



> Articles

The age of consent
Turning theory into practice
Emergent Children's Literature

> Notice board

Conferences & Publications

> Research Toolbox

**Reflections on
practitioner research**

Contents

-
- 02 Editorials & Notes for contributors**
-
- 03 RAE**
Paul Griffiths, Dean of the Faculty of Education and Sport, and Prof. Yvonne Hillier comment.
-
- 04 The age of consent: Children as participants in educational research**
Prof. Roger Homan...
-
- 07 Turning theory into practice**
Brian Marsh
-
- 11 In conversation: David Stephens with doctoral student Maria Cristina Briani**
-
- 13 Reflections on practitioner research**
Nadia Edmond
-
- 16 Researching Emergent Children's Literature**
Dr Sandra J Williams
-
- 18 Case study: a flexible yet robust strategy for research design?**
Marian Willmer
-
- 21 News and Events Calendar**
-

Editorial

The second issue of a new journal is a challenge to any editorial team to sustain and build on the initial enthusiasm and energy that went into launching the journal in the first instance. We are pleased to report that R.Ed Volume 1 Issue 2 has been just as engaging and exciting to get up and running as the first issue of the journal. There have been some changes in that Dr Carol Robinson who is a Senior Research Fellow in the Education Research Centre (ERC) has now joined the editorial team replacing Dr Katrina Miller. We would all like to welcome Carol but also thank Katrina for her enthusiasm and support in getting the journal off the ground.

There is a range of articles in this issue, and in particular associated educational research in international contexts is featured with an interview with one of our PhD students, Maria Cristina Briani, about her journey travelled to postgraduate study here at Brighton University. There is also a report from Dr Sandra Williams of the School of Education about her research into emergent children's literature in international contexts. There is not space here to mention everything in this issue but we believe all articles will be of interest to those involved in education research – further evidence of our rapidly evolving research culture in the School of Education.

We are already looking forward to and planning our next Centenary issue which will be due out in December 2009, so please get thinking and writing or get in touch if you want to discuss any ideas for contributions!

Carol Robinson, David Stephens, Keith Turvey

March 2009
Vol.1, No. 2
ISSN 1759-1864

www.brighton.ac.uk/education/red

Editors

Professor David Stephens
Dr Carol Robinson
Keith Turvey

Production

Philippa Bandurek
Sylvia Willis

Telephone

+44 (0)1273 644533

Email

sylvia.willis@brighton.ac.uk

Web

www.brighton.ac.uk/red

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Brighton or the Education Research Centre



Research Success

Paul Griffiths

The recent outcome of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) has provided important external endorsement of the quality of Education research at Brighton. The excellent results confirmed thirty-five percent of our education research as 'world leading' or 'internationally excellent', and a further thirty percent as 'internationally recognised'.

This sends a very clear national, and international message about the quality of our education research. The results are a tribute to those who contributed in various ways directly to the RAE and also to the increasing number of colleagues who are research active in education playing an important part in the developing research culture here.

The outcomes provide us with strong encouragement for the further development of education research at Brighton, and especially its links with learning and teaching, as we move to the next stage of our development.

In that connection the recent launch of 'R.Ed' is particularly timely - it is already proving to be a valuable means of sharing practice and raising awareness of current research issues. I hope that you will read it with interest and contribute to it in the months ahead.

Yvonne Hillier

The University of Brighton has done very well in the last RAE and we are particularly pleased that our submission for educational research achieved a grade of 35% at world leading (4*) and internationally excellent (3*) levels. On average, 8% of the University's output was graded at 4*. Educational research managed 10% of its output at 4*. We also managed a further 30% at internationally recognised level and 30% which is nationally recognised.

We are extremely pleased with this result – we have done very well by comparison with other newer universities and the comment by the panel argued that research income was very high per research active staff and a significant percentage of our esteem indicators were at 3* (40%) and 4* (10%).

We do not yet know the level of research funding we will receive on the basis of the RAE outcome but we are delighted that the hard work of our research active staff has led to our success.

However, there is an important job to do for future success and we look forward to working with colleagues in the School of Education as they continue to develop their research or begin working towards becoming research active

A special thank you to David Stephens for the enormous effort made to shape the RAE submission for educational research, and to Julie Canavan who assisted in this process.

Notes for contributors

We are now looking for contributions to the third issue in December 2009. Contributions should be sent to Sylvia Willis by 22 September 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.

The age of consent: Children as participants in educational research

Professor Roger Homan has made significant contributions to the debate on ethics in education research over a number of years. In this article he shares his observations on some of the current issues in carrying out research with children in an era when the child's voice is in resurgence.

Professor Roger Homan

R.Homan@brighton.ac.uk

At what age may we trust participants to consent on their own behalf to participate in our enquiries? Ask such a question among trainee researchers and one may expect to hear nominated each of the even teenage years. This is not unreasonable: it is thought to go along with the notion of reaching a 'majority', with eligibility to fight for one's country or engage in sexual intercourse. The principle common to these legal notions is the protection or safeguarding of the individual; the intention is to avoid premature exposure. In relation to participation in research, however, the principle has in recent years shifted toward one of entitlement and by implication of competence; it is akin more to the right to vote. Unlike the franchise, however, it is no longer standardized by age but individuated by aptitude.

The legal framework within which principles are established for the engagement of children in research is broadly conceived and international in character, though national in specification. In the last 20 years there has been a steady development of protocols, prompted largely by a concern for the physical and economic well-being of children and for the validation of policies relating to children by their being involved in its formulation (Stalford, 2000). Simultaneously, a new 'sociology of childhood' has gathered momentum, challenging the passive and marginal roles to which children were previously relegated and calling for the child's voice to be heard and honoured: see, for example, the volume of papers collected by James and Prout (2001).

Gillick competence

The notion that in certain matters a fixed age was to apply derived from the notion that children were akin to the property of their parents (Alderson, 1993, P. 43). This proprietorship was relaxed in the mid-1980s when Mrs Victoria Gillick took her Health Authority to court seeking an assurance that her daughters under the age of 16 could not without parental consent be given contraceptive advice. The position is now that such an assurance may not be given: if persons



of whatever age have the capacity to understand medical advice and the undertakings to which it leads, they may seek and receive it without the cognizance of parents or carers. The principle extends beyond the receipt of advice and beside its applications in the domains of health and medicine, the ethical obstacles in the way of educational research are seldom insurmountable. The extent to which the Gillick principle of competence is now applied is demonstrated by a recent medical case which was put to the legal test in November 2008. Hannah Jones aged 13, having undergone prolonged treatment of leukaemia, suffered a hole in the heart and doctors wanted to give her a transplant: her decision to decline further surgery was upheld in the courts. Prompted by the particular case by which the issue of consent entered the legal domain, the ensuing debate

deployed the vocabulary of rights (as though of property) and the effort was to adjudicate the allocation of these between children and responsible adults. Always, it was insisted that the welfare of the child was paramount. The problem is then one of who is most competent to determine such welfare – the child, the parent or the agencies of the state? It will be argued below that the researcher has a duty to take a view of the interests of all affected parties and not only of active respondents.

