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Increasing Inclusion in Educational Research: A Response to Pip Bruce Ferguson and Jack Whitehead



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I am responding to Pip Bruce Ferguson's and Jack Whitehead's articles in recent editions of *Research Intelligence* (March '08 and June '08) about their arguments for greater latitude in terms of what counts as educational research. In this short response I would like to suggest the ways in which there are links to be made between living standards of judgement and multimedia forms of representation and how these can augment the educational nature of the research.

In my doctoral thesis (Laidlaw, 1996) I made the case for our values being not static, but in fact living and developing as we do. If this contention is seen as valid and it is taken on and used by others in the development of their own educational research, then this has ramifications for what might be perceived as appropriate ways to represent the educational value of research processes and outcomes.

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At Ningxia Teachers University we have been developing Collaborative Action Research with Chinese Characteristics, which is encouraging Chinese ways of knowing as valid additions to current action research formats (www.actionresearch.net/moira.shtml). This includes the living values of the democratisation of knowledge; an emphasis on establishing a dialectic between individuals' and groups' knowledge; the validity of knowledge from parenthood informing the educational research process; tolerance of another way of knowing such as Confucianism.

At China's Experimental Centre for Educational Action Research in Foreign Languages Teaching (CECEARFLT) we are negotiating a democratically-focused New Curriculum (Laidlaw, 2006) with new teaching methodologies in a society which is heavily hierarchical in its views of knowledge (Yao, 1996).

In such complex work we need different ways of representing what we know and video has become a crucial avenue to the realisation of our endeavours. Because of limited resources (the Centre is situated in one of the country's newest and most remote universities) we are only slowly able to make progress in this regard. However, one representation of the flow of life-affirming energy in the way in which students and myself are looking at each other and holding meanings in our interactions can be seen at: <http://ejolts.net/drupal/node/36> (filmed by Jack Whitehead during one of his visits to the university) in which I am saying cheerio to ninety students, but wish to single one out for special congratulations. As I try to say something to individuals as they stream out of the door I catch one student's attention while still acknowledging others as they leave. Our gaze is held with smiles and words and there is an energy flowing between us, which I believe is easy to see. This holding the gaze of individuals is a fundamental part of what I do in education because it is my belief that such attention is itself educational (Laidlaw, 1996). It fulfils one of my values of respect for the other. It also accords with Whitehead's comment:

For me, inclusionality in educational research is distinguished by flows of life-affirming energy and a gaze of recognition of the other (RI, June '08)

As you see, I can write my description of the end of a lesson, but I feel very sure that it is not as powerful as watching the video itself! I believe that more information is carried in the video than can be conveyed in words. In representing more appropriately what happened between those students and myself during our year of working together I needed the aid of the video. In fact, it wasn't really until I saw the video that I realised some of what I was doing.

Such data-collection also enabled me to learn more about what it is I want to do in education by rooting out my living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989).

It doesn't stop here, though. It isn't simply that I need to work with video and multimedia forms of representation to express more clearly what is being done, it is that watching the video changes the nature of knowledge itself and allows its development. If values are not static, then neither can knowledge be and if those are valid statements then new forms of representation need to be employed to enable a closer study of educational research processes. In my opinion the work of Branko Bogner in Croatia is particularly significant in this regard – see www.vimeo.com/videos/search:branko%20bognar, in which young students discuss their own experiences of carrying out action research enquiries. Any claims that he, or the teacher of the class, or the students themselves, make, can be enhanced through the use of the video-tape. In addition this tape can be used to help others see what is meant by quality in educational development.

Additionally I believe there may be some elaboration of multimedia forms of representation and connections to developing new epistemologies in the work of EJOLTS (Educational Journal of Living Theories) at www.ejolts.net. It will be interesting to see how the first edition (to be published in September 2008) will stretch our understanding of the nature of educational knowledge through

different forms of representation and fulfil what Bruce Ferguson asks for at the end of her article:

[to] validate forms of research that can convey knowledge not easily encapsulated just within pages of written text and work to overcome those whose knowledge and skills have been, in the past, inappropriately excluded.

