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Increasing Inclusion in Educational Research: Reflections from New Zealand

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It is good to be able to share some reflections about developments in educational research over the twenty-five years in which I have been involved in research endeavours.

In this brief paper, I want to note the changes that have occurred in how research is carried out, funded, presented and assessed in the time I have been a practitioner-researcher, and the attempts that I have observed to include more diverse perspectives and presentation styles in research. I want to suggest that these changes are indicative of an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge. The bulk of my reflections are based on practice in New Zealand, but towards the end of the discussion I expand this to consider work done elsewhere.

When I first started working in New Zealand polytechnics in the early 1980s the research conducted was largely positivistic. Educational research was marked mostly by the gathering of institutional data by university academics using their own frameworks to develop theories which were then taught to the practitioners, rather than being developed in conjunction with them. This is obviously a sweeping generalisation, but did represent how things were done in educational research at the time.

I encountered action research in the late 1980s, when it was still considered to be a fringe approach. Bob Dick from Australia commented that in his university, action research was still considered rather suspect at that time. Bob's 'arlist' discussion group was of immense help to me in learning more about this approach, as has been the work of Jack Whitehead and his colleagues at the University of Bath, and Jean McNiff. My PhD studies, completed in 1999, used a combination of action research and Foucauldian analysis to help with the development of a research culture in the polytechnic. In 2003 I moved on to work in a Māori university, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa (TWOA), as research manager. This appointment coincided with the first occurrence of New Zealand's Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) process, an attempt to measure, assess and fund research nationwide. The PBRF was based loosely around the U.K. RAE. Along with colleagues at the Wānanga, I was involved in gathering data on research that had occurred in the institution over the past six years, a massive job given that New Zealand researchers had not been pre-warned of the need to gather data to prove research had occurred, when, where and how. All this had to be done retrospectively.

We were greatly assisted in this process by the Tertiary Education Commission's adoption of a very broad definition of research which, for the first time, counted creative and performing arts research as research, not as 'similar to' research processes. At the Wānanga, along with more traditional business and environmental research, there was a huge amount of creative and performing arts research, incorporated in such outputs as carving, flax weaving and composition of songs and plays, many of which were very innovative and contributed to the expansion of knowledge in their areas. However, despite the TEC's attempts to assess this knowledge appropriately by designating a 'Māori Knowledge and Development' (MKD) panel, other aspects of the PBRF led to staff nominating their research to the Performing Arts panel, for example, rather than MKD, in order to attract the most funding possible for their institution. There were several other ways in which Māori research and researchers were disadvantaged in the PBRF assessment process. Notwithstanding glitches of this nature, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, despite having had government funding for research for only three