The practicality of observing and applying the Gillick principle in classroom research may militate against it. In many a class of pupils it will be likely that some will be competent to decide for themselves while in other cases it would be wiser to send a letter home. Few teacher-researchers would want to be selective in this event and have to explain why some are judged competent and others are not. There is a risk in allowing all to consent on their own behalf, while a letter for all to take home denies some pupils their legal entitlement to speak for themselves. If the research act does not involve any physical risks, one ethically acceptable procedure may be to give good notice of the assumption of consent, explaining the research design and enabling parents and carers to opt out if they desire.



In judging the competence of research participants, the magnitude of risk is indeed a significant variable. It is recognized that medical practice (Alderson, 1993, P. 44) varies according to the implications of the medication or procedure. So too in educational research the investigator will be in a position to judge whether participants have sufficient vision and detached interest to make a responsible decision; it is one thing to invite short written evaluations of a curriculum component, but another to commit periods of educational time to a far-reaching survey of pupils' backgrounds that are likely to be of more interest to the investigator than beneficial to the participants.

'Participants' and 'subjects'

In recent years the fashion has been to avoid use of the term 'subjects' on the grounds that persons helping in research are not subordinate to it. We prefer rather to talk of 'participants': this nomenclature is studiously observed in the revised guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA). But there continue to be subjects in research and they may or may not be participants at the same time. Pupils who talk to investigators are likely to convey

The risk is that the privacy and confidentiality offered to the participant means that third parties will have neither access to data about them nor the right to reply.

information about the adults in their homes; students may refer to their teachers. In these cases the respondents are acting as informants who have incidentally observed an environment distant from the research act and, one supposes, without having secured the formal consent of actors within it. Arguably, the consent of the surrogate observer is less appropriate than that of the observed.

The question of who are the effective subjects of research may be applied more widely. A teacher who in the cause of informing her own research introduces in her classroom a particular resource or pedagogy will herself be the one being observed; the interpretation of her presentation will perhaps draw evidence in the form of pupil responses but it will not be personal to the pupils. Always supposing that such risks as emotional strain are negligible and the cost of educational time will be small (were it not for the need to inform and secure consent), we may propose that it is time to take a utilitarian view of research ethics; let us seek the greater good rather than adhere to a cautious code more suited to clinical trials in, for example, the pharmaceutical industry.

These observations challenge what is regarded as correct nomenclature.

So the rationale in talking of participants rather than of subjects is to avoid the sense of them as passive factors in social and educational research. We would not have them be subject to the investigator. But when we recognize the limited capacity of interviewees to honour those whose behaviour inevitably enters the discourse, we will note that there are subjects; albeit they are not participants. In the case of children or students, they may readily talk of parents and carers, of teachers and peers. The investigator learns about these individuals but, if we have trusted to Gillick competence, they have not been invited to give their consent.

The BERA guidelines (2004, p.8) urge that parents or responsible adults be informed if participation by their children incurs any risk: as often with ethical guidelines, the advantage of the recommendation is to indemnify the researcher. The risk, however, is that the privacy and confidentiality offered to the participant means that third parties will have neither access to data about them nor the right to reply. Typically, a teacher holding a position of responsibility within a school may, in the course of seeking a higher degree with the prospect of professional advancement, conduct a study within the school involving pupils as individual interviewees or as a focus group. There is in such an event a high probability of participants offering identifiable evaluations of the practice of the investigator's colleagues. Or again, a researcher who is interested in factors affecting literacy might ask pupils to agree or otherwise to a series of statements such as:

- I possess my own dictionary.
- I borrow books from the public library.
- I am sometimes given books for my birthday.

Each of these will yield some insight of the participant as a passive factor but much more about the home from which the child comes, whose adults are the disenfranchised subjects of the enquiry.

Under Data Protection legislation third parties have the right of access to stored data that are personal to them and the BERA guidelines (2004, P. 9) treat extensively of advised procedures. However, the legal position begs a number of questions that persist in professional practice. Out of loyalty, a teacher-researcher may elect not to record data that are prejudicial to colleagues; nevertheless, they abide in the awareness when it comes to preferment and to data stored in the mind there is no legal entitlement. Again, data in both cases may be personal in kind but only identifiable by speculation and not such as to justify the overriding of the prior assurance of confidentiality.

Is it enough to inform?

One of the problems with consent which is particularly pronounced when children are involved is the insufficiency of its foundation upon information. That a participant is competent to be informed does not mean that he or she is competent to survive unscathed the asymmetric relationship that will ensue. For that experience the investigator has privileged insight and trained skills. It has the characteristics of a relationship of power in which any participant is vulnerable. The proper precaution of ensuring that voluntary informed consent is secured without duress before research gets under way (BERA, 2004, P. 7) is belied by some standard procedures in the field. An easily recognized instance of this is the technique of overcoming the resistance of respondents by using the early items of a questionnaire or interview to soften or break down the defences of the participant in readiness for sensitive or intrusive questions. Bell (1999), who is extensively used and respectfully regarded as a manual and checklist for those making their first steps in the field, reminds her readers of the prevalent view that sensitive questions should be reserved until the closing stages of a schedule when abandonment will mean that not all is lost (Bell, 1999, P. 124-25). In a likewise highly esteemed manual, Cohen and Manion (2007, P. 124-25) draw upon the practice of William F. Whyte (in a social setting remote in time and place from the English classroom) and note that the resistance of some groups of respondents may be circumvented by the grooming of insiders or, as we would now call them, 'moles'. To speak of grooming and of moles will certainly alarm the responsible teacher who would want to stop short of Whyte's strategy; it has been submitted above, however, that children are frequently used – albeit not wittingly recruited – as moles by dint of their own confiding manner with trusted adults. Having informed participants that they can withdraw at any time, the guile is to disincite them to do so and so to proceed that awareness of that right will lapse. Children are still more vulnerable than adults: they are, for example, notoriously poor guardians of the privacy of their families. They are not equipped to be otherwise by the intelligence that there is a research act in progress, that they will be asked questions, that participation is voluntary and so on. What is needed, therefore, is more than information: it is training for participants.

Rushd

The principle of *rushd* takes its name from that of the twelfth-century scholar of Moorish Spain Abâ al-Walid Muhammad Ibn-Rushd, usually known in the west as Averroës. His distinctive contribution was to harmonize his Islamic faith with Aristotelian philosophy. Ahead of his time Averroës was much occupied with the condition of women, particularly in respect of closures upon their awareness and aspirations. He wrote,

Our society allows no scope for the development of women's talents. They seem to be destined exclusively to childbirth and the care of children, and this state of servility has destroyed

their capacity for larger matters. It is thus that we see no women endowed with moral virtues (Salloum 3).

It is in respect of consent to marriage that the principle of *rushd* is invoked. Information about procedures – of the kind that counts for the informing of research participants – is palpably inadequate. Those undertaking either course must know fully what they are letting themselves in for, understand the effect it is likely to have on them, and be prepared to hold their own.

