Liberating Knowledge at the Margins: Towards a Discursive-Transactional Research Paradigm in LIS

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Michael Dudley, University of Winnipeg
Purpose

To name, describe and demonstrate the potentialities of a mode of LIS research by illustrating with suggestive examples.
Outline

- Definitions
- **Context**: Critical LIS perspectives on normative pragmatism in LIS research, and its critics
- **Theory**: Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge*
- Proposed *Discursive Transactional Research Paradigm*
- **Methods**: LCSH as Foucauldian “statements”
- **Suggestive examples** in the LIS literature
- Conclusions
Definitions
Discourses:

- “systems of thought,” or the “demarcation of a field of objects” which are maintained as “discursive practices” not necessarily tied to any particular discipline, but which require normative acts of exclusions and selection (Foucault 1997).
Definitions
Transactionality:

Dialectical processes of knowledge production and reproduction in which libraries participate across all disciplines, and leads to the creation of further literary warrant justifying the knowledge organization systems they employ.
Definitions
“Subjugated knowledge”

“historical contents that have been buried and disguised ...knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to the task or insufficiently elaborated…” (Foucault 1980, 81-2).

e.g., counternarratives re: race, gender, sexuality, power, colonialism, social justice.
**Context: Research Paradigms in LIS (Hjørland 2000)**

- physical paradigm (artifacts – documents, abstracts, indexes, and databases)
- cognitive paradigm (user-oriented views);
- Systems view
- The domain-analytic view (holistic view re: scope of a knowledge domain, its thought/discourse communities, communication channels)
- Document-oriented approaches (bibliometrics)
- Hermeneutics (interpretation, semiotics, phenomenology)
**Context**: Normative pragmatism in LIS research, and its critics

- LIS dominated by a “professional paradigm” (Gauchi Risso 2016)
- LIS’ “practicality imperative” (Hudson 2017)
- neoliberal ideology emphasizes practicality and efficiency over critique (Nicholson and Seale 2018).
- the book and its indexing are fetishized or viewed in isolation from their sociocultural and historical bases (Popowich 2018)
- Librarianship as “hegemony’s handmaid” (Pawley 1998)
Theory
Social Epistemology (Egan and Shera1952)

- The role of libraries in the “production, distribution and utilization of intellectual products” in society (133-4)

- To what extent is the Library active or passive in this role; does the library “speak” or generates truth claims? (Budd 2004, 365).
Theory

Foucauldian Statements
(from The Archaeology of Knowledge [Foucault 1972/2002.])

- Statement as the “elementary unit of discourse”
- does not need to be grammatically correct sentences (can be tables, graphs, charts, maps, genealogical trees etc.)
- represents concepts, ideas
- To be read exclusive of authors or intent
- intentional rhetorical “texts” tied to surrounding contexts
- contribute to the creation of further statements
- result in discursive and non-discursive effects
Theory
Foucauldian Statements (from The Archaeology of Knowledge [Foucault 1972/2002.])

- To be read in terms of their
  - Material existence
  - Rarity
  - Exteriority (additivity and recurrence)
  - Accumulation (persistence or oblivion over time)
The Discursive Transactional Research Paradigm

- Definition
- Structure
- Methods
- Suggestive examples in the LIS Literature
The discursive-transactional research paradigm explores the epistemological transactions between knowledge organization systems (KOS) and external discourses, by considering the former as rhetorical discursive acts unto themselves and which, even as they are influenced by such discourses, produce their own potentially marginalizing discursive effects as well as non-discursive effects on users.
Rationale

Identifying the role of library knowledge organization systems as a factor in knowledge production, stabilization and subjugation.
Structure

- **Theoria (thinking):** Describing and Situating Knowledge
- **Poiesis (making):** Representing Knowledge
  - **Method:** Foucauldian analysis of KOS
- **Praxis (doing):** Acting on Knowledge
Theoria: Describing and Situating Knowledge

- A discourse and its **ontological, epistemological and/or methodological foundations**;
- The **socio-cultural, historical and/or political contexts** in which a dominant scholarly discourse exists;
- The **institutionalization of this discourse** and how this works to exclude and subjugate other forms of knowledge;
- The **counter-knowledges** subjugated by these forms of institutionalization, and the extent to which they constitute an insurrection against dominant narratives.
Poiesis: Representing Knowledge

- The representation of *both dominant and subjugated discourses* in library knowledge organization systems;
- An analysis of these representations *as Foucauldian statements*, in terms of the extent to which their rarity, exteriority and accumulation reflect and reinforce dominant discourses;
- The material, *discursive and non-discursive effects* of these representations.
Praxis: Acting on Knowledge

- Approaches to knowledge organization systems which would *reflect and include subjugated knowledges* in institutional and socio-cultural contexts.
- Pathways to implementing these approaches.
Examples in the LIS Literature

- Seeks to establish a theoretical framework for an Indigenous knowledge organization system.
  - **Theoria**: Indigenous knowledge discourses at the “Cultural Interface” with Western knowledge (Nakata 2002);
  - **Poiesis**: Eurocentric and colonial KOS are incommensurate with Indigenous knowledge;
    - Describes negative non-discursive effects of Eurocentric KOS re: barriers to discovering desired Indigenous content.
If the knowledge organization systems used by a university library are offensive or derogatory from Indigenous perspectives, they may also contribute to an alien climate for learners, with associated impacts on identity, sense of belonging, the ways in which learners perceive themselves, and their histories (Doyle 2013, 141).

