

The Nature of Enquiry

Dr Pat McLaughlin

Course Outline

The aim of this course is to enhance participants' awareness of the epistemological and methodological perspectives that inform social and educational research. Discussion of the main debates between the various traditions of enquiry will lead to a consideration of the arguments and assumptions which each makes about the social world. The course focuses on issues of methodology (ie., the principles of research) rather than on providing training in the use of specific research methods, but these will then be linked with the discussions in other units on the actual practice of research. It is also important that a course of this nature should address the values and ethical problems inherent in educational research.

Assessment

Assessment consists of an assignment (4–5,000 words) that demonstrates a sound grasp of the theoretical concepts covered in the course. The essay should explore the nature, the context and the goals, of social enquiry and should be supported by reference to the student's own area of research interest and/or professional expertise.

Background Reading

The following text might provide a preliminary introduction to the main theme before the start of the course:

- Bell, C. and Roberts, H. (eds) (1984) *Social Researching, Politics, Problems and Practice*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bryman, A. (1988) *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, London: Unwin Hyman.
- Hammersley, M. (ed) (1993) *Social Research: Philosophies, policy and practice*, London: Tavistock.
- Hughes, J. (1980) *The Philosophy of Social Research*, London: Longman.
- May, T. (1993) *Social Research: Issues, methods and process*, Milton Keynes: OUP.
- Pring, R. (2000) *Philosophy of educational research*, London: Cassell.
- Wright Mills, C. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.