

Paper presented to AARE Conference, Deakin University,
November 1992.

Against Transcendent Methodologies
(and that includes deconstruction)

Lyn Yates

La Trobe University

How does one judge the worth of a methodology?

If one is a 'research methodologist', what practice does one
see oneself as furthering?

This paper is going to take up a theme which is not a new one
in discussions about research methodology in education - that
the assessment of different types of educational research
should have some regard to the field of education, and, more
specifically, to furthering progressive and critical
development within that field. But it is a theme that
periodically surfaces and then resubmerges as the focus turns
back on methodology as a thing in itself. The issue was raised
in a major way as part of the move to proselytize case-study
and qualitative rather than quantitative methods in the late
70s and early 80s. Now it is in danger of being submerged as
people become fascinated either with the refinement of
technique (especially in computer-based technologies and their
uses in both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis)
or with the legacy of Foucault and Derrida and their friends
as providing a way of doing intellectual work that overrides
everything else.

This paper is specifically grounded in an interest in the
problem of how to construct and teach a course of research
methodology. If a School of Education is going to offer such a
course (and whether it should do so itself deserves
discussion) what should that course contain, and how should it
be organized?

Taking research methodology as a teaching issue involves
considering both what answers are to be given in the course as
to how different methodological frameworks are to be assessed
(that is, what is the teacher's perspective on my opening
questions and the theme questions proposed for this section The theme of

this section of AARE was advertized as follows: 'To specifically address the following question/ problem/ dilemma: how can "we" bring together the "qualitative" and "quantitative" in and for socially-critical policy studies and educational research? Is it a matter of refusing these terms altogether, or somehow "transcending" them?')

but also considering the issues of student learning and of avoiding reification.

The paper also has regard to questions being raised today by those who work within post-structuralist frameworks. Post-structuralism asks us to interrogate the terms we work with, to be suspicious of the answers we issue as truths. The discussion that follows takes note of these imperatives for

education researchers, but discusses also the danger of deconstruction itself being framed as a new transcendent methodology for educational researchers.

In the next section of the paper, I will describe some of the contemporary modes of discussion of methodology issues against which this paper is set. Following that I will discuss briefly some areas of education in which I have been involved, to explain why I am wary of transcendent answers to questions about what style of research is legitimate, and to relate this in particular to judgements about quantitative approaches by qualitative researchers, and to problems of taking deconstruction as an over-riding meta-theory. In the final part of the paper I describe the Masters course I developed to attempt to teach research methodology as simultaneously a wide-ranging theoretical reflection yet also a field whose legitimation is grounded in some concrete concerns and contributions.

I Giving an 'overview' of methodology: some contemporary practices

When in the late 70s and early 80s there began a wave of writing, activity and conference presentations promoting the value of case-study and qualitative methodology rather than quantitative and quasi-experimental procedures, the justification advanced was not primarily methodological, but was educational and social. The basis for improving the practice of teachers, for developing innovation in curriculum, and for according educational practitioners a status as subjects and not just objects in educational research, it was said, was to deal in more qualitative, small-scale, 'illuminative' procedures. See, for example, D.Hamilton et.al. (ed), Beyond

the

Numbers Game, MacMillan, London, 1977; H.Simons (ed), Towards a Science of the Singular, CARE, 1980; Deakin University, Case Study Methods (8 vols), 1982. The more strictly methodological justification for this approach For example, Stephen Kemmis's excellent article, 'The

Imagination of the Case and the Invention of the Study', in Simons, op.cit. was, as in science, a second-order task, to explain the validity of the procedures, particularly vis a vis traditional ones. But the impetus of that movement has been lost in the way the discussion of quantitative and qualitative methodologies are taken up in many textbooks and courses.

A common approach in contemporary courses and books to giving an overview of different methodologies is to show these differences in a relativist taxonomy, one which sets out definitions, techniques, assumptions (sometimes) of different approaches, with the suggestion that students should choose whatever they feel comfortable with. Another and alternative approach is to develop an account of the differences around what I will call a teleological taxonomy. In this, approaches are categorized to reveal the inadequacies of certain previous methods, and to show the reader why a particular contemporary approach ('naturalistic' inquiry; or 'critical' inquiry, or post-structuralism) has surpassed those earlier frameworks.

