Chapter 15
Researching the Learning and Teaching of Writing: A Retrospective Analysis of Paradigms Employed

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ABSTRACT
In this chapter, the author reflects on a research journey and the conscious and subconscious application of paradigms to research design. The chapter is focused on research conducted in her role as research and teaching academic in the area of literacy learning and teaching. Through the retrospective analysis of a particular program of research the author concludes that it may not be necessary to articulate a paradigm in the design stages of research to be strongly guided by that paradigm. The author contends that a researcher’s theoretical orientation and worldviews about how research should be enacted may be the key to paradigm “choice.” However, not all researchers have the luxury of determining how and what they will research, nor the paradigms or methods to be applied, in the world of competitive grants, commissioned research and multiple research agendas.

INTRODUCTION
This chapter provides a retrospective reflection on the research paradigms that informed some of the research carried out by the author, as an academic researcher with a particular interest in literacy learning and teaching. While it is contended in the preface that “being clear about the paradigm in which the research is conducted is critical in ensuring all elements of the research exercise are congruent” (2016), the author of this chapter will argue that the way a researcher subconsciously understands the world, and how research should be carried out, may mean that a research project can follow the parameters of a particular paradigm without the paradigm having been explicitly named in the original study design.

The program of research discussed in this chapter operated between 2007 and 2014. The research involved multiple projects over the seven years. The author of this chapter was chief investigator for all

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1738-2.ch015
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projects; some that were single researcher projects and others that involved a team of researchers. The contexts for the projects were early childhood centers, preschools and/or primary schools in New South Wales and Victoria, two of the most populated states in Australia. The common link across the projects was their focus on understanding the learning and teaching of young writers. The projects examined what happens in the year before children start school (preschool) and the first two years of primary school from the perspectives of children and their teachers. While each of the projects will be discussed more fully later in the chapter, they are introduced briefly at this point in Table 1. It is these projects that provide the “data” for the chapter and its discussion of the place and power of the research paradigm.

The first five projects to be discussed built on one another with each informing those that followed. The first, *Writing in the First Year of School*, was designed to find out “what was out there” and fits quite comfortably into the interpretivist paradigm as described in Chapter 1, Table 1. The four phases of the *Becoming a Writer* research program came about as a result of the findings of the *Writing in the First Year of School* study. While the interpretivist paradigm informed three of the four *Becoming a Writer* studies, it will be argued that *Becoming a Writer* Phase 3 (study 4) drew on earlier findings and aligns more comfortably with the pragmatic paradigm, although some may suggest it could also be aligned with the transformative paradigm. The final project to be discussed, *Year One Writing*, is described as interpretivist, although the process of analysis involved the development of an analysis tool that was then applied to the data statistically. In this instance, the outcomes of the statistical analysis elaborated and enriched the study findings.

The author’s background and experiences help to explain the approach to research and research paradigms. The teaching and learning of writing is explained, as each of the research projects central to this chapter focus on this topic. The literature focused on literacy in the 21st century, the ways success with literacy is measured, and the learning and teaching of writing specifically. This literature will assist the reader to understand the projects, and therefore their paradigms, ontology, axiology drivers, episte-

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Study Title and Brief Description</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Writing in the First Year of School: The collection and analysis of 337 writing/drawing samples from kindergarten classrooms (first year of school, children aged between four years, six months and six years at the start of the year) across New South Wales (NSW). The purpose was to establish the current status of writing in kindergarten classrooms.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Becoming a Writer Phase 1: Case studies of nine children from three kindergarten classrooms in different schools. Focus on the teaching and learning of writing.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Becoming a Writer Phase 2: A survey of 228 Foundation Year teachers provided three different forms of data: demographic information, responses to questions using a 5-point Likert scale, and open-ended responses to a sample of early writing provided by a student in the fifth week of school.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Becoming a Writer Phase 3: A case study of 60 students, in kindergarten, and their teachers. Teacher participants were volunteers who agreed to implement intervention over the first six months of kindergarten, which focused on encouraging children to draw and talk as a way of supporting their early attempts to write.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Becoming a Writer Phase 4: Interviews conducted with 23 preschool teachers based at not-for-profit preschools of Early Childhood Centres from Victoria and NSW. The purpose was to discover how children’s experimentation with drawing and writing was encouraged and supported within the preschool context, in the year before they started school.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Year One Writing: Collection and analysis of writing samples from year one children at the middle and end of the school year. The purpose was to establish what mainstream grade one children’s writing looks like in the second half of year one. (N.B. Year one is the second year of school in Australian schools)</td>
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