The Nature of Enquiry

Dr John Ravenscroft (Course Organiser)

Credit Rating 20 credits, SCQF 11

Course Summary
The aim of this course is to introduce philosophical and epistemological perspectives that inform research practice in the social sciences in an educational context. The course provides an essential introduction to the issue of values and ethical problems in educational research. It discusses conceptions of education and their implications for educational research processes. Within MSc by Research (Education).

Course Description
The aim of this course is to introduce philosophical and epistemological perspectives that inform the aims and practices of social and educational research. Discussion of the main debates between positivism, critical theory, constructivism, post modernism, feminism will lead to a consideration of the arguments and assumptions which each makes about the social world. The course will focus on issues of knowledge, what is knowledge, how do we know what knowledge is as well as determining what knowledge is for education research.

Learning Outcomes
- critically evaluate the main traditions and paradigms of educational research
- analyse the ways in which the different methodological positions affect research questions, and research design
- demonstrate critical awareness of the values and ethical debates inherent in social and educational research

Teaching
10 x 2.5 hour weekly sessions in semester 1.

The course combines lectures, group discussion, film clips, guest speakers and student presentations. Core reading will be distributed in advance of each session.
Course Assessment
Students are required to complete an assignment on:

The best research exposes causal relationships all other research is secondary. Discuss.

The word limit is 4,000 words (excluding references). Please refer to the Generic MSc Handbook for guidelines on the preparation and presentation of assessments, and for full details of the marking criteria.

A comprehensive reading list for each session is detailed on the Learn page.

Indicative Content
This will include:
- modes of philosophical, historical and empirical enquiry
- epistemology
- research values and research ethics
- positivism
- interpretivism / constructivist
- structuralism
- feminist epistemology
- post-critiques

Reading List
Introduction: The nature of educational research


Virtue epistemology


Background reading on Virtue Epistemology (to be read before class):


What is Knowledge


Some type of Constructivism


Critical Theory in educational research/ Marxism in Educational Philosophy


Postmodernism


Feminist epistemology


Values, Ethics and the politics of educational research


So just what is the value of research?