Recommendations

The observations offered above prompt the suggestion of three ways in which ethical practice might be profitably reviewed:

First, in order to address the power relationship between researcher and participant in the conduct of fieldwork, some training might be offered on issues such as trust, privacy and confidentiality. Second, those such as parents and teachers who are likely to be featured as third parties may be consulted beforehand and/or the assurance of confidentiality should be withheld in respect of them. There are, of course, risks of reactivity in such a procedure but they are arguably subordinate to the case for access to data. Third, more attention should be given to the care of vulnerable participants once the research is under way; this will involve the avoidance of questions and tactics that take participants off-guard or prompt them to reveal information in an unconscious way.

On the one hand we may ensure children's awareness of their rights in respect of intended procedures and, on the other, we cannot guarantee their skill or wit to withstand any advantage that may be taken of them, whether or not intended and whether or not institutionalized in standard research practice. It is with regard to this problem that we may consider the proposals of Peter Newell (2000) and others for the appointment of a commissioner to monitor and safeguard the rights of children.

References

- Alderson, P. (1993) *Children's Consent to Surgery*. Buckingham: Open University.
- Bell, J. (1999) *Doing Your Research Project: a guide for first-time researchers in education and social science*. (3rd edition). Buckingham: Open University.
- BERA (British Educational Research Association) (2004) *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*.
- Cohen, L. and Manion, L. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.
- James, A. and Prout, A. (eds.) (2001) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Childhood*. London: Routledge.
- Newell, P. (ed.) (2000) *Taking Children Seriously: a proposal for a Children's Rights Commissioner*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Salloum, H. 'Averroës: the great Muslim philosopher' (http://alhawar.com/habib_salloum_averroes.htm).
- Stalford, H. (2000) 'The developing European agenda on children's rights' *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 22, 2: 229-36.

InSTEP: Turning theory into practice

This article discusses and evaluates the University of Sussex InSTEP Project. It draws upon some findings from the evaluation of the University of Sussex In-School Teacher Education Programme (InSTEP).



Brian Marsh
B.Marsh@brighton.ac.uk

This was an initiative aimed at PGCE Science trainee teachers. InSTEP-type programmes appear to have the potential to support trainee teachers in connecting theoretical and practical aspects of their learning at an early stage in their development by linking theoretical concepts to observed classroom activity, and at the same time developing the trainees observational skills prior to embarking on teaching practice (Mitchell et al., 2008). In this sense, the InSTEP project may be described as supporting an accelerated induction to the PGCE programme. The purpose was to bring 'excellent teaching practice' to an audience of trainee teachers so that:

1. Trainees would observe in real time good practice in these and other areas as part of their PGCE programme. Rather than just being taught they would observe 'theory in action'
2. There would be subsequent discussion of these activities with the teachers involved, enabling reflection to occur.

While research literature exists which examines a number of potential advantages and limitations of the use of video in teacher education and of other initiatives which have certain features in common with InSTEP (e.g., Sherin and Han, 2004 and Abell and Cennamo, 2004), there is little focus in such literature on the extent to which such technological developments have assisted student or beginner teachers' understanding or use of theory. What follows hopes to make some impression on this gap in the evidence base.

InSTEP Infrastructure

The centrepiece of the project was a two-way, fully interactive video system comprising cameras and broadband technologies installed both in the university and in six partner schools chosen for their expertise in a specific area of Science Education. Audio and video live feeds were relayed in both

directions between the classroom and the university. Such an infrastructure enabled Science teachers and trainee teachers to observe classroom activities from distant sites in InSTEP-equipped schools and the University in 'real time'. These activities were followed by subsequent live discussions.

Such a configuration offered a variety of interactions to support the trainees. These included university-based sessions structured around the live observation of remote classrooms (i.e. one in a partnership school) with the possibility of the trainees being able to interact with classroom practitioners, tutors and peers. Also there were 'showcase events' where synchronous teaching of both trainees (in the university) and sixth formers (in a school laboratory) were undertaken.

InSTEP is different from (and uses different protocols from) video-conferencing, although

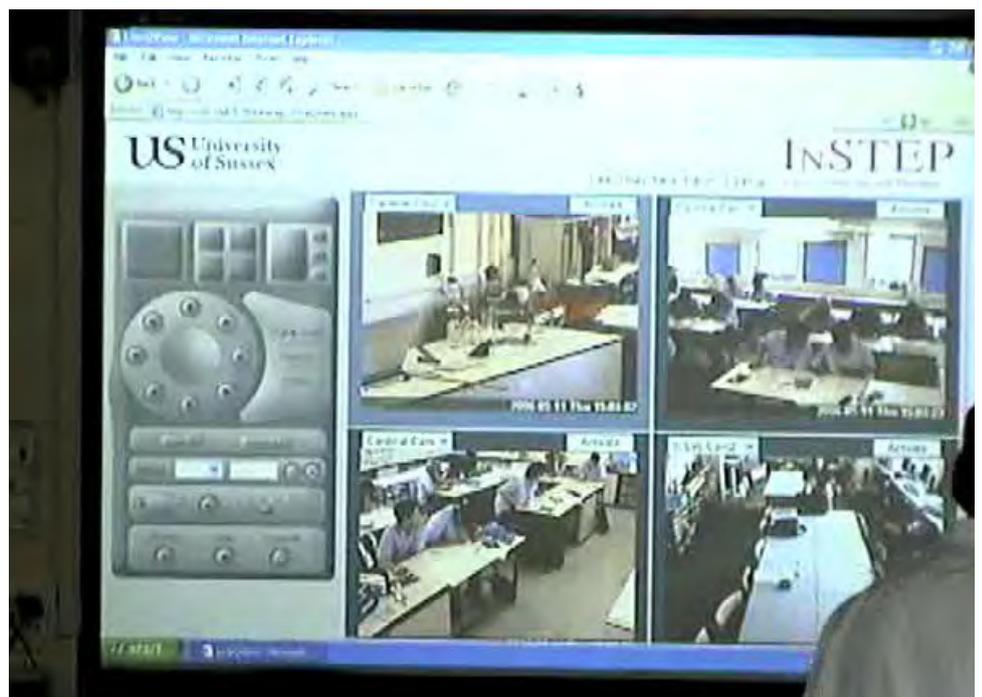


Figure 1: The Split Screen View at the University

and limitations of the use of video in teacher education and of other initiatives which have certain features in common with InSTEP (e.g. Sherin and Han 2004, Abell and Cennamo 2004), there is little focus in such literature on the extent to which such technological developments have assisted student or beginner teachers' understanding or use of theory.

Methodology

Collection of data was undertaken through a collaborative and iterative effort between external and internal evaluators. They worked together on design issues and instrument development, and raw data was shared. The data generation was designed so that participant groups were not contacted exclusively by one team. Multiple data generation methods were used involving both investigator and methodological triangulation.

During the summer of 2005 initial semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 6 mentors from the agreed participating schools and 2 university tutors. In the following summer (2006) there were semi-structured interviews with 2 participating mentors and 2 university tutors, as well as a questionnaire completed by 29 out of 32 trainees. This was followed in the summer of 2007 by semi-structured interviews with 8 trainees (in 3 groups), 3 university tutors (individually) and 7 mentors (individually).

Preliminary inductive analysis was undertaken and emerging themes identified which were then further developed by detailed analysis. Subsequent interviews in spring 2008 with 2 tutors and 2 former PGCE trainees (not previously interviewed) were undertaken in order to clarify issues emerging from the analysis.

