

## Interplay of the Dimensions of Pedagogy: Getting the Quadrant Right

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This paper argues that there are two major dimensions of pedagogy in social sciences including management. These dimensions may be framed with the polar ends for the first, as "positivistic" and "interpretivistic", and second, as "separative" and "inclusive". This paper takes the view that current debate on pedagogy in the social sciences is generally dominated by the first dimension to the neglect of the latter. Further, it suggests that it is useful to examine the interaction of the two dimensions by cross classifying positivistic-interpretivistic with the pedagogy of separation/ inclusion. The implications of such a view in the light of post-modern concerns of the developed societies (which because of the success of the western paradigm has become an issue for almost all societies of the world) and the post-colonial histories of the erstwhile colonized societies are discussed in this paper.

### Positivism and Interpretivism

The last few centuries, dominated by science, held that the world out there is objective. According to this view, irrespective of who the observer is, observable reality is inviolate and fixed. This is positivism. Any other view was considered unscientific. In adopting the rules of science in social sciences this view was never questioned. However, in the last few decades this view as the only reasonable way to approach reality (ontology) and this being the only basis for building valid knowledge (epistemology) has been squarely challenged. Now it is admitted that what we call reality and reasonable knowledge may depend upon the meta viewpoints of the observer (Kuhn 1967) or the version of the world (Bateson 1979) that is under inquiry. Or how we look at things may entirely alter the way we see things. This is interpretivism.

According to Keegan (2009), positivism follows two fundamental commitments. One, all valid knowledge should be rooted in experience and two, that it should

be based on logical analysis through which problems and paradoxes would be resolved and scientific theory built. Positivism is modelled on scientific principles of reason and the purpose of inquiry in social sciences is to present laws in there that are akin to the fixed laws of natural sciences. Positivism assumes that there is one reality out there that can be understood in an impartial manner with the "right" observer and the right instruments. This way, there is one convergent explanation for any phenomenon. If there is any divergence in our understanding of reality it is because we have not inquired in a manner deep enough to reveal the truth. Truth is absolute and the only thing that comes in the way to understanding reality is the level of knowledge that we possess. Positivism would ascribe to language a purely representationist role. Language is merely an instrument to represent the reality that exists outside the observer. The purpose of language is to offer words, sentences, structures of sentences and other models that represent reality as closely as possible the objective reality that humans face. Viewed thus, there is no scope for language to create any subjective reality; for instance, there is no scope for generating reality through the evocative words of, say, poets and seers.

Interpretivism challenges the above notions (Prasad 2005). According to it, it is not possible to have one objective, unbiased view of the world. According to this view, all knowledge is relative and depends on the lens through which reality is viewed. It accommodates multiple realities and recognizes the presence of individual biases in the observations made, no matter how good the intentions are and how "perfect" the observer is. Interpretivism applies both to the observer and the observed. The subjective orientation of the observer (or the researcher) is recognized and its impact of the paradigmatic positions that he or she holds is recognized. Similarly the nature of the world

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as reported by the participants (in say, a survey) would depend on the cultural and other backgrounds through which they see the world.

The purpose of research in the positivistic lens would be to create inviolable and fundamental laws. With the interpretivistic lens the purpose would be to bring out, examine and detail different viewpoints which may or may not be reconciled between themselves.

The ideals of positivistic orientation calls for a rational, dispassionate observer examining the observed without emotions or personal biases. It is assumed that the experience of the observer will be error free by keeping an emotional distance from the things being observed. Here truth will be revealed to the patient observer who is unencumbered with personal involvement with the affairs of the observed. As opposed to this, in the interpretivistic tradition, truth is relative and how we see things depend on the angle through which the observation is made. Truth is subjective. Everything depends on the lens through which the observations are being made. The observer does not claim neutrality. He or she admits of paradigmatic biases. The old Indian fable of the elephant and the four blind men makes immense sense in the interpretivist mode. Interpretivism admits of individual idiosyncrasies. The post modern sensibility and world-wide awakening to pluralism corresponds, in an epistemological sense, to interpretivism.

