



A Post-Modern Exploration of Community College Formal Curriculum
Reviews: Curriculum, Language, Power and Pythons.

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the formal curricular review and renewal processes in one Ontario community college and the experiences of two faculty members within this process. The paper is the creative presentation of a qualitative research study conducted at Georgian College in February and March 2004. The study is composed of in-depth interviews with two faculty members at the college. The research is informed by Foucauldian discourse analysis, Conrad and Pratt's Framework for Curricular Decisions, and Gay's Pragmatic Model of Curricular Development. In an effort to underscore the injustices, ironies, and absurdities of language, this paper is framed by the work of Monty Python's Flying Circus. The paper expresses concern with major conceptual themes of "economy" and "objectivity" arising in language used by faculty members as they consider curriculum.

The Context: Biography of the Ontario Community College: A Context for Curriculum and for Interviews about Curriculum

1967. An act of Parliament creates Ontario Community Colleges.

1969. Late one night on the BBC, the genius of Monty Python is unleashed to the world.

McCabe (narrator): Hello and welcome to this audio recording of The Pythons on The Pythons. My name is Bob McCabe and I've had the incredible privilege of interviewing each of the Pythons over a period of, well, it feels like years... actually, it has been years... to gather together resource material for their autobiography. You will hear some of these interviews on this recording. Once I had the interviews, I was able to edit them in text form, to complete their autobiography. Only, that doesn't mean that it's an autobiography in its strictest sense though, does it? I mean, not in its purest form. Because I edited it, I could have quite easily arranged the material in such a way that the Pythons appeared the way that I would like them to appear.

Jones: That's not really an autobiography then, is it? I mean, I never even picked up a pen for a minute.

McCabe: Excuse me.

Palin: This is Michael Palin. Ah. Would you just shut up.

McCabe: I don't deserve this. I've spent hours, no, actually years...

Gilliam: This is Terry Gilliam. Go away, Bob. This is our book.

Jones: Quite right, Terry. He really shouldn't be in on this.

McCabe: Look, I'm not even getting paid for this bloody thing.

Gilliam: Go away, Bob.

Jones: You're right, Terry. He shouldn't be on this.

Gilliam: Bob, out.

McCabe: If I could just...

Jones: Look, I completely agree with you Terry, if Bob would just shut up.

McCabe: If I could just have...

Idle: Now, come on, John. Say something funny. That's what they're paying you for.

Cleese: Your mother was a hamster and your father smelt of elderberries.

McCabe: Sorry?

Gilliam: Go away, Bob.

McCabe: If I could just have a few minutes to introduce this...

Gilliam: Our book

McCabe: If I could just...

Gilliam: Go away.

Palin: This is our book.

My starting point is that the researcher cannot be separated from the process of research. This notion is particularly applicable when the focus of the research, language, is also the tool we use to share research findings. Although the purpose of this research is to activate and encourage diverse voices and perspectives, this narrative about two programs in a College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) going through the challenging process of curricular reform is very much informed by my own evolving perspective about power relations. Power does not depend upon formal authority or prestige as much as traditional administrative theory posits. Rather, social reality and social relations, including relations of power, are constituted subjectively and not identified as some abstraction from the discourses in which they are embedded.

In the fall of 2003, two programs at Georgian College in Ontario began a formal curriculum review process, as is standard practice, and did so in the context of the 2003 Georgian College Academic Plan and the release of a new Curriculum Handbook for the college. As a means of reflecting upon the faculty experience in relation to these curriculum reviews, I interviewed two faculty members at the college. I decided to conduct my research because I understood that organizations are formed by many voices and many interpretations of what those voices express. In the Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT), these voices are manifested within and represented by the official legislation, the policies, and the various groups of people.

