



AARE news

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

President's Report

Improving the quality and relevance of education research

There seems to be increasing recognition of the important contribution research-based knowledge, along with other factors, can make to policy action. However, the issue is how do we improve the nature of education research so it can be a better job and so secure further funding, especially for long-term projects.

The relationship between research and the state has changed over the decades. Education research has always been shaped by the prevailing political and ideological context. In the 1960s, education research was used as an instrument driven by the cold war to improve scientific and mathematics education, and to give expression to the Democratic ideals of the day. This should not be misconstrued as suggesting this was some golden age for Education research. But it was a time of relatively plentiful funding.

Today the problem of the quality and relevance of education research has much to do with changes in social conditions. In a time of considerable uncertainty, there are calls for research-based knowledge that can be used to inform the decision-making of policy Makers. The creation of quasi-markets in education, the massive increase in competition, along with a plethora of targets, performance indicators and audits have not solved the problems of student underachievement, disengagement or disadvantage.

Education researchers are now being asked whether we have the quality research to provide answers relevant to deciding what might work under given conditions, to guide policy action. In particular, education research is now seen as making possible contributions to issues of common-and-control governance versus distributed educational management, evaluation and pedagogy. This suggests a need for a better understanding of the relationship between research, the state and the processes of change, one that might benefit from a longer historical perspective.

AARE NEWS No 56
October 2006

What can AARE do to help education researchers improve the quality and relevance or impact of education research? What would it take to move more education research in the direction of what research has always been very good?

AARE encourages members to provide accounts of research , through this newsletter, the Australian Education Researcher and the Associations annual Conference showing where the money invested in education research is having a direct impact on matters of concerns to policy makers, including members of government, policy-managers, school leaders, including teachers. AAREs various awards also acknowledge the quality and relevance of education research.

The creation of quasi-markets in education, the massive increase in competition, along with a plethora of targets, performance indicators and audits have not solved the problems of student under-achievement, disengagement or disadvantage.

With increasing opportunities for educational research have come more substantial challenges to redressing weaknesses, perceived or otherwise, in the field. Different models for addressing these challenges are available. Some are optimistic about the use of randomised controlled trials as a means of identifying ways of improving results on standardised test scores. In effect, the US Federal Government appears to have mandated the use of this particular research method. Other Governments are proscribing the types of research methods they do not want used; these are largely ones that come from the humanities tradition. This is an expression of increased selectivity in the funding of education research and efforts to concentrate research capacity in a limited number of centres.

Continued Pg 2

EDITOR

Mr Peter Jeffery
PO Box 71 Coldstream
Victoria 3770 Australia
Ph 61 3 5964 9296
Fax 61 3 5964 9586
Email pjeff@aare.edu.au

**AARE the
association
for active
educational
researchers**



From the President continued...

Engaging the debates needed to improve education research

The forthcoming AARE Conference in Adelaide provides members with important opportunities for formally and informally engaging in the debates about ways of improving education research. Current policy developments, especially the RQF and political debates about evidence-based research, provide an important stimulus to debating ways of improving the quality and relevance of research and evidence produced within the various traditions in the field. Those education researchers whose processes are designed to find and discover knowledge, need to explore ways of improving the quality and relevance of their work. For education researchers whose work is directed towards constructing and making knowledge, the conference provides an opportunity to examine ways to make similar improvements in accordance with their fundamental principles.

- What tests of quality and relevance are now appropriate for each of these traditions in education research?
- What is required to improve the plausibility, consistency, insightfulness of all of this research?
- What core of norms, principles and practices are now required to guide education research within each of these traditions?

AARE's Annual Conference and Focus Conference provides opportunities for discussions which better inform us all about working with the complexities we face in education research. For the sake of promoting a serious, scholarly research community, it is important in such discussions that we acknowledge the breadth and depth of theoretical issues at stake in any given research tradition. There is much for AARE members to learn from researchers experienced in the humanities, scientific and engineering traditions that inform different approaches to education research. It is important to understand rather than trivialise or disparage these different traditions as each has much to contribute to improving the quality and relevance of education research generally. One thing these different traditions share is their capacity to contribute to change through their long term effects in informing conceptual understandings.

Developing the capacity for advanced education research

Developing the capacity for improved quality and relevance in education research in order to produce such research-based knowledge is a challenge. This requires increasing the capacity of (some) education researchers to undertake large-scale quantitative studies; more such studies are needed in education. It also requires further development of the capacity to undertake empirically grounded, theoretically informed, large-scale, publicly relevant and rigorous research. Useful questions to ask of research proposals and studies include ...

- Does this research pose significant questions?
- Can this research question be investigated empirically?
- Is an appropriate method chosen to address the specific research question?
- Does this research make an explicit link between evidence/data and relevant theory?
- Are the methods used such that they are appropriate for directly investigating the research question?
- Does the research report provide a coherent argument with an explicit line of reasoning?
 - Yield results that are explicitly linked to other quality research?
 - Provide adequate explanation of the research methods and provide sufficient evidence?
 - Framed in ways that invite and expect public scrutiny and critique?
- Does this research provide interesting insights, identify problems, suggest multiple possibilities or even generate practical solutions for consideration by decision-makers?
- What processes of knowledge transfer might usefully be embedded in this research?