In the relativist taxonomies found in textbooks such as Gay, 1987; Bell, 1987; Borg and Gall, 1989; Burns, 1990 L.R.Gay, Educational Research, Merrill, Columbus Ohio, 1987; J.Bell, Doing Your Research Project, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1987; W.R.Borg & M.D.Gall, Educational Research: An Introduction, 5th edit., Longman, New York, 1989; R.Burns, Introduction to Research Methods in Education, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1990., different approaches to research methodology are presented as

if they are packages of techniques available for the student consumer who might choose between them in the same way that they might make decisions to use Word Perfect rather than Word Mark to type up the finished result. Certainly, these days, some comments are usually included about the differing assumptions regarding the nature of research inherent in quantitative/qualitative or postivist/post-positivist modes, and the books will often point to types of questions a particular package is designed to answer. But the smorgasbord is abstracted from education as a socially-located developing context of all this methodology, and the principle of selection between approaches implicitly gives highest regard

to individual preferences.

In the second approach (found, to some extent, in Lather, 1991; Kemmis & Carr, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985 P. Lather, *Feminist Research in Education: Within/Against*, Deakin University, 1991; W. Carr & S. Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Knowing Through Action Research*, Deakin University, 1986; Y. Lincoln & E. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Sage, Beverly Hills, 1985.) to varying degrees, the taxonomy is supposedly related to a historical progression in enlightenment, and moves from positivist to post-positivist or critical, to, in some cases, post-structuralist. Katie King observed of such taxonomizing in the field of feminist theory that its intent is not so much one of categorization as the promotion of a particular position: 'to taxonomize the women's movement to make one's own political tendencies appear to be the telos of the whole'. Quoted in D. Haraway, 'A manifesto for cyborgs: science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s' in L. J. Nicholson (ed) *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Routledge, New York, 1991, p. 198. Certainly, at least in some texts, the historical accounts present post-positivism as succeeding positivism in a way that does scant justice to traditions of interpretative inquiry, as well as being highly US-centric in telling the story of styles of research. British and Australian work on qualitative research is more likely to acknowledge substantive theories (of resistance, for example) as part of the guiding agendas of ethnographic work; or to be explicitly related to movements concerned with teachers as researchers. American references to ethnography and 'naturalistic' inquiry often seem to imply a concern with the blank-slate, inductive inquirer, and what that inquirer needs to do to get the stories of the various participants to be adequately told. Because in taxonomies of this kind, the succession of approaches is partly presented as a historical progression of increasingly more adequate approaches, there are also, as Patti Lather has suggested, some interesting anomalies if she also wants to have some reservation about the final column being clearly the most progressive. The same might be said in relation to education politics.

Research methodology is, of course, a practice (or set of practices) and a discourse (or set of discourses). But, to get back to my opening questions, how does one make judgements about that discourse: how does one not take for granted ('naturalize') that the current enthusiasm is the most obviously progressive?

The text-book approaches, I have suggested, effectively give either relativist or teleological answers to these questions.

They address methodology, in many cases, as an abstracted field of study, in which the discussion focusses on what is done and discussed by those who see themselves as research methodologists. Or they address methodology by reference to the most general conclusions of contemporary social theory. What happens though if one takes a field of educational

inquiry, or a socio-critical project within education, and looks at research methodology from that basis? Despite what I have said earlier, it is clear that Carr, Kemmis and Lather, as well as other writer such as Popkewitz, Hamilton, Biklen and others do have an interest in methodology as related to particular socio-critical projects in education. However their various arguments on this take a rather different form than the approach I am proposing in this paper.

