R.Ed

Research in Education

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R.Ed
Research in Education

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the views of the University of Brighton
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Editorial

Welcome to R.Ed, the University of Brighton's
new research in education online journal.

The impetus for this new journal is derived
from the growing importance of research in
education within the University's School of
Education and Education Research Centre
(ERC).

R.Ed will be published twice a year.
Specifically its aim is to provide a vehicle
for news and information about the array of
local and international research in education
occurring in the School.

Research in education at Brighton currently
focuses on the twin areas of policy, practice
and pedagogy, and international education.
The first incorporates research on: creativity
and ICT within Education; learning and
pedagogy; higher education policy and
practice. The second includes research on
first-cycle or basic education and individuals'
understandings of learning within global
contexts.

We are the first university in the country to
achieve an 'outstanding' rating from Ofsted
for management and quality assurance across
the full range of primary, secondary and post-
compulsory (16+) teacher education courses.
As such, new areas of research are being
identified within the School and supported
by the ERC, which exists to facilitate and
nurture research in education whether small
and linked directly to practice, or large and in
collaboration with other institutions here and
abroad.

Specifically this journal seeks to:

- highlight current and critical issues
  in educational research of interest to
  both researcher and practitioner. Such
  interests might range from linkages
  between theory and practice, to the
  interrogation of theories of educational
  structures, policy and experience

- exchange and share information about
  educational research activities in the
  region and by partners further afield
  through short reports, articles

- publicise and disseminate news of events
  (research conferences and seminars),
  new publications, funding opportunities
  to partners and associates

- provide a platform for researchers in education at whatever stage of their research career. We will be looking to promote contributions from a range of researchers; from the professional embarking on their first piece of postgraduate research for their PG Cert or MA Education, to the more experienced voices of research in education.

These aims are reflected in this first edition which carries a range of contributions. David Stephens' piece on Ivor Goodson provides an interesting snapshot into the inspiring longitudinal work being carried out by Ivor Goodson and the team of the Learning Lives project.

In the Research Toolbox section each issue will look at an aspect of educational research methodology. In this first issue Keith Triggs offers an insight into how he reconciled issues of bias and reflexivity in adopting an action research approach to develop his own practice with the Interactive Whiteboard. In another article Jackie Hannay reports the key findings from her MA Education research project which examined factors affecting girls' attitudes to Physical Education and their participation in sport. The ERC and the School of Education have well-established international links and this is reflected in Katrina Miller's interview with Anita Curpen of the Mauritius Institute of Education.

We hope you enjoy reading this first edition of R.Ed and look forward to receiving contributions for the next issue.

David Stephens, Katrina Miller, Keith Turvey

Moving on!

Intellectual endeavour within the School of Education focuses on Education, Learning and Development; all of which is undertaken collaboratively and in partnership with a broad range of educational establishments. As a consequence, our teaching and research profile is built on strong and successful community engagement.

Over the last two years, the School has seen unprecedented developments and currently enjoys a very high reputation for the quality of learning and teaching. Indeed, we are the only institution in the UK to have achieved the highest Ofsted quality ratings for primary, secondary and post-compulsory teacher education.

These endeavours and developments will be further enhanced by the planned opening of the new physical learning environment in 2009. This will bring School of Education and the Education Research Centre colleagues together under one roof and facilitate

closer working relationships and greater collaboration.

An imperative for 2009 and beyond is to capitalise upon these hard-earned developments to articulate our principled, forward-looking and innovative approaches in order to further enhance the School's research profile. The launch of Research in Education (R.Ed) will play a fundamental part in achieving this aim. I am delighted that colleagues in the School now have an opportunity to read and contribute to this online journal and I have no doubt that it will serve to highlight and celebrate their distinctive contributions to research in education.

**Lorraine Harrison
Head, School of Education**

Notes for contributors

We are now looking for contributions to the second issue in February 2009. Contributions should be sent to Sylvia Willis by January 9th 2009 at: sylvia.willis@brighton.ac.uk

Short pieces should be approximately 1500 words, and longer pieces between 2000-3000 words.

If any articles contain 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.

An imperative for 2009 and beyond is to articulate our principled, forward-looking and innovative approaches in order to further enhance the School's research profile.

Learning Lives

Professor David Stephens on Professor Ivor Goodson
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Learning Lives is a significant collaborative research project between the Universities of Brighton, Exeter, Leeds and Stirling, and is funded by a major grant from the Economic and Social Research Council as part of their Teaching and Learning Research Programme.

Learning Lives is a significant collaborative research project between the Universities of Brighton, Exeter, Leeds and Stirling, and is funded by a major grant from the Economic and Social Research Council as part of their Teaching and Learning Research Programme. The project has now finished and the research team are in the process of writing up their findings. A number of summative working papers have been added to the Learning Lives website, which review and summarise main areas of the project and main project findings. They have also produced a research briefing paper (May 2008) and a 'Gateway' book in the TLRP's 'Improving Learning' series (due to be published early 2009). In the summer of 2008 the final project report was completed and is available on their website www.learninglives.org.

Learning Lives is a major longitudinal study which aims to deepen understanding of the meaning and significance of formal and informal learning in the lives of adults. What makes the project relatively unique is not only its length (a data-collection period of almost three years) and size (about 750 hours of in-depth life-history interviews with a group of 120 adults aged between 25 and 85, plus analysis of data from the British Household Panel Survey, a national longitudinal survey), but also the fact that it combines retrospective life-history research with 'real time' life-course research.

The main focus of Learning Lives is on the interrelationships between learning, identity and agency in the life-course. On the one hand, it seeks to understand how identity (including one's identity as a learner) and agency (the ability to exert control over one's life) impact upon learning dispositions, practices and achievements. On the other hand, it seeks to understand how different forms and practices of learning and different learning achievements impact upon individual identities (including learner identities), on individuals' senses of agency, and on their actual capacity to exert control over their lives.

In order to do so, the research examines the meaning, significance and impact of a range of formal, informal, tacit and incidental learning experiences from the perspectives of adult learners. More importantly, it does so against the background of their unfolding lives. The research aims to understand, in other words, the transformations in learning dispositions, practices and achievements which have been triggered by changes in the life-course.