AARE, through its Focus Conference in Canberra in 2007 will be seeking to promote discussion of these methodological and epistemological commitments necessary to address these issues of quality and relevance.

Michael Singh
President 2006

AARE AGM November 2006

The Annual General Meeting of AARE will be held at the forthcoming annual international conference in Adelaide. A formal notice of meeting will be sent to members in the first week of November. Members of AARE are invited to submit items for the AGM agenda, or any questions for the Executive, in writing to the Honorary Secretary by close of business [5.00pm] on Friday 20 October 2006.

Please send by email to debra.cunningham@qct.edu.au or post Debra Cunningham, QCT, PO Box 389, Toowong, Qld 4066.

Review of AARE Constitution

Progress has been made in working towards a renewal of the AARE Constitution. A drafting Committee (Ray Debus and Debra Cunningham) and a Reference Panel of AARE members have so far focussed on issues related to Executive membership and possible alterations to the terms of office of Executive members. A draft Preamble for the Constitution has been prepared and will be revised in the light of responses from the Reference panel. The Committee is working towards completion of a Draft Constitution during 2007 to allow full consideration by the Membership and adoption at the 2007 AGM.

Ray Debus

Important notice to all members: AARE executive ballot goes electronic



After a demonstration at the June Executive meeting and a subsequent trial of an electronic balloting system by executive committee members it has been decided that AARE will use electronic (email/internet) methods for the forthcoming executive committee ballot.

Debra Cunningham (Hon. Secretary) said, "The system is easy to use, may increase the response rate in the poll and certainly will reduce the huge paper and postage costs attracted by AARE's previous method of conducting the ballot. We will make sure that members who cannot access email or the internet will get a vote and we have established that the principle of a two envelope system of privacy will be maintained for voters using the electronic system. No one will be able to find out who voted for whom! In addition the principle of one vote per person will be enforced."

Why move to electronic polling?

The decision has been taken in the interests of:

- saving you time and effort (no papers to fill in, no double sets of envelopes to contend with, no postage)
- saving the organisation money in the form of postage, printing, and time expended by the AARE Office
- potentially increasing the number of members who vote and thus improving democracy in the Association
- eliminating invalid votes
- saving trees
- saving (voluntary) time spent by the Hon Secretary in counting votes

Here's how it works:

1. AARE Returning Officer (Debra Cunningham) will place the candidates' names and their statements on a website. (It happens to be in Brisbane as a matter of fact but it could be anywhere. Importantly, the service provider is independent of AARE members' institutions!)
2. Members will be informed of the website address by AARE broadcast email and reminded twice to vote. Members wishing to vote will login to that website with their email address.
3. The machine will verify --
 - a) that this person is registered to vote (financial member, name on the list of eligible voters - supplied by AARE Office) and
 - b) the person has not voted before in this election.
4. Then the member will be presented on-screen with a choice of candidates and the option to number the candidates in order of the voter's preference.
5. This vote is immediately and irrevocably recorded against the candidate's names and separately the voter is recorded as having voted and is henceforth "locked out" of the ballot.
6. The process takes only seconds and does not involve members or their institutions in postage and envelope costs to lodge their vote.

All members will need to ensure the AARE Office has an up-to-date email address for them. Please contact the AARE Office on aare@aare.edu.au by email with the subject line **BALLOT EMAIL ADDRESS UPDATE**.

If you do not have your own computer or email account, you could use a friend's computer or an internet cafe or other means of internet access to register as a voter on the system being used for the AARE Executive ballot and to cast your vote.

If you do not have any access to email, please contact the AARE Office to advise that you wish to vote by post. You will then be sent a postal (paper) ballot form. While we would not wish to deny anyone the opportunity to vote, we would encourage members to try to use the internet ballot wherever possible. If a large number of people wish to use the paper option, it will greatly increase our costs.

Will my vote be secure?

Yes. The system ensures one vote per voter via a secure polling infrastructure. Votes will be tallied automatically. Various statistics on the poll will be able to be obtained automatically (eg the number of people who voted, the number who voted for a particular candidate). However, it will not be possible for anyone to see how any particular member voted.

electronic ballot

Special Interest Group Meetings for Adelaide

The SIG meetings during the Adelaide Conference will be embedded within the program and scheduled in sessions with SIG paper presentations. Paper presentations will be followed by the SIG meeting in the same room. In this way members of the SIG should already be present and some of the problems associated with lunchtime meetings might be alleviated.

A meeting with SIG Convenors, myself and the President will also be scheduled. Suggestions for increasing SIG activity and supporting SIGs would be most welcome.

Finally, thank you to all SIG Convenors and members for the contribution they have made to AARE in the two years I have been SIG Coordinator. I wish you all the best for 2007 onwards.

