Habermas's "Lifeworld" and Instrumental Rationality: The Advantage New Brunswick Report.
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The purpose of this paper is to consider Habermas's "lifeworld" as a theoretical framework for critical policy analysis. Habermas's notions of "ideological critique" and "lifeworld" provide valuable tools of policy analysis for liberal and democratically minded educators. By applying Habermas's notion of the lifeworld to the 2007 Advantage New Brunswick Report and New Brunswick Action Plan, the taken-for-granted aspects of underlying ideologies are brought forward for circumspection. For example, the instrumentalizing tendencies advanced in the policies under review do not mention either the political value of autonomy or the democratic processes of decision making in the university. After developing the philosophy of Habermas, I turn to a descriptive summary of the content of the policies under review. Finally, I turn to ideological critique, using Habermas's notion of the lifeworld, to show the negative aspects of instrumentalizing tendencies and human capital ideology on higher education.

According to Brookfield (2005), critical theory is a name given to a theoretical framework that seeks to explain the contradictions and conflicts inherent in late-twentieth-century capitalism. It is a framework, or interpretive perspective, that seeks to critically analyze the world of practices and ideas that underlie policy imperatives. Central to the critical theory framework is the need to philosophize about creating the conditions within which people can realize their full humanity and pursue principles of justice and democracy. The discourse of critical theory is grounded in Marxism, specifically with respect to the special relationship that theory has to practice. Critical theory is aimed at how practices cause us to embrace ideas and ideologies that are presented as in our best interests. The guiding principle of critical theory is that the commodity exchange economy comprising capitalism
will generate increasing tensions between the desire of some for freedom and the desire of others to prevent that freedom from being realized.

Edgar (2005) tells us that Habermas is an inheritor of the Frankfurt school of Western Marxism (German critical theory). The fundamental questions that guide his work involve the nature of rationality and the question of social progress. Habermas explores this in terms of the confrontation of the human subject with bureaucratic structures and the alienation of the person as producer. He explores this relationship in terms of how consumption has impoverished the experience of work.

Habermas's strain of critical theory deviates from orthodox Marxism in four ways: i. the causality of the base and superstructure is more complex than Marx thought, ii. workers are more affluent than Marx could have imagined, iii. workers depend on capitalism and will lose more than chains from its overthrow, and iv. Marx never could have imagined the development of twenty-first century Western capitalism (Edgar, 2005).

Edgar (2005) shows us that Habermas rejects the orthodox Marxist approach. In his framework, he criticizes the ontological assumption that the knowing subject is separate from the known object. He also criticized the positivist and objectivist posture of the sciences and the belief that nature exists as a sum of facts separate from perception explainable in terms of mathematics. Habermas regarded the objectivity of the sciences as ignoring the historically formative relationship that underlies the subject-object dichotomy. His argument is that theory must be generated self-consciously as grounded in a political and historical context.

In Habermas's (1972) Knowledge and Human Interest, he shows that the subject-object dichotomy assumed by the objectivist model of the sciences is shared in many areas of theory. It is based on a non-dialectical approach aimed at describing reality in law-like mathematical terms. Habermas advocates for "ideological critique," (Edgar, 2005, p. 13) which is a self-reflective, critical activity wherein the knowing subject, in the act of reflection, becomes aware of underlying values. For Habermas, nothing is ever "value-neutral," because it is the product of natural human interests. A positivistic and objectivist framework, which characterizes the underpinnings of many domains of social and economic policy, is committed to a program of instrumental rationality that ignores the dialectical processes of decision making that happens between people. In the act of reflection on values and ideas, knowledge and interest are united.

A "dialectical science" (Edgar, 2005, p. 22) is one that is conscious of itself and the values that motivate it. Self-consciousness raises processes out of the domain of instrumental or alienated activities into the domain of reflexive awareness. Policy is a social process and human beings are inherently social and need language to express themselves. Decision making, even in policy, is a discursive, collective activity carried on through language. Policy is the product of a dialectical process.
of historical and political development. As the unreflective acceptance of certain values over others becomes the norm, reason takes on an instrumental character.

