

The Time is Right Now!

‘How can I enhance the educational influence of my pupils in their own learning, that of other pupils, myself and the school?’

Joy Mounter

3rd MA Educational Enquiry May 2008

‘The time is now, break free and fly..... if you have the courage!’

‘We have the courage we can fly!’

The children in my class and I have travelled far on our shared journey of self reflection and learning. But we are interested to explore our understanding and ability to create knowledge, the space where this happens and our awareness of this. I am interested in learning, reflective practice and philosophical creation, thinking, the understanding that we all create and explore with our curiosity.

The awareness of self as a learner fades as we begin to connect with other learners and develop our skills and depth of thought. We can no longer be content with being a teacher in the traditional sense but as co-learners and co-creators of thought and knowledge. For me all are linked and create the active sense of reflective learning, a space that vibrates and changes with the moment as the lead is exchanged and all thoughts and experiences add to the learning pool we can all dip into.

This assignment will build on my previous work (Mounter 2007), enabling the reader to share the journey we have undertaken and feel the change in language, beliefs and living values. Whitehead (2005) summarises this journey of exploration and development of ones own embodied ontological values which we hold ourselves accountable to. We move through our journey from teacher and pupil, filling the vessel with knowledge, through the self awareness and awakening as a learner, understanding the roles and changeability of teacher/ learner/ coach/ mentor/ c-creator.

Our journey is shared through not only the words of this assignment, but through the design of the flow and choice of vocabulary. My journeying involves doubt and uncertainty, the end is hidden until that point is reached, and I want you to share those qualities of my authentic journey through this account. The point and my writing will only become clear when you reach the end. The style and ‘flow’ is reflective of this, almost tangible but just the certainty out of grasp. Through this assignment you will share the journey, the drawing together of the threads at the end of the journey through reflective thought, mirrored in the conclusion of my writing. Our journey is challenging

perceptions of researchers and pushing beyond current research. Bruce- Ferguson (March 2008) explores the courage and open-mindedness it takes to move away from traditional research processes and representation

' 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.' (Ferguson, 2008. p25)

This assignment will explore my beliefs in the co-creation of living educational theories between teachers and pupils, and between pupils and pupils. It is more than a new epistemology of learning, that Schon (1995) calls for and a new epistemology of reflective practice and action research within new types of scholarship:

'I argue in this article that if the new scholarship is to mean anything, it must imply a kind of action research with norms of its own' (p.27))

I am extending my response to Biesta's (2006) work, which I explored previously (Mounter 2007) where he emphasises the need to move beyond a language of learning to create a language of education:

'We might look at learning as a response to what is other and different, to what challenges, irritates, or even disturbs us, education is not just about the transmission of knowledge, skills and values, but is concerned with the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student, with their "coming into the world" as unique, singular beings.' (p.27).

Whilst combining the work of McNiff (2007), describing the story of my journey as becoming my living educational theory, revealing new living standards of judgement, the meanings and values of my educational responsibilities, expressed and explored through the relationships, interactions and responses of my children and the co-creation of living theories together.

The children are fascinated by the idea that we learn, we think, and their understanding of how the knowledge is stored. Please see appendix 1a We explored the children's understandings of where we store the knowledge we learn or develop, but our discussions have now shifted to the creation of knowledge from the space deep inside our heads. The children have looked at the work of West-Burnham, (2006) who describes 'deep learning' and thought about their understanding of that space within themselves. We sat and wrote together about what we felt the space was like, where it is, what goes in there, can we access it all of the time or do we think on different levels or plains at different times?

To see samples of the writing we shared see appendix 1b. .

This is the space the children feel the creation of knowledge takes place. I explored this concept of 'deep learning' by West-Burnham, (2006) and the children using creative vocabulary to record their thinking in Mounter (2007). But it is the creation of knowledge

which the children believe happens in this space that interests us at this point in our journey.

This sense of self exploration as creation ‘conditions’ is discussed and highlighted by the ‘Internalists’ arguments that claim all knowledge-yielding conditions are within the psychological states of those who gain knowledge.

(Wikipedia, free encyclopedia accessed 8.45pm 23/10/07)

We began by considering how we ‘create knowledge’, what does this actually mean?

Please see appendix two.