I couldn't agree more!

References

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Creating new forms of living educational theories through collaborative educational research from Eastern and Western Contexts: A response to Jack Whitehead



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Over the past few years I have been engaged with exploring my educational journey and how I have influenced others in my practice as a Nurse educator and practitioner. I believe that the discussion and issues raised by Bruce Ferguson (2008) and Jack Whitehead (2008) in *Research Intelligence* are highly relevant to current debates in education about the creation of a World Education Association or a World Educational Association.

Such scholars are seeing that textual representation solely on printed pages does not adequately allow us to communicate the lived, energy-flowing values we claim to hold in our practices. There is a growing realisation, excitement and frustration as new technologies come on line that will allow us to explore the representation of our knowing and knowledge in new mediums.

In the year of the Olympics new standards of excellence will be measured in 100th of a second as humans reach the limits of what is physically possible. The new unexplored horizons have to be the exploration of the human mind and its ability to communicate outside the use of texts. >>

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>> In my research and seeking to make sense of the teachings of my order and my practice I managed to find texts that traced an educational evidence trail of over three thousand years. This trail was explored with the use of texts, narratives, pictures, poems, mediation practices and spiritual exercises. Once the connection was made and I understood in a form of transitional certainty a flow of energy that surges through my body, where time and space have no separation and the past becomes the present as I allow the knowing to flow in my practice.

As a western scholar who now lives in the East I have found that the sole use of western critical objective thinking leads to a fragmentation of knowing and knowledge. Reading such scholars as Tarnas (2000) and Van Doren (1992) clearly shows how new forms of knowledge have to be explored and represented in new ways or we will fall into the dogmatic illusion that we know and such knowing solidifies the fluid dynamics of space. Talbot (1992) offers exciting ideas and concepts to how we think. I have become increasingly confident that original contributions to educational knowledge can be made through collaborative educational research from Eastern and Western contexts.

“From my Buddhist perspective I wish to mindfully share insights embedded in my lived understandings....”

Through sharing ideas from a position that we do not know we are exploring a creative synthesis of standards of judgment from Eastern and Western academic traditions to validate and legitimate differing forms of educational theory that provide valid explanations of the educational influences of individuals in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work.

From my Buddhist perspective I wish to mindfully share insights embedded in my lived understandings of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism and the embedded concepts of life flow. These processes include the evolution of my ontology and the creation of an inclusional pedagogy of the unique (Farren, 2005) with transitional certainty as a living epistemological standard of judgment. An energy-flowing, living standard of inclusionality as a space creator for engaged listening and informed learning is offered as an original contribution to knowledge in my doctoral thesis (Adler-Collins, 2007).

On the practitioner-researcher day on the 6 September 2008 at the BERA conference I will show how the generation of living educational theories can reach

across cultures as a celebration of their differences which included a flow of similar awareness through the production of a web-based electronic poster presentation.

These insights are offered with visual data that emphasises the importance of flows of life-affirming energy with values in creating safe spaces for relating, enquiring, learning and researching in educational relationships. Within the global communities of professional educators I believe that there exists an accumulated wealth of knowledge about how to improve teacher practice through teacher training and follow-up professional development experiences. However, the knowledge base has been significantly underutilised due to a lack of mechanisms to facilitate and sustain educational knowledge sharing and educational knowledge transformation. I agree with most of Snow's point:

The challenge here is not to ignore or downplay this personal knowledge, but to elevate it. The knowledge resources of excellent teachers constitute a rich resource, but one that is largely untapped because we have no procedures for systematising it (p.9)

I believe that the poster session on the 6 September 2008 at the BERA Practitioner-Researcher Day at Heriot-Watt University will mark a significant advance in the development of a new epistemology of educational knowledge.

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