The researchers are particularly interested in the ways in which adults respond to events in their lives and in the processes of learning involved in such responses. Such events may be structured transitions or they may be changes of a more incidental nature, including critical incidents, such as redeployment or illness. Many such events stimulate encounters with new formal and informal learning opportunities. They can also result in forms of tacit learning of which individuals sometimes only become aware (long) after the event. Learning also occurs, however, in relation to the routines of everyday life, where 'turning points' (Strauss, 1959) are not immediately discernible.

A number of working papers have been produced. The Brighton paper comes out of the team led by Professor Ivor Goodson of the Education Research Centre (ERC). This paper explores how the 'original' spaces we inhabit, the spaces we are familiar with and initially know as home, may impact on our identity projects, providing frameworks within which we are able to 'travel', and beyond which we may find it difficult to go. Drawing on examples from a larger data set of life histories collected as part of the Learning Lives project, we suggest that where our places of origin are familiar but insecure, the ensuing estrangement from 'home' provides an impetus for change and learning. Ivor is Co-director of the Learning Lives project with responsibility for overseeing research based in Brighton focussing on migrants and asylum seekers. As he says of his role in the project:

My research has moved from detailed focus on socio-historical approaches to curriculum study into more broad based studies of people's life history. In more recent research I focus on life history methods to understand critical learning incidents in people's lives and their overall life stories and life missions.

In his inaugural lecture 'All the lonely people: the struggle for public meaning and private purpose' Ivor explains the rationale for his interest in learning about lives:

For the past five years – with each new research project I have been involved in – I have noted a change, a dramatic change, in the way that people talked about their lives. Much of my research work is 'life history' work: the detailed historical study of people's life stories

in occupational settings. As Levinson (1979), Levinson & Levinson (1996) and Sheehy (1998) have evidenced, many people define their life around a central 'dream' or mission, or an ideal that they want to attain. This ideal might range from the modest to the heroic, but it is a central heartland in the way that life stories are told and people often judge the 'success' or 'failure' of their lives against this yardstick. Having 'dreams' or 'pet projects' or 'missions' has provided strategic guidance in the business of making a life and leading a purposeful and meaningful life. Without these 'dreams', it would seem life might become mundane, episodic, unfocussed, shapeless and without any overriding meaning or energising passion. One distraction of their life 'missions' would be more than a change from modernist myth to post-modern bricolage: it would represent the erosion of long-established modes of 'making a life'.

For the past 30 years, I have conducted social research in a variety of educational and policy settings. Most commonly, my work has focussed on public services – notably in education, but also in medicine, the police and the social services. I have, if you will, become familiar with the 'ecology' of public services; with the way in which people conduct their professional life and generate, thereby, professional and personal meanings and missions.

For the past 30 years, I have conducted social research in a variety of educational and policy settings

Much of my recent work has focussed on the life histories and work histories of professional people. In this work, there is a chance to confront, in great personal detail, how people manage their lives. Above all, you see how people's sense of purpose and meaning is played out in their workplaces and their own personal 'hinterlands'. In some ways, I often think the work is similar to wildlife experts studying the changing ecology and habitat of a particular species. Over time, such studies provide the researcher with a finely-grounded sense of whether dramatic change is underway. In wildlife studies, global warming is generating such dramatic change at the moment.

Studies of professional life and work are beginning to provide similar snapshots of dramatic change. For the past five years, I have been directing a large research team together with Professor Hargreaves, funded by the Spencer Foundation, to look at 'change over time' in American and Canadian schools. I spent six months each year in America conducting this research. For the other six months, I have been examining similar data in the United Kingdom and Europe.

The research was set up to explore change in schools over a 30 to 40 year period. To do this, we interviewed cohorts of teachers from the 1950s and 1960s (Cohort 1); the 1970s and 1980s (Cohort 2); and the 1990s through to the present (Cohort 3). These interviews focussed on the detailed life histories and work histories of the teachers and hence provide a snapshot of professional life and work.

Most research has its epiphanic moments – if you are lucky. For me, it was trying out some interview schedules with Cohort 3 teachers. We had added a final question: 'are there any projects or interests outside your work that you would like to tell us about?' Cohorts 1 and 2 teachers had spoken about their teaching as a central project, often as a 'passion'. Teaching for many (though, of course, by no means all) was their 'life work' and a source of enduring passion and commitment. Teaching gave their life personal meaning within

a collective project or vocation that expressed deeply-held values and beliefs. In their professional life then, personal meanings and public purposes were held in a balance that provided some sense of purposeful life work.

For Cohort 3 teachers answering my question, this sense of purpose had patently collapsed. In the early stages of the interview, they proffered the opinion that teaching was 'just a job'; 'only a paycheque'; 'I turn up and do what I'm told between 8 and 5'; 'I follow the rules'. Their strategy was one of minimal engagement and teaching was far from being 'purposeful life work'. My epiphany came when they talked about 'other interests or projects'. Here the change in body language was deafening: they leaned forward in their seats, their eyes shone, their hand movements were animated. 'Did they have other interests?' 'Oh yes, I'm planning to get out in the next two years and start a beauty clinic... I'm so excited'; 'I'm training in the evenings to become an occupational therapist, I can't wait to begin my new life'; 'I'm saving up so as to retire at 50 – it's only five years away ... then my life will begin'.

For these professionals, it would seem that the workplace and its meaning are dramatically different from the experience of previous generations, but perhaps teaching is an exception. Other research, however, points to a similar phenomenon: a growing range of studies point to a crisis of personal meaning and collective, public purpose at the heart of Western life. These confirm my belief that the New World Order is in profound danger of 'losing the battle for the hearts and minds' of its own citizens, certainly in the struggle to deliver better public services and a reinvigorated public life.

Apart from being Professor of Learning Theory within the Education Research Centre, Ivor recently joined the Centre for Educational Research at St Edmunds College, University of Cambridge; and is Stint Foundation visiting professor at the University of Uppsala. He is also founding editor of The Journal of Education Policy and Europe and Editor of the journal IDENTITY. He has written and co-authored numerous books concerned with life-history including: Learning, Curriculum and Life Politics: Selected Works by Prof. I. F. Goodson (Routledge Falmer - to be released 2005). Life History and Professional Development: Stories of Teachers' Life and Work, with U. Numan (ed.) (Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2003). Professional Knowledge, Professional Lives: Studies in Education and Change. (Open University Press: Maidenhead & Philadelphia, 2003). Life History Research in Educational Settings: Learning from Lives, with P. Sikes (Open University Press: Buckingham and Philadelphia, 2001). Ivor's full paper can be downloaded from the Learning Lives website at **www.learninglives.org**.