This paper posits that besides Positivism-Interpretivism (Dimension 1 for the purpose of this paper) there is another dimension that deserves better attention than it has received so far. The polar ends of this dimension (Dimension 2) may be termed pedagogy of separation and pedagogy of inclusion. This paper takes the view that social sciences pedagogy, and management pedagogy in particular, suffers from a pedagogy of separation. The article suggests that there is need to balance the two. A pedagogy of separation has its root in the rational viewpoint wherein doubting forms the basis for generating knowledge. Marx (the social scientist), when asked what his motto quoted Descartes, "Doubt everything". Doubt and separation

are homologous. While there is need to breakdown, atomize and dissect there is also need to see the big picture, synthesize and seek patterns and commonalities. This would involve unifying disparate objects or practicing a pedagogy of inclusion.

In further viewing the two dimensions of rational-interpretivistic and separation-inclusion pedagogies and examining their interaction we can develop deep insights on how our views of the world are shaped by the approaches we adopt.

### **Paradox of Man's Need for Separation and Inclusion**

Separation is painful. Yet human condition today also seems to point out that we abhor being together. Passages from Jean-Paul Sartre's "No Exit" seem to exemplify contemporary man's condition.

Inez, who is consigned to be in hell is utterly lonely in spirit there. She is joined by Galvin. She states in exasperation about her loneliness, "Ah, that's the way it works, is it? Torture by separation..." Not that she can rest content with being together either. She, fed up with Garvin's exhortation to quietude, roundly chastises him, "To forget about the others? How utterly absurd! I feel you there, in every pore. Your silence clamors in my ears. You can nail up your mouth, cut your tongue out--but you can't prevent your being there. Can you stop your thoughts? I hear them ticking away like a clock, tick-tock, tick-tock, and I'm certain you hear mine. It's all very well skulking on your sofa, but you're everywhere, and every sound comes to me soiled because you've intercepted it on its way." (Sartre 1989). Human dilemma of wanting neither loneliness nor company seems inescapable.

As technology races ahead, man's avenues to communicate and the potential to be with the other has indisputably reached phenomenally high levels. On-line, real-time communication, Twitter and Facebook, amazing electronic gadgetry, far too greater choices for meeting people one couldn't have dreamt of meeting earlier have all been marvels of the last couple of decades. But the potential for communication is

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<sup>1</sup> The expression "Pedagogy of Separation" owes to Zajonc's (2006) expression "Epistemology of Separation"

accompanied by angst and hopelessness. Now compare Sartre's passage with the grand unifying vision of the poet mystic, Shri Aurobindo who was being tried in case of bomb conspiracy. If convicted Shri Aurobindo would have faced death sentence.

"...I had no idea that I happened to be the main target of suspicion (of killing two European women) and that according to the police I was the chief killer, the instigator and secret leader of young terrorists and revolutionaries. I did not know that that day would mean the end of a chapter of my life, and that there stretched before a year's imprisonment during which period all my human relations would cease, that for a whole year I would have to live, beyond the pale of society, like an animal in a cage... For long I had made a great effort for a direct vision (sakshat darshan) of the Lord of my Heart; had entertained the immense hope knowing the Preserver of the World, the Supreme Person (Purushottam) as friend and master. But due to the pull of a thousand worldly desires, the attachment towards numerous activities and the deep darkness of ignorance I did not succeed in that effort. At long last the most merciful all good Lord... pointed to the Yogashram, Himself staying as guru and companion in my little abode of retirement and spiritual discipline. The British prison was that ashram... They wanted to do me an ill turn, the result was that I got what I wanted. The only result of the wrath of the British government was that I found God." (Aurobindo 1974). The solitude of the prison and his preparation of a higher life led Shri Aurobindo to the understanding of unity<sup>2</sup> of all beings. It is interesting to note that when unity is discerned at higher levels (in Aurobindo's case unity between the jailor and imprisoned), such understanding borders on the spiritual.

### **Pedagogy of Separation**

A pedagogy of separation is one which overly seeks out and ratchets up well-bounded differences to the exclusion of commonalities between entities. By itself separation, in as much as it means dissection, is a task that is required in any scientific endeavour. Pedagogy of separation has major ramifications (Bohm 1980).

Indeed human learning happens by various means. The process of learning in the broadest sense consists of living because every moment we are learning through a process of what psychologists call reinforcement. For the purpose of this paper we will define learning as formal education that takes place through established institutions.