Findings

In the course of InSTEP sessions at the University of Sussex, tutors were able to draw on examples of everyday, 'unscripted' classroom activity to illustrate their teaching in a flexible and responsive way. They were, for example, able to comment on aspects of classroom practice that might otherwise be hard to exemplify, such as those related to the management by individual teachers of low level classroom disruption. Tutors were also able to make use of cameras and image manipulation software to direct student teachers' attention to particular features of the classroom activity. During such sessions, all student teachers present experienced the same examples of classroom practice at the same time; a sort of group observation that would not be possible without using technology in this way. This enabled discussions informed

by common experiences between student teachers to take place in the university classroom.

The focus below is on three distinct but related aspects of activity in InSTEP sessions that appear, on the evidence of the data, to have contributed to the integration of theory and practice elements of student teachers' learning.

(a) Contextualisation

The first type of activity might be called contextualisation. InSTEP sessions provided student teachers with examples of practice which illustrated and reinforced previously introduced theoretical themes. In this type of activity, InSTEP-mediated observation was used by tutors to juxtapose theoretical and practical elements, with the student teacher being encouraged to make connections between theoretical ideas introduced in the university teacher education classroom and elements of observed school classroom activity. In one example of this process of contextualisation, during a session on classroom management, the tutor first gave a commentary on the use of starter activities and then, making use of contemporaneous InSTEP action from a classroom, drew student teachers' attention to how the teacher walked purposefully around the classroom, re-focussing pupils back to the set task. In one incident, the tutor was able to identify two misbehaving boys and he then zoomed in on the pair and drew the group's attention to how the teacher assertively intervened.

InSTEP was also used to contextualise theoretical notions associated with assessment for learning. The effectiveness for student teachers of sessions on these topics was apparent from responses given in the student teacher group interviews where all three groups independently gave this as an example of a theoretical area where they felt InSTEP sessions had contributed to their learning.

(b) Decontextualisation

InSTEP also enabled a second complementary and, in a sense, inverse process of decontextualisation, where examples of classroom practice experienced by trainee teachers through InSTEP were given a more generalised, theoretically influenced interpretation by university tutors, focusing trainee teachers' attention on aspects of what was taking place. Two of the tutors to whom we spoke described this process as analogous to offering an expert commentary on classroom activity. Examples of this process were given by trainee teachers in one group interview and in one mentor interview. In terms of trainee teacher learning, the value of such activity

seemed to lie in the immediate juxtaposition for the trainee teacher of practical activity and theoretical perspective, linking particular individual observed actions and behaviours to general principles.

(c) Classroom Observation

The third way in which InSTEP appeared to support bringing theory to life lay in the development of the abilities of student teachers to observe classrooms. Whilst it was possible to isolate examples of what we have called contextualisation and decontextualisation taking place in sessions involving InSTEP, it was clear that these processes did not always take place separately and distinctly. Indeed, in some of the most effective InSTEP sessions, an interactive dialogue was established between theoretical ideas and examples of practice drawn from contemporaneous classroom observation, collectively experienced by student teachers, supplemented by a commentary from a university tutor and, in some cases, by interaction between student teachers and the teacher whose lesson had just been observed. In such exchanges, contextualisation and decontextualisation were both apparent as, in a context where a range of 'authentic' classroom activity was interpreted and discussed, theory and practice seemed to flow into each other. Neither was it always necessarily obvious to student teachers at the time that this linking of theory and practice was taking place: from their perspective, and from that of others involved in supporting the learning of these students, it was their capacity to observe classrooms that was being enhanced in InSTEP sessions.

One reason why InSTEP was felt to have helped in developing observational ability was that during sessions at the University, the technology allowed student teachers to observe a wider range of practice in a greater range of classrooms than would otherwise have been possible. This was a capacity of InSTEP identified by all groups of participants.

Part of the value of InSTEP in such activities was the way it offered tutors a resource whereby groups of student teachers could simultaneously observe the same classroom. This appeared particularly powerful in developing student teachers' observational skills when university tutors used a process of guided observation in the course of two InSTEP sessions prior to their first placement.

Finally, the evaluation of the InSTEP project suggests that an important resource may have been underutilised. There was evidence, however, of some mentors not engaging fully with the project and even where mentors were committed to InSTEP, a lack

of mentor training offered by the university led to an uneven pattern of practice. Some mentors worked with student teachers in much the same way as they had before the introduction of the InSTEP technology whilst others adopted their own interpretation of the programme. This suggests a missed opportunity which is particularly striking given the potential of InSTEP itself as a means of supporting communication between school and university.

Conclusion

It appears from the evidence of this evaluation of the project that InSTEP has played a role for those student teachers who participated, in bridging the gap between theory and practice. InSTEP seemed to achieve this by bringing a greater range of classroom practice into university-based teacher education settings; setting that practice in a context in which student teachers could interact and draw on the experience of university tutors and school practitioners, sometimes during 'real time' observation; and stimulating discussion between student teachers and their peers on the basis of shared common experiences of classroom activity. During InSTEP sessions, classroom observation and theoretical ideas are linked in an immediate way, facilitating the integration of theory and practice. This process is clearly not unique to InSTEP-style teacher education, in that it could equally be said to be an intended outcome of many traditional teacher education activities, but InSTEP does extend opportunities for this synthesis to take place. The association by student teachers of theory with the university classroom and practice with the school classroom can be seen as mirroring the divergence of two communities of practice (Wenger 1999, Smagorinsky et al 2003) and, to an extent, mirrors the physical separation experienced by the two sets of practitioners. University tutors rarely find themselves in schools for purposes other than observing student teachers and most school practitioners generally have limited awareness of, or involvement in, university-based teacher preparation activities.

InSTEP and similar technologies have the potential to mitigate both these barriers to knowledge transfer between the school and the university setting. Drawing on live classroom action by means of InSTEP provided opportunities for demonstrations that contextualised the theoretical and decontextualised the practical, assisting student teachers in developing an understanding of the relationship between theory and practice at an early stage of their ITP course. It seems that part of the value of such InSTEP sessions, and one of the reasons for their apparent success in this

respect, might lie in the capacity of InSTEP to loosen the association of theoretical learning with the teacher education classroom and practical learning with the school classroom, thereby providing a catalyst for knowledge transfer between these settings.

Current Developments

Since the evaluative research was conducted a mobile unit has been developed with recording facilities. CPD sessions for SASP (Science as an Additional Specialism) have been recorded and are accessed through a secure website enabling participants to review the content close to the point of teaching. It is anticipated that both trainees and SASP participants will have their lessons recorded and reflectively reviewed with a supportive coach.

Notes and Acknowledgements

This article is a distillation of a paper presented to BERA (September 2008) and submitted for publication to *Teacher Education*. The substantive work on which this is based forms the basis of the author's Ed.D thesis at the University of Sussex. The author is particularly indebted to Nick Mitchell (University of Nottingham) who along with Andrew Hobson (University of Nottingham) undertook the external evaluation. The author gratefully acknowledges the support and critical guidance provided by Michael Eraut (University of Sussex) and Peter Sorensen (University of Nottingham).