Ontario's community colleges were created in 1967 by the government as a means of addressing the need for accessible higher education that would differ from both universities and trade schools. A number of visions and revisions have posited the need for the community colleges to offer skills-based training within a framework that also includes the non-vocational arenas of humanities, arts, social sciences, and communications. The Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002, often referred to as the new College Charter, is the latest legislative pronouncement. By virtue of this Act, community colleges acquire greater autonomy over their curriculum. At the same time, however, they are forced into more intense intercollegiate competition for funding. This Act thus moves colleges deeper into an instrumental 'business model' and forces them to adopt the objectives of 'cost-effective strategies' in order to survive and outperform their competition. In this paper, I examine the issues associated with this framing of college's directions by deconstructing the language of curriculum review. I infuse the essay with pieces from Monty Python sketches because Monty Python illuminates the ironies and absurdities of language.

At the time of the birth of the CAATs, and (the birth of Monty Python), many educators began to explore the politics of education. Much discussion focused on how the form and content of education and educational institutions work to reproduce existing hierarchies in general, and class divisions in particular. "Similarly, although certain so-called scholarship and research came under indictment for being politically motivated, more attention was paid to pedagogy and institutional structures than to the curriculum or the canon" (Rothenberg, 1996). The Brazilian educator Paulo Friere's work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) prompted many teachers to re-consider their methodologies and develop new ways to structure the learning experience (Sleeter, 1996).

Eventually, the politicized would turn attention to the curriculum and the dominance of a largely white, Eurocentric, and elitist starting point for much history and culture. While policies soon proliferated around such activities as enrollment and acceptable behaviours within the colleges, it was the politicized faculty who explored diversity and power as essential to curricular reform. But it must be noted that the policies currently in place for curricular reform at Georgian College have less to do with content and more to do with the processes departments must follow in considering and reconsidering curriculum. Examples of such processes include the curricular bodies that must “sign-off” documents, timelines for the generation of documents, and delineation of such course delivery elements as credit value, delivery mode and course numbers. This focus has both beneficial and detrimental implications that are fairly obvious. The standardization of format and approach improves efficiencies in the system; however, standardization and process orientation may also distract attention from some of the key questions, which I contend need to be asked of curriculum.

Perhaps the first questions we might consider are how, when, and whether or not conversations about power are still occurring in relation to community college curricula. What kinds of conversations are taking place? And further, are we talking *about* power, or *with* power, or both? When I refer to power I mean a Foucauldian notion of a network of relations in exercised through the production, accumulation of discourses – power as social normalizing. But I wonder if *any* concepts of power are entering into curricular conversations. Are there discussions of formal authority or informal authority? Are the faculty members at the colleges examining issues relating to power?

Colleges were established initially to provide opportunities for higher education to those members of society for whom a university education was not accessible. Access was key and “empowerment” was an implied effect. While some would argue that the original role of the colleges was simply to develop a highly skilled workforce, the CAATs also had an obligation to educate for more than vocational skills. As with universities, the mission of community colleges included social and civic commitments. Their adherence to these commitments was embedded in curriculum through generic skill development, including expectations around critical thinking, communication, and historical/political/social contextualization of the individual learner.

As recently as a few months ago I thought that the dominant cultures and ideologies were being passed off to the masses from above. I believed that the leaders in our institutions of higher education were becoming so focused on the economic aims of institutions that they themselves were losing sight of other important academic aims. Furthermore, I believed this focus was trickling down to the faculty who held on tight to the college’s academic purposes. Now, however, I see that my initial viewpoint was somewhat simplistic.

Power does not come from ‘on-high’ but is much more intricately orchestrated and lived through the language we use and the meanings which are acceptable according to various dominant ideologies, not necessarily according to dominant leaders or policies. As Fairclough reminds us:

We live in an age in which power is predominantly exercised through the generation of consent rather than through coercion, through ideology rather than through physical force, through the inculcation of self-disciplining practices rather than the breaking of skulls (although there is

still unfortunately no shortage of the latter). It is an age in which the production and reproduction of the social order depend increasingly on practices and processes of a broadly cultural nature. Part of this development is an enhanced role for language in the exercise of power (1994, p. 257).

Consent is largely achieved through discourse. Ideologies and values are transmitted in the conversations we have, the documents we generate and the very words we use to construct our social realities. Who gets a voice is important, but the subtle nuances in denotation and connotation are also essential in considering power constructions.