These are my thoughts I shared with the children as we wrote together:

Time through learning is a transitional experience that ripples out affecting all it touches as specks of consciousness, momentarily felt. Dimensional impacts bounce and meander, spiralling within the sphere we create and beyond those we are aware of. This transitional inflection or vortex, stores on some level the awareness to process in the moment it is felt or until that moment may never be found again. Can we be reflective learners if we only have the ability to reflect in the near moment and not within the vortex of thought that impacts on who we believe we are, but have no recollection of the time or space it was created. We cling to the awareness or feeling of some distant thought or connection or let it go and return as a variation of thought, as a connector to our past. The creation of knowledge implies by its nature the concept of birth and oneness of ideas, but isn’t it a mirror of all that we are through the moments we save, the connectors produced and analysed as new growth. Tangled but clarified by historical reflections and strength of the future we as yet have no experience of?

But as children by their definition have limited historical experiences to draw upon, can they create knowledge to form chains of justification?

Epistemology or theory of knowledge is the branch of philosophy that studies the nature, acquisition, methods, limitations, and validity of knowledge and belief. Much of the debate in this area has focused on analysing the nature of knowledge and how it relates to truth, belief, and justification. It also deals with the means of production of knowledge. It explores the question of ‘what is knowledge’ through the writings of Socrates, Edmund Gettier, the American philosopher in the 1960s who really challenged long held views to Richard Kirkham.

The ‘Regress Problem’, the area of Epistemology that covers the acquisition of knowledge, highlights and discusses the difference between ‘experience’ and ‘apriority’ (independent of experience) as a way of creating knowledge. This argument is explored in depth by Hofer and Pintrich (2002):

‘Invention is a routine experience for children, and ‘I made it up’ a routine explanation for the origin for many of their ideas, including stories, imaginary character, and games.

Knowledge by this resource, like the pictures a child draws on a blank page, does not have any source other than the child's own mind, where it rose spontaneously.'
(Hofer & Pintrich, 2002, p.178)

The effect of creating a chain of experiences that leads to the creation of knowledge. Experience is the foundation upon which our system of education is built:

'We would expect that children's creations arise from other knowledge they have.'
(Hofer & Pintrich, 2002, p.178)

Beginning with play as a form of learning, beginning from what the children already know and have experiences of, forming the chains of justification which are built on throughout their Primary years.

Foundationalists believe and argue that some ideas do not require justification; we just understand them to be true and therefore stand alone as an idea and do not need to be part of a justified chain, to be acknowledged as knowledge. Where as Coherentism argues that knowledge learning can't be linear, but justification comes as it fits together with other knowledge, as pieces do in a jigsaw.

In contrast a sceptic will argue that no chain is possible, so we cannot justify knowledge, so that we know nothing!

As our journey and understanding of ourselves has deepened, the children's focus and concern has moved from the centrality of themselves, to worrying about the opportunities for other children and schools to feel the benefits of understanding through research of learning as they have. Two strands of significance are highlighted here. The sense for the children of having something to share and say, which they feel is important enough and would be valued by others, an amazing concept and secondly a forum for children to talk together, share ideas and stimulate each other as knowledge creators.

As the school years progress so does the thinking and understandings of the children I am working with. For me the challenge comes to learn from my experiences with the class and use these to inform the way I work with my new class. The children progress on to other teachers but I yearn to still work with them and share their thinking. Talking to the children I had two years ago one lunchtime, they said they thought they had forgotten some of their thinking about learning because they don't talk and think about learning so much now. That I thought was really sad, they described it as dripping away and were keen to talk about what we used to do together. This demonstrates their ability to reflect critically on the educational value of their previous experiences and their beliefs of the conditions that benefit learning. This was the trigger we needed to do something about it and also give me the opportunity to work with them again, which really excited me. We decided to organise a lunch time meeting for anyone interested in reflective learning once a week, on a Tuesday. This will be open to anyone:

'Within this paradigm there is a tendency for researchers, and others, to perceive children as incompetent and incapable of understanding the research process' (Christensen & Prout) (O'Brian & Moules, 2007, p387)

We hope as co-researchers this group and the videoing of our discussions will help validate the children's belief in the value of what they feel they have to contribute to a wider audience as researchers and creative thinkers.

We will create a video diary of our meetings to reflect on and follow no path, but forge our own.

