✳
University of Brighton

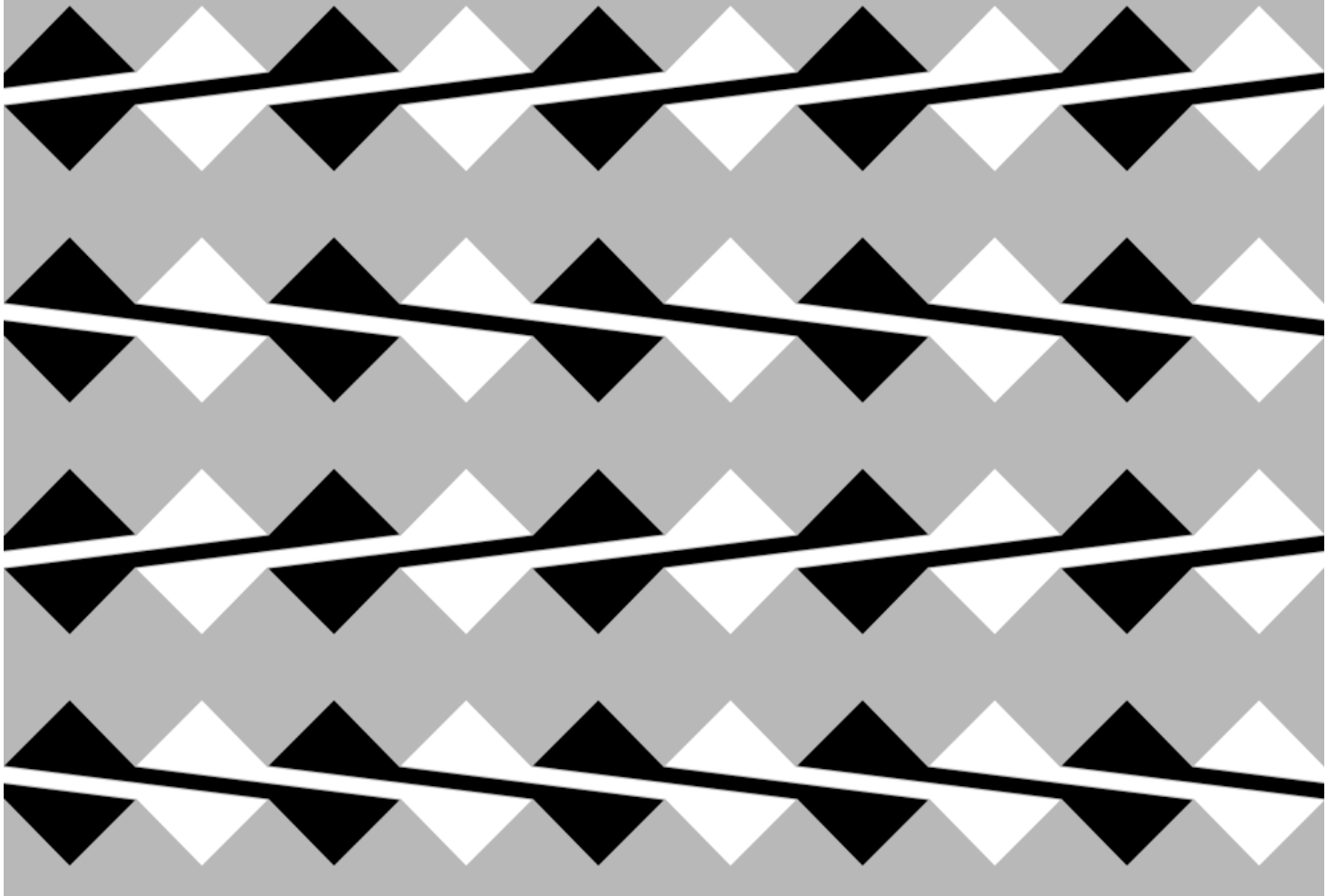# Research Literacy?

> Phil Wood reviews Gert Biesta's new book:
The Beautiful Risk of Education

> Dylan Wiliam on RCTs

> Andy Hobson & Ivor Goodson on Getting published

R.Ed
Research in Education

University of Brighton

Design:

JacksonBone.

Front Cover: Fraser Illusion courtesy of James Fraser. Click here.

Contents

Editorial

Welcome to this issue of R.Ed. 'Research literacy' is the underlying thread that characterises this issue. The recent report by the RSA and BERA entitled 'Research and the Teaching Profession' called for 'self-improving education systems in which all teachers become research literate and many have frequent opportunities for engagement in research and enquiry' (Furlong et al, 2014, p.3). Such a call can justifiably be extended to all phases of education and we hope this issue will go some way to illustrating this.

In a generous contribution, Professor Dylan Wiliam explores some of the problematic aspects of using randomized control trials in school contexts against the backdrop of calls by some for this to become the 'gold standard' of education research. Professors Hobson and Goodson address the area of research dissemination in discussing some of the potential issues in getting published in peer reviewed journals. Lorraine Harrison explores the potential benefits of nurturing and sustaining an evidence-informed culture in schools through Masters-level study and other tools such as Lesson Study.

The book reviews to be found in this issue bring a broader perspective and remind us of the universal philosophical, sociological, psychological and cultural issues to be unravelled in any attempt to become a 'research literate' educator. We hope that this issue will prompt further thought and discussion of what it means to be 'research literate' in these times, in whatever educational context.

Carol Robinson, David Stephens and Keith Turvey
Editors

References

Furlong, J. et al (2014) Research and the teaching profession: Building the capacity for a self-improving education system, BERA-RSA. Available: http://www.bera.ac.uk

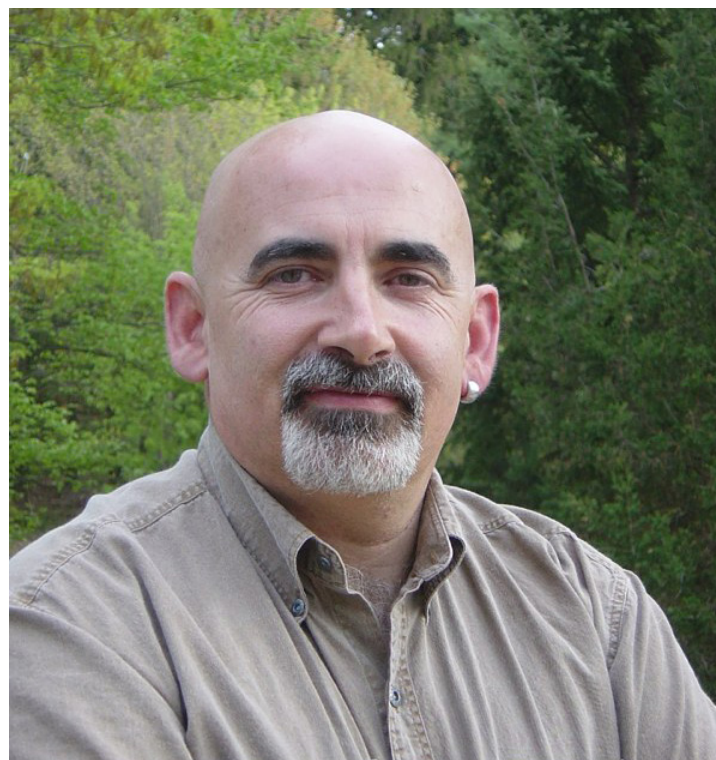# Randomized control trials in education research

There has been a great deal of debate about the use of RCTs to inform policy and practices in education since Ben Goldacre's report commissioned by the coalition government. In April the Financial Times published an article by Tim Harford titled 'The random risks of randomised trials' available here. Professor Dylan Wiliam of the Institute of Education, London, responded to Tim Harford's article and has kindly given us permission to republish his response here.

Dylan Wiliam writes...

There is no doubt that when RCTs produce statistically significant effects, they produce very strong evidence for a causal relationship. If we can do RCTs in education, we should probably do so. However, if, for whatever reason, RCTs are not possible, should we say that we simply do not know anything, or should we investigate what we can say? There are some who would hold to the former view, but as Robert Solow has pointed out, this is tantamount to saying that because perfectly sterile conditions in an operating theater are impossible, "one might as well do surgery in a sewer" (Solow,1970, p.101).

In this context, it is worth noting that RCTs were not required to establish that smoking causes cancer. If we truly wanted "gold standard" evidence that smoking causes cancer, we would have to solicit volunteers for an experiment, divide them into two groups at random, prevent one group from smoking, and ensure that all the members of the other group smoked a certain number of cigarettes per day for a significant length of time (say around 20 years) and then compare the prevalence of cancer in the two groups. Needless to say, this was not the approach adopted. Instead, researchers looked for a way of establishing a causal relationship without an RCT (Hill, 1965).

Even where RCTs are possible, there are a number of factors that make their use in education problematic. The first is to do with clustering effects. If we wanted to explore the impact of financial rewards for students, then randomization at the student level might be quite possible. Some students are given financial rewards and others are not, and we see the impact on their outcomes. However, where we wish to investigate the impact of a particular instructional program on student achievement, the appropriate unit of analysis is likely to be the class rather than the individual, because the way the program is implemented depends on the individual teacher. Indeed, given the fact that teachers in the same school talk to each other, it would probably be prudent to assume that the unit of analysis should be the school. The experiment would therefore need to be very large to produce a statistically significant effect.