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Gender and Physical Education

Jackie is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education. She completed her MA Education in 2006, researching gender issues in Physical Education. Here she relates some of her key findings and implications for her current role in Initial Teacher Education.

Jackie Hannay
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Introduction

This investigation sought to examine key factors which affect female sport participation. Through a review of literature, key issues emerged surrounding: perceptions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'; a gendered curriculum; and the media and influences of peers, parents and teachers. The fieldwork sought to challenge or support the issues raised in the literature. Questionnaires were given to 28 Year 8 girls, an interview was carried out with two sports women who competed at international level, and a collection of data made from a small range of newspapers over a weekly period. The data collected was both quantitative and qualitative. A key finding was that although attitudes and perceptions appeared to be changing there remains significant work to be done in raising student teachers' and in-service teachers' awareness of the impact of gender stereotyping upon female participation in sport.

Perceptions of femininity and masculinity in the social construction of Sport

With the inception of the Butler Education Act (1944) and the beginning of mass compulsory schooling up to the age of 15, a separate physical education curriculum was established for girls and boys. Kirk (2002), argues that it reflected the role of men and women within society, with men being prepared for war and women to be fit mothers. It was during this time, Kirk goes on to argue, that physical education became:

"Strongly associated with stereotypical views about behaviours and activity that is appropriate for girls and boys respectively and with notably singular images of femininity and masculinity". (P.25)

Masculinity was still associated with power and strength whereas femininity was linked to notions of weakness and vulnerability. From this perspective, games are often seen as gender-specific or performed with different expected outcomes for males and females. These outcomes often address what are perceived to be exclusively masculine and feminine qualities with particular implications for the prestige and appeal of certain sports for girls and women. As Clarke (2003, P. 9) claims, this role was being strengthened through the physical education curriculum in the ways in which 'pedagogical practices and expectations contribute to and reinforce stereotyped ideologies of masculinity and femininity.'

Fletcher (1984) discusses how after the Second World War men took over many prominent professional positions, which included key positions as physical educators. This, it is argued, compounded the issue, further entrenching a curriculum that reflected the needs of boys rather than girls and affected equality issues within the physical education curriculum (Kirk, 2000, cited in Penney, 2002). Although an attempt was made to offer boys and girls the same activities, simply to have provided access to a physical education curriculum that reproduced and reinforced an essentially masculine world was not offering equal opportunities (Williams, 1995 cited in Penney, 2002). The curriculum did not fulfil the needs of many girls nor some boys, who felt threatened by the masculine association of sport (Penney, 2002). Miller (1992, p.32) argued that girls required a curriculum that:

"balances aesthetics, team-games……… and endeavour: extolling attributes of agility, speed, strength, suppleness, stamina, coordination, balance, cooperation and competition, which is accessible to all girls in situations where girls can achieve success, self esteem and physical pride in a supportive, confidence-building environment."

Other commentators and academics in this field have focused on socialisation processes in the home and perceptions of femininity or masculinity associated with sport (Glover, cited in Payne, 2003). Glover argues that many girls continue to be disadvantaged by their upbringing which reinforces masculine and feminine roles. Parents are strong role models and could reinforce this through the covert and overt messages that they provide, for example, finding it more acceptable for boys to get broken limbs and black eyes in sporting activities than girls. Laker et al (2003) focus on teachers' roles. Arguably teachers have stereotypical expectations that have a strong impact on girls' participation levels in sport. These needed to be addressed not only in schools but also in colleges and universities. As Laker et al (cited in Hayes and Stidder, 2003, p.76) suggest, 'pre-service teachers should be made more conscious of gender influences so that they are better prepared to contribute to a broad and balanced curriculum.'

Another area of concern is the media. Although participation levels of women in sporting events has increased substantially

over the last decade the media have failed to respond, with women's events receiving arguably less coverage. The Women's Sports Foundation have been active in challenging this. However, women still receive a fraction of media coverage compared to men and when they do their achievements are often trivialised and sexualised (Duncan, 1990, cited in Creedon, 1994). As Lines and Stidder (2003, p.66) suggested, the media play a central role in forming attitudes and 'can impact on girls' perceptions of the place of games in their lives.'

Thus, much of the literature suggests that girls' lack of confidence and self esteem in comparison with boys with regards to sport is compounded by complex attitudes surrounding masculinity and femininity amongst parents, teachers, the media, society and peers (Piotrowski, 2000). The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation recognises that there are:

"Low levels of participation, poor images of girls' sport and reluctance and self consciousness among girls about taking part in activities on offer" (WSF, 2005).

Teachers, schools and the curriculum obviously have a key role to play in addressing gender and issues around masculinity and femininity impacting on participation in physical activity and sport for both girls and boys. However, that said, it is also worth considering limitations upon the influence that schools may have in this area as Mittler (1999) points out:

"What happens in schools is a reflection of the society in which schools function. A society's values, beliefs and priorities will permeate the life and work of school and do not stop at the school gates" (P.1).

Methodology
The fieldwork addressed the key issues raised in the review of literature through the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data offering breadth and depth to the information gained. Data was gathered through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and the collection of relevant newspaper articles.

Year 8 girls from a state secondary school were selected to complete questionnaires, as according to Flintoff (1996) this is the time when physical activity becomes less attractive to girls and they become more independent from their parents. Greater clarification was gained as to why selections were made by the inclusion of both open-ended and closed questions to 'catch the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour' (Cohen et al 2000, p.255). The sample came from a random class of Year 8 girls (28) where the teacher believed there to be a range of attitudes towards physical education. These were completed prior to the start of their physical education lesson.