I feel a knot of excitement and can't wait to probe their thinking again learning together. This links very much with the previous paragraph and the children's wish to help other children in other schools, feeling a sense of responsibility towards them. This group of children enthusiastic about learning will be able to look at ways of 'spreading the word'. This will also be an opportunity for the children to be able to record their journey through an action research format. But for us as learners, developing a new format of the TASC Wheel (Wallace et al, 2004) purely to promote action research for children would be an exciting project. It will also give the children the opportunity to test the process and use the new 'Research Wheel' to explore their story and tell it clearly.

The group began with four children I sat with that lunch time, but this week through 'word of mouth' we had twelve. It was a lovely feeling when they came to me at odd times and said they had heard about our learning meeting and could they come.

I have exciting news to take to the group this week, I have managed to book a staff meeting for the children to present a short film about learning and the way they see this going forward, but they haven't long, it is in a couple of weeks time. Perhaps then I can arrange for some other staff to come and listen to the children at lunchtimes too! I don't know who will be more excited the children or myself! This is a real opportunity for the children to plan what they want to say, prioritise, be involved in the planning for their future and create a film that needs to present thoughtful, learning pupils. I am curious whether the impact will be from the final finished product or the filming of the planning, production and journey towards their goal?

It is two weeks now and the group of 12 have continued to come and talk together. What is interesting is their enthusiasm for presenting their ideas at the staff meeting, they have met independently in the library during their lunchtimes, three times this week, discussing and planning. They are keen to involve interviewing other children to find their views about how they learn and possibly interviewing our new Headteacher as well:

'Inquiry must begin with the experiences, perspectives and agendas for inquiry of those whose personal experience is at the centre of the enterprise'. (Winter & Munn-Giddings, 2001)

This links very much with the chains of justification we explored and calls the experiences and self understanding the children have developed as the core of their researching.

Running alongside of this the children and I have been helping me with ideas for a new concept I have been working on for children with Marie Huxtable. They have trialled the product and we are now in trial two. They have developed prompts that look like friendly monsters and like being asked their views on developments. It was also interesting how as we were talking about an idea for a name they thought it could be named after them. N also suggested 'Molle' which stands for 'My Own Learning Log in Education'. If they would like one they take a large exercise book, (one we don't use in class, so different) and use it to store, think and reflect on ideas and discussions during our meeting. It is here some of their designs for helping children and 'Molle' were developed.

Before we focused our energy on the film we were talking about ways for children to pull their thinking and reflections of self and learning skills together and how this could be on going. The children are very aware from their own experiences that this needs to be on going to maximise the benefit for themselves. This links back to an initial conversation I had in which the children explained how they felt their learning knowledge was slipping away. It is also evident in the film where child 'C' explains how important it is for children to continually have the experiences of thinking as learners when he says how in my class he thought about learning a lot and used it a lot, in the next class he 'used' it a little and in his current class he hasn't talked about learning at all! The film is their own work, but I do think this might seem a little critical, it will be interesting how the teachers take this and how much authority and credence they give the film! For the children feel, it is important and they are trying to show that for children to be the best learners they can be, it is an important part to focus on their learning skills and reflection of themselves, but the key is for it to be a cycle and on going. This was the decision of our discussion yesterday.

The children are very concerned that other children don't have the same opportunities to talk about learning and develop their knowledge about themselves as they have and are keen to review and help develop the materials we have been working on. The reflective flow between concerns of the children, my research at university and the project I am working on are becoming clearer and more intertwined as time develops our understandings. Discussions have also developed the idea of having some format for children to be encouraged to reflect, ask questions and pull their thinking together. The points the children were talking about are similar to the process of action research. We discussed this, as the children have already an understanding of what 'action research' is. Our group meeting quickly concluded that it needed to be free for the children to develop their own understandings in whatever format they chose, but that is quite difficult to do completely independently. But it was felt strongly that if as an adult, a teacher and the author I generate questions for the children to work on, even if they chose the one to focus on, I would be guiding or framing the children's thinking. We decided prompts would be useful, to encourage thinking and open up ideas of their own, although the children thought this would be difficult to do. Child P having developed his own model

of the TASC Wheel felt a wheel would be useful. So I have been working on ideas to take to the children and e mail to Marie. I think perhaps a wheel within a wheel would be useful to link or move the questions and change the perception for each child as they wished and controlled it. Please see appendix three.