A second problem with educational interventions is that because the range of achievement within a single group of students is so large, the differences between students receiving an intervention and those not receiving the intervention tend to be relatively small in comparison. The most common way of reporting the magnitude of the impact of interventions is by the use of the standardized effect size, defined as the difference in mean achievement of the treatment and control groups, divided by the population standard deviation (Cohen, 1988). While Cohen and others have suggested that effect sizes below 0.3 should be regarded as "small," Lenth (2006) has pointed out that an effect size needs to be interpreted in context, and here guidelines that might work well in psychology work rather poorly in education because the magnitude of the effect size of an intervention depends on the ages of the students under study. This is because, as students get older, the range of achievement tends to increase (Black & Wiliam, 2007), and since the standard deviation of achievement is greater for older students, the denominator in the effect size calculation is increased, and the effect size is therefore smaller. For example, an intervention that increased the rate of student learning by 50% (so that

There would appear to be a clear moral imperative for researching education even when RCTs are not possible; as Robert Slavin once observed, "Do we really know nothing until we know everything?" (Slavin, 1987 p.347).

students receiving the intervention learned in eight months what those in the control group learned in in a year), this would equate to an effect size of 0.75 for 6 year olds, but to an effect size of only 0.1 for 15 year olds (Bloom, Hill, Black, & Lipsey, 2008). An intervention with an effect size of 0.01 on the learning of secondary school students, while hard to detect, requiring thousands of schools to participate in an RCT sufficiently powerful to produce a statistically significant result, would nevertheless have an annual value of around £1 billion per year in the United Kingdom.

There are many other reasons that randomized control trials are difficult to do well in education. For one thing, it turns out to be quite difficult to get people to implement the programs as designed. A randomized control study of the Compass Learning Odyssey Math program found that only one out of the 60 participating teachers used the program for the 60 minutes specified each week—the average usage was around 38 minutes per week (Wijekumar, Hitchcock, Turner, Lei, & Peck, 2009). Similarly, an evaluation of Classroom Assessment for Student Learning found that teachers participating in the trial received only around half of the training specified in the program (Randel, Beesley, Apthorp, Clark, Wang, Cicchinelli, & Williams, 2010). The fact that neither of these evaluations found a significant impact on student achievement shows merely that if you do not implement a program, you are unlikely to get its benefits.

Of course, if an intervention is so cumbersome to implement that it is routinely implemented badly, or implementation requires levels of teacher skill that are not commonly found, this would raise questions about the usefulness of the intervention, at least as a way of improving education at scale. On the other hand, if the intervention can be implemented faithfully, and has the potential to substantially improve students' achievement, but the nature of the intervention is such that randomized control trials are difficult, or even impossible, to conduct, then given the substantial lifelong benefit of higher achievement (e.g., Crawford & Cribb, 2013), there would appear to be a clear moral imperative for researching education even when RCTs are not possible; as Robert Slavin once observed, "Do we really know nothing until we know everything?" (Slavin, 1987 p.347).

Finally, a randomized control trial of an intervention might be successful because of the presence of factors that are not present in all educational settings, so generalizability to other settings would not be warranted. This suggests that even where randomized trials can be conducted, for their results to be interpretable, they usually need to be accompanied by careful theorizations, which often benefit from careful qualitative observations of the phenomena under study. More developed theorizations of interventions also permit interventions to be optimized, by removing aspects of the intervention that prove to be unnecessary or less effective.

None of the foregoing is intended to suggest that randomized control trials are a bad idea. Rather the discussion highlights that if we rely only on such experimental designs, we end up not being able to say very much, and even when we do conduct such experiments, they benefit from research designs that include complementary approaches to inquiry. As the physicist Arthur Eddington (1935) said:

"But are we sure of our observational facts? Scientific men are rather fond of saying pontifically that one ought to be quite sure of one's observational facts before embarking on theory. Fortunately those who give this advice do not practice what they preach. Observation and theory get on best when they are mixed together, both helping one another in the pursuit of truth. It is a good rule not to put overmuch confidence in a theory until it has been confirmed by observation. I hope I shall not shock the experimental physicists too much if I add that it is also a good rule not to put overmuch confidence in the observational results that are put forward until they have been confirmed by theory" (p. 211; italics in original).

References

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2007) Large-scale assessment systems: design principles drawn from international comparisons. *Measurement: Interdisciplinary Research and Perspectives*, 5(1), 1-53.

Bloom, H. S., Hill, C. J., Black, A. R., & Lipsey, M. W. (2008) Performance trajectories and performance gaps as achievement effect-size benchmarks for educational interventions. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 1(4), 289–328.

Cohen, J. (1988) *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Crawford, C., & Cribb, J. (2013) *Reading and maths skills at age 10 and earnings in later life: a brief analysis using the British Cohort Study* (Vol. REP03). London, UK: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Eddington, A. S. (1935/1959) *New pathways in science*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hill, A. B. (1965) The environment and disease: association or causation? *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 58, 295-300.

Lenth, R. V. (2006) *Java applets for power and sample size*, University of Iowa College of LIberal Arts. Retrieved from http://www.stat.uiowa.edu/~rlenth/Power/#Advice.

Randel, B., Beesley, A. D., Apthorp, H., Clark, T. F., Wang, X., Cicchinelli, L. F., & Williams, J. M. (2010) *Classroom assessment for student learning: impact on elementary school mathematics in the central region* (Vol. NCEE 2011-4005). Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL).

Slavin, R. E. (1987). Ability grouping in elementary schools: do we really know nothing until we know everything? *Review of Educational Research*, 57(3), 347-350.

Solow, R. M. (1970). Science and ideology in economics. *The Public Interest*, 23, 94-107.

Wijekumar, K., Hitchcock, J., Turner, H., Lei, P. W., & Peck, K. (2009). *A multisite cluster randomized trial of the effects of Compass Learning Odyssey Math on the math achievement of selected grade 4 students in the Mid-Atlantic Region* (NCEE 2009-4068). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

The *waithood* generation

An African perspective about youth's strategies in the contemporary world

Xenia Carvalho

Xenia is a doctoral student in the Education Research Centre, University of Brighton. She is studying with Professor David Stephens and Dr Carol Robinson. Her own doctoral research focuses on three generations in Post-Colonial Mozambique. She is interested in how knowledge is constructed in the education system in Post-Colonial society, and how this impacts upon personal and social identity. In this article she reviews:

Honwana, A. (2012) *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change and Politics in Africa,* Washington DC: Kumarian Press. 222 pages.

Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'

(Excerpt of Bob Dylan' song *The Times They Are a-Changin'*, 1963)

Alcinda Honwana begins her book The Time of the Youth: Work, Social Change and Politics in Africa (2012) invoking Bob Dylan's song The Times They Are a-Changin' (1963). From 1968 in Europe to the riots in the UK in 2011 and the Arab Spring in 2010, Honwana draws the portrait of contemporary youth and the feeling of discontent all around the world in a neo-liberal economical and political landscape. No matter if it is a poor or a rich country, in the South or in the North, youth is sharing the same expectations and it is creating new strategies for understanding and overcoming an age of youth' marginalization linked with access to education, employment and social construction of their own adulthood. In the modern capitalist society, as Honwana argues, youth as been the space of cultural reproduction and social self-awareness through education, a space where society 'hides its dreams' – Honwana's invocation
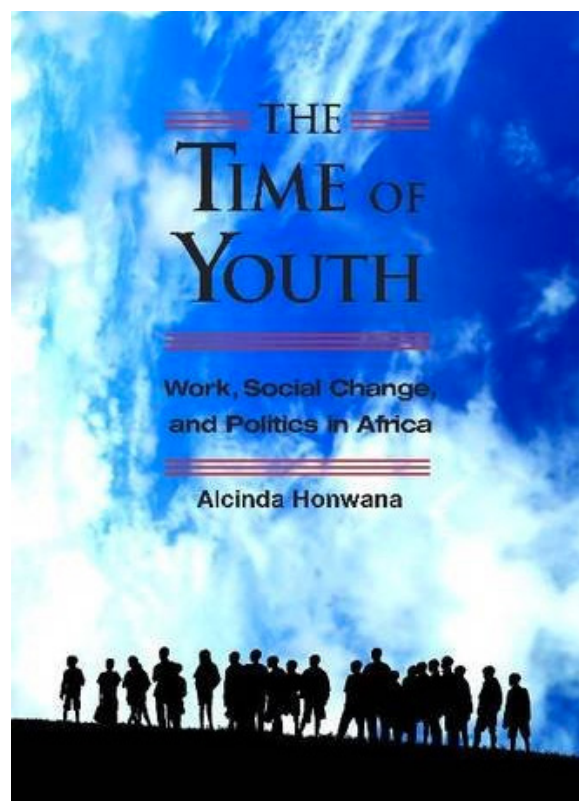
of Foucault's words of 1976. If indeed youth, in the industrialized countries, is a transition stage from education to work, there is a need to re-conceptualize the notion of youth itself, considering it a social category much more than a matter of age classification. However, this marginalization process seems to be more profound in Africa, as Honwana argues, in spite of the fact that this is a globalized trend. So the author draws on African youth and their expectations regarding the present and future times that are a-Changin', presenting the African youth's own narratives.

The Time of the Youth is a study about four African countries and youth's strategies in the contemporary neo-liberal economic and political environment. Honwana draws on in-depth interviews in Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia between 2008 and 2011. The author writes about the young people excluded from the mainstream labour market and traditional forms of acquiring economical and social independence in the four countries, using youth's own words and descriptions. In doing so, Honwana uses a key concept for understanding the new generation, the concept of waithood. This concept was initially developed by Diana Singerman (2007), Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef (2009) addressing the new challenges that youth faces today in the Middle East and Northern Africa. However Honwana addresses the waithood concept in a critical sense. In the transition for the adulthood, young people are facing several challenges such as unemployment, access to education, constitution of a family and civic participation. As Honwana argues, the waithood period that characterizes youth nowadays is not characterized by 'inactively waiting' for things to change, as it was first described by Singerman, Dhillon and Yousef. The African youth is developing creative ways to encounter solutions facing a high level of uncertainty that characterizes their present and future lives.

'Despite the challenges, youth in waithood are dynamic and use their agency and creativity to invent new forms of being and interacting with society. Waithood accounts for a multiplicity of young people's experiences, ranging from daily survival strategies such as street vending and cross-border trade to involvement in gangs and criminal activities' (Honwana, 2013, p.6).