To illustrate the point we will take Management education as a case in point. Management education is indeed always caught in the dilemma of having to satisfy practical relevance in a commercial sense and the lofty goals of higher education to align its goals with the larger and higher interests of society. In addressing the "practical" commercial objective, management education may be one of the easiest victims of the pedagogy of separation. Given the ubiquity of management and the worldwide success of "MBAs", it is worthwhile to take management education as a case in point. This, despite the recent world-wide financial and economic malaise, because, eventually, it will take the same management graduates to shoulder the responsibility of bringing things back on rail.

Perhaps much of management practice until recently has been about transactions. A purely mercantile relationship between a buyer and a seller would be entirely transactional. Any transactional approach would necessarily seek differences. The buyer is looking for the lowest-priced seller and the seller would be looking for buyer who would buy at the highest price... price differences govern the search process in the marketplace. Even with the advent of the marketing concept (of the seller seeking out actively what the potential buyer wants) the business world is preoccupied with figuring out differences. A title of an article on design of products reads as follows, "Seeking commonalities, highlighting differences: in today's complicated world, designing products based on consumer differences may be the secret to success." (Kitzmiller 2006). It is quite evident that uncovering differences is still the dominant motivator for much of competitive strategies, industrial and consumer market research, market segmentation, corporate strategy and

<sup>2</sup> The terms "unity" and "inclusion" are used analogously in this paper.

so on. The result is often targeted product design, product specialization, differentiated service offers etc. etc. All such innovations are predicated on cleverly uncovering differences.

While capitalizing upon differences in human preferences and human dispositions is required in the "practical" world of business, a mind exclusively targeted on figuring out differences may turn out to be unprepared for learning the big lessons. Battles may be won by seeking differences, but for the war to be won, we may have to undertake sober reflection on commonalities. In other words, business education has to equally promote in students a mind that seeks commonalities too. We will come to a description of the pedagogy of inclusion in due course.

### **Why is an Exclusive Obsession with the Pedagogy of Separation Dangerous?**

A pedagogy of separation sets up the human mind in a certain way when not balanced with a pedagogy of inclusion. The process of differentiating acquires a life of its own in the human mind. Perhaps it may even be right to say that this process takes over the human mind. Neuroscientists recognise development of different types of plasticities of the brain as humans grow that allows for higher adaptation (Kolb & Metz 2000). Plasticity allows for progressive synaptic firings -- based on previous learning and previous firings -- that result in further successful adaptation to changes in the environmental context. Measurements in the brain made possible by instruments that can measure very fine physical, chemical and electrical changes in the brain suggest that learning even causes structural changes in the brain (Draganski et al. 2004). If there are different types of plasticities and structural changes made possible with learning, it seems right to conjecture that there are forms of plasticities that are blocked by a pedagogy of separation.

Could it be that the neural networks and plasticities that are established in the human brain slowly get geared towards merely seeking differences? It seems that the process set up by a pedagogy of separation

has a dynamic of its own that seeks separation ad infinitum. The mind gets channelled in predetermined ways without adequate plasticity of the brain to conceptualize the "grey" unities, holisms and interconnections. Human imagination gets stifled and the victims go on a self-destructive dissecting trip, a process of the mind, that comes back to oneself in the form of alienation, disconnect with fellow human being and the malaise we see today.

This realization is not new. Poets have long been concerned about this. The so-called practical man never took the muse seriously. William Blake, the great poet of extreme sensitivity keenly expressed this as the separation (difference, mind you) between human consciousness and nature that man has given himself the "right to exploit". Is it that Descartes' separation of mind and material is finally coming home to roost? Or perhaps epistemic pondering gets confused with ontic certainties.

A Pedagogy of separation was adequate so long as the world was not globalized. It created artificial barriers in the form of royalty and subjects, in the form of privileged few and the rest, colonizer and the colonized, caste system, followers versus heathens and so on. The world thus atomized could carry the pedagogy of separation without causing too much damage. It served a purpose. The pedagogy of separation made sense to whip up strong sentiment among advancing armies and masquerading troops. But when technology races ahead with unifying possibilities and unified realities, the pedagogy of separation is inadequate to deal with the complexities that it has set up. As Korzybsky (1921) suggested, when the rate of change in one area (technology) outpaces the rate of change in the other (human mind), the mismatch creates havoc. The problems that we alluded to may be precisely on account of this mismatch.