Program Reviews and Ensuing Questions:

Perhaps one of the most discussed aspects of education is the curriculum. Curriculum can refer to everything from expected learning outcomes and objectives to the hidden agendas of individual teachers and students. For the purposes of this paper, I rely more upon the concept of curriculum in its most traditional sense, as set with specific learning outcomes and objectives. Program reviews, which are in essence discussions about curriculum relating to a specific program of study, are conducted regularly at community colleges in a variety of ways ranging from formal to informal. Informal reviews of content and teaching occur on a very local and individualized level in an informal and spontaneous fashion. In a literature class, a teacher may decide that students really do not need to learn about poetic assonance as much as they need to learn about a particular rhyme scheme. Or, a cohort of teachers from a particular program may meet to decide that a technology is outdated and does not need to be taught anymore. For instance, the web design instructors with whom I work regularly chat about how the students need to develop greater fluency in one programming language over another. Nothing happens, necessarily, to formal curricular documents, but changes are made within the content which faculty include in their instruction.

The official program review is significantly more “structured” and formalized. At Georgian College, it is conducted with a number of faculty members, a dean, as well as a research team and a particular reporting process. There is also an ‘Academic Plan’ which articulates the importance of conducting regular formal program reviews, and a Curriculum Handbook which identifies how to conduct the reviews, including the kinds of questions, the formats for review teams and the nature of reporting findings.

As political legislation continues to impact and alter the relationships amongst colleges, I expect that the central tension between the societal purpose of education and the associated economic discourse (financial value of programs both to the college and to society) will be heightened. In an increasingly competitive environment, I understand that curriculum-planning processes are being fused with economic discourse (business solutions and cases for programs) in formal guiding documents, as well as within discussions regarding curriculum planning at the management level of the community college. As a former dean, I participated often in these conversations and in the development of documents that entrenched and augmented their significance (such as an Academic Plan and College Curriculum Handbook). At the same time, interestingly, I

anticipated much faculty resistance to these efforts to consider dollars and cents centrally within our considerations and reconsiderations of the programs offered by our college. I counted on this tension and resistance to serve as protection to those parts of the curriculum that do not serve the economy. Ultimately, my experience with the formal curriculum review process, and the type of resistance and tension I encountered, left me with many unanswered questions. At no time did I feel that the faculty members in my college were silenced by what Fairclough referred to as the “cracking of skulls”. Rather, there was a consensual adoption of language and concepts which are framed with what George Orwell might have called “business-speak”.

In order to talk about talking within, we must understand that curriculum is neither developed nor reviewed in a vacuum. Numerous factors flow in and out of curricular discussions and decisions. Conrad and Pratt developed a framework for curricular decisions which asks that the following factors be considered:

- The competitive environment (societal purposes of education);
- The institutional purposes of education;
- The student clientele/culture (demographic characteristics);
- The institutional interface with immediate and larger community (competitive/cooperative); and
- The financial guidelines (governmental impact and institutional) (1983, 16-30).

I am interested in how the curriculum review process engages these different variables. In relation to the central tension between the academic and economic rationale, what happens to programs that are not financially viable, yet are valuable in other ways to our communities (e.g., dialysis technologists or fine artists)? How does the rhetoric of economics prevent other important conversations from occurring? And how are the faculty empowered to act in relation to these questions? I attempt to address these questions in what follows.

*Theoretical and conceptual framework:
Argument, conflicting conceptions, language and power.*

Mr. Vibrating: Come in.

(The man enters the room. Mr. Vibrating is sitting on a desk.)

Man: Is this the right room for an argument?

Mr. Vibrating: I've told you once.

Man: No you haven't.

Mr. Vibrating: Yes I have.

Man: When?

Mr. Vibrating: Just now!

Man: No you didn't.

Mr. Vibrating: Yes I did!

Man: Didn't.

Mr. Vibrating: Did.

Man: Didn't.