Rob Cavanagh, Executive SIG Coordinator

AARE 2007 Focus Conference

13 - 14 June 2007 Canberra, ACT



theme

Education, innovation & research: strategies for capacity-building

Our aim in running this conference is to address two critically important issues – research impact and capacity building – and to identify routes forward that involve a coherent response to both. How can we make research more usable? How can we improve the ability of the education sector to make better use of good research? How can we strengthen recruitment to the community of educational researchers? These are not new questions, but the time is right to address them once again, with some fresh thinking and the impetus of changes in higher education policy and funding allocations.

Research impact: planning for the RQF has revived a debate about methods of improving and documenting the impact of research – where impact is defined as the extent to which research has influenced social, cultural, economic and/or environmental outcomes for end-users *outside* the peer academic community. The Minister has been emphasising issues concerned with technology/knowledge transfer and improving access to the outcomes of publicly-funded research. The ALP's Higher Education White Paper encourages some fresh thinking about innovation and identifies the problem of skill shortages hindering innovation. Much can change in the next 12 months and the specific treatment of these matters remains hard to predict. But while the policy settings may shift, the underlying issues are core concerns for the AARE community: indeed they will be picked up again as the theme of the annual conference in Freemantle (November).

Capacity building: the educational research labour force has one of the oldest profiles in academia and it is already becoming hard to recruit good new researchers. Recruitment will become harder and more competitive over the next few years. But capacity building is not just about ensuring there are enough capable researchers to do the job – it is equally necessary to attend to the capacity of practitioners and policy makers in education and surrounding areas to make use of research. Capacity building involves supply-side and demand-side factors.

What steps should education schools/faculties be taking in the coming years to address these related matters?

- How do we interest more people in becoming educational researchers?
- How do we help practitioners and policy makers become more demanding users of research?
- How can richer conceptions of 'impact' condition our strategies for capacity building?
- How do new technologies and practices of knowledge-creation need to be taken into account?

Depending on the state of play with the RQF, the focus conference will also address specific issues of quality and impact assessment of relevance to schools and faculties of education.

The conference will be of particular interest to:

- senior staff in schools and faculties of education who are responsible for research strategy and research development, recruitment and retention, or graduate programs:
- Deans, Associate Deans (Research), Associate Deans (Graduate), etc. It will also be a key event for those researching issues around educational innovation, impact, research take-up, research policy, graduate education, research training, research capacity-building.

Put AARE Focus'07 in your diary now!

To put your name on the mailing list for further information about the Focus conference send an email with FOCUS'07 in the SUBJECT LINE to aare@aare.edu.au A call for papers will be issued later in October 2006.

Peter Goodyear
AARE Executive Member



AARE 2007 Annual Conference

24 - 29 November 2007
Fremantle, Western Australia

theme

Research Impacts:
Proving or improving?

The venue is the University of Notre Dame Australia in the port city of Fremantle. The UNDA Fremantle campus is a unique conference venue. The university comprises renovated historical buildings situated within a world renowned tourist destination. There is an abundance of multi-cultural restaurants and shops close to accommodation and the conference venue. Summer evening sidewalk dining in Fremantle is highly popular with locals and visitors.

Fremantle and Perth are connected by a modern railway system that links to the northern, eastern and southern metropolitan suburbs. Delegates will have a choice a full range of accommodation both in Fremantle and Perth.

Apart from the tourist attractions of Fremantle including Rottneet Island which is a short ferry trip off the coast, the Northbridge entertainment precinct in Perth and the Swan Valley vineyards are not far away. For those wishing to venture further, the Southwest towns of WA such as Margaret River provide rural settings for award winning restaurants and wineries.



Planning for the conference is well underway. The Conference Committee is representative of the local education systems – Catholic Education Office, Association of Independent Schools and Department of Education and Training, and also of the local universities – Curtin University of Technology, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, the University of Notre Dame Australia, and the University of Western Australia. Invitations for keynote addresses have been extended to international academics from Europe and North America. Significantly, the 2007 Radford Lecture will be presented by Professor Jane Kenway from Monash University.

On behalf of the Conference Committee, I extend a warm invitation to members of AARE and our international affiliates to join us in Fremantle for what promises to be a highly enjoyable and professionally stimulating experience.

Rob Cavanagh
Conference Convenor



AARE 2007
Fremantle



AARE 2006 Annual Conference

Book launches at Adelaide Conference

There are some exciting book launches planned for the conference. They will be held at various times and days. Full details will be in the Programme Book and of course on the Adelaide Conference website.

Don't Miss These!

Lyn Yates and Julie McLeod will be launching **Making Modern Lives: Subjectivity, Schooling and Social Change** University of New York Press, 2006

Bob Lingard will launch the work of Jane Kenway, Anna Kraack and Anna Hickey-Moody **Masculinity Beyond the Metropolis** Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006

Fazal Rizvi will launch the work of Barbara Kamler and Pat Thompson **Helping Doctoral Students Write: Pedagogies for Supervision** Routledge, 2006

Open your bottle and pour out 2006 Conference Dinner details!