The result of the objectivist view is that reality can be expressed in mathematical law-like terms which can then be used to administer society. Policy is, then, the attempt to administer society through expertise grounded in an objectivist view. It is a form of social practice based in technological innovation, rational planning, and workforce administration. It aims at stabilizing certain social systems and values over others. The result of this is a commitment to instrumental forms of rationality that perpetuate taken-for-granted values and assumptions.

While critical theory is generally aimed at deconstructing the values and practices that produce capitalism, Habermas's theory of "ideological critique" (Edgar, 2005, p. 13) provides a useful mode for policy studies and critique in general. The values that underlie policies like The Advantage New Brunswick Report and New Brunswick Action Plan are taken-for-granted precisely because they are embedded in the language, culture, and habits that shape the way we think. Underlying the theory and practice of policy are "ideologies," or sets of ideas enmeshed in political actions:

Critical theory views ideology as a broadly accepted set of values, beliefs, myths, explanations, and justifications that appear self-evidently true, empirically accurate, personally relevant, and morally desirable to a majority of the populace. The function of this ideology is to maintain an unjust social and political order. Ideology does this by convincing people that existing social arrangements are naturally ordained and obviously work for the good of all (Brookfield, 2005, p. 41).

Brookfield (2005) explains that ideologies are typically conceived as false beliefs that serve to justify social and political ends. Critical theory can challenge this through Habermas's notion of ideological critique. It is an emancipatory cognitive interest meant to liberate from ignorance and dependence. A major concern is the extension of rationality beyond mere instrumental utility and into all domains of life.

Underlying ideological critique is a commitment to a social ideal of democracy. The democratic ideal is one where people are free to pursue their own desires and goals through the vital power of autonomy. Ideological critique is emancipatory and seeks to liberate. It is predicated on a form of rationality grounded in a respectful, open discussion among free and equal people. Instrumental forms of rationality are predicated on a distortion of communication and experience, and result in alienation and the elevation of the economic domain over all other areas of life.

The concept of "lifeworld" (lebenswelt) is first developed by Habermas in The Theory of Communicative Action vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society (1981) and The Theory of Communicative Action vol. 2: System and Lifeworld (1987). The lifeworld is
the pre-understood communicative horizon that functions as the basis of dialogue. It forms an interpretive horizon within which the process of reaching understanding can unfold. It is a pre-understood stock of concepts and beliefs that reflect and inform life at the level of everydayness.

Habermas's solution to instrumental forms of rationality is discussion and debate for its own sake. Dialogical communicative learning is fundamental to the democratic process. In contrast to this are instrumental forms of rationality that see communication as an instrument for business-minded aims and students as objects to be manipulated. The loss of the ability to communicate and apply reason to all areas of life results in what Habermas calls an invasion of the lifeworld by bureaucratic and administrative structures.

In Habermas's interpretation, definitions are at the disposal of decision-makers to enter into a dialectical process of reaching understanding. Instrumentalized reason abandons this commitment and is instead merely purposive. Instrumental forms of rationality obfuscate the possibility of reaching understanding in the lifeworld. Habermas (1981) regarded this as leading to a loss of freedom and a loss of meaning (p. 244) in the life of individuals at the level of everyday life.

In this work, I will employ Habermas's notion of the lifeworld and instrumentalized rationality to critique the ideology embedded in the Advantage New Brunswick Report and New Brunswick Action Plan. These post-secondary education reforms expand instrumental, technical, and bureaucratic rationality at the expense of higher education as a democratic enterprise. Under the form of technical and specialized training for workers, and in terms of "human capital" (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006) ideology, bureaucratization will lead to a diminishment of the possibility to extend reason and rationality into all areas of life and therefore distort the possibility of reaching understanding so vital to a free and democratic society.

**Instrumental Rationality in Higher Education: The Advantage New Brunswick Report Summary**

To summarize the policies under review, the Commission on Post-Secondary Education released its report, Advantage New Brunswick: A Province Reaches to Fulfill its Destiny in September 2007. This report, put together by Rick Miner and Jacques L’Ecuyer, is meant to situate and enhance the strategic economic advantage of New Brunswick’s post-secondary education system. The report outlines the direction the New Brunswick system should take to reach its potential. Miner and L’Ecuyer outline a “student focused system” seen to be in: "the short and long term best interests of the province" (Miner & L’Ecuyer, 2007, p. iv).