References

- Abell, S. & Cennamo K. (2004) Video cases in elementary science teacher preparation, in Brophy, J. (Ed.) *Using video in teacher education*. Amsterdam, Elsevier
- Eraut, M. (1994) *Developing professional knowledge and competence*. London, Falmer Press
- Eraut, M. (2004) 'Transfer of Knowledge Between Education and Workplace Settings'. In Rainford, H., Fuller, A. & Munroe, A. (Eds.) *Workplace Learning in Context*. London, Routledge.
- Foster, R. (1999) 'School-based initial teacher training in England and France: trainee teachers' perspectives compared'. *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 7, 131-143.
- Hobson, A. J. (2003) 'Student Teachers' Conceptions and Evaluations of "Theory" in *Initial Teacher Training*. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 11, 245-261.
- Mitchell, N., Marsh, B., Hobson, A. J. & Sorenson, P. (2008) Bringing Theory to Life? Findings from the evaluation of the University of Sussex In-School Teacher Education Programme (InSTEP). British Educational Research Association. Edinburgh.
- Roth, W.-M. & Tobin, K. (2001) 'Learning to teach science as practice'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 741-762.
- Sherin, M. G. & Han, S. Y. (2004) 'Teacher learning in the context of a video club'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, 163-183.
- Smagorinsky, P., Cook, L. & Johnson, T. (2003) 'The twisting path of concept development in learning to teach'. In *Teachers College Record*, 105, 1399-1436.
- Younger, M., Brindley, S., Pedder, D. & Hagger, H. (2004) 'Starting points: student teachers' reasons for becoming teachers and their preconceptions of what this will mean'. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 27, 245-264.

In conversation: David Stephens with doctoral student Maria Cristina Briani

Maria Cristina Briani is studying for a PhD in Education under the supervision of Professor Ivor Goodson of the Education Research Centre. Her research topic is a curriculum history of the Brazil Medical School of the State University of Campinas close to the city of Sao Paulo. The Government of Brazil awards doctoral scholarships to a handful of applicants each year. Cristina won one of these in 2004 but because of family issues waited until 2007 to take up her research place at Brighton.

Cristina, as she is known, is from Sao Paulo, Brazil and has been at Brighton since September 2007. She is living in Seaford with her young daughter Maria who will be 4 in May. She has other children, both living at home in Brazil: son Mauricio, 33, a graphic designer, and daughter Marilia, 28, a travel agent who came with her for 4 months and was of a great help during the difficult beginning at the new land.

David: Why Brighton, Cristina?

Cristina: I was an undergraduate student of the State University of Campinas – it is one of the best public universities in Brazil – I had a Degree in Economics and worked for 9 years in the finance office of



the university. I also had a short experience in the private business as Finance and Administrative Manager, which was just to make me sure that I had enjoyed the Economics course, but I didn't have the profile to work as an Economist. Eventually I got an administrative job in the undergraduate office of the School of Medicine and returned to work at the university. By that time they were discussing the reform of the curriculum. My ex-husband had trained as a doctor there and I knew everyone and was aware of some curriculum issues as well. Then I decided it was time to take a Master's Degree and I did a Master's in Education which had looked at the history of the medical curriculum from 1963 to 1983.

At the completion of the Master's degree I found I had a huge pile of material that might be useful for a doctorate. I'm particularly interested in what happened to the innovations in the development of the



curriculum. I also want to understand how the new rules in teacher's careers introduced by the University influenced different generations of teachers who graduated in that school, changing the profile of 'doctors and teachers' to 'doctors and researchers'. I had read Ivor Goodson's *The Making of Curriculum for the Master's* – it opened my mind – and so I realised he would be the best person to help me, as my research is based in life stories. For me it is a dream come true to be here!

David: What are your impressions of the University and life here?

Cristina: At first it is quite lonely particularly if you are a mature student with a young child. For example most of research seminars are held between 5 and 6.30 which I cannot attend because I have to look after my daughter. In the beginning I made good use of the University English support services. I'm doing a French course too which is great as it is a way to meet people. The location of Brighton is also great; when Maria's father came to visit her I had a chance to spend 5 days in Paris. And I visited Belgium for a few days at Easter with her.

I live in Seaford, very close to the beach – it is a nice place, my daughter loves to walk by the sea and I love the countryside around, all the open space. But I have made friends. We have a Greek friend, also a PhD student, who invited both of us to Athens for Christmas. We manage to get back to Brazil once a year. That's when I did the interviews for my research. We'll visit Brazil again next Christmas.

David: Is it worthwhile coming all this way to pursue your dream?

Cristina: Very much so! I always wanted to experience student life abroad. Ivor was the hook. And I've always had a curiosity about England. My brother introduced me to British rock n roll bands when we were teens and since then England became a place I wanted to

'I'm particularly interested in what happened to the innovations in the development of the curriculum.'

know. I still listen to rock, especially indie bands. I have come really to like Sussex as a place – the beautiful countryside and the old things from the past which you still have – the old railway stations. You don't have to go to a museum, just take a walk and you can see how people lived a long time ago. In my country people tend to destroy and replace.

David: And is the research going well?

Cristina: Yes it is. I've just had my thesis outline approved and have been given some good advice. I have a second supervisor who works in the Medical School and I may compare the experiences of the Campinas with the Southampton medical school which is almost the same age. I'm now looking at the emerging themes that are coming out of my data. I do miss my friends and family in Brazil, but I'm very happy to be here. It is only the weather that makes me unhappy!

David: Thank you Cristina.

Reflections on practitioner research



Nadia Edmond

N.Edmond@brighton.ac.uk

It is often only by looking back that we make sense of the journey. For an age we make our way, keeping our eyes on the rough ground, not daring to look up and see the distance yet to go. And then comes a moment when we can pause and look around and see the world from our new vantage point. And it happens that the road we took was not the one we embarked on and the point we reached not our anticipated destination.

So it is with research. Having recently completed a professional doctorate based on practitioner research, I offer, in this paper, some reflections on the road travelled. As Hodkinson (2004, P. 12) has pointed out, research is a form of work and a form of learning which involves 'seeing researchers and research communities as learners: people who learn about doing and being researchers, as well as about the topics/ issues/subjects that they are researching.'

My research was concerned with the work-based learning of students on a part-time course and the relationship between workplace and academic learning. The subject of my research was based on an understanding of learning as participation in social practice (you learn to be a worker by participating in workplace practice and you learn to be a student by participating in academic practice) and I was interested in how participation in these different 'communities of practice' interact in terms of learning. Here I reflect how participating

Methodological considerations and developing a practitioner-researcher identity

in a 'research community of practice' has impacted on my practitioner identity. What were some of the issues faced and questions raised during this process of developing a practitioner-researcher identity?

Beginning of the road

My point of departure, a legacy of my undergraduate studies for a BSc in Psychology, was a standard positivist view of enquiry and an acceptance of its conventions as the best way to both uncover and communicate 'truth'. According to this dominant positivist paradigm research is a technical rational process conducted by a researcher who (according to Cartesian dualism) is essentially a rational mind and a solitary, self-contained independent spectator, separate from the world they are studying.