A pedagogy of separation is unwittingly sets up mental habits that are unsuitable in a world that is inescapably growing global. Pedagogy of separation begets, in a subtle manner, alienation, fear and hatred. We now need a new pedagogy that promotes sensitivity to a

connected world, while at the same time not prone to over-simplified ideals. There is an opportunity to promote a pedagogy that eschews creating atomized human being, but works towards a collective of minds, what Gregory Bateson (1972) calls an ecology of mind. This, of course, will have to be achieved without falling prey to collectivistic rhetoric.

### **Pedagogy of Inclusion**

In the context of business education, what could seeking inclusion or, in more concrete terms, commonalities, mean? Many things... For instance, it may mean seeking historical patterns. Consequently, consciously or unconsciously those who advocate teaching of business history are arguing for getting student minds to seek commonalities. A historical inquiry may teach us that the past and the present may have much in common. At a very concrete level, issues we face today may be completely different from yesterday's. But with sufficient abstraction, it would be possible to see the commonalities. This knowledge may give the wisdom to act judiciously.

Seeking commonalities also would mean learning to apply thinking skills across a wide spectrum of disciplines and areas. New areas of inquiry such as complexity and self-organization which are becoming the frontiers of management education [for instance, see Axley & McMohan (2006)] require, at a basic level, an eye for figuring out commonalities which are not obvious. Such ideas demand higher-level abstraction. Are we preparing our students in these skills? In a very influential book Ohmae (1981) briefly introduces the idea of abstraction for problem solving. But how many books on business management would take the idea further and discuss it. I suspect very few! Perhaps in the "practical" world of business management have little place for something as abstract as abstraction. Pedagogy of separation and transaction orientation is so ubiquitous that there are management educators who wrongly (but triumphantly) assert that the relationship between the learner and teacher is that of seller and buyer, or that of the service provider and the

customer. We desperately need a new pedagogical contract that emphasizes the co-evolutionist nature of thinking and action. Framed thus, there is a "double inclusion" here: of student and teacher on the one hand, and thinking and action on the other.

If we look carefully, the idea of seeking commonalities or inclusion is also related to the idea of positive-sum games. Fortunately there have been some calls to move from the narrow zero-sum or negative-sum game views (as exemplified by game theoretic models such as "Prisoners' Dilemma") to positive-sum games. As Wright (2000) argues the destiny of human being has progressed because of the creativity of humans to devise nonzero-sum games. When business leaders have to be appreciative of multiple stakeholder needs, they have to have an eye for creating complex positive-sum games. In such scenario, it is the mind that is trained to see commonalities that will be creative enough to come up win-win imaginations. Dealing with climate issues, multiple cultures, knowledge workers, complex organizational forms, learning organizations, knowledge management etc. require of business graduates to be not only looking for differences (and capitalizing on these differences to generate superior financial performance and cleverly cleaving the customer base), but also an eye for seeing the big picture and figuring out the patterns without which they may win battles, but not the war. Awareness may be the key here in so far it shapes the discernment of patterns sans preconceived ideas. According to Martin Buber "becoming aware" is the openness which puts aside this perfected shell (of signs and symbols that mental constructions have abstracted into standard signs) in favour of true presentness, that is, of being willing to see each new event as something which is, despite all resemblance to what has gone before, unique and unexpected" (Friedman, 1955, pp:167-168).

### **Viewing the Two Dimensions in Interaction**

When we cross classify the contrasting ideas of positivism/interpretivism and pedagogies of separation/inclusion some interesting insights emerge.

Interactions of Pedagogy Dimensions

Pedagogy Dimension – 2	Pedagogy Dimension – 1	
	Positivism	Interpretivism
Pedagogy of Separation	<i>Quadrant: 1 Learning to homogenize</i>	<i>Quadrant: 3 Confused learning (Alienation and loneliness)</i>
Pedagogy of Inclusion	<i>Quadrant: 2 Over convergence in learning (Invalid generalizations)</i>	<i>Quadrant: 4 Learning through awareness</i>

Positivism and the pedagogy of separation (Quadrant: 1) gives rise to the idea of exclusivity and the dominance of the majority and the powerful. Action that arises from such a perspective is likely to try and destroy variety, and may through force, if required, enforce homogeneity. In the era of colonization we can discern that this was the colonizers' intellectual justification for establishment of colonies and exploitation of human beings who were seen as separate and alien. Positivism thrived by precision among those who subscribed to the scientific principles and reduction of variation across those who did not.

