

How can I carry out Masters level educational research without abandoning my own educational values? – Ed Harker’s Question.

Imagining I’m Ed (with my knowledge of educational research and theory), responding to his question with the intention of supporting the completion of his first educational enquiry and supporting the rest of the group in completing their research methods in education enquiry– Jack Whitehead 15 June 2006.

I'm getting interested in the idea of work as art, or my professional life as a different "field of action" (as the Bhagavad Gita describes it) for my creative drives. Seeing the stone sculpture of the Ring of Love by Samuel Murambika on Tuesday 30 May 06 has helped me see parallels in the works I produce at home (for example, a cumulatively drilled and eroded stone, left to gather lichen and other patination, an artificial approximation to a "natural" piece of stone) and my approach to developing my nursery environment/curriculum (small cumulative changes and additions, left to grow their own 'culture', with the end result being as close as I can artificially achieve to being a natural place for growth and learning).....it's in the translation or framing of this discursive talk into something acceptable to what Jack calls the Academy that I feel the greatest inertia.... Anything that brings them alive, and makes them both personal and interesting to others (a definition of satisfying art?) is important. (Ed Harker – e-mail correspondence, 9th June, 2006)

I am beginning to recognize that the application of the standards used to judge my stories in the Academy can help to take my own enquiries forward and communicate my own values and standards more clearly to other educators. It can also help me to make a contribution to our knowledge-base in education. I am thinking of the criteria:

Made critical use of literature, professional experience and, where appropriate, knowledge from other sources, to inform the focus and methodology of the study or enquiry.

Made appropriate critical use of the literature and, where appropriate, knowledge from other sources, in the development of the study or enquiry and its conclusions.

Demonstrated an ability to identify and categorise issues, and to undertake an educational study or enquiry in an appropriately critical, original, and balanced fashion.

Demonstrated an ability to analyse, interpret and critique findings and arguments and, where appropriate, to apply these in a reflective manner to the improvement of educational practices.

I like Eisner’s (2005, 1997, 1993, 1988) analyses of the primacy of experience and the politics of method, forms of understanding and the future of educational research and the promise and perils of alternative forms of data representation. I agree with Eisner about the hegemony of propositions (hegemony, according to Wikipedia is that *dominance of one group over other groups, with or without the threat of force, to the extent that, for instance, the dominant party can dictate the terms of trade to its advantage, more broadly, cultural perspectives become skewed to favour the dominant group. Hegemony controls the ways that ideas become “naturalized” in a process that informs notions of common sense* – see

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegemony>):

“In our schools and in our research communities in education, the language of science and propositional forms of discourse have been dominant. Knowledge is defined within these forms...” (Eisner, 2005, p.114).

I also agree that:

How we try to understand our schools, how we seek to learn how our classrooms work, and how our teachers teach should not be limited to the schemata, theories, or methods that a propositional conception of knowledge requires. If the schemata shapes experience, should we not become versatile in the schemata we can use? (Eisner, 2005, p. 115).

I also share Snow’s (2001) view that

“Good teachers possess a wealth of knowledge about teaching that cannot currently be drawn upon effectively in the preparation of novice teachers or in debates about practice. 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 systematizing it. Systematizing would require procedures for accumulating such knowledge and making it public, for connecting it to bodies of knowledge established through other methods, and for vetting it for correctness and consistency. If we had agreed-upon procedures for transforming knowledge based on personal experiences of practice into ‘public’ knowledge, analogous to the way a researcher’s private knowledge is made public through peer-review and publication, the advantages would be great.” (p.9)

One of my problems in writing up my educational enquiry is in the translation or framing of the discursive talk I engage in everyday with my pupils, with parents and fellow educators. My problem is in translating into something acceptable to what Jack calls the Academy. The framing and translation always seems to lose a connection with and distorts my lived reality and because of this I feel a great inertia.

I think this inertia is connected to a distinction that Whitty is advocating for educational researchers between education research and educational research:

One way of handling the distinction might be to use the terms ‘education research’ and ‘educational research’ more carefully. In this paper, I have so far used the broad term education research to characterise the whole field, but it may be that within that field we should reserve the term educational research for work that is consciously geared towards improving policy and practice..... One problem with this distinction between ‘education research’ as the broad term and ‘educational research’ as the narrower field of work specifically geared to the improvement of policy and practice is that it would mean that BERA, as the British Educational Research Association would have to change its name or be seen as only involved with the latter. So trying to make the distinction clearer would also involve BERA in a re-branding exercise which may not necessarily be the best way of spending our time and resources. But it is at least worth considering.

