1991, 15)

Since interactions always take place in the wider context of the social, cultural and political domain, so it is that research methods applied in a certain situation also have to take their epistemological aspects into consideration. According to Lather (1991) three shifts in recent methodological considerations have taken place: The first shift is one from emphasis on general theorizing to problems of interpretation and description. For her a

problem in terms of description/interpretation is the foregrounding of one's own perspectivity. Can this be anything but an intrusive voice? How do we explore our own reasons for doing the research without putting ourselves back at the center? (91)

The second shift refers to "the textual staging of knowledge", which represents the attempt to give the original voices in research more room, as can be seen in interview studies or in the presentation of authentic texts recorded in their original context.

Turning the text into a display and interaction among perspectives and presenting material rich enough to bear re-analysis in different ways brings the reader into the analysis via a dispersive impulse which fragments univocal authority. Such writing works against the tendency to become the locus of authority; it is writing that probes the blind spots of the interpreters' own conceptualizations and attends to its own constitutive elements. (91)

The third shift is one towards a focus on the social relations of the research act itself. Since the relations among the people involved mediate the construction of knowledge, this process has a political moment, which takes place at the fundamental level of 'doing' research. Therefore the results achieved in the research process always depend on the power relationship among the people involved: the individual researcher(s) and the other members of the research group on the one hand and their

individual and collective interactions with the other people involved in the research process on the other. The space for moving on to the original research goal is not only limited by the interactional framework but also by the here and now of the situation and the respective socio-cultural context. Therefore, educational researchers have to readjust their individual steps of action according to the socio-dynamics of the interactive process within the situational context. Thus, similarly to Schön's 'reflection in action' processes (1983), this readjustment of the original programme design leads to what could be called 'design in action'. As shown in figure 1, a research programme cannot develop outside the time and space limits defined by the people involved and both the interactive capacities and the socio-cultural context. Since people involved in research are usually busy achieving their research results, they pay little attention to the interdependency of these aspects. Time and space have so far often been regarded as signposts of 'objectivity' since they can be measured in terms of standardised measuring devices. Yet, neither time nor space can be assigned objective meanings even within the socio-cultural domain

Beneath the veneer of common-sense and seemingly 'natural' ideas about space and time, there lie hidden terrains of ambiguity, contradiction, and struggle. Conflicts arise not merely out of admittedly diverse subjective appreciations, but because different objective material qualities of time and space are deemed relevant to social life in different situations. Important battles likewise occur in the realms of scientific, social, and aesthetic theory, as well as in practice. How we represent space and time in theory matters, because it affects how we and others interpret and then act with respect to the world. (Harvey, 1989, 205)

As for changing the socio-cultural framework in which research takes place, the interactional pattern involved depends very much on the individual and collective behaviour of the people involved. Similar to what Popkewitz attributes to the intellectual who

becomes the expert in legitimation, influencing moral conduct and direction of will by controlling the communications through which a society establishes purpose and describes and evaluates its institutional conditions (1984, 185)

researchers establish purpose through their own actions and interactions embedded in the situational context and their conceptions of space and time. Moreover historical processes within a (research) group, regular occurrences in field work, structural conditions and the actions of particular individuals contribute to persistence and change in doing research. In a research process each chain of events has, as its consequence, a new formation that rejoins the events in such a way that there are new conditions and circumstances in action. This socio-dynamic process and its complex conception of causality makes it difficult to inquire critically into the multitude of interdependent actions (cf. Schratz, 1993a). In the following section I offer an insight into the workings of 'collective self-reflection' as a means of redesigning the research agenda, which might help in deconstructing the psycho-social

realities in a research group.

Reflection on collaboration: Re-living collective processes

Committing oneself to educational research activities which cover a certain time has consequences on different levels. For the researcher it means spending a lot of time planning, realizing and evaluating one's research programme so as to achieve desirable results. Afterwards a professional audience is needed for the findings to be implemented in educational practices or at least discussed among as many interested people in the scientific community as possible. Very often, however, research reports end up in a drawer or get dusty on a bookshelf without practical consequences. Everybody who has been involved in a research project for a longer stretch of time knows that there is also another level of experience which is rarely mentioned in project reports. It consists of the multifold structure of relationships of human beings who are willing to venture into the experience of several months and years of research work, usually without knowing a lot about the inner dynamics of such an academic adventure. Although everybody who has taken part in collective research knows how intensely research activities can affect the members of a team, very little research has recently been done on how the interactions within the research group influence the research process itself and vice versa.