The recommendations in the report arise from the needs of the province identified by the commission. Miner and L’Ecuyer tell us that these are the needs of New Brunswick, the needs of students, and the needs of the distinct communities of New Brunswick. New university governance will be established to focus on global
economic concerns rooted in human capital ideology. The emphasis is to be on job training and vocational preparation.


A central component of the Miner and L’Ecuyer report is the notion of a “polytechnic” that delivers “technical, vocational, and professional education” (Miner & L’Ecuyer, 2007. P. 17). The development of the polytechnic in New Brunswick is to be part of a wider paradigmatic shift towards an emphasis on applied learning. The three proposed polytechnics are to function as a new center of gravity in the province intended to respond to the needs of students and the regions, allowing for the development of a complete range of opportunities in an integrated fashion.

The polytechnic is an institution whose mission is merely instrumental to market needs. As Hyslop-Margison and Thayer (2009) argue, the imperative of immediate economic relevance and a narrow focus on practical ends naturalizes instrumentalizing tendencies as common sense. An idea that has been naturalized is so widely distributed that its logic seems normal and self-evident, and so it wins acceptance as common sense by almost everyone. The Miner and L’Ecuyer report recommends the establishment of three such institutions: the Saint John Polytechnic, the Northeastern New Brunswick Polytechnic, and the Northwestern New Brunswick Polytechnic. Each is intended to provide a mix of basic knowledge and skills relative to the needs of the region. The NBCC-Woodstock and the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, along with the Maritime College of Forestry Technology, are to be amalgamated. The amalgamation is a move towards greater centralization with a central administration and geographically dispersed campuses. Centralization is intended for a quick and effective response to the economic needs of the province.

Miner and L’Ecuyer tell us that the amalgamation of the New Brunswick Community College system is a shift in the bureaucratic order of governance towards greater centralization. The move is intended to make the college system more responsive to corporate and private sector labor market needs. This is predicated on the imposition of new fiscal controls and the reopening of the university acts, missions, and mandates for revision. The University of New Brunswick, the Universite de Moncton, St. Thomas University, and Mount Allison University will be influenced by corporate directors, and market imperatives will play a larger role in determining educational means and ends in New Brunswick.
Universities and colleges are being called upon to adjust their mission statements and mandates to articulate new roles, aims, and goals. The reconfiguring of the mission statement is to be narrowly focused on economic competitiveness and does not mention either the democratic role of higher education or the importance of free inquiry. Hyslop-Margison and Thayer (2009) are correct when they assert that what counts as a “quality” education under the new Post-Secondary Education Agency will be measured in terms of corporate imperatives and human capital labor market gains. I am arguing that with the re-opening of university acts for revision and the imposition of new fiscal controls a new bureaucratic order will emerge, predicated on an increase in externally imposed checks and balances. These administrative structures often view citizens as objects to be shaped by the dominant political ideology of the day.

Miner and L’Ecuyer recommend a new formal partnership between institutions is to be fostered through greater centralized control. The new partnership vehicles are the Institutes of Applied Learning and Training and the Consortias of Applied Learning and Training. The IALTs and CALTs are intended to oversee the instrumentalization of the post-secondary system with regional economic needs. The IALTs are to be incorporated entities owned jointly by the community colleges and universities in each region. The purpose is to strategically identify in-demand programs meant to meet the immediate economic demands of the region.

Alongside the emergence of the polytechnic the IALTs are intended to identify the demands and needs for new programs and to identify skills, training and educational priorities. Each IALT is to be made up of a core staff (A CEO, academic and administrative support) with expertise in program development, marketing, and quality assessment. The IALTs will be positioned to take advantage of a web-based infrastructure to maximize the availability of online learning and training. The CALTs are a less formal collaborative mechanism meant to focus on building relationships and partnerships between the region, government, colleges, universities and the private sector. CALTs are to mediate and encourage partnerships between community groups, private companies, economic agencies and non-profit organizations. The primary focus is on upgrading the skills required by provincial economic demands (Government of New Brunswick, 2007).