(Whitty, 2005)

In this research methods in education enquiry I am focusing on my research methods as an educator and educational researcher as I ask, research and answer my question, **How can I carry out Masters level educational research without abandoning my own educational values?**

My approach is consistent with what Marion Dadds and Susan Hart refer to as methodological inventiveness:

" The importance of methodological inventiveness

Perhaps the most important new insight for both of us has been awareness that, for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus. We had understood for many years that substantive choice was fundamental to the motivation and effectiveness of practitioner research (Dadds 1995); that what practitioners chose to research was important to their sense of engagement and purpose. But we had understood far less well that how practitioners chose to research, and their sense of control over this, could be equally important to their motivation, their sense of identity within the research and their research outcomes." (Dadds & Hart, p. 166, 2001)

If our aim is to create conditions that facilitate methodological inventiveness, we need to ensure as far as possible that our pedagogical approaches match the message that we seek to communicate. More important than adhering to any specific methodological approach, be it that of traditional social science or traditional action research, may be the willingness and courage or practitioners – and those who support them – to create enquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care. Practitioner research methodologies are with us to serve professional practices. So what genuinely matters are the purposes of practice which the research seeks to serve, and the integrity with which the practitioner researcher makes methodological choices about ways of achieving those purposes. No methodology is, or should, cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods of techniques.. (Dadds & Hart, p. 169, 2001)

The purposes of my practice are to support my pupils in improving their learning and to contribute to the knowledge-base of education. I want to contribute to an enhancement in professionalism in education by contributing to our knowledge-base as educators through my research-based professionalism (Whitehead, 1989). What I mean by this is that I can contribute to enhancing the knowledge-base of our profession of education, by generating, evaluating and sharing my living educational theory of my educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which I am living and working (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). My living educational theory is my explanation for my educational influences in learning. As such I believe that I can generate and evaluate my own living theory in a way that avoids the inertia that overcomes me

whenever I engage with research writings that appear not to connect to my lived experience as an educator. I am seeking to avoid this inertia by writing through my experience of my values as these are lived in my educational relationships with my students.

In the story in Appendix 1 I communicate my account of my work with my pupil Daniel as we work together. I am seeking to enhance my educational influence in Daniel's learning, first through my face-to-face engagements and later through my sense of the environmental and community influences in his learning as I work with my commitment to inclusionality. By this I mean, following Rayner (2006) that I work with a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries that are connective, reflexive and co-creative. In my story there are two episodes where pupils show their inclusion of Daniel within the class and Daniel is showing his growing confidence in leading a field trip in the local country side. Through my story I am seeking to show the non-linear flow forms of my educational influences in learning with my students. I agree with Connelly and Clandinin (1999) that storying our lives as professional educators, helps to create our identities and to understand the educational influences we have in the world.

"Following the work of Dewey (1938), Schwab (1970), Polanyi (1958), Gauthier (1963), Johnson (1987), and others, we became fascinated with trying to understand teachers as knowers: knowers of themselves, of their situations, of children, of subject, of teaching, of learning. To reflect our epistemology interest in the personal and practical nature of education we coined the term "personal practical knowledge," which we defined as the following:

'A term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher's practice. It is, for any teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p.25).'

Increasingly, as our work progressed, we came to see teacher knowledge in terms of narrative life history, as storied life compositions, These stories, these narratives of experience, are both personal, reflecting a person's life history - and social - reflecting the milieu, the contexts in which teachers life. Keeping our eyes firmly on the question of teacher knowledge, we realized that knowledge was both formed and expressed in context. Within schools this context is immensely complex and we adopted a metaphor of a professional knowledge landscape to help us capture this complexity (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999, p.1)

In thinking about how to make public my embodied knowledge as an educator, through the educational influences I am having in my pupils' learning, I am aware of the need to make explicit my standards of judgement. I am thinking about the living standards I use to account to myself for what I do and that help to validate my beliefs about what I do. Validation is important as it shows that my claims to know my educational influences in learning, have been subjected to the mutual rational controls of critical discussion (Popper, 1963). In validating my accounts I use personal and social criteria. I understand my personal criteria as the ontological values I use to give meaning and purpose to my life in Polanyi's (1958, p.

327) sense that I have made a decision to understand the world from my point of view as an individual claiming originality and exercising his personal judgement responsibly with universal intent. I also use Habermas's four criteria of social validity in seeking to enhance the validity of my accounts through the mutual rational controls of critical discussion:

The speaker must choose a comprehensible expression so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true proposition (or a propositional content, the existential presuppositions of which are satisfied) so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with on another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified. (Habermas, 1976, pp.2-3)

In my narrative in Appendix 1 I do not use any quantitative measurement or statistics.. In my qualitative self-study I am concerned to present evidence that enables my narrative to withstand criticism as I focus on my explanation of my educational influences in my own learning and in the learning of my pupils. The focus of my narrative is on living my educational values as fully as I can in my educational relationships with my pupils in a way that contributions to their educational influences in their learning. In my understanding of quantitative data (see <http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/PA765/datalevl.htm>) it is important to understand the differences between nominal, ordinal and interval and ratio data. This is particularly important with any attempt to add or multiply marks or to operate on the marks with any statistical technique.