Two international athletes were interviewed on separate occasions using a semi-structured approach to ensure that any unpredicted responses were followed up to maximise the information gained. These were recorded and transcribed at a later date. Care was taken to limit non-verbal responses from the interviewer such as inflections, pauses and facial expressions, understanding the impact that the interpretations of these could have on the validity of the research (Schuman 1982, p.23 cited in Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p.19). Information was collected for a weekly period during August 2005 from a range of newspapers including broadsheet, tabloid and local. Photographs of sportsmen and sportswomen's action and non-action shots were counted to establish whether men or women were photographed more often during sporting participation or afterwards. Sports were categorized and coverage of these sports measured so that comparisons could be made with regard to gender.

The quantitative data were indexed and categorized in the hope that 'discerning patterns would emerge' (Wellington, 1996). This was reflected upon, interpreted and key themes established.These data were then combined to find supportive data that could strengthen the findings, or conflicting data that may lessen the argument.

Findings
Piotrowski (2000) stated that sport was associated with characteristics such as physical power, speed, strength. The qualitative data collected supported this. Historically these characteristics were also associated with 'masculinity' and this appears to have changed with girls and women possibly also attributing these characteristics to 'femininity'. The role of women in today's society has altered considerably from the 1880s when women were being prepared for motherhood and men for war, and therefore this would support Askew and Ross' (1988) argument that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are constructed by society. Further research would be required to establish more clearly the characteristics that girls now associate with 'femininity' and with the clarification of this term, but it was clear that traditional boundaries and perceptions of notions of femininity in sport were shifting.

Sports were still found to require the characteristics of power, speed and strength and both the international female athletes were comfortable to develop these attributes in order to succeed. The Year 8 girls reported that they used sport to 'channel their aggression' and some girls enjoyed rugby as it gave them the opportunity to 'get muddy and it's quite dangerous' whereas these were the reasons why others disliked the sport. These contradictory findings appear to suggest that for some, such attributes are factors that would encourage their levels of participation whereas for others they would not. In other words, for some they are still perceived to belong exclusively within male domains, but not for others. The Year 8 girls were offered a broad range of activities as part of their physical education programmes of study which included what were often perceived to be traditional boys' games. The majority of the girls enjoyed the sports offered, with over 80% considering themselves to be 'good' or 'excellent' at these games. Therefore they appeared to gain self esteem, satisfaction and success through engaging in sport which should encourage them to participate.

However in another data gathering activity (Figure 1) the Year 8 girls were shown photographs of the torsos and legs of two athletes and a female 'pop' singer (Kelly Holmes, Paula Radcliffe and Britney Spears). Their responses to these photographs revealed that the two athletes did not have the body types that the girls aspired to. They found the photograph of the body of Britney Spears far more appealing. With this in mind girls may be conscious of how sport develops a body type and this may also have an adverse effect on their participation levels.

The data gathered from newspaper coverage of women's sport revealed that in the period of a week, women's sport represented less than six percent of the total sport coverage on any given day of a week in comparison with the coverage of men's sport. Eighteen events were covered with only five including the coverage of women's events; 299 photographs appeared in a selection of national and local newspapers of men athletes compared to 20 photographs of

Would you want my body?

■ Percentage No
■ Percentage Yes
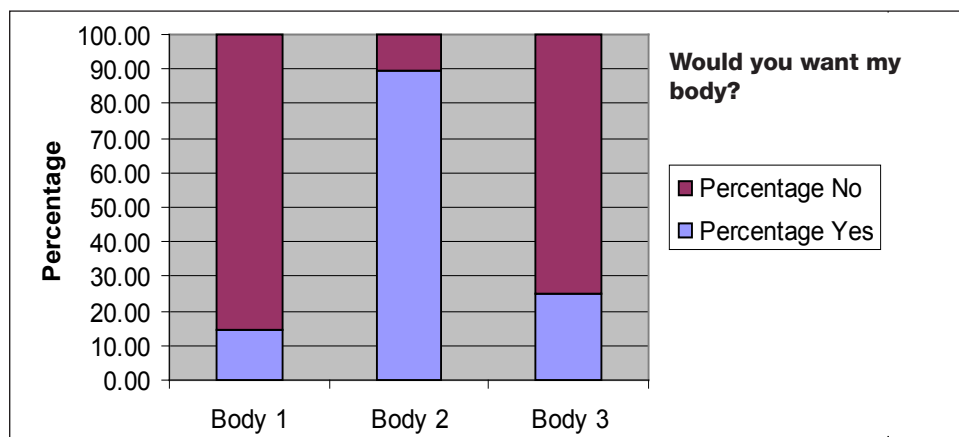
(Fig.1 illustrating the majority of the Year 8 girls questioned found body type 2 – pop singer – more appealing)

women athletes. Furthermore, women had double the amount of inactive shots than men (10% compared with 90%). However, when compared in the context of questionnaire data from the Year 8 girls only a small percentage of them indicated that they read a newspaper, magazine, or watched television to gain information about women's sport. The lack of coverage of women's events could mean that the girls did not consider the media (newspapers, magazines or television) as a source of information for sport. This data would appear to support the argument that the media gave a clear message that women's sports were inferior to men's, through men receiving the majority of media coverage which could in turn have an impact on women's participation. The media appeared to offer little status to women's sporting.

Interviews with the two female international athletes revealed an interesting picture of support mechanisms both within school and beyond. Both had received adult support during their development in their individual sports. This included parental support with travel, money and encouragement, as well as support and encouragement from teachers. Such support mechanisms, it appeared, were vital to their participation in sport indicating the significant impact that teachers, schools and parents can have on pupils' sporting achievements.

Conclusion

The research, although only small scale, revealed some interesting results. As has already been mentioned, the social construction of 'masculinity' in relation to sport may have altered from Piotrowski's (2000) understanding with the characteristics of physical power, speed, and strength being characteristics associated with sport but not necessarily with characteristics of 'masculinity'. Further research would be necessary to establish a common understanding of this term and to determine whether the changes in roles of women

and men in society have indeed merged characteristics that were once associated with one particular gender over another.

The survey of the coverage of women's sport in the media supported the international athlete's observation that:

"…[the media] try to promote us for our looks…and like all her photos are like when she's not playing football or when she's just scored or just standing, but are after when she's changed."