II Research Methods and Fields of Education Policy: Some Examples

Two years ago, I was commissioned to provide an overview of a whole area of policy and research enterprise in Australian educational history: that of access and participation in Australian schools. This was developed as a paper for the first NBEET national conference on Australian education, and subsequently for a publication (ed R.Linke) on Australian Education and Training in Perspective, which is still 'in press'. After spending a year reading up on various historical, statistical and qualitative research accounts, and after considering changing policy documents on these issues, I began that overview of research and policy on access and participation in the following way:

Access and participation in schooling looks like a factual matter and one which can be addressed straightforwardly by tables of statistical comparisons, but it is not. What we want such tables to tell us is constructed against assumptions about what a good and fair pattern for schooling would look like. Such assumptions in Australia have clearly changed over time. They have changed as different groups in the community have raised claims to have their experiences of schooling assessed as inadequate. They have changed as the task of 'fairness' in the schooling system has been associated not with preparing different groups appropriately for different future roles in life, but with having all students remain to the final years of secondary

schooling, and with having different groups similarly successful in gaining the common certificates of those final years. And they have changed as new questions have been raised as to whether 'participation and access' can be assessed simply by counting who is in school, or whether these relate also to the experiences of students in schooling: in one sense a qualitative matter, but a matter whose existence is demonstrated in measurable differences in the post-school careers of different groups.

The idea that what we set out to research changes in historically-specific ways is scarcely news to most educational researchers. What was of interest to me, was that my attempt to see and interpret the nature of these changes made considerable use of quantitative research and quantitative agendas. The issue, for example, of when quantitative outcome patterns and research on quantitative relations between inputs and outcomes were taken up, and when they were subordinated to other concerns (in the post-Karmel Schools Commission and PEP eras) helped show changing policy emphases, and was a basis for raising questions about what was being silenced. As well, the work of quantitative researchers was one source to draw on in interpreting differences in the forms of inequality experienced by different groups (women cf Kooris cf working-class) and in furthering some but only some concerns to change patterns of inequality.

Research such as Williams et.al's ACER projects For example, R.Williams, Participation in Education, ACER Research Monograph No.30, Hawthorn, 1987. for example, might monitor and attribute relations between class or sex or school type, and patterns of retention in schools.

Quantitative research too is important in showing that, in broad terms, the relation between educational achievement and income is markedly different for women as compared with men. But quantitative research cannot answer other questions important to those concerned with inequality: why has the inequality of girls, who do so well in schools, received such high priority in recent years, while issues of class inequality, so apparent in any statistical studies of retention, have been so little addressed? Where certification is equal, what does schooling do to produce the different patterns in employment of women and men?

In relation to the themes of this section, my substantive focus here was pointing to a number of issues for courses in methodology: some literacy in reading quantitative research is

important, and not simply to be dismissed by students who feel more comfortable doing qualitative research themselves: it can be a necessary background to framing qualitative inquiries, at least in so far as these are part of a socio-critical project. Secondly, deconstruction as with any other form of being socially-critical, is not a content-free process: it needs existing knowledge, existing documents, existing assumptions against which, but also on the basis of which, its deconstructive reading can proceed.

As well, my assessment of this field of inquiry and action suggested, different questions need to be addressed by different research methodologies. One of the strengths of the wave of qualitative research advocates of the late 70s and early 80s was in explaining the inappropriateness of some traditional quantitative approaches to address many of the research questions with which teachers were concerned. What the example I have been discussing here also reminds us, is that similar critical reflection needs to be addressed to all forms of research enthusiasm. As I have argued elsewhere L.Yates, 'Theorizing inequality today', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 7 (2), 1986., the micro-level qualitative research interest that so engaged Australian researchers in the early 1980s sat very neatly with a government policy discourse which produced process rather than outcomes as the truths about inequality in schooling.

Next, consider the substantive field of research on gender and education. When Alison Kelly, a British researcher, summed up her experiences of a decade of work on girls and science education, she noted the following:

The changes in research on girls and science over the past few years are not confined to an expansion of interest. There has also been a marked shift in the type of research being carried out. In *The Missing Half* most of us approached the topic from a broadly psychologistic angle. We wanted to know why girls avoided physical science, and we looked for the answer in individual attitudes and personality traits, based on survey methods. This type of work is still popular, and certainly has much to offer. But it has a tendency to

blame the victim.[...] The alternative approach which has developed recently is more sociological and structural. It locates the fault at least partially within science, within schools or within society at large.[...] Based on this type of thinking, a number of researchers have begun to study the historical construction of science as we

know it today, to observe the processes taking place in classrooms, and to analyse curricula. Equally important, we have begun to explore the possibilities for action to remedy the situation. A.Kelly (ed), *Science for the Girls?*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1987, pp.1-2.