Early Career Researchers and the 2006 AARE Conference

As early career researchers it can be difficult to map out and navigate your career; particularly in the current competitive research climate. There is often uncertainty of the research and career opportunities available, who to ask, and the most effective and efficient paths to take. This year as part of the 2006 main conference at Adelaide I have organised a symposium which focuses on supporting today's early career researchers in their career efforts. The symposium focuses on clarifying research and career issues both external and internal to the university, the impact of these issues and how the early career researcher can work with them meaningfully and advantageously. Three well-regarded researchers will be presenting at this symposium.

The presenters and their papers are:

Professor Peter Goodyear
RQF and after: research quality and impact assessment - implications for Early Career Researchers

Professor Jennifer Sumsion
Beyond the PhD: Developing a repertoire of research methodologies

Associate Professor Christine Woodrow
Developing a professional development plan

I think this symposium will be really worthwhile. Keep an eye out for it in the program and hope you can attend.

See you in Adelaide.

Joanne Dwyer

A random selection of papers forthcoming

Selected by random number. There are some 800 papers and we only have space here to list a few. See the Abstracts book on-line [or printed] for full details.

PAR06030
Neil Humphrey
Interventions for children and young people on the autistic spectrum: A critical perspective

EHR06037
Lisa Ehrich
Learning from the story of a great leader

DEH06045
Yavar Dehghani
Problems in teaching non-Roman script to English speakers

WIL06054
Anne Williams
Is there anybody there? Virtual learning on a part time professional training programme

PHA06065
Bisun Deo
Approaches to learning in Educational Psychology and Mathematics: A comparative analysis in the South Pacific region

LIE06070
Bobbie Matthews
Are values more important than learning styles? - Factors influencing student performance at an international university

MIL06076
Kathy Mills
Transformed practice In a pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Revoicing the world through claymation movie-making

KUS06083
Kusumarsdyati
Vocabulary strategies in reading: Verbal reports of good comprehenders

GRO06091
Michael Hayes
What counts as evidence: Mixed methods in a single case

DIX06094
Shelleyann Scott
University students' perceptions of workload: The challenges and vagaries of assessment

SIR06100
Lou Siragusa
Quality elearning: An instructional design model for developing pedagogically effective online learning in higher education

From the Research Development Coordinator

Jan Wright

AARE Research Development Coordinator and President Elect

The second meeting and workshop of the AARE Australian Research Directors of Education Network (ARDEN) was held at University of Technology Sydney on 22nd September (see Research News No. 54 for more detailed information on the first meeting in April). Whereas the first meeting focused on 'Quality', this meeting was designed to assist Research Directors in understanding the notion of 'Impact' in the context of the RQF and to consider its likely implications for educational research and researchers. There were 22 attendees and about as many again apologies from people unable to attend. It seems that a good proportion of research directors are on study leave this session.

The first item on the agenda was a presentation by Allyson Holbrook and Sid Bourke on developments with the SORTI/AARE journal banding study. The aim of the study is to develop two measures: an academic esteem or quality measure and a more general measure of impact on educational practice and the profession. The study is now at a point where the research team needs to trial their electronic survey with educational researchers from a wide range of areas. ARDEN members will be asked to participate in the trial to ensure that the survey is sufficiently comprehensive in its coverage of journals across fields and that it makes sense to those completing it. It will then be distributed nationally and internationally to academics, research and professional organizations to ensure a wide coverage of areas and interests. There was also a brief discussion on Allyson's proposal that AARE support the establishment of an Academy of Education. Further development on this can be expected in the near future.

The second item was a workshop on honours and research training for higher degree research in education. This workshop was prompted by my concerns with the costs to students at my university of struggling to complete an honours thesis in parallel with their final pre-service year. For some this included an extended practicum. It was also prompted by a suggestion that the Bologna Agreement might see the end of honours – a highly contentious proposition but one which challenges academics to reconsider the value and purpose of honours. Prior to the workshop ARDEN members were asked to respond to the following prompts:

- i) what form does your honours degree(s) take?
- ii) how it assessed (what proportion of the degree, through WAM, internal/external assessment)?
- iii) are there any requirements re supervision and/or supervisor(s)?
- iv) your views re preparation for doctoral study; other forms of training pre doctorate available.

The responses from those who were not able to attend, together with the roundtable discussion at the workshop suggest that practices across institutions vary considerably. Some faculties/schools have no honours program and use a masters degree as entry into further doctoral study and others have a range of modes of honours study. Discussion in a smaller focus group also suggested that the Doctor of Philosophy has undergone a metamorphosis in some institutions to be more inclusive of research on professional practice and that in this context the Doctor of Education degree has become redundant and is no longer offered.

More than anything the discussions revealed how little we know as a group about practices in other institutions and how much we might benefit from sharing our approaches to issues that are often common across institutions. As an outcome of the discussions, a template will be developed to collect information about honours and research preparation more generally from the ARDEN. The results will be used to inform a presentation at the June Focus Conference in Canberra next year and to foster a wider discussion about research "training" in education in the future.

