

Keynote Address to the Act, Reflect, Revise IV Conference, Best Western Brant Park Inn, Brantford, Ontario. February 17/18th 2000.

CREATING OUR OWN KNOWLEDGE

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I'd like to thank Marg Couture and the sponsors of Act, Reflect, Revise IV, for the invitation to speak with you this evening. I've given keynotes on action research to conferences in Greece, Ireland and the UK over the past twelve months but these have lacked the perspective of my annual visits to Ontario which began in 1992 with an invitation from Tom Russell to visit Queens University. The changes we have experienced since the first Act, Reflect Revise Conference in 1996, in Toronto, have been enormous. The Conservative Government in Ontario restructured your School Boards. It restructured the Curriculum and Assessment. It established the College of Teachers and is now in the process of implementing a policy of 'Tests for Teachers'. Two years ago, I organised a session on action research for the Grand Erie programme on Leaders of the Future. The room was full of happy smiling faces. I soon learnt this pleasure wasn't due to their anticipation of an exciting session on action research with me. That morning the 85 factor had just been announced and everyone was busy calculating when they could retire!

PROGRESS

What I want to focus on this evening is not your retirement! I want to focus on the many years of productive life in education in this room. I'm thinking particularly of your influences as professional educators on the quality of learning of your students. I'm also thinking about the ways in which action research can help your professional learning and help to improve the quality of students' learning. Perhaps more than anyone Jack MacFadden has demonstrated the potential of portfolio assessment to enable students to show their own learning and to show the influence of a teacher's learning on student's learning.

I have just spent the day in a workshop on action research, where we have talked about what really matters to use in education. We have talked about what we value, what we have tried to do to improve student learning. We have also focused on the importance of producing accounts of what we do in our classrooms so that we can strengthen our professional knowledge-base. The progress made over the past four years by participants in Act, Reflect, Revise, can be seen in the publications edited by Nancy Halsall and Leslie Hossack (1996) and in the Action Research Kit edited by Jackie Delong and Ron Wideman (1997). It can also be seen in the impressive use of the new technology which Ron and Jackie pushed forward in the development of the Ontario Action Researcher, the electronic journal we are going to here more about later this evening (OAR, 2000). Another significant advance has been made by Brock University in its support of an accredited programme of action research, but before I talk about this initiative and our other achievements over the past four years, I want to talk a little about the influences of government policy on teacher professionalism.

PRESENT CONTEXT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY AND POWER

Here is an extract from a letter Janet Ecker, Minister of Education, sent to Ms. Donna Marie Kennedy, Chair, Governing Council Ontario College of Teachers, dated 10th Nov. 1999.

".....I know you share, as the government does, a commitment to quality education and accountability.

Therefore, as one of the important steps in proceeding with this commitment, I am seeking the advice of the College on how to implement a program for teacher testing which is cost effective and within the following parameters:

- *regular assessment of teachers' knowledge and skills*
- *methodologies which include both written and other assessment techniques*
- *a link to re-certification*
- *remediation for those who fail assessments*
- *de-certification as a consequence if remediation is unsuccessful.*

THE PROFESSION'S RESPONSES

The Ontario College of Teachers have responded with a Consultation Paper in four sections (OCT, 2000):

Section A - Maintaining Competency: Survey of programs and practices of Ontario Self-Regulatory Bodies

Section B - Ensuring Competency: Survey of international programs and practices in the teaching profession

Section C - Demonstrating Competency in the Teaching Profession: The Ontario Context. Here are some extracts about the present systemic dysfunction and the College's response.

"Ontario has the potential to construct an integrated system to ensure competency in the teaching profession. At present, however, the various components of the Ontario system designed to ensure competence remain unconnected and disparate. As a result, even with the best intentions and efforts on the part of all stakeholders systemic dysfunction results. In such a system, the whole is actually less than the sum of its parts."

".....The College has provided, in Roth's terms, the standard that will represent the vision and provide a conception of teacher and teaching". The College, through the standards of practice and ethical standards, has articulated the first component necessary for the construction of an integrated approach to ensuring competency in the teaching profession. The profession and the public, through the consultation process, have generated an image of what constitutes a competent teacher in Ontario."

