

An Epistemological Transformation in what counts as Educational Knowledge: Responses to Laidlaw and Adler-Collins



Jack Whitehead, University of Bath

Pip Bruce Ferguson (2008) began this open dialogue with a suggestion that changes in how research is carried out, funded, presented and assessed are indicative of an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge. These changes involve the inclusion of diverse perspectives and presentation styles in research.

Pip Bruce Ferguson (2008) began this open dialogue with a suggestion that changes in how research is carried out, funded, presented and assessed are indicative of an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge. These changes involve the inclusion of diverse perspectives and presentation styles in research.

I responded (Whitehead, 2008) by agreeing with Bruce Ferguson about the epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge and explained the significance of inclusionality (Rayner, 2004) in this epistemological transformation:

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.

Laidlaw's (2008) response to Bruce Ferguson and me included the sentence below, which I think has profound implications for extending the forms of representation that are presently used in the British Educational Research Journal. I believe that Laidlaw's (2008) and Adler-Collins' (2008) contributions to Issue 104 of *Research Intelligence* are leading the way in evolving the forms of representation that can communicate the epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge. The key to communicating this epistemological transformation is the live url in Laidlaw's sentence:

Additionally I believe there may be some elaboration of multimedia forms of representation and connections to developing new epistemologies in the work of EJOLTS (Educational Journal of Living Theories) at www.ejols.net (p17)

Because *Research Intelligence* is now available in an e-format it can contain the live urls that take readers to multi-media representations of educational research. For example, readers of the e-version of *RI* can now click on www.ejols.net and go into the contents of the current issue that supports Adler-Collins' point (2008) about visual data that emphasises the importance of flows of life-affirming energy with values in creating safe spaces for relating, enquiring, learning and researching in educational relationships.

As a reader of *RI* you can now see if multi-media representations of educational theories are bringing about an epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge. Through the live urls below you can access the evidence to evaluate the validity of Laidlaw's (2008, p17) and my own claims about this epistemological transformation. Through the urls you can access the following multi-media accounts, in the current issue of the Educational Journal of Living Theories to see if they stretch and transform your understandings of the nature of educational knowledge through different forms of representation. You can judge this evidence to see if it also fulfils what Bruce Ferguson asks for at the end of her article in *RI* to:

"...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".
(Bruce Ferguson, 2008, p25)

Here is the evidence:

Foreword	Jean McNiff	http://ejols.net/drupal/node/85
Pupils as action researchers: improving something important in our lives	Branko Bognar and Marica Zovko Marica Zovko	http://ejols.net/drupal/node/82
Co-creating an educational space	Margaret Farren	http://ejols.net/drupal/node/78
In pursuit of counterpoint: an educational journey	Moira Laidlaw	http://ejols.net/drupal/node/76
Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories	Jack Whitehead	http://ejols.net/drupal/node/80

My hope is that after seeing, hearing and reading the multimedia representations of educational knowledge above, together with Jean McNiff's foreword, you will want to sustain this particular thread in the open dialogue in *RI* and perhaps campaign for an e-version of BERJ. I am thinking particularly of sustaining a dialogue on the proposition that the forms of representations used in BERJ are too limited to communicate the energy flowing, explanatory principles that can explain educational influences in learning. I am suggesting that the e-version of *RI* is open to different forms of representation as demonstrated through the live urls above and that these can communicate the epistemological transformation in what counts as educational knowledge.

There may be readers of *RI* who believe that it is important to distinguish education research from educational research. Those who make this distinction may believe, like Geoff Whitty (2006) in his 2005 Presidential Address to BERA, that 'education research', should characterise the whole field while educational research should refer to the narrower field of work specifically geared to the improvement of policy and practice. I do agree with Geoff Whitty that it is important to distinguish education research from educational research. I also believe that it is important to distinguish education theories generated by researchers in the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, economics, leadership, administration, politics and theology of education, from educational theories generated to explain the educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations.

As readers can see in my paper in *EJOLTS* I stress the importance of generating educational knowledge in living educational theories from educational research. For me, educational research draws insights from education theories, without any individual's living educational theory being reducible to these education theories either individually or in any combination. My anxiety about those who restrict or reduce educational research to improvements of policy and practice is that they may be failing to recognise the importance of educational researchers as educational knowledge creators. In my view educational research necessarily includes both matters of improving educational practice and of generating educational knowledge, especially in living educational theories. I say this in the spirit of encouraging open dialogue in *RI*.

References

- Adler-Collins, J.P. (2008) Creating New Forms Of Living Educational Theories Through Collaborative Educational Research From Eastern And Western Contexts: A response to Jack Whitehead. *Research Intelligence* 104, 17-18.
- Ferguson, P.B. (2008) Increasing Inclusion in Educational Research: Reflections from New Zealand. *Research Intelligence* 102, 24-25.
- Laidlaw, M. (2008) Increasing Inclusion In Educational Research: A Response To Pip Bruce Ferguson And Jack Whitehead. *Research Intelligence* 104, 16-17.
- 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>
- Whitehead, J. (2008b) Increasing Inclusion in educational research: A response to Pip Bruce Ferguson. *Research Intelligence* 103, 16-17.
- Whitty, G. (2006) Education(al) research and education policy making: is conflict inevitable? Presidential Address to the British Educational Research Association, University of Glamorgan, 17 September 2005. *British Educational Research Journal* 32 (2), 159-176.

Philip Cowley: Your man in the Treasury

The impact of social science research on government in Britain is patchy at best, non-existent at worst. Whilst individual academics, and some disciplines, have developed good links with policymakers, there is a growing awareness within academia that collectively we often do not do enough to disseminate research findings outside of the academic world.

See, for example, the comments in the recent report from the Academy of the Social Sciences. There may be many reasons for this collective failure, but there's also an awareness within government that sometimes they also don't do enough to reach out to the external research community, that it's not easy enough for advice to reach the ears of those who need to hear it. The result has been a worrying separation of academia and policy advice.

This was the rationale for the funding of an ESRC-placement in the Government Social Research Unit, based in HM Treasury. The GSRU coordinates the work of the Government Social Research professionals – around 1000 social scientists – across government. The post has just been filled by Philip Cowley, currently Professor of Parliamentary Government at the University of Nottingham, who will be spending the next nine months working in the Treasury, helping social science research feed into policymaking.

The initial priority is to develop work flowing from the Strategy Unit's report *Realising Britain's Potential*, published in February 2008. That report identified nine strategic challenges for the British Government over the next – from climate change to life chances, and from economic prosperity to democratic renewal. What is striking about *Realising Britain's Potential* is that nearly all of the challenges identified are ones where social science – including education specialists – should have a key role to play.

More generally, he will be working developing routes in to government for government, and in particular to the government social research profession. He describes the work as 'pimping for academics'. He commented: "One of the principal challenges of this project will be to turn around the ways in which academia communicates with government, which are not always successful." Academics often don't know to whom they should communicate their work, or in what format it should be sent. His advice is to send a summary of the research's findings (one side of A4), which sets out what the research has found, and why it might be useful to government. He can be contacted at philip.cowley@hm-treasury.x.gsi.gov.uk and will ensure that research reaches the right people within government.