

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Conclusion**

#### **My Research a voyage of discovery through changing scenes**

I have referred at various points in my thesis to my educational career in terms of a voyage of discovery. This approach to research owes much to the idea of a ‘living educational theory’ that I have used as my guiding light. The idea of a voyage is also in many ways appropriate to the context in which my educational career has developed. Today, new technologies allow for new way of doing things. In the past, the syllabuses, even at university level, were slow to change, and the time honoured tradition of the lecture and tutorial dated back almost to mediaeval times. I have journeyed through much more interesting times than many of my predecessors. Higher Education, as I try to explain in chapter two, has been transformed in my lifetime, from an elite preserve to a system of education for the masses. Recently, higher education has had to address many issues, including a thorough re-appraisal of the teaching/ learning process. Everyone engaged in higher education in the United Kingdom and Ireland are affected to a greater or lesser extent by the abrupt changes taking place. The re-appraisal of the teaching and learning process inevitably raised the question whether ICT could bring about the massive productivity improvements that Governments hoped for to facilitate the shift to higher education for the masses. As ICT was my chosen field of study, my expertise was particularly relevant. My university (DCU) took a leading role in advising the Government in Ireland and in implementing plans for the formation of teachers capable of using ICT throughout the Irish school system. My field of study was itself subject to accelerating change as ICT

offered an increasing range of flexible communication systems. That added a further set of rapidly passing milestones along the eventful path that I was navigating.

### **ICT in the context of teaching and learning debates**

Having undertaken Masters' research in 1990 in the University of Bath where some very radical ideas were being discussed around about the direction that educational research should take and the relationship between research and teaching, I was well equipped to appreciate the debate that began to develop in academia around teaching and learning in higher education. When I graduated the expansion of universities in the United Kingdom was just beginning – in the Republic of Ireland, it still lay in the future. It is difficult to realise it now but that was also a time when the internet scarcely existed as a means of global communication. I have lived through the debates on university pedagogy. I have been endlessly up-dating my knowledge and skills in ICT. As the director of a postgraduate programme in ICT in education and training, I have the advantage of having perspectives upon both these developments. My experience in either direction, informed by the increasing flow of literature about practice-based research, has enabled me to secure a fuller understanding of the continually crucial role of the teacher and the importance of teacher/student collaboration in the learning process. It has also enabled me to see that ICT, far from displacing the teacher, opens up new creative possibilities for participants provided that they see learning as a collaborative process not only involving teacher/student dialogue but with a wider dimension of student/student dialogue moving toward a 'web of betweenness' that ICT can facilitate (Appendix D, E, F).

### **Theory and practice**

All this leads to a conviction of the need for more practice-based research. I have been greatly helped by the fact that this is the way that much research in the educational field has been moving. I have been able to cite a series of authors that have made this their chief preoccupation. They offer methodologies, including, among others, action research, that have both helped me in framing my own research study and provided criteria that enable me to work out the form of rigour and validity that would be most relevant to the research studies in which I have been engaged. Above all they have shown me how the development of teaching can yield results that hopefully may help others along similar paths, as I have been assisted in my own journey by what I have learned of the experiences of others.

### **Practicing values**

Chapter Six and Seven explore my work in the context of the M.Sc. in Computer Applications for Education, and how I have endeavoured to improve my practice by recognising myself as a ‘living contradiction’, in the sense of holding values and negating these values in practice. I endeavour to involve and support participants in creating their knowledge from the ground of their own practice.

### **Web of betweenness**

I show the processes that are involved in my supervision, as my value of ‘web of betweenness’ emerged and was enacted in practice. I explained how this relationship evolved beginning with a one to one basis as I tried to support a teacher in developing his capacity to accept responsibility for improving his practice. Subsequently I transformed this learning experience into a collaborative process when I involved him

in validation group meetings that were intended to help him to develop his learning in a peer group context. I also engaged him in developing his understandings through dialoguing with other researchers and academics.

### **Pedagogy of the unique**

Chapter Eight shows how I have successfully achieved my goal of developing the capacity of participants to be proactive in developing their knowledge. In the context of my ‘pedagogy of the unique’ these dialogic processes reflect my growing openness to the notion of learning and relearning with others, and reveal that I believe that education should be a democratic process that gives adequate “*space to each participant to contribute to the development of new knowledge, to develop their own voice, to make their own offerings, insights, to engage in their own actions, as well as to create their own products*” (Barnett, 2000). I believe that I have directed my teaching towards learning by gradually providing opportunities for participants to take responsibility for their own learning and develop their capacity as learners.