The afternoon was devoted to a presentation from Peter Goodyear and small group workshops on Impact and other topics arising from the morning discussions. Allyson Holbrook led a group working on a paper targeted at the ABS, proposing changes to, and improved definitions of, the RFC codes. Jane Kenway's group began a process of composing case studies on impact using criteria derived from DEST descriptions. Jan Wright's group considered preparation for HDR in education and Peter Goodyear's group began work on a paper for the Annual AARE Conference in Adelaide on the latest RQF developments on quality and impact particularly in relationship to likely funding models.

The ARDEN listserv continues to grow and discussions on honours and a possible Academy of Education have already proved fruitful. It is proposed to move the listserv to the Faculty of Education, University of Sydney so that we can include attachments and store and retrieve information relevant to ARDEN. If you are interested in being added to the listserv please contact me at jwright@uow.edu.au

Recent Doctoral Theses in Education



The column in AARE News dedicated to publishing news on recent doctoral theses in education.

Abstracts of completed doctoral theses can be sent to me at vharwood@uow.edu.au

Guidelines for your submission can be found in AARE News Issue 42 (available on AARE's website).

Please note that we are now publishing the names of candidates' supervisor(s), to include them in the celebration of the work completed.

Some key points to remember are:

- the abstract must be no longer than 300 words
- the thesis must be recently conferred by your institution (last 6-12 months)
- the abstract is from a doctoral thesis (PhD or EdD), and from an education faculty/department/school in an Australian University
- Include your name, postal address, email, and the name of the conferring institution
- Include your supervisor(s) names

Valerie Harwood,
Executive Member

Dr Robert J. L. Parkes

Interrupting History: A Critical-reconceptualisation of History curriculum after 'the end of history'
PhD

University of Newcastle

Supervisor: Professor Jennifer Gore (University of Newcastle)

Degree Awarded: 25th July 2006

It is argued by defenders of 'traditional' history (from Appleby, Hunt, & Jacob, 1994; R. J. Evans, 1997; Marwick, 2001; and Windschuttle, 1996; to Zagorin, 1999), and some postmodernists (most notably, Jenkins, 1999), that if we accept postmodern social theory, historical research and writing will become untenable, that we will be facing 'the end of history'. This study re-examines the nature of the alleged 'threat' to history posed by postmodernism, and explores the implications of postmodern social theory for History as curriculum. Situated within a broadly-conceived critical-reconceptualist trend in curriculum inquiry, and deploying a form of historically and philosophically oriented curriculum theorizing, the study explores past attempts to mount, and future possibilities for, a curricular response to the problem of historical representation. The analysis begins with an investigation of 'end of history' discourse in contemporary theory. It then proceeds through a critical exploration of the social meliorist changes to, and cultural politics surrounding, the History curriculum in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, from the Bicentennial to the Millennium (1988-2000), a period that marked curriculum as a site of contestation in a series of highly public 'history wars' over representations of the nation's past (Macintyre & Clark, 2003). It concludes with a discussion of the missed opportunities for 'critical practice' within the NSW History curriculum. Synthesising insights into the 'nature of history' derived from contemporary academic debate, it is argued that what has remained uncontested in the struggle for 'critical histories' during the period under study, are the representational practices of history itself. The study closes with an assessment of the (im)possibility of History curriculum after 'the end of history'. I argue that if History curriculum is to be a critical/transformativ enterprise, then it must attend to the problem of historical representation.

Dr Anna Hickey-Moody

Unimaginable Bodies: Intellectual Disability, Performance and Becomings
PhD

University of South Australia

Conferred 2005

Supervisor: Professor Jane Kenway

Unimaginable Bodies critiques aspects of medical discourses of intellectual disability, arguing that Cartesian methods for thinking about the body are recreated within these discourses. The author illustrates how Cartesian ways of conceiving corporeality can be traced through select studies of the social construction of intellectual disability. In opposition to Cartesian methods of thought, Hickey-Moody argues for an understanding of corporeality that medical and sociological discourses of intellectual disability are not yet able to realise. The argument for theorising corporeality and embodied knowledge that is constructed is grounded in a careful mobilization of the poststructural philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. This body of theoretical knowledge allows Hickey-Moody to offer a critical interpretation of the processes of knowledge production and subjectification that occur in integrated dance theatre. In *Unimaginable Bodies*, knowledge produced within integrated dance theatre is translated into thought in order to explore the affective nature of performance texts.

Thus, *Unimaginable Bodies* explores the politics of thinking about intellectual disability. It builds relationships between academic discourses and communities of integrated dance theatre practice. Through this focus on integrated dance theatre, Hickey-Moody examines the work of Restless Dance Company (AUS) as a site of inquiry and a source of knowledge production. Three main lines of argument are advanced. Firstly, comparative discussions of the intellectually disabled body medical discourses of intellectual disability and some studies of the social construction of intellectual disability are provided. Secondly, the ethicco-aesthetic philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and his scholarly debt to Benedict Spinoza is considered. Thirdly, ways in which devising and performing integrated dance theatre informs intellectually disabled dancers' subjectivities are considered. Integrated dance theatre as text is analysed. As a textual form, integrated dance theatre can affect, or augment spectators' subjective limits. The study signals new ways of thinking and writing about intellectual disability and posits a broader project of ceasing to define bodies with intellectual disability in terms of what they cannot do.