Section D - Consultation: Addressing the Range of Options Emerging from the Research. Here are some extracts related to a 'standardized electronic format portfolio'.

"Option B9. All members of the Ontario College of Teachers retain a professional portfolio highlighting their ongoing professional learning and achievements that is reported to the College periodically by employers, perhaps once every three to five years....."

"Organized around both the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession and the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession, a

standardized electronic format portfolio, with an optional hard-copy component, would be developed by the College of Teachers for use by all members. The Professional Learning Framework of the College would determine general expectations of the portfolio and the professional learning recorded in the portfolio would reflect the actual work assignment of the member."

Some twelve months before the above letter of the 10th November 1999 I gave a keynote address to the Educational Studies Association of Ireland at Trinity College in Dublin, on Developing research-based professionalism through living educational theories.

Here is how I criticised the Teacher Training Agency in England and Wales and praised the Ontario College of Teachers. The Teacher Training Agency has similar responsibilities for teacher education to OCT.

"Learning from the Teacher Training Agency

In England and Wales the Teacher Training Agency has produced a framework for the professional development of teachers. At the present time it includes some 63 standards of practice which novice teachers must meet for them to be awarded their credentials of Qualified Teacher Status. It also includes the national standards for Subject leaders, for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators and for Headteachers.These developments give some indication of the importance being given to the professional development of teachers in England and Wales. This concern is accompanied by a major recruitment crisis. The professional status of teaching (and I include pay within this) is not sufficiently high in England and Wales to attract sufficient numbers of good quality entrants into the profession and to retain the numbers we need. It will require a major cultural shift to change the public perception of teaching as a profession. Quotes from Ted Wragg (1998) highlight the problem when he talks of:

... the zombie method of training heads or teachers, whereby complex human behaviour is atomised into discrete particulars, or 'competencies'. This mechanical approach, much favoured by the hapless Teacher Training Agency, is an unmitigated disaster..... The tyranny of brain-corroding bureaucracy must end.... Most important of all is to support creativity and imagination, collegiality and trust, not just foster the mechanical implementation of dreary, externally driven missives.

Jim Graham (1998) in an excellent article on teacher professionalism has added his voice to the growing criticism of the negative influences of the TTA when he says:

For teacher professionalism, the over-prescribed, centralist regulation by the TTA established a technicist model of teaching at variance with the autonomy, flexibility, collegiality necessary to create the learning organisations required to socialise the new generation of knowledge workers. (Graham, p. 17, 1998).

In contrast to the errors of the TTA I want to recommend the work of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) as it develops its standards of practice. Explicitly influenced by action research approaches (Squire 1998), OCT appears much more aware of the need to view standards of professional practice in terms of the living values which teachers use to give meaning and purpose to their productive lives in education.

Fran Squire works with Linda Grant of the Ontario College of Teachers on the development of standards of practice. Her enquiries, are focused on the questions,

What implications arise when standards of practice are linked to action research endeavours?

How do we keep the spontaneity and individualism inherent in action research as we establish criteria for its recognition in the educational community?

The reason I think that the work of Fran Squire, Linda Grant and the OCT is so important is that they are developing, to use Jean McNiff's phrase, a 'generative' form of action research. Unlike the Teacher Training Agency, they appear to understand that the standards of professional practice are the living values used by teachers in their educative relationships with their pupils. OCT is a learning organisation which is enquiring into the process of relating standards and professional learning in relation to the creation of a professional learning community which is concerned with the development of required professional knowledge."

I think the generatively described by Jean McNiff is understood by the Ontario Action Researcher (OAR 2000) with its current issue edited by Cheryl Black and Peter Rosokas and with contributions on the following topics from Heather Knill-Griesser, Janet Trull and Lori Wiens.