In order to deconstruct the ideological impact of the group processes involved, the interactions among scientists doing educational research have to be studied from a distant perspective. According to Altrichter (1990) it is an expressive indicator for the consciousness of a research process how the people involved find the balance between distance from and involvement in the respective actions. Historical processes within a (research) group, regular occurrences in field work, structural conditions and the actions of particular individuals contribute to persistence and change in doing research. In a research process each chain of events has, as its consequence, a new formation that rejoins the events in such a way that there are new conditions and circumstances in action. This socio-dynamic process and its complex conception of causality makes it difficult to inquire critically into the multitude of interdependent actions.

To engage in critical inquiry into the socio-dynamic aspects of educational research it is necessary to analyze the research process from a meta-communicative point of view. Metacommunication is communication about how people interact among each other, how successfully communication takes place, how people behave in certain situations and so on. In the socio-dynamic approach to educational research this metacommunication is achieved by means of phases of self-reflection, which offer a good way

- to throw light on the (usually hidden) motives of the individual members of a research group,
- to deconstruct the individual perception of the research process and to decipher the social construction of certain key situations involved,
- to analyze the research process according to certain discursive patterns used in collaborative work,
- to put research findings into a broader context of the wider educational community or even society at large,

- to assess work on the micro-level of educational change for its transformational power on the macro-level of societal development. According to these aims, the socio-dynamic approach to educational research can be used in different areas of application when analyzing the design of research activities in action. They mainly differ in the respective time span covered in the particular phases of reflection. Without going into further detail of particular applications here (cf. Schratz 1993a), I want to describe some concrete experiences from this kind of collective self-reflection based on a cooperative research project in adult education. Its main aim was an attempt to involve as many people as possible in an educational needs analysis within the community for the institutional development of a local adult education institution (cf. Schratz, 1984). Together with the inhabitants of its neighbourhood, the researchers engaged in a number of activities. There was little time, however, to reflect on the underlying processes of planning, doing and evaluating cooperative action. It was when problems among the people involved arose that the research group had to deal with psycho-social aspects in the research process. The subsequent figure (from Achleitner, Haring and Schratz, 1988 [1]) depicts a typical situation in collaborative research.

Insert figure 2 about here

Because of the usual time constraints in an on-going research process, the team members rarely pay attention to the worries of a particular person in the group, who, for example, feels neglected by the others. The following extract from a collective self-reflection phase in educational research at an Austrian adult education institution (cf. Achleitner, Haring and Schratz, 1988) conveys this conventional attitude.

O: We cannot afford such time-consuming ... Well, how shall I put it, a working method which tries to integrate relationship ... problems. We'd never be able to finish anything. We could quit our job. That's the reality. There are projects to be finished; there are dates to be kept, and all this has to be accomplished in a set time. And above all, I feel that the atmosphere in a group and the mutual understanding through one's achievements, which always happen step by step, turn out to be much better than if one argues about this and that for some time ... about things like I don't like your hair-style today ... and, and ... I suffer from gas pains, and I'm just not in the mood right now. I'm exaggerating a bit, but as I said before, in real life things look somewhat different ...

Voices of this kind, which in the 'distinctive qualities of a character's discourse always strive for a certain social significance, a social breath' (Bakhtin, 1981, 333), stand for a view on how results can be achieved in collaborative work which is often found even in educational research. In such a view, the thematizing of aspects of relationship among the members of a research group has little or nothing to do with the actual work. Such a view, however, neglects that in setting concrete actions human beings are led and governed by hidden motives and driving forces, which they are not aware of but which nevertheless determine their social behaviour (Brody, 1983). An important function of collective self-

reflection lies in throwing some light on the workings of such hidden motives and inner impulses. The following extracts from collective self-reflection phases may serve as examples:

M: We were not at all sure about which goals of education each of us supports ... There is no clear definition, and each of us has a different definition of what educational goals are.

I: All those attempts to find a common mission for our team were not successful, because the other members of the group didn't agree with my views, which were more directed towards the organization.

F: From the beginning, it was not possible to explicitly clarify the interests of each individual in the project ... It took at least about a year which left us in the belief that communication functioned in our team ...

The following extract shows that only the collective self-reflection phase afterwards clarified some of the relationships between the people involved and the content of the research at hand.

H: Well, it is possible that looking back I've misunderstood that, you know. I've seen this, er ... er, perhaps rather as an agent of the ministry, an agent of these regulations. May well be ... I'm not sure myself today whether I really wanted it that way, or ... whether, because I wanted it that way, I saw it that way. I definitely saw it more strictly and rigidly than you did. Well, this might have been a subjective view of mine, or it may even be that way.

Only by looking back from a distant point is it possible for the group member to interpret this behaviour as a misunderstanding. Even at present he is not sure yet, which indicates how difficult it is to deconstruct the history of project life and reconstruct it from a later perspective. This process also brought a problem to light which one member envisaged as a paradox.