This would suggest that there is a need to develop a critical understanding within student teachers of the negative impact that the media can have on the participation levels of girls in sport, in terms of media coverage and trivialising their achievements. Despite this, encouragingly, girls were developing self esteem and gaining confidence through participation in sport, and adult support from teachers was found to be vital here. Again this would imply that student teachers need to understand the importance of their role in encouraging girls' participation.

Finally the majority of girls found the body shapes of athletes to be incongruent with the body shape they aspired to. Again this raises issues of the portrayal, and arguably the manipulation, of women in sport by the media. The apparent media construction and reflection of what constitutes desirable body images within different genders needs to be raised with student teachers, so that this may inform their teaching of teenage girls and boys. This would enable them to challenge gender stereotyping in sport education as well as raising girls' awareness of the issue, so that they may be in a position to make more informed and critical choices relating to participation in sport. Thus it seems vital that as Mittlers (1991) states we recognise that 'what happens in schools is a reflection of the society in which schools function,' and as such, only by directly raising awareness of

these issues in both student teachers and our pupils will we empower change!

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Dear R.Ed
The university's new Postgraduate Professional Development in Education brochure is now available from the CPD Office. It covers MAs, the Professional Doctorate, research, and consultancy. If you'd like a copy please call 01273 643444 or email soeccpd@brighton.co.uk.

Linden Rowland

R.Ed
University of Brighton

Do you have something to say, but not the time to write an article for us?

Then send us a short piece of news for Research Postcards.

Dear R.Ed
I've delivered Keynote addresses to both the Sussex Learning Network Foundation Degree Symosium entitled "Researching Foundation Degrees", and the Eastern Region Learning and Skills Research Network (ELSRN) in Cambridge entitled "HE in FE: Researching Foundation Degrees."

Yvonne Hillier

R.Ed
University of Brighton

Dear R.Ed
Denise Kingston and I recently organised and spoke at the Early Years Professional Conference entitled "Here to Stay" on 16 May at the Hove Conference Centre. The first of its kind in England, it was a huge success, and drew attendees from right across the South East. See the next issue for more details.

Barbara Murray

R.Ed
University of Brighton

Reconciling issues in action research

Keith Triggs
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Keith Triggs is a Senior Lecturer in Science and Education in the School of Education. Here he discusses his use of an action research approach in his MA Education research

The inception of action research as an approach within the social sciences is often credited to Kurt Lewin who worked with social workers in the 1940s to reflect on their professional practices and social action. The level of interest in action research has fluctuated over the twentieth century but it was taken up by educational researchers, particularly Laurence Stenhouse in the UK who according to Altrichter et al (2008) turned practitioners' 'pragmatic scepticism' for educational reforms and innovation into a positive force for empowering teachers to research and 'observe the fit of the innovation with the specific conditions of their own practice' (P.268). Goodson (1998) raised the important issue of power relationships between teachers and academics particularly when focussing so closely on teachers' classroom practice through action research. However, the action research movement was as Altrichter et al suggest motivated by the desire for teachers to 'be seen as partners in a developmental process' (ibid).

I found myself in a professional context where I was being asked to respond to technological innovation in the form of the Interactive Whiteboard (IWB), a significant part of much wider educational reforms introduced to bring education technologically up to date with the information age. My initial response to this innovation and the early research (Glover et al, 2002: Levy 2002: Becta, 2003: DFES, 2004) which appeared to show that IWBs can have a positive impact on teaching and learning was one of 'pragmatic scepticism,'

(op. cit). This appeared to be a good starting point for an exploration into how the innovation of the IWB might impact and 'fit' with my own practice in teacher education. However, in undertaking an action research approach, what were the advantages within my professional context and how might such 'insider' research compromise the research process?

Utilising an action research approach involved me in two cycles of planning for the use of the IWB: actually utilising the IWB in my teaching; observing and evaluating the effects of the IWB and then reflecting on how the IWB had impacted on changes to my pedagogic practice. This methodology was initially drawn from the model for action research put forward by Kemmis and McTaggert (1998) and McNiff (2002) where practitioners plan for change, act to implement the change and then evaluate and reflect upon its impact. However, it is argued (McNiff, 2002) that models for action research are not representative of the realities practitioners will experience and so I was very aware of the idea that this model was not a simplistic recipe for carrying out action research, more of a guideline for how it might proceed. I was not only aware of this; it actually provided some clear advantages.

Advantages

Action research of the kind I was involved in is a 'flexible, situationally responsive methodology that offers rigour, authenticity and voice' (Cohen and Mannion, 2000 p. 241). The notion of focussing on my own practice meant that I was very much an individual teacher-as-researcher and this had many advantages. Firstly, I had ease of access to my participants and was able to decide when observations took place within my own teaching schedule. I was

able to evaluate and reflect on my teaching on a consistent basis and have access to my own students. In this way, I was very much in control and in a position to adapt my methodology and be flexible. Secondly, I was learning about the use of the IWB as I researched and this enabled me to respond to my situation and adapt my planning and teaching as I learned more about the potential impact of the IWBs. The planning, acting, observing and reflecting cycle fitted very well into my existing practice and allowed me to reflect on my own practice and relate this to theory. Thirdly, there was the idea of personal voice within action research. I wanted to focus on my own practice and how it impacted on my students' learning as this was the key to answering my research question.

However, the idea of basing my action research on my own practice meant that I needed to be very aware of not just the advantages but also the issues such as how my existing ideas, beliefs and attitudes might affect my personal evaluations of my practice. I realised the need to be very critical and honest in my reflections and willing to be surprised and challenged by the views of my students and colleagues. Without this, the rigour and authenticity of my research would be seriously questioned.

Considering the Issues

As a participant researcher looking into my own practice, the issues of bias, validity and reliability were particularly pertinent. I entered the research project having already carried out an action learning project about IWBs. Through my reading and experiences, I gained a generally positive view of the potential benefits of the use of ICT in education. Therefore, these ideas and views were brought in to the research project and

I needed to be aware of this throughout. As Hammersly and Atkinson state:

'Social researchers are part of the social world they study …. All data involves theoretical presuppositions' (1995, p.16).