The contemporary youth is living a state of limbo, a period of suspension between childhood and adulthood, but this waithood phase is creating social changes and creative answers. As Honwana argues, the waithood generation is becoming a way of being more than a limbo phase in youth's lives, and is responding to the current economical and political crisis with youth social contestation movements and the need to re-acquire their freedom. What will be the result of this? That is still to be known, since the youth social movements are still unfolding, as Honwana writes. However, the waithood generation can have a social impact similar to the generation of 1968 in Europe, argues Honwana, that was the origin of radical social changes.

'From more or less spontaneous street riots and protests in the streets of Maputo, Dakar, Madrid, London, New York and Santiago, to revolutions that overthrew dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the waithood generation is taking it upon itself to redress the wrongs of contemporary society and remake the world' (Honwana, 2013, p.10).

Honwana argues that the waithood generation is being creative, using their agency to originate new sub-cultures (i.e. "youthscapes") with new forms of livelihood, in the margins of the mainstream society. This generation believes that radical social changes are needed, and they do not believe in traditional politics. They are using the new technological tools to communicate and construct a new approach to the "failed" society where they are living nowadays.

The African local descriptions through youth's own words point to the global perspectives of new social and economical configurations. Youth behavior and strategies are indicators of how the countries are dealing with the current economical and political situations and what these mean. Zahira, a young woman from Tunisia, is part of the waithood generation. She is 28 years old, a higher degree education in media studies, but no job. Zahira has worked in several occasional jobs, that wouldn't allow her to plan her future. Ahmed, 32 years old, from Sierra Leone, is single with 3 children, attended the secondary education level of school, calling himself a "youthman", surviving with the support of friends and family, and a very low pension from being in the Army for almost 14 years. Hearing the African youth's voices, Honwana argues that the waithood generation has three ideas behind it: (1) the majority of African young people are living in waithood, that is becoming more than a transitional phase in their lives, it is a new form of adulthood; (2) the waithood is not a failed transition that characterizes youth nowadays; instead it should be understood in the light of the current political, social, economical, cultural and historical events; and (3) the waithood is not something particularly African, we find it in the West as well; young people from middle social classes and with higher education degrees are facing the same difficulties in having more than an occasional between-jobs.

Understanding the waithood generation is also to understand the youth's way of designing their lives and future, through the notion of extended present (Nowotny, 1994). The extended present represents an extended 'here-and-now' moment that helps to reduce the uncertainty of the future, remembering possibilities of social reconfigurations. In Mozambique, Jonasse, 27 years old, works in the Hulene dump, looking for things to eat, use and sell for the last 10 years. He abandoned school when he was in the 6th grade after his father's death, joining a friend who was separating garbage, waiting for the garbage trucks in Hulene. He did not find another job. When Honwana asked him how he saw the future, Jonasse answered: 'Future? My life is just today, is to see if I do not lose a good truck that can bring some food or things to sell in the market in order to eat' (Honwana, 2013, p.40). Jonasse is one of the young people living a 'here-and-now' life. Like in the UK, during the 2011 riots, Campbell, a young boy of 18 years old from Wood Green, said: 'I was expecting this to happen sooner or later, the government should also have predicted it. There is a lack of jobs' (Honwana, 2013, p.47).

For the African youth, education is one of the central concerns, saying that there is (1) a lack of quality in teaching and learning; (2) a

> "The contemporary youth is living a state of limbo, a period of suspension between childhood and adulthood, but this waithood phase is creating social changes and creative answers."

lack of oriented programs for the acquisition of practical skills; and (3) social inequalities in accessing education. Economic growth without employment is something that the neo-liberal economical politic are implementing, with the growing of unemployment and young people moving into the informal economic sector. Tarik, 27 years old from Tunisia said: 'In the old times, all you had to do to be someone was going to school, studying and then get a job. But now a degree no longer guarantees you access to employment.' Sagar, 20 years old from Senegal adds: 'someone with a higher education degree or someone without it is in the same situation' (Honwana, 2013, p.67).

In the end, I ask: what is the purpose of education? It is more than a 'supplier' for labour market; it is about acquiring knowledge to give creative tools in our changin' times.

References

Dhillon, N. & T. Yousef, (eds) (2009) *Generation in waiting: The unfulfilled promise of young people in the Middle East*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Honwana, A. (2013) O Tempo da Juventude: Emprego, Política e Mudanças Sociais em África, Maputo: Kapicua Livros e Multimedia Lda, pp. 249.

Nowotny, H. (1994) *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Singerman, D. (2007) 'The economic imperatives of marriage: Emerging practices and identities among youth in the Middle East', *Middle East Youth Initiative Working paper No 6.*

Getting published

In this article Andy Hobson, Head of the Education Research Centre, University of Brighton, and Ivor Goodson, Professor of Learning Theory, discuss how (not) to get your papers rejected by peer reviewed journals in education. They draw on documentary evidence, literature and their wealth of personal and professional experience as both authors and editors.

Professor Andrew J Hobson and Professor Ivor Goodson

Introduction

After all the time and effort that it takes to prepare and submit a manuscript to a peer reviewed journal, followed by the arduous wait to hear the outcome of the review process, receiving a 'reject' decision can be a frustrating and disheartening experience – to say the least. In an effort to help colleagues avoid this miserable fate, in this paper we explain and illustrate why many submissions are rejected by peer reviewed journals in education. We do so by drawing upon:

- a documentary analysis of decision letters and individual reviews relating to 25 papers which were rejected by the *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* (*IJMCE*), which the first author edits, between April 2013 and February 2014 inclusive (Hobson, 2014);
- the second author's experience – spanning 26 years – as (Founding) Editor of the *Journal of Education Policy* (*JEP*);
- our personal experiences of reviewing for and serving on Editorials Boards of different journals, and of having some of our own manuscripts rejected as well as accepted for publication;
- relevant literature, most notably an Editorial published in the journal *Educational Action Research* (EAR, 2012), which identified a number of reasons for the rejection of papers from that particular journal.

It is important to recognise that the reasons why manuscripts are accepted or rejected vary to some extent according to – and depending on the nature and focus of – the individual journal to which one submits. The particular review template that reviewers are asked to complete will also be influential here since, while they often have much in common, the templates used by different journals foreground particular issues. Nonetheless, our analysis and experience suggests that many reasons for the rejection of manuscripts are common across different peer reviewed journals in education – and perhaps even further afield.

Before addressing the reasons for rejection, we provide a context for this in the form of a brief account of the review process that international peer reviewed journals in education tend to follow.

The peer review and editing process

Although the editorial teams of different journals adopt slightly different approaches to peer reviewing and editing manuscripts submitted for possible publication, again these tend to have much in common, and the widespread adoption of electronic and web-based systems such as ScholarOne for managing the submission, review and publication processes has encouraged this.

Once a manuscript has been submitted to a journal, it is first subject to an initial screening by the Editor or a member of the editorial team to establish whether it is: (a) potentially suitable for publication in the journal (e.g. relevant to the aims and scope of the journal); and (b) presented in an appropriate form to undergo peer review (e.g. anonymised for blind review). At this stage the manuscript will be:

1. rejected outright, if it is considered inappropriate for publication in the journal;
2. 'unsubmitted', if it is potentially suitable for publication in the journal but not presented in an appropriate form to undergo peer review, with the corresponding author advised of the reason for this; or
3. sent out for peer review – normally by between two and four independent reviewers from at least two different countries.

Once the reviews have been returned the (or an) Editor of the journal will examine the various recommendations and comments (which can sometimes be quite divergent), revisit the manuscript as appropriate, and make and communicate a decision to the author(s). Again the decision categories vary somewhat between journals but may include:

1. Accept for publication as it stands (very rarely given for the initial submission of a manuscript);
2. Accept subject to the satisfactory completion of minor revisions;

3. Accept subject to the satisfactory completion of major revisions;
4. Revise and resubmit (where the manuscript is effectively rejected in its current form but the author is invited to submit a re-worked paper as a new submission);
5. Reject.

The decision letter (or email) sent to the author is normally accompanied by the individual reviewer comments.

Where a manuscript is not rejected outright, and so long as the author is not strongly opposed to making several of the requested/recommended revisions, we would normally advise that the manuscript is revised in line with all or most reviewer comments and resubmitted to the same journal, along with an account of the revisions undertaken and (where appropriate) a justification of why the authors consider it inappropriate to make some of the requested changes. When a revised manuscript is resubmitted to the journal, the (post-screening) review process is repeated until the manuscript is either rejected (where it is felt that the requested changes have not been carried out to a satisfactory standard) or eventually accepted, which can potentially involve as many as five or six rounds of review, though between two and four is more common. If and when the peer reviewers assigned to a particular manuscript indicate that they are happy to accept it for publication as it stands, the Editor(s) may request additional revisions prior to publication.

Rejection pre-peer review

Of the 25 'reject' decisions given by the first author as Editor of *IJMCE* between April 2013 and February 2014 inclusive, ten manuscripts were rejected at the screening stage without recourse to peer review, while 12 were rejected following a single round of peer review, two following two rounds of review, and one after four rounds of review.

Two main factors tend to be associated with the rejection of manuscripts pre-peer review. The first and most common is that the paper is considered to be **insufficiently relevant to the aims of the journal** to which it is submitted, as some of the following excerpts from *IJMCE* decision letters and reviews illustrate:

there is insufficient conceptual or empirical focus on mentoring (or coaching) in the manuscript for this particular journal, and it is felt that the manuscript would be more suitable for a higher education journal.

while your manuscript looks very interesting and potentially publishable, it is not suitable for publication in the International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching IN EDUCATION...

Similarly, the editors of *Educational Action Research* (EAR, 2012) note that "[w]e seem to get a large number of articles that are not about action research at all. They may be about practice, or even written by a practitioner, but they do not fit any of the traditions of action research which hold action and research together..." (p.481). In the *Journal of Education Policy* too this has been a continuing problem, as has the related question of the 'currency' of policy analysis. Policy changes continuously, and reports become rapidly out-of-date.