Almost all my judgments about my educational influences in learning are nominal. By this I mean that nominal data as no order, and the assignment of numbers to categories is purely arbitrary. Hence no arithmetic or logical operations can be performed validity on nominal data.

With ordinal data of the kind provided by the results of any of the tests I give and mark, the data has order. I can rank order the data but I do not know the interval distance between categories I am using to order the data.

Because of this lack of equal distances, arithmetic operations are impossible with this ordinal data but I can perform logical operations of the kind more than, less than or equal to.

For me to collect interval data I would need to know that the categories I use can be ordered and that the intervals between the categories are equal. In relation to my educational judgments about my influences in learning, I cannot think of any of these judgments of value in which I know that the intervals between my categories, such as care, acceptance, enquiry and learning, are equal.

Given that ratio data are interval data which also have a true zero point I do not know of any of my educational judgements of value that have such a true zero point.

“ For most statistical procedures the distinction between interval and ratio does not matter and it is common to use the term "interval" to refer to ratio data as well. Occasionally, however, the distinction between interval and ratio becomes important. With interval data, one can perform logical operations, add, and subtract, but one cannot multiply or divide. For instance, if a liquid is 40 degrees and we add 10 degrees, it will be 50 degrees. However, a liquid at 40 degrees does not have twice the temperature of a liquid at 20 degrees because 0 degrees does not represent "no temperature" -- to multiply or divide in this way we would have to be using the Kelvin temperature scale, with a true zero point (0 degrees Kelvin = - 273.15 degrees Celsius). Fortunately, in social science the issue of "true zero" rarely arises, but researchers should be aware of the statistical issues involved.” (see <http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/PA765/datalevl.htm>)

In reflecting on my way of being and on my influence with Daniel with the help of my memory and the video clips of our work together I am aware of making qualitative judgements about the expression and influence of the ontological values in this relationship. By ontological values I mean that I experience myself living the values that give meaning and purpose to my life in education. I can see myself expressing in my embodied gaze my valuing of Daniel. I can see myself responding receptively and with empathy to what I am perceiving as his educational needs. These include the need for recognition in the sense defined by Fukuyama:

Human beings seek recognition of their own worth, or of the people, things, or principles that they invest with worth. The desire for recognition, and the accompanying emotions of anger, shame and pride, are parts of the human personality critical to political life. According to Hegel, they are what drives the whole historical process. (Fukuyama, 1992, p. xvii)

In my experience of recognising others and being recognised myself I also feel the flow of life-affirming energy and loving warmth of humanity in my educational relationships. I do however understand the feelings Fukuyama refers to when such recognition is denied. With the evidence on the video-clips referred to in Appendix 1, I can be seen to be concerned to develop the recognition of inclusionality in which individuals acknowledge their recognition of each other as worthy of respect and attention. As I make this point about evidence I am aware of Donmoyer's concern about different views on validity in an era of paradigm proliferation:

"Contrary to dominant validity practices where the rhetorical nature of scientific claims is masked with methodological assurances, a strategy of ironic validity proliferates forms, recognizing that they are rhetorical and without foundation, postepistemic, lacking in epistemological support. The text is resituated as a representation of its 'failure to represent what it points toward but can never reach.... (Lather, 1994, p. 40-41)'." (Donmoyer, 1996 p.21.)

In seeking to explain my educational influences in my own and my pupils learning, I am aware that the act of explaining requires such a representation and that I am judging the quality and validity of this representation by its failure to represent what it points toward but can never reach. To meet the requirements of the Academy in producing some 4,500 words of continuous prose that meet the criteria in Appendix 2, I have transformed the representation in Appendix 1, that for me is a more adequate communication of the nature of my educational influences, than the account in the main body of this text. This text enables me, hopefully, to demonstrate that I can meet the University criteria for this masters unit. For my own sense of integrity I need to link this account to the one in Appendix 1 that enables me to get closer to what I am pointing towards but can never reach and that is the living experience and reality of my educational influences in my own learning and in the learning of my pupils.

As I continue with my learning I am aware to the need to move towards Laidlaw's (2006) inclusional insights in *How Might We Enhance the Educational Value of our Research-base at the New University in Guyuan? Researching Stories for the Social Good*.