In my case it was my 'world' I was researching and so I needed to be reflexive and have 'a self conscious awareness of the effects that the participants and researchers have on the research process' (Cohen et al, 2000, p.239). I was both a participant and a researcher and Robertson would support the idea that in this position an action researcher needs to be reflexive, which involves them in acknowledging their initial views and their part in the research, and recognizing that it is impossible to stand outside of it (Robertson, 2000). Therefore, the notion of reflexivity was central to my enquiry. There was a concern that the personal nature of my research might undermine the commitment to realism and the validity of the data. Hammersley and Atkinson would argue that this does not have to be the case suggesting that:

"we can work with what knowledge we have, while recognizing that it may be erroneous and engaging in systematic inquiry where doubt seems justified; and in so doing we can still make the reasonable assumption that we are trying to describe phenomena as they are, and not merely as we perceive them or how we would like them to be"
        (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.18).

I was aware that the use of the IWB in the sessions would have had an impact on my students' responses. If it was used enthusiastically then will they not view it in the same way? I was aware that I was in a position of power and that this might have affected their responses. Also, I had formulated the interview questions and interpreted the students' responses and my existing ideas might well have had some bearing on these interpretations. I realised that I could not claim objectivity and Breur et al (2002) suggest that this is almost impossible even with standardised procedures such as those used in science. Qualitative research such as my action research does not utilise standardised procedures and my impact as the researcher-practitioner was quite obvious. Delamont suggests that as long as qualitative researchers are reflexive, then issues of reliability and validity can be served (Delamont, 2000). Anderson and Arsenault go further and claim that this ability to be aware of and declare personal bias and reflection on research methods can be used as a defence against criticisms of internal validity.

So it appeared that reflexivity was a way

not of overcoming issues of bias, validity and reliability, but of recognising them and trying to grapple with them. However, it is suggested (Burgess, 1989) that reflexive practice needs to include a review of ethical dilemmas and so I needed to consider and reflect upon the ethical traps lying in wait within my action research journey.

Ethical traps
The personal aspect (looking at my own practice) and the fact that I was utilising my own students led to some potentially dangerous ethical traps. Might the participants be affected by the presence of the researcher and adapt their responses in light of what they think is expected of them (Scott and Usher, 1999)? This was a real ethical issue in relation to this research project. How could I be sure that the students' responses had not been affected by their tutor's presence? The answer appeared to be that I could not! Homan (2005) and Anderson and Arsenault (2000) question whether the students' responses can be completely open and honest because they might see that the tutor is in a position of power and want to please them. Delamont suggests that 'the researcher should not waste time trying to eliminate investigator effects; instead they

> I 'finish' the journey as a more informed, critical and reflexive pragmatic sceptic with even more questions about the use of IWBs and my role as a practitioner-researcher

should concentrate on understanding the effects' (2002, p119). This is very much linked to reflexivity and the need for the qualitative researcher to reflect on their processes and ethical issues as explicitly as possible.

Would the utilisation of my own students raise the issue of them feeling coerced and morally obliged to take part (Homan, 2005)? This did inhibit my selection of students for the group interviews. Initially I had wanted to carry out a survey in order to identify and then select for interview students with positive attitudes towards ICT and those with negative ones. Having reflected on this process it was decided that asking specific students for their

participation would have put them in a difficult position in relation to saying no to their tutor. For this reason, students volunteered their support for the project and although this did limit the range of attitudes (most of them were very positive about the use of ICT and IWBs), it did mean that all of them were free to take part, with a lesser degree of coercion!

How informed can informed consent really be? I started to see some flaws in this idea of informed consent and negotiation with participants. Firstly, researchers can promise anonymity but in small scale action research this is difficult to provide because it can be easy to track back a limited number of responses (Kelly, 1989; Homan, 2005). Cohen et al point out that 'there is no absolute guarantee of total anonymity as far as life studies are concerned' (Cohen et al 2000, p.62). In the case of action research McNiff et al (2003) believe that although it is important to try to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, it is particularly difficult to do so because action research by definition is about yourself and therefore others can identify themselves and one another through you. This issue was partially addressed by not publishing any of the names of students involved in the project.

Cohen et al (2000) raise the issue of comprehension and question whether or not all of the participants will fully understand the nature of the research project. In my research, the participants were adults and no children were involved. Walford (1998) would suggest that because of this, it is easier to explain issues relating to the research. I believe that this was partially true, but in comparison to my participants, I was much more knowledgeable about the research and so they were only partially informed before giving their consent. Cohen et al offer an answer to this issue when stating that as long as "every effort to explain to the researched what one was trying to do in order that their comment might be as informed as possible; they are competent enough to volunteer themselves" (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 51).

Boydon at el (1992) concur and believe that a researcher only needs to offer the bare bones in their initial information. This would appear to be particularly sensible in relation to the fluid nature of action research when as Burgess (1989) states, it is not always possible to specify exactly what data and will be collected or how it might be collected. Therefore, on reflection, I was happy that I had provided the students with the 'bare bones' and they were adequately informed.

Personal Response
Basing my project on my own practice and immersing myself in a world of the

practitioner-researcher did have a number of benefits but also many issues relating to bias, validity and reliability. There were also some difficult ethical issues relating to the use of my own students within the research. The key things I have learned are that one must not let these issues paralyse the research process but one must grapple with them and be honest with oneself about their potential implications. Reflexivity appears to be a key way of partially reconciling issues of bias, validity and reliability within the action research process, particularly when researching one's own practice.