Miner and L’Ecuyer (2007) remind us that: “there is no escaping the world we now live in” (p. 45). Global competition, corporate exploitation and human capital ideology now imbue almost every aspect of how we think about education at all levels. A lack of interest in anything other than knowledge with market exchange value is narrowing the vision for higher education to a socialization process into the norms, beliefs, and behaviours required by corporate interests. Narrow vocational preparation ignores the vital democratic component of higher education as well as the liberal aims of freedom and equality for all.
Ideological Critique: Habermas's Lifeworld and Higher Education

The *Advantage New Brunswick Report* and *New Brunswick Action Plan* advocate for the government and private sector to work in concert to target gaps of strategic economic importance to the province. This indicates that students will be treated as passive, compliant vessels and subjected to a distortion of the possibility for reaching an understanding in the lifeworld. The legal-political structures, bureaucrats, and administrators confront the student as an alien force, and directs their decision making power, narrowing the potential for full and open communication between free and equal people.

The new short cycle apprenticeship training system proposed in *The Advantage New Brunswick Report* and *New Brunswick Action Plan* is harnessed to short term economic imperatives. It is important that the post-secondary system effectively equip young people for life chances in a difficult economy. However, instrumental practices in education have the effect of instrumentalizing rationality, thereby reducing the possibility of realizing democratic ideals. The result of this is intended to be a passive workforce geared towards domination by the bureaucratic, managerial and administrative structures of corporations.

Post-secondary education as an arm of business and industry represents a rejection of Habermas's notion of critical emancipation. The massive increase in bureaucracy suggested by the policies under review, the increase in checks and balances at the local, provincial, and federal levels, and managerial reorganization are all predicated on an ideology that serves the needs of industrialists, financiers, and capitalists by training a passive, compliant workforce. Hyslop-Margison and Thayer (2009) are correct to argue that these policies also entail further political interference in the democratic decision making potential within post-secondary institutions. The narrow view of knowledge as vocational and technical skill that the policies under review espouse has no place for institutional autonomy.

Bureaucratic re-organization entails opening revising university missions and mandates in New Brunswick. This allows for instrumental market imperatives to play a more forceful role in determining the future of the province. Institutions lose the freedom to set their own missions autonomously. I am arguing that education for the sake of provincial economic needs simply has nothing to do with democratic ideals like autonomy. It has the effect of instrumentalizing the rationality of students, by determining their life possibilities based on the pre-existing plans of those in positions of power.

Through ideological critique, I show that the non-dialectical and intrusive ethics of managerial systems are anti-ethical to Habermas's emancipatory and democratic ideals. Habermas's "dialectical science" rests on the notion of "reification." Reification in terms of Habermas's lifeworld is the "turning into an object" of a person when confronted with bureaucratic and administrative structures. Reification is a distortion that comes about through the objectivist underpinnings of the kind of technical and strategic rationality underlying the
policies under review. These processes attribute a "thing-like" (Allman, 2001, p. 8) status to social relationships. In effect, the confrontation of the subject with bureaucracy turns the individual into a reified commodity, and reduces their value to their displaced potential labor market gains.

In Habermas's conception of the lifeworld, a narrow focus on instrumental education for the sake of the market economy reifies the students it seeks to educate. There is no provision for the rationality or humanity of the student, and so they come to have the possibilities of their lifeworld distorted. Students being confronted by administrative, managerial, and bureaucratic systems become reified and lose the meaningfulness of their social relationships. Bureaucratic, strategic, and instrumental forms of rationality colonize lifeworld relationships, bringing about a loss of freedom and loss of meaning in all areas social and civic life.

The meaningfulness of the students' lifeworld is undermined by structures that treat students as objects. The lifeworld is the foundation of friendship and family. Reification tears asunder the pre-reflective relationships human beings have with each other. The expansion of the bureaucracy in The Advantage New Brunswick Report and New Brunswick Action Plan risks having this effect. Top-down bureaucratic and managerial reorganization naturalizes short-term provincial economic interests as in the best interest of the students it exploits.

