OBJECTIVE RESEARCH? IN THE SEMINARY?

By Terry Dwain Robertson

Seminary Librarian

12th Annual Seminary Scholarship Symposium, February 4-5, 2016
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, MI

OBJECTIVES

Natural Objects — An example of research on "natural objects" in the Seminary is the work that engages the artifacts proper in the Museum. The "Primary Sources" are the artifacts themselves, and serve as the focus of the research. "Secondary Sources" include any of the writings that discuss the object itself, or objects like it. Library resources include the secondary and tertiary sources that document the analysis of the object within the community of experts. Research that creates new knowledge may include a rigorous description of the object, with definable interpretations of its origin and purpose. New knowledge may also be created by correcting prior misconceptions.

Ideal Objects — An example of research on "ideal objects" in the Seminary is the work that endeavors to understand the transformations associated with systematic theology and ethics. The "object" is an idea, an abstraction, so the standard method for analyzing the abstraction is to critique the various attempts to explain it. Another approach is to seek a method by which to critique the object with reference to other similar objects. Either approach is informed by library resources. "Secondary Sources" are useful for establishing common language and capturing the context. "Tertiary Sources" enrich the conversation on the object and have the potential to fill in any gaps in the researcher’s thinking processes. Research that creates new knowledge may make significant connections between ideas or fill in gaps in the collective knowledge.

Social Objects — An example of research on "social objects" in the Seminary is the work that engages the reified and commodified information that authors have created to communicate some thing to readers for a purpose. The "Primary Sources" are the texts themselves, which then serve as the focus and anchor of the research. The most pertinent text for study is that of the Holy Scriptures. "Secondary Sources" include any of the writings that discuss the text itself, and can be considered as the "conversation" of scholars. The library resources include the primary object, as well as the secondary and tertiary sources that document the analysis of the object within the community of experts. Research that creates new knowledge may include a rigorous description of the object as both a communication medium and a message from an author to a reader, with definable interpretations of its origins and purpose in view of both author and reader. New knowledge may also be created by correcting prior misconceptions. This becomes interesting as it informs timeless human values that remain pertinent today.

Concluding Observations

The accomplished researcher may understand tacitly this ontological framework, and may approximate the nuances that emerge with increasing levels of abstraction. On the other hand, the novice researcher would benefit from an intentional application of this ontology to specific research assignments. This would address typical assumptions that "research" can only be done one way, that it is done the same way regardless of the topic, that it is about technology and not about knowledge.

This ontology may provide a novice researcher a way of thinking that clarifies the process in a multidisciplinary context, facilitating shifts from one class of object to another.