Mr. Vibrating: Did

Man: Didn't.
Mr. Vibrating: I'm telling you I did!
Man: You did not!
Mr. Vibrating: I'm sorry, is this a five-minute argument, or the full half-hour?
Man: Oh... Just a five-minute one.
Mr. Vibrating: Fine (makes a note of it; the man sits down) thank you. Anyway I did.
Man: You most certainly did not.
Mr. Vibrating: Now, let's get one thing quite clear. I most definitely told you!
 ...
Man: Look, this isn't an argument.
Mr. Vibrating: Yes it is.
Man: No it isn't. It's just a contradiction.
Mr. Vibrating: No it isn't.
Man: Yes, it is.
Mr. Vibrating: It is not.
Man: It is. You just contradicted me.

Man: I came here for a good argument.
Mr. Vibrating: No, you didn't. You came here for an argument.
Man: Well, an argument's not the same as a contradiction.
Mr. Vibrating: It can be.
Man: No it can't. An argument is a connected series of statements to establish a definite proposition.
Mr. Vibrating: No it isn't
Man: Yes it is. It isn't just contradiction.
Mr. Vibrating: Look, if I argue with you I must take up a contrary position.
Man: But it isn't just saying, "No it isn't"
Mr. Vibrating: Yes it is.
Man: No, it isn't. Argument is an intellectual process... contradiction is just the automatic gainsaying of anything the other person says.
Mr. Vibrating: No it isn't.
Man: Yes it is.
Mr. Vibrating: Not at all.
Man: Now look!
Mr. Vibrating: (pressing the bell on his desk) Thank you, good morning.

Language is not something that is tangible and immutable. Language is constituted of social interaction – the production, accumulation and functioning of meaning in order to meet the needs of the powerful. It is an entity constantly in flux, reflecting social patterns (e.g., stereotypes) to reinforce and reproduce those patterns. Similarly, language is something difficult to rally against. Purists like George Orwell and Samuel Johnson argued, in essence, that we ought not allow the English language to import words from other languages. Now perhaps we can live without ballet and psychology, but can we imagine our language without the Norse influences of such words as than, their,

she, etc.? To imagine how we might think without these words is to recognize just how powerful language is. It is immanently so.

If language is an instrument of power, we may situate our understanding of power. According to Michel Foucault, power is a network of relations constantly in tension and ever-present in activity (1976). Rather than possessed and localized in individual hands, power, according to Foucault, is exercised through the production, accumulation and functioning of various discourses as opposed to, exclusively as one person or group over another.

Many critical theorists imagine the possibility of a utopian world wherein equality exists and we all participate to create and transform our reality. Change in this vision is desirable. According to Foster, critical theory questions the framework of the way we organize our lives or the way our lives are organized for us (1986). As he explains:

It probes foundational assumptions that are normally taken for granted and seen as natural outgrowths of historical process.... A critical theory examines sources of social domination and repression, but with the caveat that since we ultimately make our worlds, we can ultimately change them.... Its critique is largely oriented toward... attainment of such values as democracy and freedom (1986, 72).

Within post-structuralism, the binary of “same” and “other” is an important structure to consider. While theorists such as Derrida and Lacan focus on language and texts as structures which organize this binary, Foucault looks at discursive formations – bounded bodies of knowledge such as the social sciences (Seidman and Alexander, 2001, 7). It is his poststructuralist/postmodern work that provides a particularly useful lens for program review. For Foucault, knowledge and power are not in binary opposition but in integrated construction. Foucault asks both how we know what order is and what is ‘same’ and ‘other’ in our society. He questions what categories in and of themselves reveal about order, marginalization and centering.

At first pass, arguments seem like a mechanism that promotes the binary. For the Python aficionado, the guy behind the desk who merely contradicts is the one with power (same) despite the customer’s (other) obvious ability to engage in the definition of argument and presumably a more sophisticated form of argument. In Monty Python, irony is rife. The guy behind the desk determines the meaning of argument. He is not willing to analyse discourse and definition and does not need to do so in order to maintain his position of power. His position of power (holding the bell, sitting behind the big desk, taking money for providing questionable service) suggests he is better off ignoring discourse. Thank you. Good morning.