I viewed the recording of my lunchtime group this evening for the first time. It is more critical and forthright than I imagined. Child 'C' begins by talking about how adults need to listen to children and that adults aren't always right, and don't always know best. They describe the importance of children understanding they have a responsibility towards their learning and the key skills they need. They also talk about how they want all children to be the best learner they can be. They haven't finished and want more time to interview children across the school as well as the staff. They want to share samples of their thinking that will inspire grown ups and children to begin finding their own path. It is strange how I find lots of conversations linking to other strands of learning, intertwining and developing in ways that I had not initially even considered. I am working in different strands or spheres of thinking that float, separate and sometimes overlap and link: my lunchtime group, at the masters meetings, with my class and with my Headteacher and the rest of the staff in my school.

Talking to children at school about how children learn is really interesting, for the broad range of answers you will get. My class and those I have taught talk about their brain, learning skills and how they think and create their own ideas and knowledge. But my group were interested to find some of the children still think that you come to school to learn by listening to your teacher. I have only really been focusing on learning with my class for about four weeks and the change in their self belief already is noticeable. It is evident in their attitude to challenges in their learning, their readiness to learn and independence as learners. This has been commented upon and noticed by my Headteacher. They reviewed what they would like to add to the presentation at staff meeting and had very clear ideas. They listed features they would like to see across the school, for example displays, focused planned learning times each week and even thought they could prepare boxes of resources and ideas to help less confident teachers start working with their children 'like we do'. They also thought about the most important principles to be a good learner that all children need to use. This links interestingly to the children's initial understanding of how children learn by listening, and demonstrates their changing beliefs. Ideas were generated and we had a class vote to decide the order they should appear on the list, listening isn't even there.

The staff meeting had to be cancelled due to a talk running over, the frustrating thing is that there are no more slots before I leave available. But the staff have agreed to give up half of their lunch hour. This has happened very differently to how I had hoped. I had thought that we could plan it carefully, prepare the film if the children wanted and work together to sort what they wanted to show and say. In an adult setting and meeting the children to sway opinions need to be articulate and confident. Instead we were initially offered a slot 10 days ahead, which sounds a lot, but it isn't if you are trying to get a group of children together in between school dinners and be on duty at the same time. I feel the children deserve more, but my time is not my own to give. But it was that or

nothing. Trying our best half of the filming has been done, but the children are very adamant about what it should contain. The children could not attend the meeting as we were allocated the second half and it would make it too late for the children to be asked to stay. Already it felt as though we were being forced to fit into a box, that we are desperately trying to show shouldn't contain our thinking and learning. But for now it feels as though it does. I sat through the talk, all the time clock watching. Slowly the minutes ticked by and it ate into the children's time..... But it wasn't stopped.

Irritation was clear and we felt unvalued and squeezed out, the lack of 'time' for the pupils voice in the governance of the school and in the educational influences of learning felt over whelming, sinking in the traditions of time but played through the new initiative of 'pupils voice' that is a gesture, nothing more. We need to persist to be heard, in many formats and arenas, creatively responding to the sociocultural practices that serve to exclude pupil's voices.

The staff kindly offered half of their lunchtime for which I am grateful, but also slightly resentful because the children's initial hope is being changed. I showed the beginning of the short film, the part of 'C' explaining how adults must listen to children, that they have skills and knowledge that adults can learn from. Nobody spoke, just listened. Two clear messages rang out through the clip, the children's belief in themselves and their understanding that children can, need to and should take responsibility for themselves as people and as learners and their certainty that all children need to have a reflective, on going understanding of themselves as a person, the link to their learning and how to develop their skills as a learner.

Conclusion

I am so proud of them.

They stop me in a busy day, stop my self reflection and link my beliefs, hopes and ideas to the possibilities I am beginning to realise are just beyond my reach. But now I know I can grasp them and unfold them to 'be'.

The teachers listened to the clip and I showed them some of the writing and pictures the children had selected. I also explained how the children had referred to themselves as the 'Learning Council' in the film, a title they had come up with. But this, the children believe should be a mixture of adults and children who respect each others opinions and want to try new things. Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) explore children's voices being heard, but the children and I have gone beyond this, they are confident in their own opinions and voice and are suggesting changes strategically for the school, pupils and adults. For example the Learning Council, planning for their and others future learning and teaching adults. The children are confident they can lead the council and help the 'grown ups to understand learning better, helping plan for the future!'

This has clarified for me the necessity to incorporate action research and the skills to tell our own narrative as part of our curriculum and CPD (continuing professional

development). Watts (2008) explores this and highlights the benefit for ourselves of seeing the bigger picture and developing the skills to tell our own and help others to share their narrative.