**- ONTARIO ACTION RESEARCHER -
Current Issue**

V. 3.11E - Supporting the Process

- GUEST EDITORS - Cheryl Black and Peter Rasokas

V. 3.11 - Improving Math Attitudes Through Action Research: Attitude is the Key to Success

Heather Knill-Griesser

V. 3.12 - Action Research: A Personal Inquiry Into Early Literacy

Janet Trull

V. 3.13 - An Action Research Approach: Engaging Parents in the Assessment Process For Increasing Mathematical Achievement:

Lori Wiens

Now, from my criticisms of the Teacher Training Agency in England and Wales and the uniqueness of Cheryl's Peter's Heather's, Janet's and Lori's contributions to OAR, I think you will appreciate why I am concerned about 'standardised portfolios' in the OCT consultation paper and statements like,

"The profession and the public, through the consultation process, have generated an image of what constitutes a competent teacher in Ontario."

My own strong belief is that each individual in this room has a unique constellation of values, skills, practices and understandings which constitute their unique image of themselves as a professional educator. I wouldn't want this uniqueness to be distorted by a 'standardised portfolio'. Perhaps it is worth stressing the points about 'variation' in professional learning in Section C of the consultation document from OCT:

".....Professional learning is at the heart of teacher professionalism. The content of the professional learning may vary. The rationale and resources

for professional learning may vary. The way in which members of the College engage in professional learning may vary. The constant will be that these programs included in the professional learning framework directly support the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* and the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*. Through the professional learning framework, the Ontario College of Teachers meets its legislated mandate to "provide for the ongoing education of members of the College".

For compelling evidence of the variation in the 'images' of themselves as teachers you might like to look at the action research accounts, published since the first Act, Reflect, Revise Conference in 1996, in the Living Theory section of the homepage, <http://www.actionresearch.net> .

ACCESS TO THE LIVING THEORIES ON THE INTERNET

You have only to look at the prologue of Moira Laidlaw's Ph.D. in the Living Theory section of the above homepage, where she uses the poem of the Ancient Mariner as a metaphor for her life as a professional educator and then to read the accounts of John Loftus, Kevin Eames, Moyra Evans, Hilary Shobbrook, Erica Holley and Ben Cunningham, to see the extent of the variations in their approaches to their professional learning and their 'images' of themselves.

CREATIVITY AT BROCK UNIVERSITY/ CREATING OUR OWN KNOWLEDGE

Because of my interest in the construction of our professional knowledge-base, I want to turn to the professional learning programmes supported by Brock University, Professors Susan Drake and Michael Manley-Casimir, and the Grand Erie Board. I also want to share the details of some similar programmes I have been fortunate in being associated with at Bishop's University in Quebec and Bath University in the UK. Details of these action research and portfolio programmes are in the Masters Programme section of <http://www.actionresearch.net>

In sharing the details of these programmes I want to stress the importance of strengthening our learning communities as professional educators. The first group of teachers to complete the portfolio assessment unit at Bath University submitted their portfolios two weeks ago. Gill Hewlett a secondary teacher, allowed me to put her commentary from her portfolio, on

my homepage in the masters programme section. I do hope you will download it. My plan is to make the homepage more interactive so that you can contact each other directly to share your ideas and your accounts. Moira Laidlaw is one of the group of Bath teacher researchers who have inspired many educators around the world with the quality of her accounts. You can access three of Moira's papers, which describe and explain how she worked at living more fully her values of equal opportunities with her pupils, in the Values section of the homepage.

John Loftus, a primary school principal has just finished a five year action research study of his work as a principal. I think you will enjoy chapters 2 and 3 of his account on action research and leadership. Ben Cunningham, a former secondary school principal, has another inspiring account of action research in the appendix of his account in the Living Theory of the homepage. I do hope you will access some of this work and contact the writers. In the masters programme section you will also find a dissertation by a learning support teacher, Teresa Burke, who asked, researched and answered the question, 'how can I improve my practice as a learning support teacher?', with Jean McNiff (1993) in Ireland.

Earlier today in the action research workshop I stressed the importance of educational enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'. We focused on the importance of relating such enquiries to pupils' learning. One question I think would be well worth keeping at the forefront of these enquiries is, 'what kind of data will I need to collect to enable me to make a judgement on my effectiveness in helping my pupils to improve their learning?'.