This relates to curriculum planning because the process of schooling is a form of “social and cultural reproduction”, which is linked directly to structures in society. I argue that some of the core links are to economic structures. According to Corson, formal education legitimates knowledge, class and social strata. “Schools allocate people and legitimate knowledge, or legitimate people and allocate knowledge. By extension, language is the vehicle for power distribution through education” (1996, 9). Education is then a place of normalization, and language works both within the institution and as part of the institution to legitimize and normalize knowledge.

When planning curriculum, we begin with a general framework that considers the many interdependent elements of process and purpose that constitute a curriculum plan. Some theorists, such as Eisner and Vallance, call these “conflicting conceptions” (1974). While higher education models of curricular frameworks have begun to appear in research literature, the bulk of curricular planning writing focuses on pre-collegiate education.. According to Gay (1980), for example, there are four models, or “conflicting conceptions”, for curriculum planning. They are the academic rational model, the experiential model, the technical model and the pragmatic model. The pragmatic curriculum planning model (political and social interaction model) aligns with critical theory in efforts to change the distribution of power. What follows is a brief sketch of each model, how each functions, and what the goals and objectives are.

1. The Academic Rational model is a systematic view of curriculum which assumes a clear view of what knowledge is worth knowing. Curriculum planners strive for a balance among five tensions: learner, society, subject matter and disciplines, philosophy of education and psychology of learning. They also seek a balanced emphasis on physical, psychological, intellectual and moral dimensions of learning. With this model there is the assumption that curriculum development is a linear process in which decisions are made sequentially about objectives, content, learning activities, teaching techniques and evaluation processes. In my experience, this is the model espoused by most people who are involved in teaching adult educators and supporting their efforts to consider their teaching and curriculum. It informs the Outcomes Based Education model, the model perhaps most recognized by adult educators who have worked with curricular process.
2. The Experiential model has the planner engaging students in planning their own active, self-directed learning experiences. Planning steps cannot be specified in advance. Desired outcomes include intellectual, emotional, social, physical, aesthetic and spiritual development; self-control; and a sense of personal efficacy.
3. The Technical model is derived from systems management and production and assumes that education is a rational process. If the process is carefully controlled, the nature of the products can be predicted and determined. It requires specifying desired objectives in advance, constructing activities to achieve these objectives, and evaluating their success, primarily as observed changes in learner behaviour. Frequently, the purposes are linked with preparing the learner for life’s functions. Again, this is a favoured model in the College curriculum processes with which I have been involved.
4. The Pragmatic model is a dynamic political and social interaction model reacting to events and stakeholders who wield power in determining both the purpose and process of curriculum. Curriculum development is often localized and pluralistic. Planning is a consensual process, responsive to constituencies and seeking to distribute influence and resources and to exert pressure on various sources to develop and sustain the negotiated curriculum.

Stark and Lattuca posit that there is evidence indicating faculty in different disciplines generally support different purposes and their views concerning learning relate to these purposes (1997). For example, faculty members working in the sciences tend to support the academic-rational model, while faculty in the humanities and visual arts are likely to follow the experiential model. Generally, faculty who teach career-directed courses endorse the technical model and this model is congruent with the emphasis on skill development in the new assessment movement. Stark and Lattuca present evidence that American College faculty acknowledge but do not endorse the pragmatic model and I assume that this is true in Canada as well. At the public school level, where Gay's models originated, political tension and value conflicts occur in the local community. In the college, these same tensions affect curriculum development, resulting in political compromise within and between curriculum committees or departmental groups, or among the entire faculty. Just as faculty may not recognize other assumptions that direct their curriculum thinking, Stark and Lattuca believe they often fail to recognize the political aspects of curriculum planning and development. The pragmatic model helps us recognize that the framework of a curriculum review and reform is incomplete without considering power.

As I moved from my theoretical framework into research, I wondered what faculty felt about their recent experiences with the formal review process. I became interested in the language they use to consider their experiences. What discourses, that is, what "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" and are inherently about power, have some individuals experienced as central to curriculum planning? How did these individuals feel about themselves in the process? How do they interpret power? These questions and my own impressions about the value of research would define my methodology.

Methods:

Canning: The stuff of history is indeed woven in the woof. Pearl Harbor. There are pages in history's book which are written on the grand scale. Events so momentous that they dwarf man and time alike. And such is the Battle of Pearl Harbor, re-enacted for us now by the women of Batley Townswomen's Guild.