Now let us combine positivism with the pedagogy of inclusion. This is shown in Quadrant: 2. Here, the need is to be rational and at the same time inclusive. These two needs can simultaneously be met only by stretching one's knowledge far too wide and making over-generalizations. On the one hand, there is one right way to understand and think about things (positivism). On the other hand there may also be the cultural tradition of inclusivity and "memories" of the pedagogy of inclusion, as may be happening to erstwhile colonized societies which have traditionally been more familial, clannish and relationship oriented, and hence, inclusive. This quadrant is characterized by an effort towards "convergence" where none exists. This is likely to happen when positivism as a pedagogical device is introduced into societies that are culturally inclusive in nature to start with. The application of a positivistic agenda may cause "loss of diversity" and the pedagogy may seem overly mechanistic with the attendant feeling of having been imposed something foreign from

outside. This is a familiar situation reported by those in erstwhile colonies having to live with the burden of the onslaught of the scientific methods. It is the burden of learning methods that are introduced in their educational institutions in the wake of the having to copy successful western educational and institutional standards.

The third quadrant combines interpretivism and the pedagogy of separation. This combination mirrors the post-modern confusion of centrelessness in terms of having nothing fixed to root one's understanding on, while not letting go off the sense of separateness (pedagogy of separation). This explains perhaps the post-modern conundrum that many in the developed world are going through, a confusion of sorts. Finally, the last quadrant combines interpretivism with a pedagogy of inclusion where awareness of unity (pedagogy of inclusion) with diversity (interpretivism) provide a meeting ground where interpretivism is supported by the pedagogy of inclusion. Here differences are not only accepted cognitively but also emotionally or affectively. It may be difficult for those schooled in positivistic tradition to accept the reference to the "affective" here. Bateson (1979) is prescient, according to whom "... epistemology is always and inevitably personal. The point of the probe is always in the heart of the explorer. What is *my* answer to the question of the nature knowing?" (italics Bateson's, p: 82).

**Concluding Comments**

This paper briefly reviewed the two dominant ways of approaching reality and ways of understanding it, namely, rationalism and interpretivism. It further argued that this dialectic is insufficient by itself to explain the current epistemological challenges. It took the view that besides Positivism-Interpretivism (which was named Dimension 1) there is another important dimension that deserves better attention than it has received so far. The polar ends of this dimension (namely, Dimension 2) were pointed out to be "pedagogy

of separation" and "pedagogy of inclusion". Further it was argued that social sciences pedagogy, and management pedagogy in particular, suffers from a pedagogy of separation.

By combining the two dimensions, four quadrants were generated and the characteristics of each of the quadrants were described. It was argued that while quadrant 1 (positivistic-pedagogy of separation) was the dominant characteristic of western pedagogy until about a few decades during which time interpretivism started making inroads. Quadrant 2 (rationalism-pedagogy of inclusion) was something that traditionally relationship-oriented cultures with an inclusive mindset had to face with the introduction of positivistic scientific methods in their educational and institutional setups in the wake of global movement towards homogenous western-inspired ideals. Quadrant 3 (positivistic-pedagogy of inclusion), it was argued, corresponds to the difficulty of post-modern centrelessness that many, particularly in the developed world, are facing now. Finally, the paper took the view that interpretivism finds its full expression only when combined with a pedagogy of inclusion.

This paper is an early attempt to combine two dimensions dealt with here that have major ontological and epistemological implications. This paper grapples with viewpoints which explain current dilemmas in a manner that is sympathetic both to the post-modern developed-world dilemmas as well as the conflicts of post-colonial realities faced by those in the developing world. It may be noted that while the positivism-interpretivism dimension belongs more in the cognitive domain, the other dimension, namely, pedagogy of separation versus pedagogy of inclusion may belong more to the affective domain; something which may even stray in the domain of spirituality. Much further inquiry is required to tease out these finer points.

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