And, when Sue Willis did the same reflection regarding girls and mathematics, she noted that there had been some change over a decade or so of intensive work on the area from addressing the question 'why can't girls do well in mathematics?' to considering 'why don't girls do well?' to another 'why won't girls do well?', and the types of research methods being taken up indicated some related shifts. S.Willis, 'The power of mathematics: for whom?', in J.Kenway & S.Willis (ed), *Hearts and Minds: Self-Esteem and the Schooling of Girls*, Falmer Press, Barcombe Lewes, 1990.

A number of things are being said in these reflections on research methodology in a substantive area of research (and within a social project of reform). One is that the definition of the problem for research changes, or, in other words, that the adequacy of research methodology is intrinsically related to the substantive literature of a field. Yet in textbooks and courses, the question of the literature review is frequently treated as a discrete matter which can be taken up after decisions are made about what research methodology will be adopted.

Secondly, in the development in both of these fields (fields which have seen some of the largest amounts of research activity in recent years) there is no transcending commitment to particular methodological frameworks (quantitative, qualitative or deconstructionist) as necessarily valuable, or as inherently irrelevant. Some careful quantitative work was useful in showing that the initial framing of the problem (girls' biological inadequacy) was based on poorly controlled comparisons (not controlled for previous learning in mathematics); some questions ('why won't girls continue with mathematics') inherently cannot be addressed by quantitative and quasi-experimental procedures; and while Walkerdine's deconstruction For example, V.Walkerdine, 'Some issues in the historical construction of the scientific truth about girls', in A.Kelly, op.cit. is now uncovering how the discourse of mathematical ability and the discourses of femininity produce a teaching practice where girls' success is not taken as evidence of their ability, it is arguable that this discussion is meaningful only given the non-deconstructionist body of research which made the deconstructionist question recognizable.

There are other examples too within research on gender and education which cast a different light on criteria for good research than that traditionally found within courses on methodology. A form of quantitative research was supremely important in legitimizing sexual inequality as an area of research for schooling. It was the quite crude school-based

monitoring of 'who does the talking?', and 'who uses the space?', popularized by Dale Spender and promoted by equal opportunity consultants. The projects here used no sophisticated controls, or research training of observers, or theoretical refinement of the observation categories. But these research projects were powerful because counting was accepted by those involved as 'non-ideological', as objectively proving a claim which many had wanted to dismiss as political, and which had not previously been obvious to commonsense interpretations of the classroom reality.

Conversely, the more sophisticated quantitative analyses of employment patterns in Australia, of patterns of subject choice and achievement of girls and boys, and of school-work relations of girls, I would argue have had relatively little impact on policy (and indeed teachers' assumptions) that the key area to be addressed in the case of girls is that of increasing retention in mathematics and science. Here the value of good quantitative research is that it enables critical researchers to question (to see as other than truth or commonsense) the discourse of reform. My arguments on these issues are elaborated further in

L.Yates, 'Feminism and Australian State Policy: Some Questions for the 90s', in M.Arnott & K.Weiler (ed), *Education, Gender and Social Justice*, Falmer Press (in press).

In the preceding section I have been attempting to illustrate by examples why different types of research have made a contribution to movements concerned with critical changes in education; to show that particular historical context is relevant; and to suggest that both doing certain types of research and trying to address what is being produced and what silenced by the research approach being favoured will have some point. My 1986 paper, 'Theorizing inequality today', *op.cit.*, though it did not use the current jargon, was in part a discussion of how gender was being produced and silenced in sociological inquiry of that time; and in part too a discussion of how Australian qualitative, democratic participation and equity emphases were producing processes rather than outcomes as the truths of inequality of schooling.

III Argument by Example versus Deconstruction as Meta-Methodology

The foregoing discussion of examples has clearly been influenced by the post-structuralist acceptance of multiple discourses rather than a single rationalist truth, and by its interest in silences and the discourses whereby truths are produced. But it is by no means an argument for constructing a methodology course around deconstruction as a project or as the central metatheory. Attention to projects and to educational issues as in this last section, enables us to reflect on the following questions about post-structuralism:

(1) Taking post-structuralism in its own terms, we might ask what produces this as a truth? Noting when poststructuralism begins to be taken up in relation to gender and schooling (which is some time after it is significant in feminist theory generally) is one means of preventing the reification of deconstruction as a new transcendent framework.