In my case, focussing on my use of the interactive whiteboard and what my students thought about it was enlightening and allowed a real depth of critical reflection on my own pedagogic practice. I have been on a journey. I started as a pragmatic sceptic about interactive whiteboards. Throughout the journey I have learned about my practice, pedagogy and the use of ICT as a potential tool for interactive teaching and learning. Just as importantly, I have learned about the research process through wrestling to reconcile the issues associated with it. I 'finish' the journey as a more informed, critical and reflexive pragmatic sceptic with even more questions about the use of IWBs and my role as a practitioner-researcher. Rather than reaching the end of my journey, I have arrived at a new starting point.
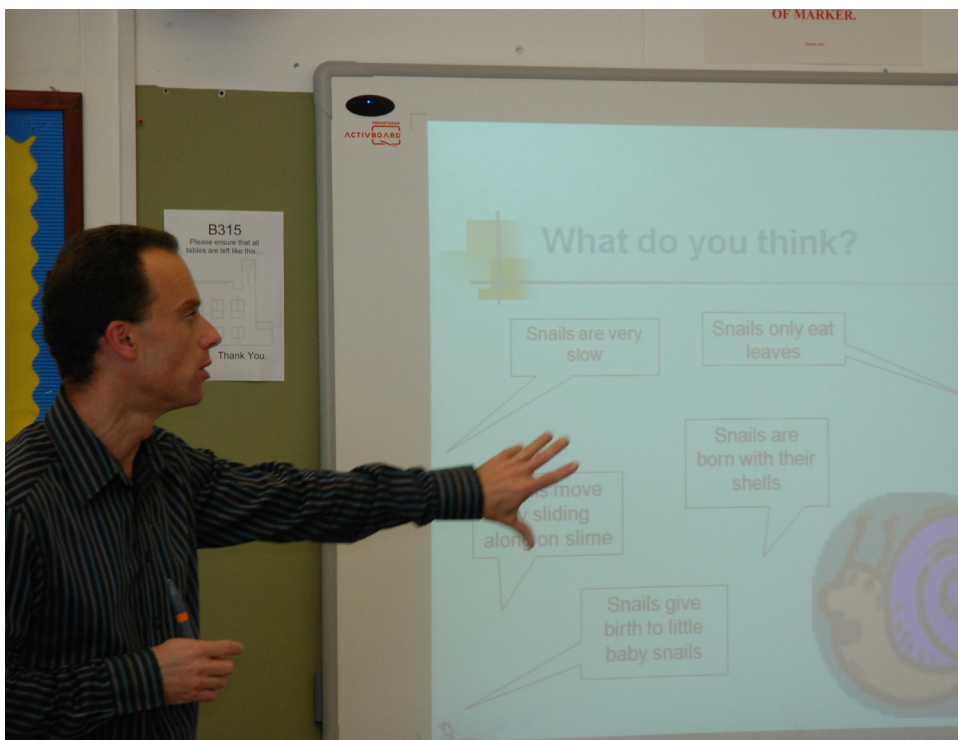
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Partnership with the Mauritius Institute of Education

For the past 10 years, the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) and University of Brighton have offered a Masters programme to education professionals on the island. Such a sustained and collaborative programme is highly unusual because, possibly uniquely, the programme has not only produced more than 150 Masters level practitioners in the education sector in Mauritius and the region, but has also produced many mutual benefits and developments in both institutions.

Anita Curpen and Katrina Miller have taken a novel and important step in evaluating the programme ten years on, not as one would expect simply from a quality assurance point of view, but importantly from the viewpoint of the central theme of this year's International Education Research Conference: how far does the UoB@MIE MA Education programme recognise our post-colonial globalising times; are we practising a new form of colonialism through teacher education or to what extent is ours an empowering decolonising model for both institutions? As the two authors discuss in our interview with them, what possibilities are there for creating different practices and structures in our developing collaboration that will not replicate an old colonial pattern?

Newshound:
So can you tell us what the aims of the programme are to begin?

Anita:
First of all we aim to impact in our schools at classroom level through improving professional practice of teachers, thereby raising more inclusive pupil achievements. Second we want to impact at the MIE with improved HE practices and build Masters level capacity in teaching and research. Also, and perhaps most importantly, because of the unusual sustained relationship between us, there has been significant impact at Brighton: enhanced cultural sensitivity, M-level capacity building also, and internationalised practices and perspectives.

Newshound:
That's unusual isn't it? To claim that Brighton courses benefit from the MIE experience?

Katrina:
Yes, we think it is. Largely this is due to the fact that we have been working with the MIE for about 10 years now. But also it's to do with the design of the programme and the expectation that we are working together, that it is a truly collaborative project where Brighton and MIE colleagues work together. And not just at the MIE. We have been lucky over the years to be able to welcome MIE tutors to Brighton on study visits and these have been fantastic opportunities on both sides. We have shared our teaching experiences, talked about common research interests, and both sides have experienced the management meetings and learning resources in each of the two institutions. So in this way the achievement is not just for teachers undertaking the programme, but there is learning for tutors too in practices and strategies for effective international teacher education.

Newshound:
And what do the students think of all this? What impact has there been on the teachers who have completed the MA Education?

Anita:
Well what we have noticed are some really important changes on a range of levels. There are more than 150 MA Education graduates working in the secondary sector now in all the zones. It's interesting to see how many of these teachers have been promoted to senior posts in their schools and colleges. Many are now Deputy Rector and Rectors. And there is evidence that schools are more confident to apply the important learning from the MA course which is aimed at improving teaching and learning directly. Coursework and assignments are geared to improving practice and developing those skills that a professional teacher needs in today's education world. Management and leadership as well as curriculum and assessment are all features of the modules so the course really is about impact in the classroom and school, and not simply an academic award for the teacher. A lot of them tell us that one of the major outcomes is their personal increased confidence at work in suggesting and following through on improvements to teaching and learning.

Katrina:
And we've also noticed how Brighton tutors change in terms of the way we think about educating students back at Brighton. Working at the MIE means we learn a lot about the issues in schools here in Mauritius and use these stories and experiences back in our teaching at Brighton. Many of the problems and concerns are common in both contexts; many are specific because of the different national policies and initiatives in the two countries. Some of the conversations that take place are fascinating as teachers share their professional experiences with tutors and vice versa. What's great for us is the capacity for internationalizing our teaching back at Brighton – sometimes teacher education can become very local-focused rather than reflecting the common experiences that we all contend with every day.

Newshound:
So how do you see the partnership developing in the future?

Anita:
Well as we said in our paper at the Conference, the MA Education programme is now facilitating study visits to Brighton for colleagues who are taking responsibility for the design and delivery of modules on the course. We are also very excited that this year's International Conference is going to be repeated next year and hopefully the year after. This will establish and strengthen the lead role that the MIE is playing in teacher education in the region. That's why we have deliberately called it a Conference for the Indian Ocean rim countries and small island states. The idea came from discussion between the three convenors, myself, Vickram Ramarhai, and Katrina. We were so pleased to welcome colleagues from Reunion, Madagascar, Australia, Singapore and Malaysia as well as Nigeria. Next year will be even better I'm sure. Then the research capacity at the MIE is really strengthening too and we hope also to begin serious publication and dissemination of teacher education research in the region.