For active educational researchers

Dr Robyn Henderson

The social and discursive construction of itinerant farm workers' children as literacy learners.

PhD

James Cook University

Conferred 2006

Supervisors: Professor Annette

Patterson, Professor Nola Alloway,

Professor Pam Gilbert

Using a case study approach, this thesis examined the social and discursive construction of itinerant farm workers children as literacy learners within a North Queensland primary school. By focusing on six case study families who enrolled at the school during two winter harvesting seasons, the study analysed the narratives of teachers and of families in order to yield insights into the fields of educational itinerancy and literacy. The study found that teachers' narratives about itinerant farm workers' children were predominantly negative, constructing itinerant children, their families and their lifestyles in deficit and stereotypical terms. The families' narratives, however, provided 'another take' on the events and practices that were so often read as negative by those more permanently located in the school and community. In providing insights into what it meant to be itinerant, the families highlighted their attempts to balance education with lifestyle and to fit into the town where they were residing temporarily. The study concluded that a reconceptualisation of the literacy learning needs of itinerant farm workers' children should look beyond the school and take account of the social and cultural contexts of the children and their families. Such an approach should help to shift the focus away from deficits and stories of blame, towards an exploration of the literacy strengths that itinerant children bring to school. By disrupting deficit views, teachers should be better placed to focus on responsive and flexible pedagogies for enabling itinerant children to achieve demonstrable and sustainable learning outcomes in school literacy learning.

Dr. Charles Kivunja

The structural and cultural dynamics of a multi-campus college: A case study inquiry of four multi-campus colleges in New South Wales

PhD

The University of Western Sydney

Supervisors: Dr. Ray Livermore,

Dr. Anne Power, Dr. Geoff Munns

This case study of four multi-campus colleges in New South Wales combines qualitative and quantitative research instruments in a multiple-case study methodology to investigate the reasons why the DET restructured 34 of its comprehensive high schools into 11 multi-campus colleges and to study the interplay of the structural and cultural dynamics in those colleges. The study is situated in the literature on leadership and organisational behaviour. In particular, special attention is given to Pace's (2002) dynamics model which was redesigned into the Dynamics Paradigm that underpins the data analysis in this thesis. Quantitative data was analysed with the assistance of Excel spreadsheet and the *Likert-scale* analytical tool. Qualitative data was coded and analysed using the *QSRNVivo* software. Using 16 dynamics criteria, themes and patterns were identified in the data and through iterative, inductive analysis, they were categorised into the different elements of the Dynamics Paradigm for analysis. Contextual contingency, curriculum, opportunity, economic rationalisation, politics and policies of the DET, plus demonstration effects from other Australian States and Territories were the reasons for the restructuring of the high schools. Two primary theoretical implications arise from the study. Firstly, the structural-cultural dynamics in a multi-campus college have cumulative multiplier effects which improve the synergies in the human interactions among participants. Therefore, the multi-campus college is a new way of secondary school delivery in New South Wales and needs a new mindset to be understood and recultured. Secondly, the new Dynamics Paradigm developed in this thesis, provides a powerful cognitive lens to focus research on the reconstruction of the multiple realities in any educational institution. The study identifies 12 areas for further research, recommends 32 policy options which could lead to improved outcomes for participants and proposes 11 potential applications of this thesis.

A MASSIVE PUBLICATION and ASTOUNDING USAGE

AARE's website contains a lot of information on conferences and the Association's multitude of facets but in addition it contains AARE's largest publication with world wide use.

AARE Conference Papers Collections commenced in 1989 and there are now just on 5,000 full text papers available

on the website. [For details see AARE NEWS # 55 on-line]. The papers are used by the world's researchers, public and students. They are accessible directly from AARE website or via Google and Google Scholar amongst other search engines which scan AARE website daily.

AARE website statistics are impressive and very detailed. You can check them yourself because as is appropriate for a research organization, we have our usage stats available publicly. The numbers are huge. In the last 12 months 6,163,645 hits [that's 6 million!] 344,223,441 Kbytes of data transferred to tens of thousands of sites and users. The website has had 1,229,208 visits in 12 months.

The content of the AER is also visited and used and of course if you drill down in the stats you can find out if YOUR papers are being read and used.

Make sure you hand in your papers on disk at Adelaide conference so that your work can be published in the AARE Conference Papers Collections then found and used from March next year! This is the fast track to research dissemination on a world access scale.

Peter Jeffery
AARE Website Manager



AARE website report

member comment column

Call for comment

The Executive Committee of AARE invites you to contribute to the Member Comment column of this newsletter, or to write letters in response to commentary.