These assumptions are problematic for social science and for research into one's own practice in particular, and for me Beckett and Hager's (2002, P. 95) characterisation of the 'organic researcher' as an 'embodied person' (i.e. with feelings as well as intellect) who is a social being and therefore an interdependent actor in the world is one in which I recognised myself as practitioner researcher.

Recognising voice and agency

The telling of the story of research is premised on a view of the 'story-teller', the researcher, as essentially independent of, not to say invisible in, the story they are telling. From an objectivist perspective, researchers write their research to conform to this ideal. What this means in practice is that, although the research report purports to be a description of what 'really' happened, it is in fact a post hoc rationalization (a retrospective tidying up) of the process to ensure that the account conforms to the ideal.

In my experience, research, and perhaps particularly practitioner research, is not a neat sequential process but rather an untidy iterative and evolutionary process in which all aspects are subject to review and construction and reconstruction in the

light of an emerging understanding and an emerging identity. I had an interest not only in a phenomenon (work-based learning in a programme of professional development) but in a way of investigating that phenomenon. Choices were the result not only of what I wanted to find out but of the research skills, and the researcher identity I wanted to develop. And of course I was not clear about these at the outset, they did not become apparent until I had already collected some data and was struggling with finding a meaningful (to me) way of dealing with them.

To 'tell it like it was' I conducted 19 interviews because, at the point at which I was gathering data, I had been steered by my supervisor (of a more positivist bent) to what he considered an adequate sample size for a particular kind of project. It was not until many months and two supervisors later, and through grappling to make sense of the data I had collected on my own terms, that I came to appreciate that methodological considerations were not just a question of 'rational' choices but of personal values.

The idea of individual agency is significant here – I had choices and made judgements about how to proceed with my research, but as Beckett and Hager (2002) argue, judgement making in research contexts (as in all contexts) is embodied, engaging the whole person, values, emotions and practices as well as reason. The judgements I have made in terms of my research have engaged my whole 'situated' person.

Smith (1997, P. 10) suggests that there is something not quite straightforward about the claim that educational research is a predominantly rational and objective process; disagreements between researchers are 'not empirical, or better said, they cannot be resolved empirically' because, as Hodkinson (2004) points out, if it were 'it would be relatively easy for most researchers to agree about contested issues, as each took notice of the rational arguments and objective

evidence of the other' (Hodkinson 2004, P. 18). Yet they don't, precisely because of the embodied nature of judgement making. I can make a rational case for choosing interpretivist methods in my research but this ignores and renders invisible how my personal life history and socio-cultural context has shaped my academic and intellectual development and choices.

Hodkinson (ibid) illustrates this 'life history' dimension with reference to himself and a group of colleagues with whom he has worked closely, and articulates how their similar, though different theoretical approaches can be seen as rooted in deeply held personal values, partly drawn out from their own experiences. In a similar way, I could articulate how my own background has resulted in a commitment to social justice, suspicion of authority, a desire to challenge or resist hegemony and a concept of 'academic freedom' as a space for developing criticality and critique. Perhaps what has been most significant for me is finding theoretical frameworks which have enabled me to develop an epistemology consistent with these 'deeply held personal values'.

Researchers as learners

Part of the socio-cultural context in which we operate as researchers can be characterised as 'fashions' in education research. Thus, according to Hodkinson (ibid) there is a 'new orthodoxy' in education research in which 'the technically rational aspects of positivism and empiricism, where research is seen as primarily concerned with the prediction and control of educational practices, are resuscitated' (Hodkinson 2004, P. 10). However, what we (as researchers) learn and how we learn is not determined by the context or 'fashion' of the time. Individual agency, dispositions and identity have a significant part to play in shaping the kind of researcher we become.

'As we research, we are constantly making embodied judgements about what to read or write, what to make of what we read and of the data we collect; who to work with and who to avoid; who to attack and who to defend ourselves against. This often means joining different communities of practice, with different versions of authentic behaviour' Hodkinson (2004, P. 20) .

For me this meant relinquishing the certainties of my previous apprenticeship in the positivist paradigm and getting to grips with an interpretivist perspective. In this I was informed by the challenge to the normative paradigm which derives from the social constructivist view that knowledge is socially constructed and, therefore, that any account of a social phenomenon or situation inevitably reflects the observer/researcher's partial understanding arising out of their social context.

It follows from this, that truth claims cannot simply be checked (confirmed or falsified) because accounts on which such claims are based do not have a direct, but rather a mediated, correspondence with an external reality and themselves constitute and change what they purport to describe (Wetherell, 2001, P. 12).

Deconstructing the discourse of learning

An acknowledgement of language as 'productive' i.e. constructing versions of social reality and achieving social objectives led me to consideration of methods concerned with analysis and understanding of discourse. Operating within the interpretivist paradigm, Discourse Analysis (DA) can be seen as a methodological consequence of the 'linguistic turn'. Notwithstanding the nature of DA as a 'field' of research encompassing different approaches rather than a single practice, all DA derives from post-structuralism and its concern with

'deconstructing' text. DA is concerned with the close study of language in use to reveal patterns in that use and recognizing language as 'constitutive' of meaning (i.e. it is in the use of language in interaction that meaning is generated) rather than 'referential' (i.e. language conveys meaning).

Social constructivism has been influential in our understanding of the process of learning and in terms of educational research it follows that if talk (or text) is seen as constitutive in the process of learning, then talk (or texts) must be seen as such in the process of investigating learning. This means that talk (for example interviews) and text (for example transcripts of interviews) cannot be seen simply as referential i.e. telling the researcher about an external reality, but as at least partly constitutive i.e. constructing a reality in the context of the research.

However, treating talk as data (rather than as referring to data) comprises different approaches, with some, such as conversation analysis more positivist, and others, such as Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), more interpretivist (Willig, 2001, P. 106).

My approach

The approach which best fit my concerns was 'Critical Discursive Psychology' (CDA) (Edley 2001) . CDA insists on seeing all sequences of talk as embedded within some kind of historical context and recognizes that when people talk they do so using a lexicon or repertoire of terms which has been provided for them by that history. Social groups with such a shared history are what Edley calls a 'language culture' (Edley, 2001, P. 190). This concept, which is closely related to the concept of 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and 'Discourse' Gee (1992, P. 107), provides members with a 'preferred' or hegemonic way of understanding and talking about the world such that, from a range of possible



ways of talking about the world, some will be encouraged and become the taken for granted 'true' view of the world.

Critical Discursive Psychology aims to capture the 'paradoxical relationship that exists between discourse and the speaking subject' (Edley, 2001: P. 190). It aims to examine not only how identities are produced on and for particular occasions, but also how history or culture both impinge upon and are transformed by those performances. It draws attention to the productive capacities of discourse, showing how it comes to structure both subjective experience and our sense of who we are.

Discursive psychology makes use of three analytical tools; interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions. The concept of interpretative repertoire derives from the work of Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) in which they used the term to refer to two quite separate ways scientists talk about scientific activity. Potter and Wetherell defined it as 'basically a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, P. 138). Interpretative repertoires can be seen as 'plot lines' available to us to structure our narratives and are part and parcel of any community's 'common sense', providing a basis for shared social understanding.

