

Appendix F

Ontological commitments in Self-study

The Transformative Potential of Individuals' Collaborative Self-Studies for Sustainable Global Networks of Communications

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There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good nor how valuable nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open.

Martha Graham, quoted by Agnes DeMille, Martha:

The Life and Work of Martha Graham

The Art of Possibility. (Zander, R.S. & Zander, B. 2000)

Introduction

This paper explores the contribution ICT can offer to the development of educational knowledge, and in particular, to the development of new standards of educational

judgement. The paper examines how the growth of one's own educational knowledge occurs in relationship to the development of the knowledge base of other people, and how this process can be shared through use of ICT. In this stepping forward new living standards of judgement emerge for a particular group of practitioner-researchers, who have undertaken to research collaboratively into their individual enquiries.

While each individual researcher brings his/ her unique constellation of embodied values into the academy as a set of living standards of judgement, each practitioner-researcher also acknowledges the collaborative nature of their enquiries, through the 'web of betweenness.' This web is intended to be creatively and critically responsive to each enquirer and his/her own creation of knowledge. The value of co-operation, dialogue and participation is present within the 'web of betweenness', a mutually supportive and participative environment. It constitutes a holistic process, involving an intellectual, emotional, spiritual, aesthetic, social interactive process.

I will be showing how each self-study is unique and each is contributing to a 'web of betweenness,' <http://webpages.dcu.ie/~farrenm/educators.html>. "True community is an ideal where the full identities of awakened and realised individuals challenge and complement each other. In this sense both individuality and originality enrich self and others" (O'Donohue, 2003).

Context

The context of this study lies in the professional development of teachers working in the fields of education and training. The enquiry takes place in the M.Sc. in Computer Applications for Education based at Dublin City University.

I hope to show how I have influenced the social formation of the programmes, through the design and pedagogy of a curriculum for teachers, engaged in professional development in ICT. My research is based on the creation of a new epistemology of educational enquiry in which I bring the embodied knowledge of practitioner-educators into the academy. Firstly, I intend to demonstrate the growth of my own educational knowledge over the five years of my teaching as higher education educator (1999-2004). The principles I communicate are both the practical principles, understood as embodied values, that I use to explain my learning/practice, and the epistemological values understood as living standards of judgement, that I use as the epistemology for a new scholarship of educational enquiry. The enquiry involves me in clarifying my own educational values and knowledge as teacher-educator, as I attempt to demonstrate the growth of my own educational knowledge. I make reference to 'pedagogy of the unique,' that is understood as a pedagogy that develops out of living and sharing my educational values and understandings in a community of practice, while, at the same time, respecting, learning from, and encouraging the ongoing development of knowledge creation by others. The process recognizes teaching and learning as a creative and reflective process and, therefore,

that each of us has a unique contribution to make to the creation of knowledge, through shared understandings. Therefore, it would seem that each member of the community of practice could sustain one another through a ‘web of betweenness’ – a dialogic form of human communication, leading to learning.

Shulman, the President of Carnegie Foundation of Teaching makes the point that a scholarship is only a scholarship when we make our knowledge public to a community and share with others in the community. He outlines the characteristics and criteria of scholarly work:

For an activity to be designated as scholarship, it should manifest at least three key characteristics: It should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one's scholarly community. We thus observe, with respect to all forms of scholarship, that they are acts of mind or spirit that have been made public in some manner, have been subjected to peer review by members of one's intellectual or professional community, and can be cited, refuted, built upon, and shared among members of that community. Scholarship properly communicated and critiqued serves as the building block for knowledge growth in a field.

I hope to show how I am contributing to a knowledge base of teaching using ICT, and how I communicate this to others with standards for judging the validity of our claims to know our educational influence on others. This practitioner- based knowledge can, I believe, add to the knowledge base of teaching that I and researchers such as Snow (2001), Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002) seek.

It is worthwhile, at this stage, to outline the role ICT has played in the context of my work in general. ICT has been used to complement and support my pedagogy as it has unfolded. Some examples in the context of my work are listed here: digital video has

been used to record classroom practice; online learning technology has mediated the teaching and learning process and helped shape my research enquiry and teaching practice through use of synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication; videoconferencing has allowed the possibility of including experts into the classroom; ICT tools have enabled teacher-participants to design and develop multimedia and web based artifacts that reflect one's own educational values; ICT has been used as a means of disseminating teacher-participant project work; in addition, video clips, photographs and examples of synchronous and asynchronous communications are currently available on: <http://webpages.dcu.ie/~farrenm/educators.html>