(Cut to a muddy corner of a field. Miss Rita Fairbanks stands talking straight to camera. Behind her lurk five more pepperpots.)

Canning (voice over) Miss Rita Fairbanks – you organized this reconstruction of the Battle of Pearl Harbor – why?

Rita (Eric Idle) Well we've always been extremely interested in modern drama... we were of course the first Townswomen's Guild to perform "Camp on Blood Island", and last year we did our extremely popular re-enactment of "Nazi War Atrocities". So this year we thought we would like to do something in a lighter vein...

Canning: So you chose the Battle of Pearl Harbor?

Rita: Yes, that's right. We did.

Canning: Well I can see you're all ready to go. So I'll just wish you good luck in your latest venture.

Rita: Thank you very much, young man.

(She retreats and joins the other ladies who meanwhile separate into two opposing sides facing each other).

Canning (reverential voice over): Ladies and gentlemen, the World of History is proud to present the premiere of the Batley Townswomen's Guild's re-enactment of "The Battle of Pearl Harbor".

(A whistle blows and the two sides set about each other with handbags etc., speeded up 50% just to give it a bit of edge.)

In order to answer my proposed research questions, I felt comfortable approaching colleagues to learn about their recent experiences with curriculum reviews. I wanted to listen to the experiences of faculty from different programs, working with different deans, in the community college within which I work. I chose those individuals who had worked with a formal curriculum review process within the past six months. Initially, I only had time to meet with, transcribe and code the sessions of four interviews. This dwindled to two as time passed, technology failed and people became unavailable.

Beyond these constraints, there were other necessary challenges. I recognized from the outset that, in opting to conduct discourse analysis, my research would blend researcher-researched and tools-phenomenon, but that with a post-structuralist and post-modernist approach, the virtual biographical nature of research is acceptably inescapable. I also realized the limitations of being absent for the curriculum review meetings themselves. Removed from the primary experiences, I was now researching how those experiences were perceived and then recounted. The Townswomen's Guild's reenactment of Pearl Harbor underscores the invariable "bias" of retelling through both the lenses of the researcher and the lenses of the "historian".

I met with each interviewee once and recorded our discussions on a tape recorder. I provided each individual an opportunity to review our transcripts in their written form as well as a chance to compare the transcripts against the tape-recorded version. No one took me up on this offer. Finally I have shared this paper with my colleagues. Their responses have been positive.

Findings:

"The Passion of the Christ" has recently received a disturbing amount of attention via public controversy. I remember a similar controversy some time ago with the film "The Life of Brian". Brian has been caught by the Roman guards amidst a cult-like messianic

uprising. Brian has been considered “the Messiah” despite his every effort to deny this power. The real power -- which should rest with the emperor -- is undermined by the emperor’s voice. Like Tweety-bird, he lisps the letter “R” as a “W”. Everyone laughs. “Yes”, they mock the lisping emperor... “Welease Bwyan”.

As I have expressed, I expected that when I ventured into this research project I would find emperors (deans) directing their subjects (program coordinators) to conduct formal program reviews via the parchments of the time (Handbooks and Academic Plans). My hypothesis was that the concerns of the business models and economic drivers underscoring activities of senior management would be “imposed” upon the faculty members charged with reviewing their curricula and activities. I also expected that the faculty members, the ones in the classrooms every day, would first and foremost be interested in the welfare of the students and their educational needs and that I would find them opposed to the business concerns of management. What I found, however, was a more complex tension and a series of dominant discourses having to do with economics as well as science. Here is a description of each interview I conducted.

Jan’s interview:

Jan is a program coordinator for a two-year post-secondary program. Her students must meet a variety of needs for the industry including. These include a changing demographic of users, the willingness to accommodate seasonal challenges around employment, and strong generic skills (teamwork, communication, critical thinking). She reports that her students, typically ages between the ages of 17 and 21, often possess learning disabilities, specifically around attention and information retention.