The second concept for organizing and interpreting data within discourse analysis is that of 'ideological dilemmas'. This concept, introduced by Billig et al (1988) draws a distinction between 'intellectual ideologies' (those that conform to the classical Marxist definition) and 'lived ideologies'. These are composed of the beliefs, values and practices of a given society or culture and, rather than coherent and integrated, are inconsistent, fragmented and contradictory (Edley, 2001) and these contradictions emerge as 'dilemmas' in talk.

The third concept of 'subject positions' refers to the way in which ideology creates or constructs subjects by drawing people into particular positions or identities. The way that people experience and feel about themselves and the world around them is, in part at least, a by-product of particular ideological or discursive regimes.

Applying in the practice of research

The process of analysis in DA is not a mechanical one; it involves intimate and detailed knowledge of the data. Only after much listening to tapes and/or numerous readings of transcripts, is it possible to develop a sufficient familiarity with the

narratives to see patterns and categories emerging in the way in which they are told. The challenge to the novice discourse analyst is to retain a focus not on what is said but how it is said and what 'work' this is doing in the interaction. In maintaining such a focus discourse analysts will find it helpful to have a questioning framework such as the one below (adapted from Willig 2001 and Hart 2007):

- How are 'discursive objects' (the things which are being talked about) embedded within interpretative repertoires including wider discourses?
- What is the 'action orientation' within the discourse? What 'work' is the interpretative repertoire doing in the exchange? What is it designed to communicate and how? Here the concern is to identify the rhetorical strategies and devices participants use, such as, referential (how groups are referred to as 'in' or 'out') evaluative strategies (how judgements about these groups are communicated and justified), the use of 'topoi' (van Dijk, 2000)
- How do participants 'position' themselves in relation to others and their circumstances, within the discourse? This can be seen as the 'identity work' of the communication – how are participants using talk to present a particular version/ story of themselves?
- Are there any ideological dilemmas in the discourses; here the concern is to identify contradictions and/or inconsistencies in the discourse. What are the implications for practice presented? What are the possibilities for action mapped by the discursive constructions?

In conclusion

For me, the concepts outlined in this paper provided inspiration and guidance in developing an approach to researching education which acknowledges fundamental personal concerns relating to identity (what kind of researcher do I aspire to be?), ethics (why am I doing this research and who will benefit and how?), and the social construction of knowledge (how do I reflect this in the research questions and method?). As I reflect on my own research journey and what has characterised it, this can be put another way:

'The important thing in science is not so much to obtain new facts as to discover new ways of thinking about them.'

Sir William Henry Bragg (1862-1942, English Nobel prize winning chemist and physicist.)

References

- Beckett, D. and P. Hager (2002). *Life, work and learning : practice in postmodernity*. London: Routledge.
- Billig, M., Condor, S. et al. (1988). *Ideological Dilemmas: A social psychology of everyday thinking*. London: Sage.
- Edley, N. (2001). *Analysing Masculinity: Interpretative Repertoires, Ideological Dilemmas and Subject Positions. Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*. London: Sage in Association with OUP.
- Gee, J. P. (1992). *The Social Mind: Language, Ideology and Social Practice*. New York: Bergin and Garvey.
- Gilbert, N. and M. Mulkey (1984). *Opening Pandora's Box: a Sociological Analysis of Scientists' Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hart, C. (2007). 'Critical discourse analysis and conceptualisation: Mental spaces, blended spaces and discourse spaces in the British National Party', in *Cognitive Linguistics in Critical Discourse Analysis: Application and Theory*. Hart, C. and Lukes, D. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Hodkinson, P. (2004). 'Research as a form of work: expertise, community and methodological objectivity.' in *British Educational Research Journal* 30(1): 9-26.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Smith, J. K. (1997). 'The stories educational researchers tell about themselves.' in *Educational Researcher* 26(5): 4-11.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2000). The reality of racism. On analyzing parliamentary debates on immigration. *Festschrift für die Wirklichkeit*. G. Zurstiege. Wiesbaden, Westdeutscher Verlag: 211-226.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. & Yates, S. J. (2001). *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*. London: Sage.
- Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Researching Emergent Children's Literature

Dr Sandra J Williams
sjw7@brighton.ac.uk

There are a number of research opportunities for those who are engaged in the study of children's literature. Some concentrate on a particular author, a genre or a discrete historical period. Others focus on a literary theory and apply that to selected texts. The history of publishing with links to the socio-economic climate is also an area of interest.

Research into emergent children's literature involves identifying the development of a distinct – and often under-researched – children's literature in developing countries, post-colonial countries or those that have experienced significant change. The task is to initially locate local books and produce a bibliography. After this themes can be identified and linked to the construction of childhood and cultural identity. Such research may also attempt to identify the ways in which children's literature develops in different cultural and economic settings.

In the UK thousands of new titles are published every year and a significant number of children's books are internationally known and translated into many languages. It is therefore difficult for the British



Ramsurrin, P. (1996) *Golden Legends: Mauritius*, Singapore: Heinemann
Assone, S. R. & Servan-Schreiber, C. (2006) *Tizann*, Mauritius: Bahadur Printing

reader to realise that in many countries there are few local books for children to read. Where books are available it is likely they are books in translation which means children are constantly reading 'the other'. For such children the oral tradition of myth, legend and folk tale may still be strong and reflect their own culture but unfortunately can remain undervalued until in print.

My research into emergent children's literature began in Singapore when I took up a post lecturing in Primary English at the National Institute of Education (NIE). I sought to identify local children's books which could be used in seminars on literacy after I found that student teachers were aware of British and American authors but appeared unaware that there might be local books available with a distinct Singapore setting. Singaporean children, who are all educated in English, may enjoy quality books from English speaking countries, but none of these reflect their own distinct lives and culture.

This apparent gap led to a search for

local literature which was not easy as there was no extant bibliography to turn to. In addition local children's books did not have a separate space in libraries or bookshops. Only S.E. Asian myths and legends had a separate library classification. My method was to trawl library shelves at the NIE and in the National Library looking for local authors' names, likely titles and illustrations. I also investigated what was available in bookshops and asked my colleagues what they remembered reading when they were young and what their own children read. Using this method enabled me to find a range of around 60 books which have been published since independence in 1965. These ranged from retellings of folk tales, animal stories, historical novels and a number that reflect Singapore children's current lives. With support from the National Book Development Council Singapore, I was able to publish a short annotated bibliography which served to raise the profile of local children's books. Subsequently a wider international readership was reached through publishing an article for the *New Review*



Used under Creative Commons courtesy of Pratham Books

of Children's Literature and Librarianship in which the struggle to develop a distinctive literature for children was discussed.

Currently, I am researching emergent children's literature in Mauritius. With support from the Education Research Centre at the University of Brighton, The British Council Mauritius and the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), I was able to make a 10 day field trip in February 2008 with the initial aim of identifying local children's books. There are parallels with Singapore: both are small islands, each enjoys a multi-cultural/multi-lingual population, both emerged from colonisation, children are educated in English, local books are difficult to identify and there are many books in translation. The method was the same as in Singapore, researching what was available in the MIE library, visiting bookshops and talking to local colleagues. The main difference was time-scale which meant I had less local knowledge having spent two years in Singapore and only three weeks in Mauritius teaching on the M.A. Education degree prior to the field trip. The aim is to produce an annotated bibliography of Mauritian children's books in English for both parents and teachers. The object is to describe the content and offer suggestions for activities which support the development of both written and oral English. A colleague at MIE is doing the same for local books in French.

