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Increasing inclusion in educational research: A response to Pip Bruce Ferguson



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In the March 2008 Issue of *RI*, Pip Bruce Ferguson describes attempts she has observed to include more diverse perspectives and presentation styles in research. She suggests "that these changes are indicative of an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge." (p.24)

In focusing my response on this epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge I shall outline some implications for the recognition and legitimisation of new living standards of educational judgment in the academy. In outlining these implications I shall bear the following in mind:

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. (p.25)

The exercise of courage is of course not sufficient to guarantee that a change will be an educational change. It is important to provide evidence that learning is worthwhile as part of the educational change.

The growth of my educational knowledge has included a commitment to a positivist/propositional epistemology from my first degree in the physical sciences and with which I entered teaching in 1967. My understanding and use of a dialectical epistemology developed between 1971-1980 as video-tapes of my teaching revealed my 'I' as a living contradiction in my classroom enquiries, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

The video tapes reveal that while I believed that I had established the conditions to support enquiry learning in my classroom, I was actually giving the pupils their questions and organising the learning resources in relation to my pre-set question. There is a 2,500 year history of debate between adherents to propositional and dialectical epistemologies that is distinguished by a refusal to recognise the rationality of the others' assumptions. Adherents to a propositional epistemology support Aristotle's laws of logic of contradiction and excluded middle. They hold that contradictions between statements must be eliminated from theory. They believe that everything is either A or not-A.

Dialecticians argue that contradiction is the nucleus of dialectics and that propositional thinkers are masking the dialectical nature of reality. Adherents to a propositional logic argue that dialectical thinking is based on nothing better than a loose and woolly way of speaking that is entirely useless for the expression of theory.

The third epistemology I use is that of inclusionality. This is grounded in a relationally dynamic awareness of space and boundaries as connective, reflexive and co-creative (Rayner, 2004). I want to be clear that what I am meaning by increasing inclusionality in educational research is bringing the living logic of inclusionality with its living standards of judgment into the academy.

For me, inclusionality in educational research is distinguished by flows of life-affirming energy and a gaze of recognition of the other. These are omitted from representations of educational phenomena on pages of written text, such as I am producing here. These are the usual forms of representation in the established and renowned international refereed journals of education. The radical suggestion I am making here is that the usual forms of representation in such journals are masking or omitting the life-affirming energy that distinguish what should count as educational knowledge, educational theory and educational research. I am stressing a difference between education research and educational research. I see education research as research being conducted in educational settings by researchers in the philosophy, sociology, psychology, history, economics, leadership and management of education. I see educational research as research that is focused on information gathering and educational theory generation and testing for explaining educational influences in learning.

I am further claiming that the traditional forms of scholarly representation are not only masking or omitting these flows of energy, they are also masking or omitting the gazes of recognition between educators and students that distinguish a relationship as an educational relationship. I am thinking of recognition in Fukuyama's terms:

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)

The next move requires a reader to move into the multi-media keynote I presented at the International Conference of Teacher Research (ICTR) on 28 March 2008. The presentation is in two parts. The first is the video of the keynote accessible from a streaming server at:

mms://wms.bath.ac.uk/live/education/JackWhitehead_030408/jackkeynoteictr280308large.wmv

and the multi-media presentation accessible at:

www.jackwhitehead.com/aerctr08/jwctr08key.htm

What the video shows is my expression of the life-affirming energy I express in my educational relationships and my gaze of the recognition of the other. In the first 10 minutes of the video of the keynote I use video clips of educators, students and pupils, with the cursor allowing a rapid movement forwards and backwards of the video-clip and the freezing of particular images. Given that I am saying that words on pages of text cannot adequately carry the embodied expression of meanings of life-affirming energy and gazes of recognition of the other, I am pointing to evidence to justify my

claims that is beyond the words in this brief article. Stimulated to respond to Pip Bruce Ferguson's suggestion "...that these changes are indicative of an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge" I am claiming that this epistemological transformation will require new forms of representation and educational standards of judgment in Journals of Educational Research. I have directed attention to how the evidence, showing the nature of these forms of representation and living standards of judgment, can be accessed by those with the technology to do so.

References

- Fukuyama, F. (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*. London, Penguin.
- Rayner, A. (2004) *INCLUSIONALITY: The Science, Art and Spirituality of Place, Space and Evolution*. Retrieved 17 July 2007 from <http://people.bath.ac.uk/bssadm/inclusionality/placespaceevolution.html>.

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article



VIP reading groups

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The popularity of reading groups is clear from the number of television and radio programmes, newspapers and publishers involved. It seems safe to assume that anyone interested in joining a reading group will be able to find one. They meet in homes, pubs, prisons and residential homes and there are even groups for specific genres. But is it so easy to join a reading group if you are visually impaired?

As an English teacher studying for an MA at the University of Reading, I knew I wanted my dissertation to be connected with reading. Quite by chance I heard that a reading group for visually impaired people (VIPs) met at my local library. I felt instantly that this could be an interesting focus for research. Was this group unusual or were there more groups? Why would a visually impaired person want to belong to a reading group? How did they read?

There has been some research into visually impaired people and reading (largely quantitative) and Jenny Hartley's book *The Reading Groups Book* (2002, OUP) looks at reading groups in general. However, the phenomenon of VIP reading groups seemed to present an opportunity for new research.

Although I decided to adopt a mixed-method approach, the project was rooted in a qualitative paradigm. Some purists take issue with this sort of approach (Creswell 1994, 176) but it seemed most appropriate for this project as it gave me the opportunity to investigate demographics while, at the same time, allowing me to learn something about the experiences and perceptions of VIPs and librarians.

Since the spring of 2006 I have been attending two local VIP groups as a 'participant observer' (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Denscombe, 1998). This has been important for building relationships with VIPs and library staff. Next I sent a questionnaire to groups I found by searching the Internet and I was fortunate that Calibre Audio Library, an organisation which supports VIP groups, enclosed copies of the questionnaire in one of

their mailings. In all, 37 groups returned questionnaires providing largely demographic information. This was followed by in-depth interviews with two librarians and five VIP members from the local groups and a final questionnaire which was sent to the original 37 groups to follow up key statements from the interviews. Despite a limited response to this final questionnaire due to timing, the replies I did receive were valuable and pointed to possible areas for future research.

A number of points of interest emerged from the project but, for the purpose of this article, I will focus on two key aspects of the research – the relationship between listening and reading and the quality of the discussion that takes place.

The initial questionnaire began by asking for the name of the group. While the majority were 'reading' groups, there were also 'listening', 'talking' and 'book' groups. Some of these names reflect that the fact that VIP groups mostly use unabridged recordings of books on audio tape, CD and now MP3 discs. Should any of them, therefore, be called reading groups?

I decided to ask about this in the interviews and the follow-up questionnaire. In general, librarians preferred to use the term 'reading', while the majority of VIPs referred to the activity as 'listening'. One interviewee felt that listening to audio books was different from reading as she was not doing it for herself. She felt that as she was hearing the story through someone else (the narrator), it could not be called reading. >>