The second main reason for the rejection of manuscripts pre-peer review is that they are considered for a variety of reasons to have **insufficient substance or depth** for publication in a peer reviewed journal. The reasons include an apparent lack of methodological rigour or criticality, and manuscripts being insufficiently grounded in relevant empirical and theoretical literature. The Editors of *EAR* note, in this regard, that "[s]ometimes we are sent articles that are purely descriptive" (p.481), while the following excerpts from *IJMCE* decision

letters and reviews further illustrate aspects of this general complaint:

[The manuscript] *seems to simply touch the surface on all the points presented... The results also seemed very surface-like, as opposed to perhaps having a deeper discussion or reflection on the voices heard.*

...it is not felt that the manuscript is appropriate (e.g. sufficiently developed as an academic paper) to be published in the International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education.

Other contributory factors to rejection pre-peer review are also factors in the rejection of some manuscripts following peer review, and are considered below.

Rejection post-peer review

One of the most common reasons for the rejection of manuscripts submitted to international journals in education, post-peer review, is a perceived **lack of methodological rigour** or **a lack of transparency regarding methodology and methods**. This includes perceived flaws in or fitness for purpose of the methodology or research design deployed, a lack of evidence to support findings claims, and failure to acknowledge limitations of research. The following excerpts from the decision letters and reviews of manuscripts rejected by *IJMCE* are illustrative of some of these issues:

The problem with the study's methodology is that the mentees seem to have been left out. It would seem that, certainly with respect to research question number 2 ... the perspective of the student being mentored is crucial.

...the small sample sizes and lack of detail really limits was can be gleaned from this paper.

The methodology was poorly described... There was inadequate data about the quantitative sample... how it was chosen and how mixed the sample was across the colleges involved in the study. There was no information about a second questionnaire until results were reported in the qualitative data section.

In terms of policy analysis the modes of analysis need to be methodologically rigorous and intensive. Descriptive accounts are therefore of limited utility.

A second common reason for the rejection of manuscripts is that they are considered to be **insufficiently grounded in relevant literature** and/or **do not include a sufficiently critical account of literature** cited. From *IJMCE* reviews:

...the main area missing is more comprehensive links to relevant, recent literature in the field.

Where potentially important points from the literature are being used they are not always critically explored as to relevance to the enquiry nor problematised.

The Editors of *EAR* note that:

"Sometimes we are sent articles which present work on a topic as if no one else has ever written about it... [I]t appears as if the writer has no sense of a community of other action researchers building knowledge, understanding and practice. There seems to be no sense of accumulation of knowledge, no commitment to furthering debates, and no acknowledgement of what has gone before..." (EAR, 2012, pp.481-482)

Thirdly, and related to this last point, some manuscripts are rejected on the grounds that they **are considered not to make a substantive or original contribution to knowledge**, or else it is not sufficiently clear what such a contribution entails. Again, from *IJMCE* reviews:

...this manuscript fails to offer any new significant insights into coaching.

The author needs to make his/her contributions to scholarship and to practice clearer.

Fourthly, another related and serious problem explaining the rejection of some manuscripts relates to a perceived **lack of clarity regarding the rationale for and/or argument of the paper and/or aims of the study**. The following reviewer comments illustrate the point:

All in all I don't understand the rationale for the paper. It's a think piece that doesn't seem to have been thought through very carefully.

at the end of the paper I was still not completely clear if your focus was on mentoring beginning teachers or established teachers or both.

For *JEP*, this can be a particular problem where educational policies are described but not interrogated or analysed.

A fifth contributory factor in the rejection of some manuscripts is a **lack of clarity and/or criticality regarding key concepts**. The Editors of *EAR* state that:

"We expect articles that come to us not only to locate the work as action research, but to identify how they understand that and how it is embodied or enacted in the work about which they are writing..." (EAR, 2012, p.481)

One reviewer of a manuscript rejected by *IJMCE* noted that:

the paper is full of education jargon and many of the terms and phrases are problematic and/or contested and so need to be treated far more carefully.

A reviewer of another manuscript rejected by the same journal expressed the not uncommon complaint that:

...'mentoring' itself is taken for granted really - no definition given.

A sixth reason for rejection is that, whilst on the surface the focus of some manuscripts is pertinent to the aims of the journal to which they are submitted, they are **not written in such a way that they 'fit' with the relevant genre** and/or it is felt that the manuscripts would not sufficiently engage the journal's readership because they **fail to cite and build on the work of papers already published in that journal**. The following excerpt from an *IJMCE* decision letter is illustrative:

the paper does not sufficiently engage with existing issues and debates associated with papers previously published in the journal

The Editors of *EAR* (2012) also note that many of the manuscripts rejected by that journal "do not advance the thinking and practice of the community that the journal serves" (p.481), and they urge potential authors, especially those new to that particular community, "to read some past issues to get a sense of the interests, debates and gaps that there inevitably are in the field." (p.482)

A seventh consideration and a more specific failure of some authors

to address the readership of an international peer reviewed journal in education is that their manuscripts are not **appropriately written for an international audience**, for example, because they **do not provide sufficient information about the phenomenon under investigation and/or the context in which the study took place**. The Editors of *EAR* (2012) bemoan the fact that "...authors do not always write in a way that acknowledges the broad international readership of *Educational Action Research*. Sometimes articles are sent that make reference to local contexts or use technical terms without explaining them to an international readership." (p.482). The following excerpts from reviews of manuscripts rejected by *IJMCE* make similar points:

It appears to have been written for a local, US, audience rather than an international one, acronyms and details of setting are not always fully explained.

The context of the research was limited. I wanted to know more about... teacher education program within which the research took place.

An eighth contributory factor is that the **arguments made in some manuscripts are over-generalised and characterised by insufficient precision**. It was noted in relation to one manuscript rejected by *IJMCE*, for example, that:

The discussion of literature on evaluating mentoring begins to bring together literature from outside the educational sphere on this issue with educational mentoring literature... However, it is not made clear that these literatures are distinct. So, for example, you mention the International Mentoring Association, but without explanation that this is a general rather than educational specific association.

A ninth issue, common to several manuscripts rejected by *IJMCE*, is that there is **insufficient theorisation**:

The discussion is not sufficiently informed by relevant theoretical frameworks.

There is no mention of theory or other foundation inquiry system. This is the major weakness of the article.

Theorisation is particularly important in policy studies because otherwise the policies are treated normatively. A theoretical context is required so that articles engage with the 'big picture' of policy formation.

A tenth common problem is that authors' **conclusions and/or implications are sometimes insufficiently developed and/or not consistent with the findings** presented in the manuscript:

The conclusions arising have a tenuous link and insufficient link with the way data appears to have been collected, analysed and the results actually given.

Implications are minimal and focus only on how one might examine one's language in the context of a mentoring situation. No implications for teacher education are addressed.

Another factor explaining the rejection of some manuscripts is that they **do not provide a sufficiently up-to-date account of the literature or issues under consideration**:

much of the literature referred to is quite dated.

This is a particularly serious matter for papers submitted to

policy-oriented journals such as *JEP*, since the premise of some manuscripts is effectively undermined because the account of the policy context provided is out-dated or the debate has 'moved on'.

A number of the reasons for the rejection of manuscripts that have been outlined above relate, in part, to issues with the **quality of communication**, and this general issue is a frequent complaint of reviewers of rejected manuscripts. The following excerpts from *IJMCE* reviews are illustrative:

...this paper is weak in its logical connection from one paragraph to another...

The paper, as reviewed, is poorly written and would benefit greatly from some solid proofreading and a re-write. There are numerous typos on every page as well as problematical grammatical and syntax errors throughout, the author (s) may wish to reflect upon the overall structure of the paper, and consider adopting a strategy that presents the material in a logical and systematic manner.

In addition, whilst in itself it will not normally be sufficient to attract a 'reject' decision, a number of reviewers of rejected manuscripts note that, in addition to other factors, the authors of those papers had **not followed the journal's instructions to authors** sufficiently carefully and/or were guilty of other forms of unhelpful or **careless presentation**. For example, from the review of a manuscript rejected by *IJMCE*:

Many references cited in the paper are not listed in the reference list so it is difficult to determine the actual sources.

A final factor explains the rejection of some manuscripts which are initially accepted subject to the satisfactory completion of (usually major) revisions. That is, the **authors are not considered to have satisfactorily or convincingly responded to the requests for revision** or their manuscripts **are not considered to be sufficiently improved to be worthy of publication**:

the reviewers do feel that the paper had been improved from the initial submission, but despite this do not feel that it is ready for publication or that further revisions would result in an acceptable paper.

Unfortunately, much as I hoped I would be able to support publication of your article I am unable to recommend it as you have not undertaken a major revision the editor asked for... your manuscript has not been sufficiently improved to merit publication....

Often manuscripts are revised in a very piecemeal way. That is, authors respond solely to the specifics of the points raised by reviewers but do not respond to the overarching direction of the critiques being provided and/or do not take sufficient care or time to ensure that the whole revised paper retains coherence and 'flow'.

Conclusion

Having identified various reasons for the rejection of papers submitted to international peer reviewed journals in education, we suggest that prospective authors might use this account as a checklist in preparing their manuscripts for submission. We recognise, of course, that it is one thing to be aware of various potential pitfalls and another thing altogether to ensure that these are avoided. We close with a small number of suggestions which may help. One is to urge prospective authors to consider, before putting literal or metaphorical pen to paper, whether they have the necessary armoury at their disposal to be able to support the claims they wish to make. For example, for an empirical paper, are the database and analyses sufficiently strong to make such claims? If you are unsure, there may be a case for

generating more data and/or undertaking more analysis before you begin to write, or else writing a different paper! We would also urge potential authors *not* to write their paper and then look around for an appropriate journal in which to seek to publish it: choose the journal first and write your paper *for* that journal's readership. Finally, in addition to reviewing your own draft manuscript in an attempt to avoid the reasons for rejection identified in this paper, *always* ask a mentor or colleague who has experience of publishing in peer reviewed journals and/or is familiar with the journal to which you are submitting if they will offer feedback on a draft before completing and submitting the manuscript. It may also be valuable – for various reasons – for the paper to be evaluated against other relevant criteria, such as those associated with the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF, 2014), relating to originality, significance and rigour.