### **Educational values**

As I mentioned above, at a particular stage in my teaching career, I have recognised that in a certain sense I represented myself as a ‘living contradiction’ i.e. holding educational values and denying them in my practice. Through the action research process of experiencing myself as a ‘living contradiction’ I have been able to imagine a way forward in order to live my educational values more fully in practice. I hope that I can justifiably claim to have created my ‘pedagogy of the unique’ through my ontological commitment to a ‘web of betweenness’. By this I see learning as relational and ICT as a way of bringing us closer to the meanings of our embodied

knowledge. My values as they have emerged in the course of my practice may be clarified as follows:

### **1. Learning as relational**

I believe that learning is relational i.e. we learn in relation to one other. I try to foster and create a collaborative learning environment. In my experience, learning requires the qualities of openness, sharing and trust. In my work with participants, I have tried to articulate my own educational values. This was not easy to do at the start but I realised that in order to enable participants to articulate their educational values, I needed to openly share my values with them. Trust is an important quality in creating and sustaining a collaborative learning environment. I have endeavoured to trust my own embodied knowledge by enquiring into my practice in order to bring about improvement. It would have sometimes been easier to fall back upon didactic methods. I have constantly endeavoured to maintain my trust that each participant would learn in turn to trust their own embodied knowledge as they develop their practice.

### **2. Creating narratives of our own learning**

I value each participant's creativity, enquiring mind and critical judgement. I believe that it is vital to listen to the needs of participants and to build a curriculum in collaboration with them. Participants come from various contexts and I try to support each participant from where they are starting from in their learning. It is important to provide space for each of the participants to articulate their concerns and ideas as they develop their practice. I have endeavoured to support practice-based research since the start of my work in higher education. This has involved risk as I was bringing a

new form of scholarship into the academy. I had to justify the methodology and ensure that the research was carried out in a valid and rigorous fashion.

### **3. Developing a dialogic education**

I believe that dialogue is fundamental to the teaching and learning process and that each participant has a unique contribution to make to a knowledge base of practice.

I have sought to highlight how participants have been collaborators in this educational journey, not subjects to be studied. I am conscious of the need for participants to have the space to develop their own voice. I try to provide this space, both in the classroom and online, where people can create knowledge in collaboration with one another. I have endeavoured to involve participants in dialogue with myself, one another and others. I have tried to support dialogue through face-to-face class sessions, validation meetings, and through the use of a collaborative online learning environment.

Through dialogue and trying to understand other points of view – different criteria - I was able to ensure that the participant narratives were legitimated by the academy for the DCU M.Sc. degree.

### **4. Communicating teaching as a scholarly activity**

I believe that practice-based research is a form of scholarly research. In the course of my doctoral research, I have reviewed a number of national and international reports concerned with teaching and learning in higher education. I have paid close attention in my research to the various forms of pedagogy in higher education in order to secure a better understanding of the relevant literature. This has enabled me to appreciate the strongly innovative thrust of much of the emerging scholarship dealing with teaching and learning in higher education. I have presented my practice-based research at

national and international conferences. I have also made presentations at conferences with participants on the Masters programmes. In each instance, I have benefited from the discussions that my papers have generated [WWW4] [DVD1].

### **5. Using ICT in a creative way**

My teaching practice and my research enquiry have been founded on the belief that ICT can be used in a creative way. Participants on DCU postgraduate programmes come from various contexts and I try to support them towards the development of multimedia and web based artefacts for use in their own practice as a substitute for ready made software. I try to keep up-to-date with new developments in technology. On three occasions I have successfully applied for funding from the DCU Teaching and Learning Awards body. These have enabled me to introduce new and emerging technologies into the M.Sc. programmes thereby providing a broader curriculum for participants. I try to involve representatives from industry, education and research in order to develop the programme and its reputation.

### **Summary**

In creating my 'pedagogy of the unique', I have shown the risks and challenges involved in bringing a new form of research and knowledge into the academy. My practice-based research enquiry has indeed been a collaborative endeavour that could not have taken place were it not for the participation of students in the creation of knowledge in collaboration with me. I have articulated the educational values that have emerged in my practice and I believe that I have endeavoured faithfully to live these values in my practice. My values can now be seen to be communicable standards of judgement with regard to my doctoral research enquiry. I hope that my

enquiry will contribute to new understandings of the link between teaching and research and how teachers can contribute a knowledge base of practice through use of ICT [WWW9] [DVD1].

To be a 'higher education' in the Barnett sense, I believe that the curriculum can be a co-creation between participants and lecturers as we engage with the wider curriculum. This has involved listening to the points of view of participants, understanding their particular concerns and context. I hope that I can justifiably claim to have created my 'pedagogy of the unique' through my ontological commitment to a 'web of betweenness'. By this I see learning as relational and ICT as a way of bringing us closer to the meanings of our embodied values.