Johannes Herwig-Lempp

Systemic-constructivist research means to me…

To research with a systemic respectively systemic-constructivist approach means to me, amongst others, that from time to time I remember to include the following presumptions (basic assumptions, axioms, definitions, ideas):

- Research invents and constructs knowledge (and not only "finds" it), that means it invents the reality that the researcher wants to explore: "the environment as we perceive it is our invention" (von Foerster 1973, p. 1)).

- Systems are not things, but a function of our mind, a result of our thinking, deciding, acting: "The system now means, not a thing, but a list of variables. This list can be varied, and the experimenter's commonest task is hat of varying the list („taking other variables into account") until he finds a set of variables that gives the required singleness" (Ashby 1958, p. 40).

- The researchers are responsible for the compilation of the systems to be investigated and thus for the results of their research: „Objectivity is a subject's delusion that observing can be done without him. Invoking objectivity is abrogating responsibility, hence its popularity" (von Glasersfeld 1992, p. 3)

- "It could just as well be otherwise" and "there are always at least seven possibilities" (cf. Herwig-Lempp 2009, 2013) to describe, to explain and to act (i.e. to research) which means there is always an infinite number of ways in which reality can be explored, explained, and described (and thus "may appear as true.")

- Between "knowledge" and "belief in knowing" there is a difference that perhaps is negligible, but sometimes it makes a difference and can be important. From a systemic perspective, objective knowledge is ultimately not possible, but at the same time clear as to how one can be so firmly convinced again and again that the "real truth" can be recognized.

- Research will be judged by its usefulness and usefulness as well as plausibility, not according to the criterion of truth. Who benefits from what kind of research and its results?

Systemic research for me means (in analogy to "second order cybernetics"—i. e. the cybernetics of the observing systems, ref. von Foerster 1979) also "second order research":

- I can from time to time reflect my views, interests, and perspectives—and accept the inevitable limitations of my research.

- Presenting my results, I can refer to the context in which I did this research, and by referring I do by the way relativize my findings.

- I can represent these context-related and subjective findings also linguistically—by pointing out that it is me, who researches ("I", "in my opinion", "from my perspective"), by taking in account that other results might be as possible as well under different circumstances and by using relativizing words ("sometimes", "often").

- I can point out explicitly and so remind myself and my readers, that as researchers, we are not neutral but are always in pursuit of divergent self-interests, and that we are always guided by our own perceptions, assumptions, estimates, beliefs, prejudices, stereotypes—which we of course try to get confirmed and "proved" by our studies.

From my systemic view means to research systemically, for myself and others to bring our responsibility as researchers to the forefront of our minds (to colleagues as well as to laymen). By doing research, I always also create the reality in which I am going to study. And I also try to keep in mind that there are no "real definitions"—definitions can't be "true", they are made for a certain purpose—this is also true for the/this definition of "systemic research."

Literature:

Ashby, W. Ross (1958), An Introduction to Cybernetics, 3rd impr., New York (John Wiley & Sons Inc.)

Foerster, Heinz von (1973), On Constructing a Reality, in: W. F. E. Preiser (Ed.), Environmental Design Research, vol. 2, Stroudberg, p. 35-46, http://cleamc11.vub.ac.be/Books/Foerster-constructingreality.pdf

Foerster, Heinz von (1979), Cyberneticcs of Cybernetics, in: Klaus Kippendorff, Communication and Control in Society, New York, http://143.107.236.240/pesquisas/cultura_digital/arquitetura_e_cibernetica/textos%20linkados/foerster_cybernetics%20of%20cybernetics.pdf

Glasersfeld, Ernst von (1992), Declaration of the American Society for Cybernetics, in: In: C.V. Negiota (Ed.), Cybernetics and applied systems. New York: Marcel Decker, 1–5, 1992), http://www.vonglasersfeld.com/065

Herwig-Lempp, Johannes (guest editor) (2009): Mindestens sieben Möglichkeiten – die Vielfalt systemischer Sozialarbeit [At Least Seven Possibilities – The Diversity of Systemic Social Work]. *Special issue with contributions from a conference „At Least Seven Possibilities – The Diversity of Systemic Social Work“, held Novembeer 2008 in Merseburg,* KONTEXT 2/2009

Herwig-Lempp, Johannes (2013), Resource-Oriented Teamwork. A Systemic Approach to Collegial Consultation, Göttingen (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht)

This is the English version of a contribution to the website http://www.systemisch-forschen.de/was_ist_systemische_forschung [systemic research - what is systemic research] from 2010/2014

Contact:

Prof. Dr. Johannes Herwig-Lempp
Ammendorfer Weg 115, 06128 Halle,
Tel. +49/ 345/ 54 84 680

johannes@herwig-lempp.de

www.herwig-lempp.de