

SUGGESTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING MA WRITINGS FOR SUBMISSION

Jack Whitehead, 08/01/10

Here are some suggestions that might help with 'framing/contextualising' your MA writings in relation to their significance as a contribution to educational knowledge and with relevant, up-to-date references.

I am thinking here of your writings for your 'educational enquiries', 'understanding learners and learning', 'gifts talents and education' and 'research methods in education'. I am thinking of Framing/Contextualising your writings in relation to your professional experience and values, your engagement with relevant policies and theories and with the ideas of others in relation to the methods and methodology you use in the generation of your contribution to educational knowledge.

I'd give your writings something like the following 'framing/contextualising' to explain that in studying your own practices and talents as an educator you want to contribute to the knowledge-base of education.

I think your framing/contextualization should give your reader an introduction as to **why** you are concerned with the issue you are enquiring into. I imagine that this must relate to the values you use to give meaning to your life and work in education. I imagine that we will all recognise that some of our concerns are related to the imposition by the government of inappropriate forms of accountability. The House of Lords' Merits of Statutory Instrument's Committee has put this in a way that might be useful to you:

"Able, brilliant and skilled professionals do not thrive in an environment where much of their energies are absorbed by the need to comply with a raft of detailed requirements. the evidence that we have seen during this inquiry has highlighted the problems that are caused to schools when too little thought is given to the systematic need to rely so heavily on regulation, and too little effort is put into managing the overall impact of statutory instruments issued, and monitoring whether the myriad requirements being imposed on schools are being taken seriously and implemented on the ground. We recommend that DCSF should now look to shift its primary focus away from the regulation of processes through statutory instruments, towards establishing accountability for the delivery of key outcomes."
(House of Lords, 2009, p.15)

House of Lords (2009) The cumulative impact of statutory instruments on schools: Report with evidence. The Stationery Office Limited: London. Retrieved 8 May 2009 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/mar/13/lords-report-dcsf> .

You could also let your reader know about any government, local authority or school policies that are influencing your enquiries. Marie's website <http://www.spanglefish.com/mariessite/> is an excellent resource for up-to-date material on policies on inclusion and on gifts and talents in education and on educational responses to these policies.

In locating the significance of your writings in showing how you are making explicit and evolving your embodied knowledge as an educator, I like very much the Catherine Snow quote from her 2001 Presidential Address to AERA:

“The challenge is to enhance the value of personal knowledge and personal experience for practice. 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 (my emphasis). For one, such knowledge might help us avoid drawing far-reaching conclusions about instructional practices from experimental studies carried out in rarified settings. Such systematized knowledge would certainly enrich the research-based knowledge being increasingly introduced into teacher preparation programs. And having standards for the systematization of personal knowledge would provide a basis for rejecting personal anecdotes as a basis for either policy or practice.” (p.9)

Snow, C. E. (2001) Knowing What We Know: Children, Teachers, Researchers. Presidential Address to AERA, 2001, in Seattle, in *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 30, No.7, pp.3-9.

You could point out that your narrative (living theory enquiry) is showing how to make public your embodied knowledge as an educator in terms of your talents as explanatory principles to explain why you do what you do. Pages 110-110 of a paper of mine that has just been published in *Studying Teacher Education* could be useful to you in emphasising the importance of producing evidence of educational influences, with students, on learning. See:

<http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jwselfstudyjournal1109.pdf>

You should briefly outline for your reader the methodology of your study recognizing the distinction between methods and methodology.

Methods and Methodology.

The methods you use usually refer to **how** you collect your data, for example with video or audio records, interviews, observations and/or action reflection cycles. Your **methodology refers to the principles you use in carrying out your study**. I imagine that you will identify with Marian Dadds’ and Susan Hart’s understanding of 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 of 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, be cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods or techniques..." (Dadds & Hart, p. 169, 2001)

Dadds, M. & Hart, S. (2001) *Doing Practitioner Research Differently*, p. 166. London; RoutledgeFalmer.

I also think that you may enjoy locating your writings in relation to some of the recent contributions to the **Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTS)**. You can access the homepage of this Journal at <http://ejolts.net/> .