CREATIVE COMPLIANCE WITH THE STANDARDS OF PRACTICE AND ETHICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TEACHERS.

I want to finish my talk this evening by relating the above question to your creative compliance with the standards of practice and ethical framework of the Ontario College of Teachers. I am looking forward to visiting Brock University this May and June to continue to work with those of you who are working on such questions and registered on the action research programme. It may be that we can show the kind of creative compliance which John Elliott (1998) writes about. John is one of the UK's most influential supporters of action research. What I have in mind is the kind of compliance,

with the standards and framework of the Ontario College of Teachers, which uses these standards and frameworks, not as something to conform to, but as a helpful stimulus to the expression of our own originality of mind and critical judgement as we research our professional learning in helping to improve our pupils' and students' learning. John Elliott was one of the examiners of my Ph.D. thesis (Whitehead, 1999, 2000) in which I argued for the creation of living educational theories by professional educators as we expressed our originality of minds and critical judgement in relation to externally imposed standards. I've put this thesis in the living theory section of my homepage.

As we look to the future and think what we might create, my own interest is focused on the OCT (1999a) ethical standards for the teaching profession. I particularly like the idea of being accountable to the values of:

"endeavouring to develop in students respect for human dignity, spiritual values, cultural values, freedom, social justice, democracy and the environment;

work with other members of the College to create a professional environment that supports the social, physical, intellectual, spiritual, cultural, moral and emotional development of students." (OCT, p.2, 1999a)

I think we 'should' relate these values in our action research to the OCT (1999b) standards of practice for the teaching profession. I am thinking particularly of the standard of ongoing professional learning:

Teachers are learners who acknowledge the interdependence of teacher learning and student learning. Teachers engage in a continuum of professional growth to improve their practice. (OCT, p. 15, 1999b)

And the standard of Leadership and Community:

Teachers are educational leaders who create and sustain learning communities in their classrooms, in their schools and in their profession. They collaborate with their colleagues and other professionals, with parents, and with other members of the community to enhance school programs and student learning. (OCT, p.13,1999b)

Let me conclude with a word of warning about rhetoric and 'conforming' to externally set standards. In Montreal last April I attended a presentation at the American Educational Research Association Conference. Elliot Eisner was on the platform with Maxine Greene (AERA, 1999). Both researchers are leaders in their fields. I was struck by a certain sadness in Elliot Eisner when he asked Maxine Greene why it was that with all their rhetorical power they hadn't had more influence on practice. I want to suggest that we use the rhetoric in the OCT ethical standards and standards of practice as a stimulus to our own creativity as we search for ways of living more fully our own values in our educative relations with our students. Through programmes such as those supported at Brock University and those supported by Pam Lomax during her time as Professor of Educational Research at Kingston University, (Lomax, 1999) and Tom Russell (2000) at Queens University, I think we will be able to produce portfolios of our professional lives which show our own living standards of professional practice in relation to the voices and learning of those we teach. I want to participate in this journey with you and I've made a start by putting my account of my educational practices in the living theory section of my homepage. I'm hoping that you will see that this account has arrived somewhat later than those of my students, each one of whom has been recognised as making their own original contribution to the knowledge-base of education. I'm hoping that we can continue to meet like this to share our educational journeys. In communities such as this I certainly find the mutual support and pleasure which energises me and helps to sustain my enthusiasm for education. I think this energy is connected to celebrations of being together as we work towards the recognition of the educational values expressed in both our students' voices and learning, and our own. Perhaps we should bear Rachel Kessler's point in mind from a recent paper in Orbit (Kessler, 1999):

Perhaps most important, as teachers, we can honor the quest of each student to find what gives their life meaning and integrity, and what allows them to feel connected to what is most precious for them. In the search itself, in loving the questions, in the deep yearning they let themselves feel, young people will discover what is sacred in life, what is sacred in their own lives, and what allows them to bring their most sacred gift to nourish the world. (Kessler, 1999, p. 33).

Thank you for the pleasure of your company. Jack Whitehead 16/02/00

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