References

EAR (2012) Editorial, *Educational Action Research*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 481–482.

REF (2014) *Research Excellence Framework*. Available at www.ref.ac.uk

Hobson, A.J. (2014) Why manuscripts submitted to an international peer reviewed journal in education are rejected, *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, Vol. 3, No.2, pp.188-196.

Further reading

Murray, R. (2005) *Writing for Academic Journals*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Thomson, P. and Kamler, B. (2012) *Writing for Peer Reviewed Journals: Strategies for getting published*, London and New York: Routledge.

'The Beautiful Risk of Education'

This book review by Dr Phil Wood, University of Leicester, was first published on his blog, *Learning Space,* at the following link [here](). The full details of the book are:

Biesta, Gert. J. J. (2014) *The Beautiful Risk of Education,* **Boulder, USA: Paradigm Publishers, 178 pages.**

Dr Phil Wood

In reviewing this book, it is important to state from the outset that what follows is only a partial, and obviously personal, account. This book is brilliantly written but dense in its conceptual content and to get a detailed and critical understanding of it in its entirety I would suggest that you need to read the book itself – it is well worth the investment.

Gert Biesta has spent the best part of a decade laying the foundations for this book through a host of publications, and at the centre of this work is a critical engagement with many of the 'holy cows' of modern education. Biesta makes the comment towards the end of the book,

'..I wish to argue that the particular common sense about education that is being multiplied is problematic in itself, because it has a tendency to promote what I would see as a rather un-educational way of thinking about education.' (2014, p.124)

He develops this discussion by focusing on a number of issues which are approached from original and thought provoking perspectives. The issues which are considered are creativity, communication, teaching, learning, emancipation, democracy and virtuosity. However, in each case, this is not a simplistic discussion of how to improve creativity or teaching in the classroom through a series of ready to go solutions, but instead considers these issues from the perspective of understanding the wider ideals and philosophical foundations of education. And at the heart of these discussions is the tension between the attempt by politicians and policy makers to make education a strong, predictable, risk-free activity, and the view that any education worth its name is based on the 'risk' of authentic interactions and growth of human beings. As such, this book is about developing a perspective on the 'action' of education and what it can hope to achieve and how this might happen.

The first chapter on creativity is an example of the original perspective taken. It does not outline how creativity might be taught, but instead discusses education as a creative act in its own right, as an activity which creates something new within the world. Here, Biesta introduces a reoccurring idea/question, the difference between strong and weak versions of the main ideas. Here, he differentiates between 'strong' creation, i.e. cause and effect, and the 'weak' creation of encounters and events. This leads to a discussion about strong
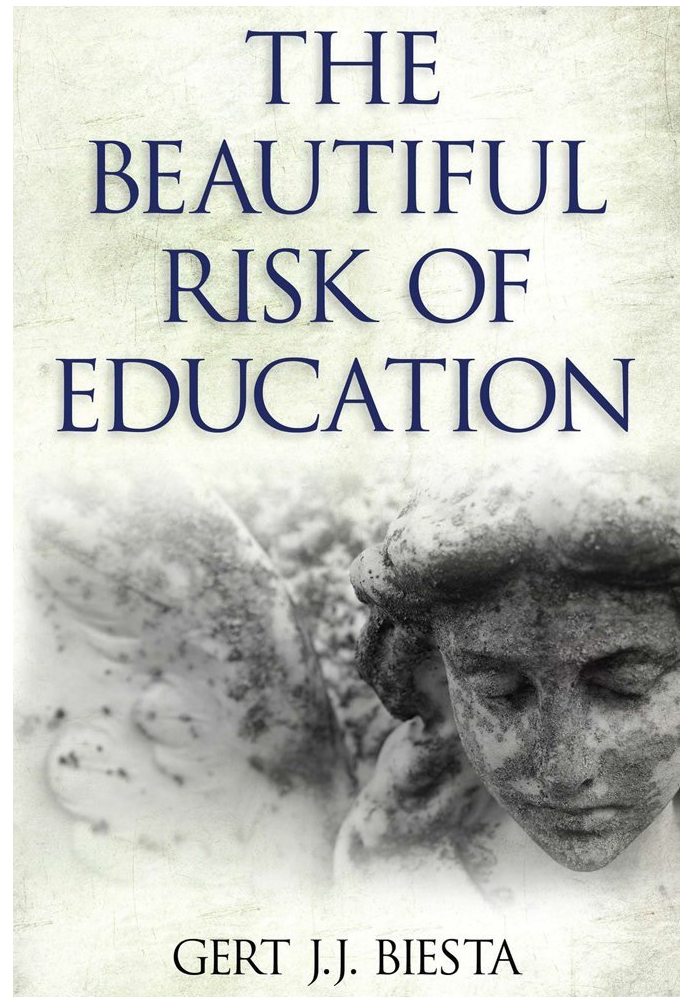
and weak creation stories within the Bible through the work of John Caputo as a door to considering subjectivity. From here a distinction is drawn between the educator who wants to control and eradicate risk in the act of creation (much like the god of the Garden of Eden), and those who accept that creation is a risky business which cannot be controlled in its entirety, and which is essential in creating something new (the god of Genesis).

Engagement with the work of other philosophers and theorists is a hallmark of this book which introduces and discusses a number of ideas and perspectives as a consequence. I found this to be one of the most appealing elements of the book as it demonstrates a deep and sustained thread of thought and critique. Levinas, Dewey, Derrida, Kierkegaard, Foucault, Ranciere and Arendt are all present and add greatly to the debate within the text.

Three chapters in particular were of great interest to me: those on teaching, learning and virtuosity. In the chapter on teaching Biesta takes an interesting and perhaps almost unique line. He bemoans the move in modern education to seeing teachers as mere facilitators

of learning, making a clear distinction 'between "learning from" and "being taught by"', and arguing that the latter is crucial to reasserting the place of teaching in education. He then critiques the position of constructivism in education, but importantly emphasises the difference between constructivist learning theory and constructivist pedagogies; one does not necessarily lead to the other. However, in re-establishing the role of the teacher, Biesta (p.57) makes it clear that;

'the experience of "being taught" is about those situations in which something enters our being from the outside, so to speak, as something that is fundamentally beyond the control of the "learner". To be taught – to be open to receiving the gift of teaching – thus means being able to give such interruptions a place in one's understanding and one's being. This is why, following Kierkegaard, such teachings, when they are received, are a matter of subjective truth, that is, of truth to which we are willing to give authority.'

Teachers have a central role to play in the educative process, and students need to be recast so as not to be seen as a consumer, but the ideas of risk and weak force once more occur as the teacher cannot insist on the student being taught – the student needs to be willing to accept the 'gift'. In this way Biesta treads a careful line between constructivist pedagogies and a teacher-dominated view of education.

The chapter on learning develops a likewise interesting perspective, critiquing the current system which is characterised as seeing learning as a necessity throughout life, a process which we cannot not do – a view Biesta terms 'learnification'. He argues that the language of learning has become politicised and has led to a situation where learning is almost forced upon individuals. From here, the work of Ranciere opens up a discussion about learning and its role in emancipation. Rather than following ideas that the learner learns from the teacher to gain emancipation (monological), or does so through dialogue (dialogical), Biesta uses the work of Foucault to make the case that emancipation can never be an escape from power, but is an active engagement with different forms and networks of power and knowledge. This leads again to the question over the difference between 'strong' learning which is enforced upon us and the risk of learning which allows us to hold the power in deciding the degree to which we want our own learning to be weak or strong.

Finally, the chapter entitled 'Virtuosity' develops a thought provoking argument concerning the nature of teacher education and development. Two aspects of current narratives are problematized here, one being the drive towards evidence-based teaching, and the other the reliance on the idea of teacher competences. Biesta argues that an evidence narrative is problematic due to its focus on facts rather than values – this leads to a loss of the idea that all educational activity is at core the result of particular purposes and from this, ideas about what makes a desirable education. He also critiques much of the evidence as once again being focused on the 'strong' creation of cause and effect, arguing that this,

'..seems to forget that any connections between teaching and what it effects are weak connections, connections established through interpretation rather than through causation.' (p.120)

He further argues that evidence is now judged to be a replacement for professional judgement, thereby disempowering teachers and creating a form of educational positivism.

Likewise, competences are seen as attempting to act as a 'catch-all', covering every possible eventuality, but forgetting the central competence of judgement. This leads to a functionalist view of teaching where restrictive notions of 'learning', assessment targets, and ultimately, uniformity occur, a view where judgment is constantly squeezed out. It is here, however, that Biesta makes his case for the work of teachers, one based on judgement and wisdom, 'a teacher who possesses all the competences teachers need but who is unable to judge which competence needs to be deployed when, is a useless teacher.' (p.130). In conveying this argument, he not only critiques competences but also the use of large-scale experimental studies as inappropriate and another attempt to subsume the judgement of teachers. In its place, he develops the 'weak' idea of 'becoming educationally wise', composed of teacher education which is about the whole person (educationally speaking), not merely an acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions; it involves the development of a person who makes wise judgements. This can only be developed through the use of practical judgement and preferably through engagement with others in a number of different ways, some of which may be asymmetrical as we attempt to understand the judgements that wiser, more experienced colleagues make. He sees the role of wisdom as central as,

'wisdom is particularly important in order to capture that our educational actions are never just a repetition of what has happened in the past but are always radically open toward the future. We need judgment rather than recipes in order to be able to engage with this openness and do so in an educational way.' (p.137)

This book offers a rich, nuanced and carefully considered argument about the role and process of education. It offers few concrete solutions but raises a large number of important questions which are developed through a text which is the result of a decade of thought. For me it demonstrates a quality of thinking and argument which is rare in an era characterised by a perceived need to constantly produce new ideas and information. It is a great read for anyone who wants to engage deeply and critically with the central issues of education faced by many countries at present.

