

An Exercise in Role-Playing

Research proposal for study of factors influencing academic performance in the New Brunswick education system.

Background:

- Origins of public schools (industrialization, democracy, nationalism, print)
 - View of education as a functional module, serving an (external) active government agenda
 - Emergence of a structuralist school of curriculum theory as the dominant force in educational discourse

Problem: The poor academic performance of some students in the New Brunswick education system can be reduced, in part, to curriculum and policy planning based on an incomplete structural-functionalist analysis and its resulting theoretical framework, further compounded by the research and findings grounded therein.

Thesis: I propose an interpretive paradigm that considers present phenomena diachronically and incorporates previously marginalized idioms of educational discourse into its narrative construction.

Theory:

Abstract: Jean Francois Lyotard – performativity / adverse effects of the commodification of knowledge

Moderate: Joseph Schwab / Ralph Tyler – practical conceptualizations of curriculum design and evaluation; ideal of 'liberal education'
Neil Postman - historical development of public education
Cleo Cherryholmes – poststructural evaluation of educational discourse / practice

Concrete: Ken Osborne – history and present evaluation of the national education system's ideals, curriculum and policy / consideration of institutional interests in a broader social context
Jerome Bruner – re: cognitive revolution, 'spiral curriculum'

Key Characteristics of Research Design:

- PARADIGMS: Critical / Positivist → Action Research
- structuralist / postmodern synthesis ("little narratives")
 - diachronic narrative construction
 - agency accorded to marginalized social relationships
- policy over curriculum

2 phases of research: 1) verify hypothesis through survey research / participant observation / generally passive methods; 2) if evidence affirms hypothesis, implement programs in line with principles that forecast success and actively monitor results.

Significance:

- provides a response to poststructuralist and traditionalist criticisms of educational research (Cleo Cherryholmes, David Hargreaves)
- a new interpretive paradigm for educational research
- a practical approach to policy planning that places it on par with curriculum theory by giving it metaphysical grounding