(2) What are the methodological rules for deconstructionists? As Michele Barrett notes about Foucault:

there is a sense in which Foucault's own achievements when

'skimming along' and selecting some statements rather than others remain unexplained by the formal method he outlines M.Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991. p.127

[but also]

there is a world of difference between the detailed historical researches that Foucault himself undertook when seeking to recast our understanding of particular discourses (medical, penal, sexual etc.) and the extremely superficial relabelling that often goes on in which, for example, sociology becomes 'sociological discourse' without any substantive elaboration of what the discursive ordering and regularities might be. *ibid.*, pp.128-9

Leaving aside the question of my own guilt on the latter point, the point for students of research methodology is both that deconstruction is not a content-free exercise and also that judgements are still made (certainly by thesis examiners and journal editors) of what counts as successful work in this framework. The background knowledge of education and education research I am suggesting is relevant to the task of reading against.

(3) How truths are produced is an interesting question, but is it the only question?

In feminist theory debates about the politics of post-structuralism concern the issue of at what point and in what ways the intellectual inquiry begins to become the unbounded indulgence of a privileged elite which talks about but not to or with those in whose interests it claims to develop. See, for example, M.Hirsch & E.Fox Keller (ed), *Conflicts in Feminism*, Routledge, New York, 1990; T.Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age*, Routledge, New York, 1991; J.Butler & J.W.Scott (ed), *Feminists Theorize the Political*, Routledge, New York, 1992. In education similarly, the genesis, uses and truth-power of poststructuralism are ones that deserve serious discussion and not just the reified placing of the methodology typology.

IV Constructing a Methodology Course

I once wrote in a review of a textbook in life history research:

When research is seen as a humanly constructed enterprise and validity not as the Q.E.D. of an equation but as a subtle judgement on the interplay of technique and substantive analysis in relation to a particular problem, the temptation can be to turn the discussion on methodology into a discourse on epistemology and social theory which leaves out techniques altogether. On the other hand, if the writer does try to mess with the real world of research and discuss substantive examples, there is the problem of from which perspective the various studies can be put together...How, too, do they balance the practical advice (which is likely to appear as a series of messy hints from experience, compared with the more formal instructions for survey methods) with the discussions of validity, which by their nature must be complex? review of K.Plummer, 'Documents of Life', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 20 (3), Nov.1984, p.436.

In constructing a Masters course in Qualitative Research Methodology (first taught in 1983), my way through this is that the course should begin with and be framed by an attempt to address substantive educational issues. This enables attention to the big issues of methodology (how the project is being constructed, what makes it reliable or trustworthy or acceptable, or unacceptable, etc) and to do so in a way which gives attention to methodological decisions being taken and

judged in a context, a context both of the existing literature on that particular area, and also of movements in the field of education (and social) policy and practice. What I want students to avoid is a blanket rejection of quantification or of non-quantification as a means of useful educational research. What I want too is that they should not see the options as an individual and relativist decision, of finding an approach and following its formula, but one in which particular types of research will arise and/or be useful to projects at particular points, and in which the framing of educational questions is treated as seriously as the empirical attempts to answer these.

In the early and mid-80s, the substantive examples I began with were *Making the Difference* and *Fifteen Thousand Hours*. R.W.Connell, D.Ashenden, S.Kessler & G.Dowsett, *Making the Difference: Schools, Families and Social Division*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982; M.Rutter et.al., *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, These texts ostensibly address the same question, 'How do schools make a difference?', yet adopt different methodologies, different types of samples, different concepts, and in fact address quite different questions in doing so. Taken together, they allowed questions to be raised about silences in each. What happened to a consideration of what might be done differently by schools with a like clientele in the research done in *Making the Difference*? What did the differences identified by *Fifteen Thousand Hours* signify in the broader social pattern? Did either study provide a convincing way of investigating processes in schooling? How well were their conclusions related to what they produced as evidence? How trustworthy was the methodology of each both within its own framing assumptions and in terms of broader interests in research in inequality? etc.