References

Biesta, Gert. J. J. (2014) *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, Boulder, USA: Paradigm Publishers, 178 pages.

Mining from the middle:
engaging with the riches of professional capital

Lorraine Harrison

In this article, Lorraine Harrison, Head of the School of Education, University of Brighton, examines the benefits of developing a research culture, in the light of the development of a new MA Education route in collaboration with the Teaching Leaders organisation.

This article was first published in *Teaching Leaders Quarterly*, available at the link here.

Good Leaders – Good Researchers

There exists an increasing emphasis on the importance of good leadership and its influence on school improvement (Steward, 2014). Alongside this, there is recognition of the distinctive and particular role that Middle Leaders play; coupled with the emergence of National Initiatives such as NQML (offered by the NCTL, through licensed providers) and the Teaching Leaders Fellows programme (aimed at creating outstanding middle leaders working in schools that face particular challenges). Both offer recognised qualifications that are focused on the implementation of a project linked to both the participant's leadership role and school improvement initiative. Hence, emphasis is placed on the Middle Leader's capacity to influence and transform school improvement through the achievement of enhanced student outcomes. It is also recognised that, in order to create and sustain system-wide change and enhancement, a research dimension should be embedded within programmes such as these. Jon Coles, for example, suggests that there is a need to bring together leading practitioners and researchers so that they can identify and research pertinent issues and disseminate strong, valid evidence (Coles, 2014). Similarly, a recent report from the Guardian suggested that if the best and latest findings of research evidence are tested, applied and refined by communities of teachers, 'riches of professional capital' will be generated.

In my view, this 'professional capital' will make a powerful contribution to transforming practice, as long as research can: secure and deepen levels of intellectual mastery; is professionally relevant; is contextualised within the workplace; has the potential to 'reach' and exert impact upon a broad range of professional settings; and is wide ranging and allows deliberative and systematic collaboration and dissemination. Under these circumstances, new professional knowledge can be created that has been co-produced and corroborated. It follows that it has the potential to create powerful mechanisms for change.

Engaging *with* Research

The NCTL identifies a number of different ways of engaging with and in research that are expressed as a continuum from interpreting and adapting publicly available evidence, to undertaking enquiries that address a research question, use instruments to explore the effects of intervention, and are reported as evidence. Given their strong association with the school improvement agenda, Middle Leaders are exceptionally well placed to engage with research so that they play a critical role in establishing an evidence-informed school culture.

Middle leaders can begin to embed research in the day-to-day work of their organisation in a variety of ways. Examples include: using

If an evidence-informed culture is to be nurtured and sustained within any school, it is crucial that the leadership team is seen to be a strong role model.

literature as a means of critiquing practice; implementing a strategy that arises from a research question; and creating professional learning communities.

There is an extensive range of literature that provides an appreciation of how research can improve professional practice. The NCTL website offers a variety of invaluable, on-line publications. Particular examples include Scott and McNeish's (2013) article that explores how research evidence can be used to support school improvement, whilst Pavlou (2004) offers an illuminating account of a specific secondary school improvement journey. Both publications would serve to support decision-making, provide a justification for action, and form the basis of further reading to influence and shape impact.

An alternative approach is to use publications that challenge current practice in schools. For instance, a Middle Leader might wish to raise levels of achievement by introducing different teaching and learning strategies. Geake's article (2008), entitled: 'Neuro Mythologies in Education' aims to examine 'neuromyths' such as VAK learning styles and multiple intelligences in the light of neuro-scientific and educational evidence. An article like this could be used to devise a strategy that initiates and evaluates change and, when analysed in conjunction with school-generated data, offers a discernible, defensible, and positive impact on pupil progress.

Researcher as Role Model

If an evidence-informed culture is to be nurtured and sustained within any school, it is crucial that the leadership team is seen to be a strong role model. Here, a collaborative strategy that arises from a research

question could be implemented. Lesson Study is a unique form of professional development that must be underpinned by a research question. It is undertaken with a small group of practitioners, normally a triad, who investigate a chosen area of enquiry (or issue) through repeated, collaborative planning and observation. As these cycles focus solely on pupil learning, explicit links can be made to the school improvement plan, a school-to-school project, or an impact initiative. Many examples of Lesson Study can be accessed on-line and Middle Leaders could build upon these to set up professional learning communities that extend and deepen the scope and reach of their research activities.

Engaging in Research
Middle Leaders can also be 'producers' of research where the research activity becomes more formalised, involves critical reflection on key themes, and analysis of evidence. Here the outcomes or impact of the research is often recognised through accreditation, usually at Masters level.

Many Masters programmes are now sufficiently flexible to ensure that requirements for engagement in research are realistic, use impact initiatives / projects as the basis for the enquiry so that professional relevance is sustained and findings are embedded into practice. The increased emphasis on the use of blended learning provides greater opportunities for building a culture of evaluation and, in so doing ensures that outcomes are authentic and shared. The University of Brighton has developed an MA programme that arises from this model of research, and feedback from participants provides a strong justification:

'I can see the clear benefits the research will have on a) the impact initiative and b) the students' achievement……..I am eager to start reading and unpicking the theories which may help me gain a deeper understanding of teaching and learning and embed this knowledge into my professional practice'

Celebrating Success
It is vital that any engagement with or in research is celebrated, debated and shared. The findings of research activity must be disseminated in an appropriate professional context to ensure that the evidence of impact is interrogated and, as a consequence, the outcomes have the potential to contribute to school-wide improvements. This supports Fullen's concept of collective capacity where he notes that 'ordinary people…….accomplish extraordinary things' and that 'working together generates commitment' so that 'more and deeper things (get) done in shorter periods of time' (Fullen, 2010, p.72). There may also be the potential for publication and, as a first step, articles could be published in the Teaching Leaders Quarterly or the NCTL or Lesson Study websites (Dudley, Lang and Jordan, No date).

Where Next?
In conclusion, I hold the view that: if research activity arises from a genuine professional issue or concern; if it is interrogated skillfully; and if it involves co-production and collaboration, it will cause ripples of impact to have a distinctly different and transformative effect on schools. The potential for enrichment and innovation that is generated from the outcomes of this kind of approach will also highlight the importance of supporting middle leaders, so that the vital contribution they make to leadership and change is recognised and celebrated. In the longer term, stronger senior leadership could emerge and perhaps this will encourage more of the most talented teachers to become the head teachers of tomorrow.

References

Coles, J. (2014) *A Royal College of Teaching would improve educational standards*. Available: http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2013/nov/14/royal-college-of-teaching-improve-education-royal-college-of-teaching

Dudley, P. Lang, J and Jordan, G. (No date) *Lesson Study UK*. Available: http://lessonstudy.co.uk

Fullen, M. (2010) *All Systems Go: The Change Imperative for Whole System Reform*, Ontario: Corwin.

Geake, J. (2008) 'Neuromythologies in Education' in *Educational Research*, Vol. 50 No. 2, pp.123-133.

Pavlou, D. (2004) *Teacher leaders and reflective practitioners: building the capacity of a school to improve by promoting research and reflection*. Available: http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/resources/publications-atoz.htm

Scott, S. and McNeish, D. (2013) *School leadership evidence review: using research evidence to support improvement*. Available: http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/resources/publications.htm

Steward, J. (2014) *Resilient Leadership: why moral purpose isn't enough*. Available: http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/resources/ldr-magazine/ldr-latest-articles/resilient-leadership

Research Active

Conference Presentations and Keynotes

From 9 - 11th June 2014 **Melanie Gil** attended the European First Year Experience conference at Nottingham Trent University, and presented a paper called "What's in it for me? - the benefits and challenges of being a PASS leader." She collected data from our 32 School of Education Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) leaders over the last year. There were 265 delegates from 16 countries over the 3-day conference which focused on issues for new and first year students.

Dr Nadia Edmond collaborated with **Jon Berry** (University of Hertfordshire) on a paper "The student as consumer: spaces and possibilities for resistance" presented at the Discourse Power Resistance Conference (DPR14) University of Greenwich, 8-10 April, 2014. This has subsequently been developed as a journal article "Discourses of 'equivalence' in HE and notions of student engagement: resisting the neoliberal university" submitted to the Student Engagement and Experience Journal.

Dr Nadia Edmond and **Jane Melvin** collaborated on a conference paper "The double bind situation: using CHAT to explore how youth work practice is evolving in a digital age" to be presented at the Professional Practice Education and Learning (ProPEL) Conference Stirling at the end of June 2014.

Dr Mike Hayler and **Liz Briggs** were at the forefront of organising The Inaugural Conference of British Autoethnography which took place at the University of Brighton's Grand Parade site on Saturday, 22nd February 2014. The conference, which involved delegates in discussions, presentations and performance events around the opportunities and challenges of contemporary autoethnography, was a great success. One hundred and fifteen delegates from near and far attended to work with contributors from a range of disciplines who are experienced and published in this approach. A variety of theoretical, ethical and methodological issues were examined and discussed throughout the day, including the performance of identity, voice, and a range of socio-cultural critiques.

Following on from The Inaugural Conference of British Autoethnography held at Brighton

School of Eduction, Checkland Building

University earlier in the year, we thought it would be pertinent to remind people of the related book Contemporary British Autoethnography, in which **Dr Mike Hayler** has a chapter (For contents and sample chapter click here)

Dr Carol Robinson was invited to give a keynote address at an International Symposium, 'Building a New Strategic Approach to School Safety Promotion', in March. The symposium was held at the Osaka Kyoiku University in Japan and was sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Education. Delegates included a wide audience from the Ministries of Education in Japan, Kuwait, Thailand and Nigeria. Carol's keynote address was entitled ' Developing child-friendly schools: the approach of UNICEF UK'.