You can access the latest issue of December 2009 at <http://ejolts.net/current> with the following contents – just click on the titles to access any of them them:

Foreword (pp.i-iv) - *Margaret Farren*

Class journal as a possibility of encouraging pupils' creativity (pp. 295-323) - *Mario Gavran*

How can I encourage multi-stakeholder narrative and reflection on the use of ICT in Teacher Professional Development programmes in Rwanda? (pp.324-364) - *Mary Hooker*

How can I help my students promote learner autonomy in english language learning? (pp.365-398) - *Li Yahong*

How can I design a recovery-oriented e-learning website for people with mental health difficulties? (pp.399-431) - *Ronan Mulhern*

How do I create my living theory of accountability as a lecturer in teacher education? (pp.432-439) - *Jane Renowden*

I think that you will enjoy Margaret Farren's foreword. You can access previous issues at: <http://ejolts.net/archive> and you might find useful the paper by Bognar and Zovko on **pupils as action researchers** and my paper on a **living theory methodology** in Issue 1(1) . I also think that you will enjoy Jean McNiff's foreword:

Foreword (pp. i-iv) - *Jean McNiff*

Pupils as action researchers: improving something important in our lives (pp. 1-49) - *Branko Bognar & Marica Zovko*

Co-creating an educational space (pp. 50-68) - *Margaret Farren*

In pursuit of counterpoint: an educational journey (pp. 69-102) - *Moira Laidlaw*

Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories (pp. 103-126) - *Jack Whitehead*

You can access Issue 2(2) from <http://ejolts.net/node/136> with the following contribution on developing talents and offering gifts from Marie:

Foreword (pp.i-iii) - *Jack Whitehead*

How do I contribute to student teachers' critical development?: A higher education practitioner's personal account of a move towards a more critical and emancipatory pedagogy through design and technology (pp.172-214) - *Sally Aston*

Developing Talents to Create and Offer Knowledge of the Self and the World as Educational Gifts (pp.215-231) - *Marie Huxtable*

Creativity in teaching plant production (pp.232-256) - *Vehid Ibraković & Branko Bognar*

How do I learn to inspire and support my primary education students' creativity in design and technology?: Finding the courage to move from craft to creativity in primary design and technology (pp.257-279) - *Dot Jackson*

Developing a living theory of theopraxis: How do I improve my practice as a professional educator in Religious Education? (pp.280-294) - *Maria James*

One of the qualities that distinguish masters writings from non-accredited writings is **the critical engagement with the ideas of others, with up-to-date referencing.**

If you go to <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/jack/jwnmmukey301109.htm> I've put a list of resources/references I used in a keynote at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa on the 30/11/09. **The urls to the 5, two page contributions to Research Intelligence include a contribution** from Marie and one from Moira Laidlaw that you could draw on to emphasise the importance, for the knowledge-base of education, of practitioner-researchers (you and me!) making public our embodied knowledge and its evolution. **The url to the keynote symposium** proposal and the presentations at the British Educational Research Association of September 2009 on '*Explicating A New Epistemology For Educational Knowledge With Educational Responsibility*' at <http://www.jackwhitehead.com/bera/bera09keyprop.htm> , explains why I stress the importance for the knowledge-base of education of gaining academic legitimation for our embodied knowledge as educators.

I think that we all can give a 'contextualisation/framing' to our writings that helps to strengthen its significance in relation to recent ideas about the importance of bringing the embodied knowledge of educators and its evolution into a publically validated and legitimated knowledge-base for education. I think your desire to clarify and develop your own talents as educators in enhancing your educational influences with your pupils and students will show that your talents are flowing with life-enhancing energy. To be educational I think that they have to be values-laden and form explanatory principles to explain why you do what you do. On becoming public/communicable they become your living standards of judgment. I mean this in the sense that they are the living standards you to account to yourself and others for what you are doing and the educational influence you are having with your pupils in their learning, as well as your own.

I'm hoping that these notes are helpful to you. For those who are working to submit writings to meet the first meeting of MA examiners in 2010 I know that Marie has to have the grades/marks in by the 28th January. She will need a week to mark your writings so that this gives you until the 21st January – an extension of some 10 days from the original date of the 11th January.

If you think that you need any further resources to help with your submission just ask – jack@actionresearch.net .