This program is four years old and as such is relatively new. I was surprised to learn that the formal program review was undertaken by the coordinator, rather than requested of her by the dean, as is typically the case. For Jan, “power” is not imposed from above, but comes from within, and the notion of a program review is based very much on her own need to “discover”. From Jan’s interview, three themes emerged:

1. In her experience, the formal review process was rooted in the positivist perspective of reality and objectivity. This is because the formal research team was assigned to collect verifiable data that would estimate the success of the program.
2. On several occasions, Jan referred to the research results as “biased” because the individuals conducting the research, like Jan, want her program to be successful. The industry advisors did not agree with the results derived from the formal research team at the college and voiced their concerns over the “bias” and “inaccuracies of the research”.
3. The language used to describe the curriculum review process was heavily grounded in business terminology and positivist views of research. “Efficiency” was the term repeatedly used by Jan to rationalize considerations for change, even while “making money” was the term used by the dean to rationalize the review and potential curricular changes. The terms “learner”, “student”, “teaching experience”, “teacher” and “curriculum” were noticeably absent in the interview transcripts, . More common were terms such as “efficiencies”, “missions”, “industry advisor” and “objectivity”.

I know and work with Jan. I respect her student-centric orientation, her formal education and practical knowledge about learning and adult education, and her willingness to regularly question her own practices as well as those around her. So when I interviewed Jan, I was struck by her language and by the absence of discussion about the *student* in the curriculum review process. I probed Jan several times about the process of curriculum review, but we regularly returned to the themes of objectivity in research, efficiencies in the delivery of education and opportunities for program growth.

The dean was, surprisingly, absent from Jan's experience with the curriculum review discovery. Despite the recommendations that a team be charged with conducting and supporting curriculum reviews, Jan was frustrated and felt alienated by the process. As she explains: "I see myself as the driver and initiator of the review based on my observations of the last four years." Jan began our discussion. "It all started with me always fiddling with the program and trying to make things better. [The dean] just wanted evidence. But because of certain pressures from industry and opportunities within the college to pilot formal review processes.... I decided that this would be a good time for a formal review."

When I asked Jan about the kinds of support that she received, her response was framed matter-of-factly. "I'm a team of one. [The dean] wanted to get involved early, but I avoided that." She continues: "The report from the research department was my way of ... selling it to everybody.... The research department was really prolific for [the dean's] benefit.... I saw all of my views reflected in the SWOT [Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats] analysis and the results were immediately challenged by the industry." When prompted about the industry challenges, Jan reported, "We regularly softened the language in the SWOT analysis because the truth is that we've had a number of flat years and the growth isn't there." When I asked questions about how she viewed "growth", Jan brought attention back to the research that had been conducted by the College Research team.

The economic and scientific discourses became very clear on review of the transcripts from Jan's interview. From the depiction of the relationship between Jan and the dean, it also became clear that the discourse was not likely "led from on high". This was, instead, discourse in Foucauldian terms -- power arriving through language rather than by decree.

May's interview:

May is the new program coordinator for a one-year post-secondary certificate program. I have come to know May as a creative, outgoing, thoughtful and perceptive individual. She has been teaching for several years in her department. She regularly invites others to help her with her teaching and professional development and brings her enthusiasm and resourcefulness to her department.

May gave off the initial impression that she is very unclear as to what a formal program review is and what it hopes to accomplish, though – perhaps ironically -- she thinks it useful. As we began the interview, this seemed to give way to a sense of frustration with the "expectations" of her leaders – including both the dean and the Academic Council to which the "reports" would ultimately go.

The terms “bias” and “quantifiable” arose many times in many contexts. Again three themes grew prominent in this interview. May expressed problems with the following:

1. The lack of clarity about what a curriculum review is to accomplish and how it is to be conducted;
2. The feeling that the research which she participated in conducting was “faulty” because it wasn’t “objective” and was “biased” by her own choices and impressions; and
3. Frustration with a review process that lends itself towards “quantifiable” and/or “vocational results”.