In the Advantage New Brunswick Report and New Brunswick Action Plan, the ideology that knowledge is to be considered narrowly as technical skill is advanced. This narrow view of knowledge is a threat to freedom because it limits the possibility of communication and dissolves the political and personal value of autonomy. The post-secondary policies under review advocate for the expansion of online learning opportunities. This has the positive benefit of increasing accessibility for students who would otherwise not economically be able to take advantage of higher educational opportunities. However, online learning is clearly inferior in terms of Habermas's "lifeworld," because it lacks any immediacy in social life and consequently negates the potential for reaching understanding through a dialectical process of negotiating meanings.

As genuine social relationships among students are rendered obsolete, the aims of those in positions of power will go unchallenged. The mediation of social relationships by new forms of technology brings about new systems of ethics and new codes of morality. By imposing regulation on the possibilities for reaching understanding between free and equal people, the program of extending rationality into other domains of life is less tenable. Hyslop-Margison and Thayer (2009) are correct when they tell us that the loss of meaningfulness of social relationships through the imposition of new codes of ethics will go unrecognized and unchallenged in an instrumentalized post-secondary education system.

In the "human capital" (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006) framework of the Advantage New Brunswick Report and New Brunswick Action Plan, people are regarded as economic objects to be manipulated. Provincial economic concerns are elevated
over human values like friendship, compassion, and love. Friendship and love lose their meaning in a technocratic human capital paradigm and "objectified human qualities, such as personality, are sold on the market of interpersonal relationships" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 162).

In the human capital ideology, the regularities of the market are regarded as natural laws. In terms of Habermas's lifeworld framework, where people come to be treated like objects and this takes on the character of everyday common sense, the lifeworld - the foundation of our intellectual, emotional, and spiritual lives - takes on the dimension of the use-value of a commodity. Managerial and administrative ethics, in their practices of performance assessment, efficiency criteria, and data collection, are inherently exploitative and invasive. In a human capital paradigm these inherently exploitative practices begin to take on the character of a natural law. Market value displaces the meaningfulness of lifeworld relationships and instrumental rationality comes to imbue all areas of social life as students are led to internalize an idea of themselves as reified commodities.

I am arguing that policies like The Advantage New Brunswick Report and New Brunswick Action Plan are committed to instrumental forms of rationality. This has the character of common sense based on the objectivist assumptions of policy related research and decision making. The post-secondary education system in New Brunswick, then, will perpetuate a cognitive division of labor between students and their political masters. With the instrumentalization of the post-secondary system, the expanding cognitive dominance of the administrative and managerial classes will go unchallenged, and societies' conscience will continue to decline in the face of the loss of freedom and loss of meaning in the lifeworld.

Habermas (1981) tells us that this loss of freedom and loss of meaning arises from unjustly structured orders of life (ie: the unquestionable cognitive dominance of administrators and bureaucrats over students). This distortion of the lifeworld precludes certain democratic processes and the possibility of reaching understanding. In order to prevent this, post-secondary education in New Brunswick and elsewhere (including vocational and professional programs) need to embrace the democratic ideals of autonomy, justice, humanity, and compassion as transcendent and realizable ideals.

In order to realize a fuller higher educational ideal, post-secondary institutions need to embrace Habermas's lifeworld framework of co-operative discussion and communication as its own end. I am simply arguing that discussion and deliberation for its own sake is a necessary feature for cultivating autonomy. Value beyond this intrinsic worth includes motivating a sense of meaning and freedom in the lives of students and citizens. The instrumentalization of post-secondary education in New Brunswick is undesirable at a time when men and women committed to democratic ideals are already in short supply.
Conclusions

This work has developed Habermas's notions of instrumentalized reason, ideological critique, and the lifeworld to frame a discussion of the assumptions underlying *The Advantage New Brunswick Report* and *New Brunswick Action Plan*. I then provide a descriptive account of the contents of the policies under review. Applying ideological critique through the mode of Habermas's lifeworld shows the negative effects that instrumentalized goals and the expansion of technical and bureaucratic rationality has in the lives of students. To avoid this, I argue that higher educational institutions need to embrace a mandate of reaching understanding through free and open discussion and acknowledge the lifeworld foundation of New Brunswick's post-secondary system.

References