Katrina:
We also have a rolling programme of colleagues who will contribute here at the MIE, and are hoping to be able to arrange work in schools for them with our graduates in the zones so that professional networking becomes the norm to support continuing improvements in the schools. We want to exploit every opportunity for a really dynamic and collaborative way of working here where everybody gains from the shared experiences. This is what Anita and I have called a 'hybrid' model of postgraduate teacher education, where the key feature is something that changes and benefits all of us in each institution and creates new knowledge which benefits both institutions. It means a lot of open discussion and a sharing of different perspectives, and is very exciting!

Newshound:
This first Education Research Conference has clearly been very successful in marking the MIE as a leading regional player in teacher education research. The 2nd Conference is already in planning stages and we look forward to reporting on its developing success next year.

Association for Information Technology in Teacher Education (ITTE) Research Conference 2008
28-29 November 2008
The Møller Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge
www.itte.org.uk/

Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) Annual Conference 2008 "Valuing Higher Education"
9-11 December 2008
Liverpool - The Adelphi Hotel
www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2008

Computer Assisted Learning (CAL) Conference 2009 "Learning in Digital Worlds"
23-25 March 2009
University of Brighton
www.cal-conference.elsevier.com/

Brighton Education Research Conference 2009
20 June 2009
University of Brighton
www.brighton.ac.uk

Education Research Seminars
Throughout 2008/9
University of Brighton
www.brighton.ac.uk/education/research/ conferences/index.php?PageId=500

University of Sussex Education Research Seminars
Throughout 2008/9
University of Sussex
www.sussex.ac.uk/about/research/

Mel Norman's EdD research has focused on an in-depth look at the new key stage 3 geography curriculum and found that certain aspects of what is being promoted as a new approach, bears a strong resemblance to what was being promoted as a new approach to the humanities in the late 1960s. Is there really anything new about the new curriculum? More details in the next edition!

Congratulations are due to the following students upon the recent completion of their doctorates: Patrick Mouvogny: Mel Ford: Noralf Mork: Sue Greener: Stewart Glaspole: Sharie Coombes and most recently Nadia Edmond and Helen Beaumont.

In 2009 Dr Joanna Swann of the School of Education will be on study leave to write a book on teaching. The leave is funded by The Karl Popper Charitable Trust and the University of Brighton's Education Research Centre and School of Education. Joanna also has a number of forthcoming publications: 'Learning; an evolutionary analysis' published in 'Educational Philosophy and Theory'; 'Student-initiated curricula: a cornerstone of learning for democracy' published in 'The Yearbook of the Institute of History'; and 'Popperian selectionism and its implications for education, or What to do about the myth of learning by instruction from without?' published in Parusniková, Z. and Cohen, R. S. (eds) 'Rethinking Popper.'

CAL09 'Learning in Digital Worlds'
This international conference will be taking place here in Brighton on 23-25th March. It brings together a community of educators and researchers focusing on how digital technologies can support learning. There are 3 internationally notable keynote speakers: Roger Saljo from Gothenburg, Josie Taylor from the Open University, and David Cliff from Bristol University. This is a great opportunity to let people know more about the interesting work that is going on here at Brighton across the University, from the School of Education to CMIS and the Creativity Centres. Avril Loveless is the Chair of the Conference.

Dr Sandra Williams, Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, recently presented a paper at an international symposium held in Lyon entitled 'Languages, Literature and the Media' organised by the Fédération Internationale des Langues et Littératures Moderns. Sandra also has two publications currently in press: 'That Wasn't There a Couple of Minutes Ago; Australian Rain Forest Meets the South Downs', in 'What do You See? International Perspectives on Children's Book Illustration'; and 'It's All Coming Together: An encounter between Implied Reader and Actual Reader in the Australian Rain Forest' in 'Literacy' United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA)

Pippa Totraku & Keith Turvey won a small grant from the TDA (£5000) to research Early Years and Foundation Stage (EYFS) practitioners' experiences of incorporating ICT into their pedagogical practices. The aim is to inform a review of the provision for the EYFS students in terms of ICT.

Dr Carol Robinson joined the Education Research Centre in October as a Senior Research Fellow. She will join Jen Colwell in developing the research projects in the ERC. She will be crossing the A27 from Sussex University, where she was engaged in a wide range of research projects, from pupil voice to e-learning. We welcome Carol to our community.

Avril Loveless has recently acted as Guest Editor for a Special Issue of 'Education and Information Technologies'. This issue selected papers presented at a recent conference in Prague in June 2008. The conference theme was 'Valuing the individual learner', and participants came from all over Europe and Australia. Keith Turvey's paper 'Student teachers go online; the need for a focus on human agency and pedagogy in learning about 'e-learning' in initial teacher education' is published in the Special Issue, as is the keynote that Avril Loveless presented with her colleagues Tony Fisher, Tim Denning and Chris Higgins entitled 'Create-A-Scape: mediascapes and curriculum integration'.

The Association for IT in Teacher Education holds a biannual conference on 'work in progress' for colleagues undertaking research at all levels. This year, Yrjo Engestrom, a key thinker in 'activity theory', will be the main speaker. The sessions are all informal, and offer the opportunity for colleagues to try out ideas, ask questions and encourage each other in their research.

Brian Marsh took part in a research project as part of his EdD working with Nick Mitchell (University of Nottingham). It involved using live and interactive video technology between schools and the University of Sussex for the training of Science PGCE students. The project was presented at BERA in a paper entitled 'Bringing Theory to Life? - Findings from the evaluation of the University of Sussex In-School Teacher Education Programme (InSTEP).'

Jane Briggs, Senior Lecturer in the School of Education and Dr Viv Ellis from the University of Oxford recently attended the British Association for Applied Linguistics and Cambridge University Press Invited Seminar Series 2008 at the University of Strathclyde where they presented a paper entitled 'Teacher Education: What applied linguistics needs to understand about what, how and where beginning teachers learn.'