Dr Carol Robinson was invited to present a paper at a conference organised by, and held at, the Neville Childhood Epilepsy Centre in Surrey. The conference was held in March and focused on the management of cognitive and behavioural problems of school age children with epilepsy. The international audience included a wide range of medical professionals (including, but not limited to, paediatric neurologists, paediatricians, psychologists, and child and adolescent psychiatrists). Carol's paper was entitled 'Children and young people have a right to be heard: how do we genuinely listen to their perspectives in healthcare contexts.

Dr Keith Turvey presented a paper, 'Participatory designs for developing key competencies for teaching and learning with mobile technologies' at the Key Competencies in Informatics and ICT International conference held in Potsdam, Germany, 1 - 4 July. He has also been invited to submit his paper as a chapter for publication in a book to be published by Springer later in the year.

Professor Yvonne Hilier presented a keynote at the CPD Forum Conference Professional Best Practice: Past, Present and Future, held at City University on Friday 20 June 2014.

Her presentation, The future of lifelong learning, examined how university adult education has continued throughout the past century, and how it currently is affected by higher education policy and demands for economic success and social well being.

Professor Yvonne Hilier also presented a summary of research conducted through the University's CUPP programme and the Hastings Learning and Skills Research Group at the Hastings Forum seminar 'Education and Accountability – going to school in Hastings in 2014' held on 19th June 2014 at the Hastings Campus. The research has involved community partners and examined the effects of educational regeneration in Hastings. In particular, she discussed how parents as researchers can be effective in establishing closer engagement with parents and their schools.

Steve Roberts attended The Seventh International Conference on Multimodality, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Department of English, to participate in the discussion of the Past, Present and Future of Multimodality. The theme was addressed in key note talks from Professor Gunther Kress (Institute of Education, London), Professor W T Mitchell (University of Chicago) and Dr Kay O'Halloran (Curtin University, Australia) with interdisciplinary contributions from international delegates. **Steve Roberts'** paper focused on the assessment of Initial Teacher Trainees' multimodal artefacts. The paper, which was well received, argues that at such a time of curriculum change, understanding multimodality is an matter of particular significance for ITT students,

Publications

Professor Henrietta Dombey had two publications in late 2013: 'Teaching Writing: What the evidence says' available at United Kingdom Literacy Association website http://www.ukla.org/resources/view/ukla_publishes_teaching_writing/ . The second publication is a chapter, 'Flying blind: governmental policy on the teaching of reading in England' in K. Goodman, R. Calfee and Y. Goodman (Eds.) *Whose Knowledge Counts in Government Literacy Policies? Why expertise matters.* Published by Routledge.

The Independent Stocktake of the Foundation Phase (FP) for 3 - 7 years in Wales was chaired by **Professor Iram Siraj** with **Denise Kingston** as researcher. It was commissioned by Huw Lewis (Minister for Education and Skills) from September 2013 until March 2014.

The Stocktake focused on the implementation of the Foundation Phase (FP) across Wales and within different FP providers, looking closely at aspects that might inform future policy. It considered the detail of how the FP supported individual children's learning, their families and communities, as well as leadership, qualifications, training, standards and transitions.

Final report: http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/earlyyearshome/foundation_phase/stocktake-of-the-foundation-phase-final-report/?lang=en

Dr Carol Robinson wrote a book chapter with Carol Taylor from Sheffield Hallam University, "What matters in the end is to act well': Student engagement and ethics'. This was published in March 2014 in *Understanding and Developing Student Engagement* (Ed C, Bryson), Oxon: Routledge.

An independent stocktake of the Foundation Phase in Wales

Final report

September 2013 – March 2014

The book considers the multi-dimensional nature of student engagement, using case examples from both student and staff perspectives, and provides conceptual clarity about the notion of student engagement. **Carol's** chapter focuses specifically on ethics and student engagement practices in Higher Education. It considers various ways of conceptualising ethics and explores some ethical practices, problems and dilemmas in detail through three empirical case studies of student engagement in Higher Education.

Another book chapter written by **Dr Carol Robinson**, 'Listening to the voices of young people in school' was published in *Learning to teach in the Primary School* (Eds T. Cremin and J. Arthur). The book aims to provide a practical introduction to the necessary knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes that a student teacher will need to acquire and to the theories underpinning them. Carol's chapter focuses on what pupil voice work 'looks like' in the school context. It identifies ways in which teachers can listen to the voices of the pupils with whom they work, and considers how implementing 'pupil voice' practices can improve the learning and experiences of young people in schools.

Dr Sara Bragg has had several recent publications. Firstly, 'School Ethos and the Spatial Turn. "Capacious" Approaches to Research and Practice' written with Helen Manchester is published in a special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry,* December 2013 Vol. 19 No. 10.

This article is part of a Special Issue on Space, Place and Social Justice in Education, which was also the title of a conference held at MMU in 2012. It argues that specific 'spatial imaginaries' are embedded in current debates about school ethos and research methods – such as the idea of the school as a 'citadel' that will 'rescue' students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The reader is taken on a journey around an English multicultural primary school supported by the creative learning programme Creative Partnerships, which was researched as part of two projects into CP and youth voice / creative school ethos. The authors explore how creative arts practices (re)configured socio-spatial relations within the school community over a 3-year period. The article proposes the metaphor of "capaciousness" to illuminate aspects of research and practice in schools concerning space, learning, and the significance of the connections of schools to other spaces, places, and networks. Recognizing these connections enables us to take account of issues of social justice particularly in relation to schools located in areas of socioeconomic deprivation.

In a second publication, '"Shameless mums" and universal pedophiles. Sexualization and commodification of children', **Dr Sara Bragg** explores how in recent years, the "sexualization of childhood," and to some extent its "commercialization," have moved into the center of public policy and debate internationally. This article offers a critical overview of these debates, focusing particularly on their relevance to questions of gender and media analysis. This article is published in Routledge Companion to Media and Gender, 2014, Eds C Carter, L Steiner, L McLaughlin.

Thirdly, **Sara** has contributed to an edited volume an article titled 'Elusive Youth' in Youth Cultures in the Age of Global Media, with David Buckingham and Mary Jane Kehily Eds, published by Palgrave Macmillan. This book is one outcome of an ESRC seminar series of the same title that took place between 2010-2012, aiming to reappraise the study of youth cultures for contemporary times. It looks back to the debates about youth culture in the seminal work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and forward to current youthscapes in South Korea, the US, India, Russia, Spain, exploring the impact of globalization and new technologies on youth cultures in contrasting geographic locations. The book profiles the best of new research in youth studies written by leading scholars in the field. Acknowledging the past to explore the present, the book is part of the rich history of research on the expressive cultures of young people, reframing 'resistance' and 'ritual' to offer fresh insights into the meaning and significance of youth cultures on a global stage.
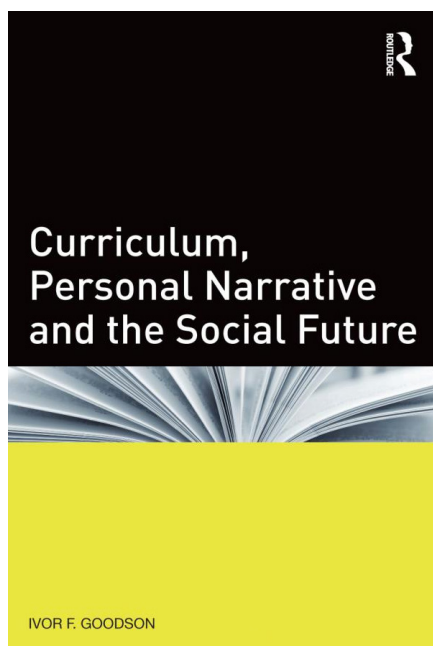
Professor Ivor Goodson has recently had two books published. In 'Critical Narrative as Pedagogy', Ivor, alongside **Dr Scherto Gill**, analyses and discusses a series of trans-disciplinary case studies from diverse cultures and contexts. They assert that narrative is not only a rich and profound way for humans to make sense of their own lives, but also is in itself a process of pedagogical encounter, learning and transformation. As pedagogic sites, life narratives allow the individual to critically examine their 'scripts' for learning which are encapsulated in their thought processes, discourses, beliefs and values. The book will be of interest and value to researchers and practitioners from diverse disciplines who seek to develop their understanding of narrative as a phenomenon, methodology, and pedagogy.

In 'Curriculum, Personal Narrative and the Social Future', it is asserted that many of the debates, policy initiatives and writing on the nature of educational and social change in Western societies, has tended to overlook the personal missions and biographical trajectories of key public sector personnel. It is argued that we must understand such personal biographical issues if we are to understand the fate of social and political initiatives.

The book highlights that a pattern has emerged in many countries around the world, whereby governments have enshrined targets and testing to ensure that teachers' frontline delivery is 'more accountable'. This plays an important 'symbolic' role associated with the 'effectiveness' discourse, with targets, tests and tables winning support from the public. However, there are often negligible or even contradictory effects at the point of delivery, enforced by the ignorance or denial of personal missions and biographical mandates.

This book locates most of its analysis and discussion at the point of culture clash between centralised dictates, and individual and collective life missions. Whilst the early part of the book considers a range of issues related to school curriculum, the focus on the biographical and life narrative becomes increasingly important as the analysis proceeds.

Projects Update

Dr Carol Robinson, **Dr Sara Bragg** and **Dr Jen Colwell** conducted a research project commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC). The research aimed to understand how tax and benefit changes, and changes in public spending, as outlined in the 2013 Autumn Statement and the 2014 Budget are likely to impact on the rights of children and young people.This project is based on the commitment given by the OCC to undertake Child Rights Impact Assessment on major legislative and/or policy developments. Findings from Carol, Sara and Jen's qualitative analysis will be combined with quantitative data collected by Landsman Economics and presented to ministers within the next month.