‘We come back to life histories as a means of talking truth and confronting power because they enable us to contextualise the stories we are told and to understand them from the perspective of the story teller.’ (Watts, 2008, p.110)

It makes me, for the first time more aware of the impact I have personally on the children, the space I create and the sense of self being so important in my classroom. From my reading in Educational Action Research (Vol. 15, No. 3. September 2007) I hear so often the research that gives children limited voice about aspects of subject knowledge but not the authority as knowledge creators, co-creating together with teachers and the depth of thinking my children confidently share through the narrative of their journey. I read the above journal including the article about student voice by Jean Ruddick, but was disappointed at the lack of depth of the research. It doesn't go as far as the research my children have and doesn't share the co-creation of knowledge and voice of self, it still focuses on the given curriculum and children's level of achievement from the teachers perspective. I have presented through this essay evidence that the children and I together have gone beyond the research and work presented in this edition.

We are creating knowledge together and contributing to the educational knowledge base. Work is shared through conferences held by Whitehead (2008) and through requests for contributions for publication in America and Britain based on my research, please see appendix 4. We are making a difference. I truly believe I have rediscovered my own living values; they are not changing daily as I grow and learn, but I feel them deepening and strengthening and I am able to articulate them to myself and to others more clearly and confidently. I feel them through the growing confidence reflected in a smile, the moment a child reflects and shares an understanding of themselves or by inspiring someone else to take a risk and try something new.

Joy Mounter

4489 words

Appendix 1a

'O' described having a wardrobe in his head where all the things he learns are stored away. Sometimes if he has forgotten where it is stored and cannot find it, he cannot use the memory when he needs it. Whereas child 'TH' described having little people that stores it safely for him in his head, but sometimes things leak and run down his neck, through his body and down his legs, out of his feet and into the ground. That is how he forgets things, because they have 'run' away.

Appendix 1b

Deep Learning and Thinking

Independent exploration

Knowledge creation

Patterns and connections in what I read, extracting key points establishing relationships with prior knowledge and building bridges to new perceptions

I examine new facts and ideas critically, tying them into exciting understandings and making lots of links

Actively interacting

Making links between all areas of learning

Relating new and previous knowledge

Linking learning to real life

Intrinsic curiosity

Determined to do well, mentally engaging

Confidence in ability to understand and succeed

Risk taker

JA 'Deep learning feels like peace and challenging'

TH 'I skip between learning and deep learning, sometimes my brain gets tired it feels like the deep learning is always hard work.'

OL 'Everyone can be a deep learner. I am a deep learner sometimes. My head thinks I am a deep learner, but my heart thinks I am not quite.'

Appendix Two

Deep Learning and Thinking

Independent exploration

Knowledge creation

Patterns and connections in what I read, extracting key points establishing relationships with prior knowledge and building bridges to new perceptions

I examine new facts and ideas critically, tying them into exciting understandings and making lots of links

Actively interacting

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Appendix Three

‘Rainbow Research’

Seven segments as the Rainbow of skills, seven key research skills

- 1 reflection square mirror with frame (symbol)
- 2 questioning ? (symbol)
- 3 re-visiting open door (symbol)
- 4 links chain (symbol)
- 5 listening ear (symbol)
- 6 investigation magnifying glass focused on a finger print (symbol)
- 7 interpretation / analysis small squared paper grid (symbol)

Symbols will link to the segments and colours on the wheel. Inner circle divided into the seven colour segments with a question prompt in each and an outer rotating wheel with more personal questions that extend the inner questions.

Inner segments

Red segment - Moment or question I am interested in.....

Yellow - Why is it important to me at this moment?

Pink – What has led to this interest?

Green – How or will my feelings change over time reflecting back?

Orange – What have I learned about me, the ‘me’ I am now and the ‘me’, I will become?

Purple – How will it be best to record my thoughts, reflections and ideas?

Blue – What other questions do my reflections on this generate?

Outer ring

How have I changed?

What is important to me?

How/will this effect my future?

How can I use this to find my path?

What paths does it open or close to me?

How does this puzzle piece link to the rest of my picture?

How am I feeling?

This would be kept in a small pocket in the research section. By rotating the inner and outer wheels the child controls the combination of prompts if they need a frame for their reflective research.

Appendix Four

Copies of e-mails in the original submission

E-Mail from editorial board re publication in America

E Mail from Belle Wallace re publication of article in Gifted Education International

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