- Seeks to establish a theoretical framework for an Indigenous knowledge organization system.
  - **Theoria**: Treats KOS “text and as discursive practice;” situates Indigenous knowledge discourses at the “Cultural Interface” with Western knowledge (Nakata 2002);
  - **Poiesis**: Eurocentric and colonial KOS are incommensurate with Indigenous knowledge;
    - Describes negative non-discursive effects of Eurocentric KOS re: barriers to discovering Indigenous content.
  - **Praxis**: Proposes developing an Indigenous Knowledge Organization (IKO) system
Fox, Melodie J. (2015). Gender as an 'Interplay of Rules': Detecting Epistemic Interplay of Medical and Legal Discourse with Sex and Gender Classification in Four Editions of the Dewey Decimal Classification. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

- Identifies correspondences between conceptions of gender in the “internal” discourse of the DDC system as well as in external medical and legal discourses.
  - **Theoria**: Critical theoretical analysis of medical, legal and library classification systems reveals how they inform each other, privileging male heterosexist viewpoints;
  - **Poiesis**: harmful misrepresentations result when women, transgender and intersex individuals are pathologized;
  - **Praxis**: a subjective epistemology emphasizing pluralistic perspectives from knowing subjects.

- Examines historiography of genocide, and of genocide in the Americas; and the concomitant treatment of this literature by the Library of Congress.
  - **Theoria**: ambivalent view of Indigenous genocide in the academy is stabilized in libraries through KOS.
  - **Poiesis**: KOS reproduce and reinforce comforting colonial narratives through benign-sounding subject headings and absence of coherent LC classification.
Poiesis: LCSH as Foucauldian Statements
LCSH as Foucauldian Statements

Materiality

- Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)
- World War (1939-1945)
- Indians of North America Wars.
- Indians, Treatment of United States.
- Massacres West (U.S.) History 19th century.
- World War, 1939-1945 Atrocities Europe, Eastern.
- Genocide Europe, Eastern History 20th century.
- Atrocities.
- Genocide.
- Indians, Treatment of.
- Massacres.
- Territorial expansion.
- United States Territorial expansion.
- Germany Territorial expansion.
LCSH as Foucauldian Statements

**Rarity:** What is said in light of what could have been said but was not

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- Indians of North America – Wars – Atrocities
- Genocide Europe, Eastern History 20th century.
- Genocide – United States
- Atrocities.
- Genocide.
- Indians, Treatment of.
- Poles – Treatment of
- Massacres.
- Territorial expansion.
- United States Territorial expansion.
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LCSH as Foucauldian Statements

Exteriority/additivity (juxtaposition/groupings).

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LCSH as Foucauldian Statements

Recurrence

- Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)
- World War (1939-1945)
- Indians of North America Wars.
- **Indians, Treatment of** United States.
- **Massacres** West (U.S.) History 19th century.
- World War, 1939-1945 **Atrocities** Europe, Eastern.
- **Genocide** Europe, Eastern History 20th century.
- **Atrocities**.
- **Genocide**.
- **Indians, Treatment of**.
- **Massacres**.
- **Territorial expansion**.
- United States **Territorial expansion**.
- Germany **Territorial expansion**.
A Foucauldian reading of these subject headings as statements reveals a discourse which does not hold as equivalent the genocides of Native Americans with genocide as committed by the Nazis – despite the deliberately balanced argument proposed by the author.

The statements concerning his book’s aboutness obfuscate the author’s stated intentions.

- Examines historiography of genocide, and of genocide in the Americas; and the concomitant treatment of this literature by the Library of Congress.
  - **Theoria**: ambivalent view of Indigenous genocide in the academy is stabilized in libraries through KOS.
  - **Poiesis**: KOS reproduce and reinforce comforting colonial narratives through benign-sounding subject headings and absence of coherent LC classification.
  - **Praxis**: pragmatic stance in which the literature is described according to its knowledge claims – rather than according to an external positivist criteria.
Discussion

“Who does the research process represent and who is excluded?...In what ways does the tradition of academic research reinforce the status quo, protecting the center and working against the innovations that might come from the margins?”

-- from Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice in Educational Research
Synthesis

- **Interdisciplinary**: connects LIS to other fields of study;
- **Holistic**: situates libraries within processes of knowledge production;
- **Critical**: adopts critical theoretically-informed perspectives on library processes and practices;
- **Substantive**: considers library practices and processes in terms of means and outcomes;
- **Ethical**: connects work of indexers to evolution of other disciplines; and
- **Pragmatic**: knowledge claims are viewed as fallible and subject to change -- not as universal and fixed (Hjørland 2008a; 2008b).
Conclusions

- The proposed research paradigm identifies, names and describes an emerging form of LIS research;
- provides more formal methodological basis for such research;
- addresses many of the criticisms identified in the literature re: instrumental orientation;
- de-fetishizes materials and their indexing;
- Provides basis for phenomenological study of effects KOS;
- contributes to the disruption of dominant narratives.
Miigwetch, thank you!
m.dudley@uwinnipeg.ca

Article forthcoming in the Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship
Sources

Sources


- Fox, Melodie J. 2015. *Gender as an 'Interplay of Rules': Detecting Epistemic Interplay of Medical and Legal Discourse with Sex and Gender Classification in Four Editions of the Dewey Decimal Classification*. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. UWM Digital Commons Theses and Dissertations. Paper 872.
Sources