Growth of my educational knowledge

I intend to show how my educational knowledge has developed through my practice, as I have engaged teacher-participants in enquiries into their own learning as they ask and research and answer the question: how can I improve my practice? I am referring to educational knowledge as professional knowledge i.e. knowledge that is intrinsically linked to practice. The growth of my educational knowledge involves a dual role: myself as a learner, as I enquire into my own learning, and myself in relation to others, as I endeavour to engage learners in a process of reflection and enquiry into their own educational practice using ICT. I believe that in order to support teacher-researchers to reflect on their own practice, it is necessary for the teacher-educator himself/herself to reflect on their own practice. The process is not a constructivist process, in which the teacher-participants might simply construct their own understandings of their practice as they communicate and interact with their learners. It is important that the teacher-educator be open to becoming influenced by this process, while influencing the process as well. In short, the process is an

individual, collaborative and interactive process. With regard to the production of knowledge, Shor (1987) points out that “Knowledge is produced in a place far from the students, who are asked only to memorize what the teacher says. Consequently, we reduce the act of *knowing* into a mere *transference* of the existing knowledge. And the teacher becomes the specialist in transferring of knowledge..... Thus the qualities required e.g. action, critical reflection, curiosity, demanding inquiry, uneasiness, uncertainty – all necessary to the cognitive subject, to the person who learns! Knowledge is thus seen as something created away from the teacher as opposed to co-created by students and teachers in their classrooms”. More recently, Barnett points to the importance of the qualities outlined by Shor in relation to higher education. He states, ‘The main pedagogical task in a university setting is not that of the transmission of knowledge but of promoting forms of human understanding appropriate to conditions of supercomplexity (the state of affairs where one is faced with alternative frameworks through which one make sense of one’s world, and acts purposively in it)’ (Barnett, 2002).

Living Educational Theory

The concept of teaching, based on a ‘living educational theory’ approach (Whitehead, 1989, 2003), suggests a theory that is in being, yet not static, but becoming. We may be said to be beings in becoming. This signifies a dynamic process, yet one that is grounded on the values of one’s person, or being. Living theory is grounded in the descriptions and explanations that practitioners give for their own learning as they ask, research and answer the question: “how can I improve my practice?” Generating theory from practice is integral to the living educational theory approach.

I hope to show from the grounds of my own educational practice how I have created knowledge in collaboration with teachers. I am now aware of these qualities and values that constitute who I am and what I am doing. I offer descriptions and explanations for my own educational development and the educational development of teacher-participants. The challenge for me in my research is to generate new knowledge and to develop standards of judgement that can be used to validate any claims that I make. In this way ontological values become epistemological standards. The process of systematizing my knowledge focuses on the transformation of embodied values into educational standards of judgement that can be used to test the validity of my knowledge claims.

I wish to show my development and responsiveness to individuals and groups of learners over time. As I tell the story of my learning, I am clarifying the fundamental values that underlie my practice. Thus, I am highlighting the importance of the reflective capacity to clarify my own learning and particularly the knowledge that I am in the process of creating.

The educational values of independent reflection, dialogic-collaboration, empathetic connectivity and responsive presence, as represented by the ‘web of betweenness’, can be communicated as my living standards of judgement to test the validity of my claim to educational knowledge. A quality that I believe underpins all others is that of empathy. Koestler (1978) point out that empathy ‘is the source of our intuitive understanding – more direct than language – of how the other thinks and feels....’ I believe that the value of empathetic connectivity has engaged the creative responses of teacher-participants and enabled them to embark on the narratives of their learning.

O'Donohue (2003) points out that creativity endeavours to bring some of our hidden life to expression in order that we might come to see who we are:

*When we are creative, we help the unknown to become known,
the visible to be seen and the rich darkness within us to become
Illuminated. No human being is ever actually there. Each of us is
emerging in every moment. When we discover our creativity, we
begin to attend to this constant emergence of who we are.*

(O' Donohue, 2003)

I am learning with my learners, as I encourage them to bring their learning into the public domain and gain academic accreditation for the narratives of their educational development as they work to improve student learning. Bernstein (1996) refers to the recontextualisation of knowledge and the pedagogisation of knowledge. In my research this involves one's own embodied knowledge and making it public with communicable standards of judgement in its legitimation within the Academy.

Influences

In developing my understanding of the meaning and significance of the concept of pedagogy of the unique, I have been influenced by Van Manen's (1991) concept of 'theory of the unique.' This is "a theory that knows how to address the particular case, the practical moments of teaching in which emotion, morality, and reason cannot be disentangled" (Van Manen, 1991). He believes that researchers and theorists tend to

forget that pedagogy is an embodied practice and that pedagogical research and theorizing too, are pedagogical forms of life.