May perceives her role as entirely supportive of her dean in his leading the review process. She began our interview with a fairly submissive verbal posture. “We have a set number of questions that we ask faculty and I just record what they are telling us.” And further: “we had initial interviews at the beginning of the year [with students] but we just wanted to know who our students were and where they were coming from.” May alluded to the fact that the data being collected had more to contribute to a marketing analysis of the program than with curriculum. When probed a little more about the student interviews, May indicated that further interviews were to be conducted with the students, but that she wasn’t clear about the information her team is seeking. “That’s something that hasn’t been really clearly defined and I’m a bit concerned about that... I was told to just randomly pick a few students. But I have a problem [with that approach] because then I’ll be biased.” May understood that students needed to be interviewed to get a sense of how they perceived the program and how it is meeting their needs.

When asked about whether the research they were doing was actually considering curriculum, May responded, “Peripherally we are looking at curriculum through the feedback we are getting. For instance, we are questioning one particular theory course because of the grades of the students and the results of the interviews with faculty, who believe that the content is fine, but that its delivery could be spiced up a bit and be a lot more dynamic, and interesting, and relevant to the students.”

Later in the interview, when I asked May about her role, she responded, “I think this is an important thing to do... the process is important and there are a lot of components in the process [as outlined in the Curriculum Handbook which guides curriculum review processes]. For example, are we meeting the standards of industry... well how could we possibly meet the standards of industry... the skills that you learn in our program ... you can’t quantify them... they aren’t vocational. There’s a list of what is expected of you [to consider in a curriculum review]. What is our workplace and how can we assess that?”

May’s impression, always gently expressed, is that the document that is meant to guide faculty teams in the curriculum review is oriented toward economic discourses and goals.

May isn’t alone in her frustration over the “vocationalizing” of community colleges and liberal education. According to Scott, many community college administrators feel it is appropriate for students to ask of any course, “How much is this worth? How much can I get for it?” - with “worth” defined in strictly practical and pecuniary terms (1992).

Perhaps most clearly, May’s closing comments display the problem of expectations of economic and scientific discourses which may underscore the College Curriculum

Handbook's multiple-step process for undergoing formal reviews. "The text is useful in that we know what's expected on the other end. We have to follow, try to follow, what they are asking as best we can. I think it's a good idea but I think some of it is a little repetitive. The review is vocationally oriented. It's beneficial in that it makes us step back. But it's really hard to be objective when you are in the program." Perhaps the emperor has not demanded the alignment with discourse, but the power is definitely in exercise.

Conclusions:

Interviewer: Good evening. I have with me in the studio tonight Mr Norman St John Polevaulter, who for the past few years has been contradicting people... Mr Polevaulter, why do you contradict people?

Polevaulter: I don't.

Interviewer: You told me that you did.

Polevaulter: I most certainly did not.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. I'll start again.

Polevaulter: No you won't.

Interviewer: Shh. Mr Polevaulter, I understand you don't contradict people.

Polevaulter: Yes I do.

Interviewer: When didn't you start contradicting people.

Polevaulter: Well, I did, in 1952.

Interviewer: 1952?

Polevaulter: 1947.

I consider education to be a social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction and transformation. Consequently, I engage in research that is critical of educational practice that is oppressive through its exercise of power and privilege. I enjoy trying to contradict dominant ideology and explore why we are so attracted to certain discourses. Since I engage a point of view that I would define as anti-positivistic, feminist and neo-Marxist, I am ultimately interested in discovering how power is established and maintained, and in communicating these findings for further discussion. That is not to say that I expected scientific discourse to be present and I was actually surprised by its prominence in both interviews.

Conrad and Pratt (1983) offer a way of contextualizing curriculum development so that we do not see the process as occurring within a vacuum. Gay's (1980) pragmatic model of curricular development specifically considers the significance of the political nature of curriculum development and the need to draw conversations toward this understanding. Finally, discourse analysis provides a framework for understanding the ways that power is manifest in our production, possession and accumulation of language and meaning.

In closing, I am surprised and pleased that the two interviews I was able to conduct and transcribe provided clarity in terms of the dynamics of these interwoven models, such that I am prepared to move forward to my dissertation, comfortable with a conceptual framework, a newfound knowledge of microphones and an eagerness to engage in my topic with humour and passion. And now, for something not so completely different.

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