Short pieces up to 800 words will be considered.

The copy dates for AARE NEWS are given on the outside back page of each issue.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this comment column are the opinions of the individual member author of the comment and do not necessarily represent the views of AARE or other members.

The 'right' way to think is wrong

Crikey it's hard to get published in *The Australian* unless you are a 'conservative education warrior'. Well that's how Kevin Donnelly and its stable of regular columnists would like us to think of them. They have mounted a sustained attack on outcomes based education, critical literacy, postmodernism and anyone vaguely associated with these ideas. Wayne Sayer has been singled out for special criticism after his post-election editorial in *English in Australia* (the *Journal of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English*), and the Hawke Research Institute has also been held firmly in their sights.

The fact is that Donnelly and his clan are not primarily interested in education but in the defence of Eurocentric Western tradition and the maintenance of its hierarchies of power, in particular their privileged place within it. This motivates them to attack what they believe to be the 'sick trends' of contemporary liberalism. In a recent address to the Big Ideas Forum conducted by The Centre for Independent Studies, Owen Harries listed these trends as: moral and cultural relativism; the denial of absolute standards; the dismissal of religion; a guilt ridden view of our own society; and the subordination of education to ideology

Unfortunately, our professional status counts for little, and much of our research is viewed as irrelevant within the context of this conservative struggle against the decline of Western culture. Educational researchers, for the most part, are dismissed as progressive lefties. And, while some of us would proudly identify as such, this excludes us from the debates that really matter at the moment.

Some educational researchers have responded strategically by embracing evidence-based research, and making friends (in some case making up) with quantitative methodologists. This is a battle being fought on many fronts, and every skirmish is an important one. But the challenge for us as an association, and as a profession is to respond more effectively to conservative ideology in all its form, and to claw back the moral and intellectual high ground which it has so effectively appropriated as its own.

Romancing 'the canon' and dismissing alternative texts and perspectives as political correctness or lacking intellectual rigour are not the rational objective stances claimed by their conservative proponents, but part of a campaign to resist change and deny that difference is a most basic feature of our society.

Being literate does not ensure that we are wise, and reading the 'great works of our society' does not guarantee that we build a better more civilised world. It can only provide the means by which we can practise do to so. Learning lessons from literature requires thinking critically about how to assess evidence, interpret advice, weigh up options, calculate consequences, and learn from success and failure.

In recent years, the global hoax of the threat of weapons of mass destruction, and our own local variant of systemic deceit unmasked through the AWB inquiry have provided compelling examples of how evidence can be distorted, manipulated or simply ignored. As a nation, our confidence in our 'intelligence' systems and public access to accurate information has been severely undermined, and the ability to think critically collectively has become an even more essential feature of a civilised society. Attacks on critical literacy are aimed at limiting this kind of thinking to political elites who know the 'right' way to think.

As a profession, we need to find ways to recast ourselves within educational debates and reclaim our voice. There are some real problems in education but not the ones that *The Australian* has almost exclusively focussed on in recent years. For example, there is a growing divide between young people with social and cultural capital who attend well resourced schools, and those who attend poorly resourced schools that operate in a culture of failure reinforced by increasing accountability measures designed to punish rather than reward those who teach and learn in them.

Refocussing the educational debate on what really matters requires our collective and sustained efforts.

Debra Hayes
AARE Executive Member
Griffith University



For active educational researchers

This provocative paper from Dr Karl Maton is the first in a series of short papers on the place of theory in education research. Contributions on particular theoretical perspectives and their contribution to educational research and/or the place of theory in particular areas of educational research are welcome. Please send expressions of interest to Jan Wright jwright@uow.edu.au

think piece

Why Theory?: It's not rocket surgery!

Like the proverbial elephant in the room it's an open secret that educational research can be theoretically inadequate. That's not to say there are no theories. In fact, there's a fair-sized menu for students to choose from. And it's not that these approaches aren't valuable in sensitising us to key issues. Rather, it's to say many are less useful than they should be in enabling research to go beyond endless descriptions of classroom activity or 'best practice'. We often get thick description but thin explanation, and the kind of theory enabling thicker explanations has been misunderstood, mislabelled and maligned. Thus the need for this new series of brief introductions to different theories in education. But before such theories can be discussed there is a prior question: why bother with theory at all?

The question must be broached because theory is often painted as intellectual gymnastics divorced from empirical reality, and contrasted to the practical, 'socially responsible' research urgently needed to improve education. Theory can be denigrated as a luxury or an arrogant intellectual imposition on the complexities of reality. Such beliefs are nonsense. There is no such thing as having no theory. As Goethe put it, with every attentive look at the world we are theorising. Moreover, without theory there is no data. Without some means of judging what is important, we encounter an infinite seamless flux. It would take eternity to describe every possible detail of even a specific incident in a classroom. As Karl Popper argued, 'the belief that we can start with pure observations alone, without anything in the nature of a theory, is absurd ... Observation is always selective'. The question is thus not whether you have a theory but rather how explicit your theory is and what it is capable of doing. The more explicit the theory, the more contestable it will be. Using a systematic conceptual framework is anything but arrogance - it's making public the intellectual basis of your arguments. If your theory remains tacit, then others cannot engage in rational critical debate with your arguments - there can be little beyond ideological posturing and name-calling.