Krishnamurti (1969) emphasizes the importance of observing ourselves in relation, and points out that all life is relationship. He emphasizes the value of self-reflection as fundamental to his philosophy and without it, he believes that our actions become repetitive and habitual. He claims that our whole mental, psychological make up is based on authority, and in order to create and in order to be creative, there must be freedom from authority. I believe that critical reflection is a creative process. I understand this as a systematic process of evaluating what one is doing in planning, monitoring and setting new targets, in the teaching and learning process. I have also been influenced by Carl Roger's theory of learning that is not solely based on mental models. According to Rogers, learning is facilitated in the following way:

1. The student participates completely in the learning process and has control over its nature and direction
2. It is primarily based upon direct confrontation with practical, social, personal or research problems
3. Self-evaluation is the principle method of assessing progress or success.

He also stresses the importance of learning to learn and openness to change. On reading 'On Becoming a Person,' I was impressed by his focus on his own learning. What emerged for him was his understanding of the need for each of us to understand our own values in any human relationship.

How have I supported dialogue through a ‘web of betweenness’?

From 1999-2002, I taught teachers on a Masters degree programme in Computer Applications for Education, in the School of Computer Applications. I taught the following modules: Interactive Multimedia and Design (semester 1, year 1) Computer Applications for Education (semester 2, year 1) and Network Information Management (semester 1, year 2).

During the previous term, I had already taught on the Interactive Multimedia and Design module. During this time, I had recognized some contradictions in my own practice, in that I emphasized the importance of teachers being knowledge creators and designers of multimedia and web based artefacts. However, the assignments that I had set did not provide the opportunity for teachers to research their own practice in the context of their use of ICT. I believe that it is important for teachers to show how they are improving teaching and learning through use ICT. At the start of the Computer Applications in Education module (2001), I discussed my own educational values with the group and talked about how I wanted to develop the modules in collaboration with them. In adopting this approach, I was inviting their contributions and judgements in developing the course. In other words, learning was being developed as learner-centered. They were being asked to participate in a reflective process through setting goals, monitoring their own progress, assessing their progress, making changes, where necessary, and setting new learning goals, developing curriculum artefacts that reflected their educational values in their teaching approach in their own classroom.

Boud et al (1985) reminds us that knowing our practice is central if we are to learn to reflect upon it. The reflective process involves looking back and looking forward.

Thus, it is pointed towards future action as well as our past action. There are three elements of reflection, as put forward by Boud et al. I used these in my teaching. At the start of the the Computer Applications in Education (2001) session, I asked each person to reflect on their experience of the previous module, Interactive Multimedia and Design (2000) module and relate to the following three points.

- *returning to experience*
- *attending to feelings*
- *re-evaluating the experience*

I invited each teacher to explore the direction they wished to take according to their own concerns. I invited them to engage in reflecting on what they have learned from the previous module and how they wish to develop learning further. What Barnett calls for in higher education is a way of enabling students to handle their own disturbances and this calls for a pedagogical transaction in which the student has the pedagogical space to develop their own voice. Barnett attempts to reconceptualise the discourse in university with the view to helping students to live and work in a supercomplex world in which there are no ready made solutions. As a higher education educator, I believe that I am developing a new type of discourse in the teaching and learning context. I am encouraging teacher-participants to live and work in the classroom context and deal with uncertainty, and to try to resolve this through enquiring into their own educational practice. I am providing them with the opportunity to explore their own practice and I am linking teaching and research in

this way to show how teacher-researchers can contribute to the knowledge base of teaching. They show their understanding of learning theories and instructional design theories in their work. However, it must be said that they are not fitting their practice into a particular theory, but bringing their own unique values and contributions into the academy.

Although some of the teachers had been hesitant at the start of the Computer Applications in Education (12-week module), I will show video of presentations that demonstrate each of their capacities to reflect on the way ICT could be integrated into her work context. Thus, my focus on embedding the pedagogy and technology within the module's structure provided the opportunity for each participant to explore the way they could design, develop and integrate ICT into their context.

During the follow-on module, Network Information Management, (2001), I integrated the use of online technology into the module. I invited each participant to document their own learning online through the creation and use of their own online learning journal. Participants on the programme had access to the discussion forum so the learning journals could be shared with other participants on the programme. In the presentation of assignment, I suggested that they use the following questions outlined by Whitehead (2003):

- What am I concerned about/what do I want to improve?
- What am I going to do about it?
- What data will I need to collect to enable me to make a? judgement on my effectiveness?

