

years came out sixteenth equal with the Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec) out of 23 full participants in the process. Wintec had had research funding for the past eleven years, so TWoA's success was no mean feat.

I was appointed to a Sector Reference Group, a small number of researchers from around the country who met to look at feedback from participants and other interested parties after the first round of the PBRF, and to make recommendations to TEC on the next round. To their credit, TEC has seemed very open to these recommendations. A partial round was held in 2006, with the results only recently released.

What was obvious to me through this exercise was the contestation that still occurs over 'what counts as research', with some people having difficulty with the notion of a carving as a piece of research. Many years ago I was privileged to be at an action research conference on the marae (Māori meeting house and surrounding area) at Waiariki Polytechnic in Rotorua. A kaumatua (esteemed elder) came in to our group in the evening and spoke for two and a half hours about the history and personalities, the tribal conflicts and colonisation of the area, using only the carvings in the room as his 'notes'. That experience brought strikingly home to me how carvings can be research. The stories of his people – also their philosophies and spiritual beliefs – were all incorporated in the representations in wood that surrounded us. Given the resistance that is still evident from some contributors to the PBRF process about the inclusion of song, dance, carving and weaving as forms of research that can be critically assessed and which can bring research funding, it is to the credit of New Zealand's TEC that the definition of research they adopted permitted this inclusion, even if some of their processes subsequently made its assessment and appropriate funding difficult.

So far, my reflections have concentrated largely on the New Zealand context. However, for some years I have been involved in discussions through a group that operates out of the University of Bath, in conjunction with Dr. Jack Whitehead, and latterly also with the British Educational Research Association's online practitioner research group. In both those groups it has been encouraging to see similar attempts to include alternative cultural perspectives into 'what counts as research'. Most recently, the discussion has considered the African concept of ubuntu.

A just-completed thesis, that of Eden Charles from the University of Bath, gained him his doctorate and the following comments from his examiners (posted on the BERA discussion group): "We found the thesis to be an important, discerning and highly original piece of work, containing much publishable material about the new approaches necessary to address and alleviate oppressive practices of all kinds, especially those associated with colonialism and post-colonialism." I believe it is a really positive and healthy move in educational research when approaches such as action research, incorporating critique from an African perspective such as Charles has used, are now readily accredited by the academy.

It is also encouraging that research embodied in forms other than the purely written is also being recognised. I have been exploring this issue for some years, receiving early support and suggestions from researchers in Australia and the U.S. who cited thesis outputs including CD-roms and performance cafés. Recently, a colleague in New Zealand gained her Masterate using a combination of thesis and DVD to demonstrate her reflective practice in dance. It takes courage and open-mindedness for people accustomed to and trained in 'traditional' research processes to consider and even embrace alternative ways of researching, and of presenting that research. But it will 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.

References

- Bright, D. (2005) *Light Reflections: A Grief Embodied*. Thesis for M. Sports and Leisure Studies, University of Waikato, Hamilton, N.Z
- Charles, E. (2007) *How Can I Bring Ubuntu as a Living Standard of Judgement Into the Academy? Moving Beyond Decolonisation Through Societal Reidentification and Guiltless Recognition*. PhD Thesis, University of Bath, June 2007.

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