Intellectual and practical progress depends on rational, intersubjective criticism, and the critical method is best served by being theoretically explicit.

Though nonsense, arguments against theory have that attractiveness of action common to anti-intellectualism. One strength of educational research is that it attracts people eager to change the world for the better. However, our virtues easily become our vices. All too often people have tried to change education in various ways. The point, however, is to understand it, so we know what is possible to change, how to change it, and with what effects for whom. Good intentions and commitment are not enough. Progressive pedagogy, for example, has often been advanced by well-meaning educationalists as helping working-class pupils, but over thirty years of extensive, theoretically-informed research reveals its often deleterious effects for these students. To make good our intentions, then, requires a degree of agnosticism about potential solutions to educational problems and a decent theory on which to base our arguments. To this extent, calls for 'evidence-based' policy and practice are not misplaced. Sadly, though, such calls are currently in the service of attempts to impose approaches from medicine (such as randomised controlled trials) without sufficient understanding of education as a distinctive object of study. Evidence is required, but without theory that offers ontological and epistemological foundations for such evidence, then what is being evidenced remains unclear. Theory, then, is not an antonym for engagement. As the linguist Michael Halliday said, there's nothing as practical as a good theory.

Theories are not, however, equally good. Many have what Basil Bernstein describes as a strong 'internal language of description': their concepts relate strongly to each other and combine to tell a convincing story. But when one tries to use them in research one can quickly run into trouble because their 'external language of description' - how their concepts relate to empirical phenomena - is far weaker. Ideas like 'habitus' or 'communities of practice' highlight important issues of concern. They open our eyes, offering us things to think about and reminding us of important issues.

But they often stop short of providing the tools for getting to grips with empirical objects of study by enabling us to explore their underlying structuring principles or show similarity, change and variation between and within contexts. Rather than being set aside, they need development from being ways of seeing the world to become genuine exploratory frameworks. Without such conceptual development, results tend to be restricted to endless description or shopping lists of requisites for educational success (invariably such motherhood statements as more resources and professional development).

A second problem resides in choosing theories. They are not universally valuable. Without a sound realist basis for choosing specific theories for addressing specific problems, it is easy to become the child who, upon being given a hammer, believes everything must be hit with it. There is a broad menu of theories to choose from, but the menu is often abstracted from the kitchen - students do not always learn why they should choose particular theories. As the PhD becomes more of a driving licence than a licence to explore, theoretical decisions become based more on serendipity and socialisation than on epistemological grounds. This leads to allegiance to an approach rather than to a problem, and relations between approaches become reduced to critique rather than representing competing attempts at offering better explanations of problems.

In short, the need for good theory is simple. If we don't have adequate conceptual tools, then we can describe much but explain little; but if we have theory that cannot be put to use, we've got little to explain. Empirical research without theory is blind; theory without research is deaf and dumb. Why theory? To coin a phrase, it's not exactly rocket surgery: without good theory we cannot understand let alone improve education.

Karl Maton
Senior Research Fellow in Sociology & Education
Faculties of Education & Arts,
University of Wollongong

Some Important Dates

End of "withdrawals" period. NO SHOW CATEGORY BEGINS NO REFUNDS AFTER THIS DATE	1 OCTOBER
Ballot for 2007 Executive Committee BEGINS ON-LINE	opens on 23 October
Ballot for 2007 Executive Committee ENDS ON-LINE	closes on 17 November
AGENDA ITEMS for AGM 2006 DUE with Hon. Secretary	20 October
Programme for Adelaide Conference ON-LINE	20 October
Closing date for Programme clashes notifications	27 October
SEE YOU IN ADELAIDE	Sunday 26 November

Four Day Conferences

This is an educational research quality issue.

Research development requires discussion and collaboration.

AARE Conferences are four day affairs with workshops and pre-registration and President's Reception on the Sunday before.

AARE is making special efforts to provide ongoing discussion opportunities across the four days and the program cannot be formulated in a cohesive educational content sense without all presenters registering for four days.

If there are special circumstances preventing a four day registration they should be brought to the attention of the Secretariat and hence the committee in writing prior to programming in September at the latest. Would be presenters cannot choose the day or days on which they will attend – the program planning committee uses all four days for streamed content according to research topics. This is to eliminate the occurrence of 'isolated' presentations which attract only small audiences.

AARE NEWS 2006 AND 2007

NEWS #	Copy Date	Web Publication	Distribution
# 53 March	1 March	8 March	11 March
# 54 April	1 April	10 April	11 April
# 55 July	1 July	8 July	11 July
# 56 October	1 October	8 Oct	11 Oct
# 57 March 2007	1 March 2007	8 March 2007	11 March 2007
# 58 April 2007	1 April 2007	8 April 2007	11 April 2007