- Act and gather data
- Evaluation of effectiveness
- Modification of concerns, ideas and actions in the light of evaluations
- Submission of description and explanation of my learning in the educational enquiry, 'How do I improve my practice?' to a validation group.

As I had introduced teachers to an action research approach during the Network Information Management module (2001), I wanted to continue to support teachers if they wished to use an action research approach within a Masters dissertation. However, this was a new approach to the one used within the School of Computer Applications at D.C.U. A positivist approach to research had been taken during the MSc in Computer Applications for Education programme. In 2002, I supervised four teacher-researchers who wished to carry out research into their own educational practice (two from the School of Education Studies and two from the School of Computer Applications). Elliott's (2004) recent paper "The Struggle to Redefine the Relationship between 'Knowledge' and 'Action' in the Academy: Some Reflections on Action Research" confirms my belief of the importance of each individual contributing their theory to the knowledge base of teaching. He points out that "one can provide a meaningful account of action research as a process of theorizing about a practical situation. This will involve challenging the assumptions that the term 'theory' exclusively refers to generalisable representations of events, which can only be produced under conditions that are dissociated from the intentions of agents to effect change in practical situations."

I agree wholeheartedly with this point. In supervising action research enquiries, I value the contribution that each teacher-researcher contributes to the knowledge base of educational practice. I would like to mention here that each of the teacher-participants in the photograph that includes Chris Garvey, Bernie Tobin, Mairéad Ryan and Fionnuala Flanagan, (image 1) were carrying out action research studies, and each of them was presenting their work to the academy for the award of M. Sc. degree.

Bernstein's idea of pedagogisation of knowledge in the creation of a higher education curriculum has been referred to earlier. During the supervision period, I organized group validation meetings to encourage each teacher-researcher to discuss their research and to provide evidence of how they were attempting to improve their own practice. In supporting teachers to bring their own living educational theory into the academy, I engaged with Bernstein's idea of the pedagogisation of knowledge and the process of pedagogisation of the embodied knowledge, through recontextualising the knowledge into libraries, conference presentations, and on the world wide web where it can be communicated to others.

The validation group meetings were carried out in a shared forum where each individual could make their contribution. The meetings were carried out in such a way that teachers were able to incorporate feedback from their peers and include these in their final dissertation write up. In this way, I believe that I show in part how I have influenced the education of a social formation. I can show how I have been successful in enabling teacher-researchers to gain accreditation in the academy for

carrying out research into their own educational practice and creating their own living educational theory.

In one of our Validation sessions, we used videoconferencing technology to link up with Dr. Jack Whitehead, School of Education at the University of Bath, U.K. Since I first started teaching on the M.Sc. programme in 1999, I have integrated a range of new technologies into the programme. I have invited experts working in education and industry to contribute to this programme. Teachers who have completed the M.Sc. programme have been able to share their knowledge and expertise with current participants on the M.Sc. in Education and Training Management. This has contributed to the collaborative nature of the programme structure and teaching and learning approach.

Conclusion

In my work as higher education educator in the context of professional development of teachers on Masters in ICT in Education, I strive to value and foster each participant's creativity. In the work assignments, I have encouraged teachers to create their own multimedia and web based curriculum artefacts that reflect their own educational values and beliefs. They have attempted to take cognizance of, and incorporate relevant learning theories and instructional design, contained in the theoretical literature, into the planning and development of their curriculum artefact. While I believe that it is important that we learn from and value what relevant literature has to say, I also believe that it is important that teachers are provided with the space to be creative and are enabled to take ownership of the teaching and

learning processes by developing and articulating their own educational values, as these emerge in classroom practice, “educational theory offers models for teaching, approaches to disciplines, techniques for teacher effectiveness, and yet we suspect that this is not enough that it is not enough to apply some technique, follow a program, or trust social policy” (Van Manen, 1991).

This developmental process involves various strands: in relation to their thinking; in relation to the literature; in relation to other teacher-participants, and the teacher educator, who values their unique and essential role in knowledge creation. Teacher-participants deserve our commitment to helping them develop the capacity to be creators of education knowledge, by learning to take an increasing level of responsibility, that involves, among other things, learning to make their own educational judgements, based on sound educational values and criteria.

During the programme, teachers have creatively engaged in developing a range of multimedia and web based curriculum artefacts. The World Wide Web can connect and disseminate the embodied values of educators and allow for a sharing of these values. Each teacher can share and show how they are developing their own living educational theory, from their use of ICT in the context of improving student learning. Thus individuals' collaborative self-studies are contributing to the development of sustainable global educational networks of communications.

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