More recently, I have taken four article-length studies of different approaches to research on gender and education. P.Carpenter, 'Single-sex schooling and girls' academic achievements', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 21 (3), 1985; T.Evans, 'Being and becoming: teachers' perceptions of sex-roles and actions toward their male and female pupils', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 3(2) 1982, pp.127-143; M.Spear, 'The biasing influence of pupil sex in a science marking exercise', in A.Kelly, op.cit; V.Walkerdine, 'Some issues in the historical construction of the scientific truth about girls', op.cit.

Again, the point is to appreciate what each study was considering as its research agenda and why; and what each was contributing in the context of a broader social project in education. Beginning the course with these substantive examples is a basis for introducing the questions that frame

the course: of how and why research is produced in a particular way; of how we (and others) judge the quality of research; of how we might develop projects of inquiry in the present context. These examples also rest there as some common ground for students in the course when we look at literature on methodology.

After the initial discussion of some contemporary research in education, and of the way some different researchers try to frame their research questions and to carry out their

inquiries, the course spends a number of sessions on the broader field of the 'history and philosophy of inquiry'. These introduce students to (i) the literature of philosophy of science, and to a consideration of science, quantification and control in relation to educational questions; (ii) the history and philosophy of interpretative traditions of inquiry; and (iii) the post-structuralist radical critique of the search for reliable or trustworthy knowledge. Following this, some sessions take up the specific literature of educational research methodology, in relation to issues such as case-study, ethnography, interviewing, ethics. etc. In another session, students are asked to take a particular area of their own field of interest, to investigate by a literature review how the framing and methodology of research in that area has developed, and to discuss in class silences and general patterns emerging when they consider their various overviews.

In some sessions too, other staff in the School of Education discuss with students their own research and their own beliefs about methodology. These are intended to extend the repertoire of examples available to the students, to elaborate the discussion of particular issues, to provide a sense of the research project as lived dilemma rather than simply as the neat achievement presented in the published report and also to present philosophies of methodology which challenge my own. For example, one session is given by a colleague who is prepared to call himself a positivist, who is not only committed to quantitative methodologies, but makes much use of attitude-scaling, a form of methodology which I find worthless. The impetus in including these different voices is not to encourage a belief in relativism on the part of the students, but to encourage among students a non-reified taking up of the 'answers' I implicitly and explicitly give in this course to questions about methodology and about education.

In the second half of the year, the substantive focus to the methodological discussion comes from the students who discuss

their own projects. Interspersed with this we return to various particular methodological issues and the discussion of these in the literature of methodology.

Conclusions

I discussed in the first section of this paper why, in my own areas of research, I would argue that there is not one overridingly valuable methodological framework that transcends all others. At times quite simple, naive research is compelling: at other time quite sophisticated research seems to contribute to little outside its own inquiry. I also argued that for those working in education, teaching and writing about methodology should have some regard to the field of education, and to what was being furthered by research projects in it. The latter question, I suggested, has been given prominence by research projects associated with

poststructuralism, but it is also an appropriate issue to address in relation to that framework itself.

In the second part of the paper, I raised some additional problems for mounting a course on research methodology. In taking methodology seriously, we do want to address how we come to know and what status that knowledge has, and to do this potentially calls on vast fields of epistemology, of history and philosophy of science and social science, of social and cultural theory. At the same time, the students are not there to dwell indefinitely on the nature of the universe; they need to be able to construct and carry out a project which meets the standards of coherence, rigour and knowledge of the field set out in guidelines to thesis examiners.

My response to these problems is the course I have described. It is not a linear course, but one in which students are asked to reflect on issues of reliability, rigour, educational worthwhileness, context, ethics and so on, as we move back and forth between various types of discussions (of Australian educational research, of literatures of methodology, etc) and various voices of educational researchers.

To go back to those opening questions:

'How does one judge the worth of a methodology?'

Not by a formula, not by its conformity with a set of technical procedures (though the latter may have some part in the judgement). Rather by informed and reflective judgements,

judgements which have some knowledge of technical and social/theoretical discussions, which are informed by substantive knowledge of the field of education, and which are historically aware.

And, 'if one is a "research methodologist", what practice does one see oneself as furthering?

Too often, I would suggest, research methodologists see themselves primarily as serving the practice of research methodologists, but to see this practice as an isolated thing-in-itself is to see it in a very inadequate way.