"... what is the purpose of all this work. Why are we doing it? What is the social good here? Isn't it that we recognize such a childhood and such an old-age is what we want for ourselves and those we love? Isn't it that we care enough to want to make sure this happens? Isn't that why families in China devote themselves to building conditions for their children to have a better chance than they did? Isn't, therefore, the social good that which takes all those qualities and helps to improve them for all citizens for the benefit of everyone? Isn't that the social good? And isn't the work we are doing here, therefore, one of the ways of addressing how our research in the new university here in Guyuan can make a substantial contribution to knowledge, educational theory and the social good? In precisely the way that Huang Ju was anticipating in his presentation on 27th September, 2004. He asked us to strive for social development. By working in this Living Educational Theory Action Research way at this new and exciting university, I think we are taking those steps, and as one famous Chinese philosopher said: every great journey begins with a single step." (Laidlaw, 2006).

In conclusion I want to focus on the ethics, logics and design of my educational enquiry. I see that education is essentially value-laden. I cannot distinguish anything as educational without my judgment of approval. My ethics of justice, respect, freedom and care are part of my identity, I bring these, along with my other values into my educational relationships. As I research my practice I am aware of the ethical principles guiding my research. Ethical permission has been given by Daniel and his parents for sharing the images in Appendix 1. I take care not to share the digital images of children who might be damaged by the exposure. I abide by the guidelines about sharing digital images of children, from my Local Authority employer, Bath & North East Somerset. My accounts also abide by the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2004). While being aware of the importance of living my values as fully as I can and of clarifying and communicating these values in the form of ethical principles, I am aware of current debates between Institutional Ethical Review Boards and self-study and of action and other practitioner-researchers (Hemmings, 2006). In particular I understand the focus on academic freedom, respect for persons, beneficence and justice. As more of my pupils become pupil-researchers and publish

their accounts on the web, I will be taking care to ensure that ethical permissions have been given by those who appear in the accounts, including parents and pupils.

In addition to the vital importance of values in my educational enquiry, I am aware of three different approaches to logic in my account. The first conforms to the hegemony of propositions in that it conforms to the Aristotelean logic with its Laws of Contradiction and Excluded Middle. By these laws I mean that two mutually exclusive statements cannot be true simultaneously and that everything is either A or not-A. This is the logic that Popper (1963) uses to show that any theory that contains a contradiction is useless as a theory. In my integration of the ideas of others into my living theory I have drawn insights from propositional theories.

My living theory however, embraces contradictions, not between statements that are understood as propositions, but as lived experiences through which language expresses the feelings and meanings of existing as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989). By this I mean

My inclusional logic of enquiry is, following Rayner (2006), expressed as a relationally dynamic flow form of meaning as I receptively respond to the ecology and environments that influence my practice and that I am seeking to influence as I live my values as fully as I can. I show this inclusional logic at work in forming my account in Appendix 1. The logic is non-linear, it embraces contradictions and is communicated as a flow form of interconnecting and branching channels of communication between myself and my pupils. This can perhaps best be seen in the responses of pupils to Daniel in the flow of the movement from my feeling that I want to work with Daniel individually, to his embrace by the pupils in our classroom community.

The 'design' of my educational enquiry has emerged through the values, skills and knowledge I bring into the enquiry and through my improvisatory responses to my pupils as I receptively respond to their needs. This 'design' or form of enquiry includes my methodological inventiveness and appears appropriate to exploring the implications of my question. My approach differs from a controlled experimental design in that the pupils are not randomly allocated to groups. I am not viewing my question as being answerable in terms of dependent and independent variables where I seek to understand the causal effect of a treatment on a pupil. My question is focused on understanding my educational influence in my own learning and my pupils learning. The research approach I am using is 'designed' to develop my living truth rather than a spectator truth:

Existentialists such as Gabriel Marcel (cf. Keen, 1966) distinguish between "spectator" truth and "living" truth. The former is generated by disciplines (e.g., experimental science, psychology, sociology) which rationalise reality and impose on it a framework which helps them to understand it but at the expense of oversimplifying it. Such general explanations can be achieved only by standing back from and "spectating" the human condition from a distance, as it were, and by concentrating on generalities and ignoring particularities which do not fit the picture. Whilst such a process is very valuable, it is also very limited because it is one step removed from reality. The "living" "authentic" truth of a situation can be fully understood only from within the situation though the picture that emerges will never be as

clear-cut as that provided by "spectator" truth." Burke, A.(1992, p.222).

My approach is also different to ethnographers (Wikipedia, 2006) who immerse themselves within a context in order to understand the cultural influences in the social formation of both individuals and the culture. I draw insights from my understandings of such cultural influences in my own learning and the learning of my pupils. My purpose is however different to that of an ethnographer or any other social scientist. As a practitioner-researcher my purpose is to generate, evaluate and share my living educational theory, as an explanation of my educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of my pupils and in the learning of the social formations in which my life and work are located. In this way I intend to produce evidence-based stories of educational influences in learning that can make academic contributions to the professional knowledge-base of education

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