M: For me the paradox was that one should have thought about the relationship among the team members at the beginning, when there was neither time nor maturity to talk about a certain need for arguments and work on relationships. However, it would have been far more important to invest this energy directly into the project rather than into trench wars. - It was a great pity that we never struggled for a clear goal consensus at the beginning.

An important goal of the underlying project lay in the participatory approach of needs-oriented educational work, which ran through the project like a red thread. This turned out to be somewhat problematical and appeared frequently in the collective self-reflection phases, as can be seen for example in the following extract:

A: Well, look at the outline of the project ...

F: Yes, I think there was a paragraph ...

A: ... in the goal definition.

F: And we struggled a lot about it, especially the part dealing with participant orientation and the ... creation of a programme which was to be modelled along the needs of the people who live there.

A: The people there don't have any particular needs. If only you understood, people don't have any needs.

I: They do have needs, for example to somehow solve the problem with the dogs ... it somehow bothers them ...

A: Right.

I: ... that there is such a problem.

A: But such needs can never be satisfied by an adult education institution.

F: Well, but part of it then. It can't solve the overall problem, but it can take over parts of it; that's for sure. Don't you think so?

A: No.

This scene turned out to be typical of the situation that by general discussion the different points of view in the team could not be resolved on an abstract level. Above all at the beginning of the research project, when the individual viewpoints were not easily available, a lot of energy was invested into respective discussions without finding a way to move on to the concrete level. Therefore, the team members found it a relief to talk about their experiences in the group and their influence on the research work. The following excerpt from a collective self-reflection phase gives an insight into the powerful dynamics during research work:

M: ... for us it has been very motivating to talk about this process that we found out certain aspects which we hadn't been aware of in the course of research but which had a heavy impact on the work itself. This has got to do with people ... and the motives of an individual person and such things, which were not available then. It is only now that we've found out that many things were responsible, contents-wise, ... for the way it worked out ...

From action to meta-communication

The motivation for collectively reflecting on the process of a research project can be manifold. Usually it is a decisive cut or turning-point during the work, which confronts the people involved with the need to reconsider the programme. They are either caused by the inner dynamics of the group, for example, if one or more members of a team decide to withdraw, which normally has a decisive impact on the further development of the group situation. However, it can also be the case that influences from outside cause the research work to go into a different direction or to come to a complete halt. Such a process was recently initiated by Sanger (1990), when grant money was taken away from a university-based action research project. Under the expressive title 'Awakening a scream of consciousness', he analyses the evolution of a different group identity from the original, grant-dependent group and its effect on their educational philosophy and practice.

In the adult education research work mentioned above the project had already been finished, and everybody was fed up and only wanted to produce the usual project report. When the remaining members sat together to put

an end to the work involved, everybody felt liberated from and relieved of several years of intensive field work. When this pressure had gone from the group and everybody started talking freely about their personal experiences, we were surprised at how many aspects in the team members' behaviour and the resulting turns in the research work no obvious explanation could be found for. Suddenly new questions arose: Why did the project develop in that direction? How did everybody feel about it? How was everybody affected by the work?

Anybody who has ever climbed a mountain and looked back from the top knows this feeling. It is not a matter of looking back from an uninvolved position, but a retrospect which takes possession, which incorporates, which makes one aware of what one has gone through and what one has achieved, a participating perception. Walking along one only sees the few metres in front of oneself - stony, narrow and tiresome. The goal only exists in one's imagination; the outlook is usually blocked. One is fully occupied with the next step. This image of looking back signalled the starting point for the continuation of the research group's further steps. In this phase a transformation of team identity took place. The original, action-oriented group changed to a self-reflective one. The individual team members wanted to find out and understand how everything in the project development really went. During this phase new questions occurred:

- o Which were the important phases in the research process?
- o Where were decisive turning points?
- o Where were the periods of strained circumstances?
- o When did members of the team diminish (or leave altogether)?
- o Where did individual team members get 'blisters'?

As a consequence the research group had to find out collectively which steps and people could give such a view of the research process that a cross section of the work came to life and the history of the project became clear to everybody involved. The individual team members tried to find out more by looking at the following key aspects which in turn became the respective topics of a collective self-reflection session:

- o Individual people's entrance into the project
- o The relationship between the project and the national educational framework
- o The group dynamics of the team formation in the preparatory phase
- o The dropouts and their motives
- o The view of the head of the local adult education institution
- o The role of project management
- o A team event with the people in the community
- o The educational fair organized by the team

At each of the meetings which were organized for the individual collective self-reflection sessions about six people who had been involved in the project took part. Each lasted for about two to three hours; however, it was not thought necessary to set a time limit. This time frame proved to be the maximum per session to be mastered by everybody, since the intensive discussions made a high demand on everybody's concentration.

