Thinking about Research in Continuing Education: A Meta-theoretical Primer

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Abstract

Every approach to conducting research in continuing education involves background assumptions about the nature of what is being studied, the means through which one can acquire knowledge, and the purpose of the research process itself. Although often not explicitly declared, these assumptions have a significant bearing on the choice of research questions, the methods employed to investigate those questions, the relationship between researchers and the subjects of their investigation, and the integration of research findings into communities of scholars and practitioners.

The goal of this article is to promote awareness of the range of alternative possible approaches to conducting research in continuing education. It pursues this goal in three stages. First, it compares and contrasts the three predominant world-views in which modern social scientific research has typically been grounded in Canada: positivism, interpretive humanism, and radical structuralism. Each world-view is explored through ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical questions. Second, the article outlines recent challenges, largely from postmodern and feminist researchers, to the background assumptions and political implications of these three established orientations to research. Third, the article poses a number of questions in order to encourage critical reflection about continuing education research.
submission process, as it can lead to productive exchanges, as well as earlier and greater citation of published work (See The Effect of Open Access).