Dr Sara Bragg and **Dr Nadia Edmond** have been awarded a small 'seed project' grant from the Research Councils UK Communities and Culture Network ('Digital Economy' theme), to investigate Teacher Professional Learning Networks and the 'politics of circulation'. This research seeks to explore networks informed by concerns for equitable, democratically accountable and research-informed schooling provision and practices, with the aim of:

- Interrogating the politics of social-media-based Professional Learning Networks
- Engaging teacher educators, teachers and others in dialogue about online communities and their role in professional cultures, identities and practices
- Better understanding how to operate and organise within digitally shifting professional environments.

Teacher Mentoring in the Further Education and Skills Sector in England

This collaborative research project is led by **Professor Andy Hobson** (University of Brighton), working with **Kerry Doyle** (University of Brighton) and **Bronwen Maxwell** (Co-Investigator) and **Anna Stevens** from Sheffield Hallam University. The research is funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation and supported by MyScience.

The aims of the research are to learn more about the strengths and limitations of institution-based teacher mentoring in FE, and to explore the potential need for and appropriateness of a programme of external mentor support for teachers of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and other subjects.

Professor David Stephens and **Professor Avril Loveless** will be collaborating with other professorial colleagues in a cross-College, inter-disciplinary project to scope a large-scale research proposal in 2015. The group won a popular vote of research 'pitches' to the Professoriate, and were awarded £7.5k from the University to pursue the development of an innovative and high-risk project. With professors of Design, Visual Communication, Computer Security and Artificial Intelligence, they will be exploring the ways in which we can use the concepts of 'Herding Cats'.

The research includes one-to-one interviews and focus groups with teachers, mentors and leaders of STEM subjects, and an online national survey of teachers / lecturers of all subjects. Findings from the study will inform improvements to support for the professional learning and development of teachers, tutors, trainers, assessors and lecturers in the FE and skills sector.
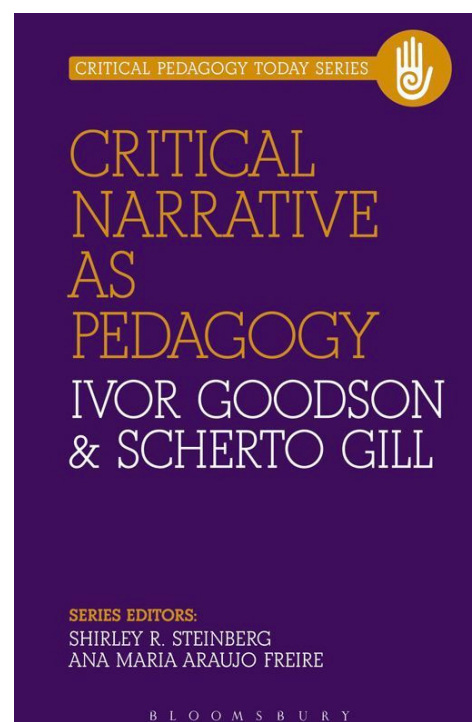
Inaugural Conference:
Autoethnography

Sandy Hutchinson Nunns

The conference

The Inaugural Conference of British Autoethnography took place at the University of Brighton's Grand Parade site on Saturday, 22nd February 2014. The conference, which involved delegates in discussions, presentations and performance events around the opportunities and challenges of contemporary autoethnography, was a great success. One hundred and fifteen delegates from near and far attended to work with contributors from a range of disciplines who are experienced and published in this approach. A variety of theoretical, ethical and methodological issues were examined and discussed throughout the day, including the performance of identity, voice, and a range of socio-cultural critiques.

Book Publication and Review

Short N. P., Turner L., and Grant A. Eds: (2013): *Contemporary British Autoethnography*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers

Published to coincide with the Inaugural British Autoethnography Conference at the University of Brighton on February 22 2014, this collection of works by British autoethnographers is a fascinating insight into this developing field.

The editors define autoethnography as,

 '… a contemporary qualitative research methodology, demanding unusually rigorous, multi-layered levels of research reflexivity, given that the researcher/s and the researched are the same people.' p.1

' … producing creatively written, detailed, local and evocative first person accounts of the relationship between personal autobiography and culture.' p.2

With its emphasis on post structural approaches to understanding narrative and the self, this field is increasingly compatible with a theoretical understanding of therapy practice. This volume demonstrates how the field has expanded to include narratives of direct interest to counselors and psychotherapists, with articles specifically about the experience of giving and receiving therapy.

For example, Jonathan Wyatt gives a wonderful evocative account of no longer practicing as a counselor. He invites you, the reader, into his experience in a way that is both familiar to the client/practitioner style, yet unique to an autoethnographic approach to the subject.

The editors Short, Turner and Grant each contribute a chapter as individuals, but it is their collective introduction, Storying Life and Lives, that sets out the field for newcomers and contextualizes what is to come for old hands. It is a field that some, more used to quantitative styles of data analysis, may find unusual, not to say uncomfortable. This is a methodology that,

' … celebrates and prizes subjectivity rather than viewing it as an irritant, and can be distinguished from autobiography or memoir by its commitment to rigorous cultural interrogation and analysis.' p.3

The methodology may be new to therapists, but the content will be of serious interest. The editors represent much that is familiar; Short is a retired mental health university lecturer and CBT therapist; Turner a consultant psychological therapist in the NHS; and Grant is a principal university lecturer in health and social sciences, all of whom write engagingly from their experiences in the field.

This theme of personal experience within an examined cultural context, brings together writing from authors and researchers from a variety of disciplines. We find narratives from academics and from professional sportswomen side by side with writing of a counselor reflecting on not practising anymore. We find stories of teachers in the mental health system, students' experience of writing their doctoral theses, attempts to fictionalize autobiography in order to make sense of a life, and increasingly theoretical and technical pieces of meta-autoethnography and the autoethnographic 'I'. All are accessible, engaging and provide that rare thing, a good academic read.

These are wonderful, generously giving accounts of the personal process of the writers. I see this discipline as complementary to the traditions of writers such as Yalom, Casement and more recently Bollas and Grosz, whose books have allowed the reader and writer to enter into a relationship of joint meaning making, so vital to the practice of therapy and counseling.

The editors often use the word 'integrity'; see for example the discussion on page 232. This is a concept that goes to the heart of this collection. To write in this way is risky – to write for yourself is to risk learning what we seek to keep hidden from ourselves, seeing our shadow if you like. To publish that writing is to let others see that process and to risk misunderstanding and the cultural consequences of that misunderstanding. So to write at all, it has to be with personal and academic integrity and that is what this volume shows: good practice at taking legitimate, boundaried personal risk.

And that is where the volume ends, with a conversation about how an,

' … ethically attuned autoethnography' is 'never as clear cut as a neat list would remedy.'

Personally, I don't have enough OCD to really value lists. Not anal enough. Maybe that's why, dear reader, I too am an autoethnographer. A psycho-meta-autoethnographer actually. But that's another story.

Sandy Hutchinson Nunns BA: MA: QTS: Dip TA psychotherapy: Dip Feminist Theology: ATAP (clinical): MBACP (accred.)

Sandy is a psychotherapist, lecturer and therapeutic writing teacher in Brighton. She reads and writes urban fantasy instead of doing housework, and grows great garlic.

Conferences

Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE)
Annual Conference, 10 - 12 December, 2014, Celtic Manor Resort, Newport, Wales, UK.
http://www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2014/

Society for Information Technology in Teacher Education (SITE)
Annual Conference 2 - 6 March, 2015
Las Vegas, Nevada, US. See
http://site.aace.org/conf/

American Educational Research Association (AERA)
Annual Meeting 16 - 20 April, 2015
Chicago, Illinois, USA. See
http://www.aera.net/Home/tabid/10041/Default.aspx

British Educational Research Association (BERA)
Annual Conference 23 - 25 September 2014
Institute of Education, London.

European Conference on Educational Research (ECER)
1 - 5 September, 2014 Porto, Portugal.

University of Brighton

Centre for Learning & Teaching
News of forthcoming events on a range of themes relating to research and pedagogy can be viewed at the following link http://www.brighton.ac.uk/clt/events/.

Doctoral College
More information about the University of Brighton Doctoral College, including the range of research degrees and how to apply, can be found at the following link:
http://www.brighton.ac.uk/researchstudy/doctoral-college/ .

Early Career Research Network
The University of Brighton Early Career Research Network offer a number of facilities and events including an annual conference and conference support funds. For further details see the following link:
http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/ro/new/ecr/home.html

Education Research Centre

The Education Research Centre, Semiar Series, is still in the process of been finalised. However, the first seminarhas been finalised and colleagues may want to make a note. The first semibar in the series is:

16 October 2014
Professor Stephen Ball of the Institute of Education, London. 4pm, Room to be confirmed.

Back copies

Back copies of R.Ed can be viewed online at:

www.brighton.ac.uk/education/red

Notes for contributors

We are now looking for contributions for the next issue Vol.6 No.2, which will be published in December 2014. Contributions for consideration should be sent to Sylvia Willis by 3 October 2014 at:

sylvia.willis@brighton.ac.uk

Short pieces should be approximately 1500 words, and longer pieces between 2500 - 3500 words.

If any article contains photographic images of people or children please ensure that you have their consent for publication on the web.

Harvard referencing conventions should be followed.

Copyright for all published articles remains with the author. By submitting to R.Ed authors acknowledge that all submissions are their own work and that all sources have been acknowledged.

R.Ed
Research in Education

✳ **University of Brighton**

September 2013 Vol. 5, No.2

Special Doctoral Issue

> Developing research students' academic confidence
> Ethics of photo-elicitation with young people
> Bricolage as a methodology
> Three new Education research books published by Routledge

"Observation and theory get on best when they are mixed together, both helping one another in the pursuit of truth. It is a good rule not to put overmuch confidence in a theory until it has been confirmed by observation. I hope I shall not shock the experimental physicists too much if I add that it is also a good rule not to put overmuch confidence in the observational results that are put forward until they have been confirmed by theory."

Arthur Eddington (1935, p.211)
via Professor Dylan Wiliam

University of Brighton