Every collective self-reflection session was taped by means of a cassette

recorder and transcribed afterwards so that nobody was distracted by writing when freely associating about certain phases of the project. Moreover, it was helpful to have everything available in written form afterwards for the reconstruction work on the history of the project. This material made it far easier for the analytical work to follow. There was no formal discussion leader during the sessions, the discussion was more or less carried by the free flow of discourse. Only if the discussion came to a halt or if the original topic disappeared in the course of the talk, did somebody try to make this clear from a meta-communicative perspective. Once the discussions had been transcribed, the texts were given to the team members to look through them closely, and then they were photocopied and handed out to everybody. The collected material gave a look into the inner world of the project life, which was only possible if one went through the dynamics of its history again. Another positive aspect was that through talking about situations from a distance, tensions between team members mitigated. It suddenly became exciting again for the team to continue the research into the group history on the basis of jointly lived-through experiences. The joint effort in sorting out previous team activities also helped in finding ways of implementing the experiences and results of the research project.

Looking back: towards an ontology of educational knowledge

The experiences with collective self-reflection as a qualitative method of researching into the history of the life of an educational research group can be regarded as a challenging attempt to analyze educational research which demonstrates how the psycho-social context is essential to a proper understanding of pedagogical practice. Following the first steps of such analyses in the natural sciences (cf. Knorr-Cetina and Mulkay, 1983; Knorr-Cetina, 1984; Latour and Wolgar, 1979; Latour, 1987), it represents a 'qualitative voice' investigating into the social reality of educational research in the making.

In this sense collective self-reflection serves as a method in ideological deconstruction. This has to happen as a collective process because, as Giroux (1983, 145) states, 'ideology operates at the level of lived experience, at the level of representations embedded in cultural artifacts, and at the level of messages in material practices' of research actions.

The theory-practice relationship which underpins any research activity has a special meaning in educational research because of its pedagogical claim to democratize society. If educationalists do not look critically at the epistemology of the creation of their knowledge, they may easily miss this overall aim and adhere to a functionalist tradition.

According to our findings, collaborative decision-making processes in team research on the micro-level mirror practices in educational organizations on the macro-level. On the assumption of this structural similarity, collective self-reflection can contribute towards a necessary transformation:

* from a position where scientifically derived knowledge is deemed superior, to a circumstance in which artistic and intuitive knowledge may

be equally appropriate;

- * from an a priori instrumental view of knowledge, to one that reflects knowledge as being tentative and problematic;

- * from a view which pre-supposes answers to complex social questions, to one that endorses the importance of problem posing and negotiated resolution (Smyth, 1989, 195).

Only if we learn to listen carefully to the subtle and often hidden messages contained in educational research will we be able to understand more about its reflective character. In order to perceive the importance of the role the voices play in the research we need to have some systematic approach enabling us to get a better understanding of the subjective parts which are usually excluded or suppressed but have a strong impact on the outcome of any research.

This paper took its starting point in the metaphoric use of the academic tribe, by which I have tried to show that the research community resembles any other group of people interacting according to certain rules embedded in their socio-historical context. I have further argued that if research fails to pay attention to the socio-dynamic aspects of the interactional processes between the people involved, it might only grasp the negotiated part of what is usually referred to as the 'social reality'. By deconstructing the psycho-social realities of research work by means of collective self-reflection processes I have tried to show the powerful voices of self-reflection and reciprocity. However, these voices do not speak at top volume, and this is why research methods have to be introduced which bring the subtle and often hidden messages to the conscious, some of which I have collected elsewhere (Schratz 1993b). This does not only involve the support of co-researchers, but often also dissolves the traditional boundaries between the 'subject' and 'object', but also asks for and creates collegiality and participation by everybody involved. Voices are then no longer seen as a collection of individual views on certain aspects. Such a process rather constitutes the collective 'consciousness' which

depends on three complementarities - or are they three aspects of one complementarity? - namely, the personal coherence of the individual and role integration in his group; his guiding images and the ideologies of his time; his life history - and the historical moment (Ericson, 1975, 20). The reconstructed history of research in action must not be seen as the true view of how things actually happened, since reflective processes construct new social realities. They help, however, in creating a transformative force in reconstructing both our individual and social selves. Whichever approach is used, it emphasises a particular aspect of this process of reconstruction and is therefore based on different sets of assumptions. Therefore, they should not only be judged by their premises but rather by the usefulness of their application in praxis.

NOTE

[1] This and all subsequent translations from this report are mine.

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Fig. 1: The socio-dynamic pattern of the research process

Fig. 2

This and all subsequent translations from this report are mine.

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Vortrag fÅr Deakin Nov. 9209/23/9209/23/9209/22/9209/22/92Í¶