A number of books have been unearthed and it is particularly useful to note who is publishing them. The Federation of Playgroups, with funding from the EEC, have produced a number of quality picture books for young children which reflect their landscape and everyday lives. Artist Henry Koombes is involved in a series of bright picture books with

access to books that concern other cultures and values.

References:

- Williams, S.J. (2004) *An Annotated Bibliography of Singapore Children's Books*, Singapore: National Book Development Council of Singapore
- Williams, S.J. (2006) 'The Struggle to Develop a Distinctive Children's Literature in Singapore' in *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, Vol 12, No. 1, April, pp103-115
- Ramsurrun, P. (1996) *Golden Legends: Mauritius*, Singapore: Heinemann
- Assone, S. R. & Servan-Schreiber, C. (2006) *Tizann*, Mauritius: Bahadur Printing

a distinct Mauritian flavour. It must be remembered that Mauritius has no indigenous population, people arrived as: colonialists (Portuguese, Dutch, French and British), slaves from Africa, indentured labour from India, and traders from China. The most fascinating aspect of what has been identified so far is how myths and legends brought from Africa and India have been changed to fit in with geographical features in the local landscape. For example a volcanic lake known as Grand Bassin is seen as a source of the Ganges by Hindus resulting in ancient Indian myths being rewritten to include Mauritius. Slaves on the other hand believed there was an underground passage back to Africa and so threw themselves in the water in the hope of escaping. In addition there are a number of short stories concerning the everyday lives of the inhabitants of the Black River area. Finally and perhaps unsurprisingly there are tales concerning the famous Mauritian bird, the sadly extinct Dodo. It is pleasing to think that, although the bird no longer exists, it lives on in the local stories told for children.

Researching emergent children's literature is not unlike searching for treasure. You enter a bookshop or a library not being sure what you will find and there is great satisfaction in bringing to light books that have been sadly forgotten or ignored. For it is vital that children are able to recognise themselves when they read and not remain colonised by only having

Case study: a flexible yet robust strategy for research design?

Marian Willmer is Principal Lecturer in the School of Nursing and Midwifery. In this article she examines her own use of case study methodology to investigate student nurses' information and communication technology use in the clinical practice environment.

Marian Willmer

m.willmer@brighton.ac.uk

Introduction

This paper critically reviews the case study as a design for research methodology. A 'case' is made for the case study design in my thesis for my professional doctorate in education (EdD). My study was on 'student nurses' information and communication technology (ICT) use in the clinical practice environment'. I argued that, as observed by others, multiple sources of data collection and methods are part of case study methodology and this approach allowed findings to be cross-checked. From my study I observed that my experience of using case study methodology stretched and challenged the accepted notion of 'case study', even though there does not seem to be an agreed definition of a case study. Furthermore, I dismissed the notion of the weakness of the case study due to lack of generalisation. I argued that this approach is about uniqueness and the concept of generalisability is essentially a positivist principle. This paper concluded that in my study the approach was both a process of inquiry about the case as well as the product of the inquiry. My study was constructionist in approach: building parts of a whole and applying judgement upon the appropriateness of these parts.

What is a case study?

The use of case study as a research methodology dates back to the 1920's and was first used to investigate cases relating to social phenomena, such as poverty. Multiple sources of data collection were included such as field observations and scrutiny of documents (Brophy, 2008). A case study has been considered as method and as a design (Jones and Lyons, 2005), and unrelated to the nature of the inquiry (qualitative or quantitative). Research studies can require a design or methodology flexible enough to take into account any event that could unfold during data collection. Used as a plan to indicate which evidence should be gathered the case study requires 'multiple sources of evidence gathered by multiple data collection techniques' (Jones and Lyons 2005, P. 72).

As Yin (2003) states, there is no control over contemporary, behavioural events, and a full variety of evidence (documents, interviews and observations) is required. This triangulation of data sources can provide strength when analysing the data, especially where all varieties of evidence support the interpretation made from



the data. The process of triangulation can be deemed constructionist in nature as it builds a more complex picture of the focus of the research study. Multiple sources of data collection and methods are part of case study methodology (Jones and Lyons, 2005), and allow findings to be cross-checked (Bryman, 2004; van Heugten, 2004).

A case study in focus

In my grappling with the description of a case study, I concluded that the case was 'student nurses' use of ICT in nursing practice' in the context of the local NHS Trust. A case study approach, in this case, enabled analysis of the micro level of the student nurse entering different communities of practice (CoP) such as clinical placements, with different team members (Wenger, 1998). Therefore the interpretation of the case as the above phenomenon assisted the researcher in the data collection process to focus upon the phenomenon in the multiple data collection techniques, such as interviews, observation, and scrutiny of strategy documents.

Understanding how the environment affects the use of ICT within the social world context of nursing practice was the focus or heart (Miles and Huberman, 1994) of the study. A case study approach was therefore appropriate, as the research questions were to answer the how or why which as Yin (2003) identifies, is appropriate when the investigator has little control over a contemporary set of events.

Case study and an understanding of professional practice

The first aim of my study 'to contribute to the understanding of the use of ICT in one NHS Trust by providing a critical view of current ICT practice', was met through identification of one of the local Trusts with the largest numbers of pre-registration students. A comparison with the other local trusts was considered and discarded due to the fact that a comparison would not necessarily add to the understanding of the use of ICT in any one NHS Trust. In this respect, the 'case' could be considered to be the 'NHS Trust'. However, upon scrutiny, the definition of a 'case' became difficult to apply (Miles and Huberman 1994). The focus was on the student nurses' use of ICT within the Trust; this was one element (use of ICT) of a range of practice tasks undertaken, within the complexity of one diverse organisation. The research questions for the study were:

- How does the nursing practice environment affect 'adult branch' student nurses' usage of ICT?
- How do mentors influence 'adult branch' student nurses' engagement with the use of ICT?
- How have 'adult branch' student nurses transferred their use of ICT to the nursing placement?

The first and second research questions recognised that student nurses' experiences of using ICT will be affected and influenced by the physical and social environment of adult nursing practice. The third research question reaches to the heart of the study to uncover what use student nurses are able to make of their ICT abilities, in the adult nursing practice context, and whether the content of the taught ICT sessions was used.

Another way of describing a case study is from Stake (cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, P. 436): 'The case is a specific one'.

For this study the 'one' was 'student nurses' use of ICT in nursing practice'. I gave careful, detailed and prolonged consideration to this. By adding 'in nursing practice', the focus was on the influence of the learning processes and developments that take place in order for a student nurse to use ICT in nursing practice. The influences of other places in which learning ICT has taken place were not the focus of this study, yet it is acknowledged that these influences had taken place.

Case study and generalisability

This study was not attempting to capture student nurses' age, gender, or any specific factor about the student nurse, only their use of ICT. The depth of information from student nurses was in relation to their 'use of ICT' as this was then regarded as a 'bounded system'. In this respect, this study perhaps stretched and challenged the accepted notion of 'case study', although there does not seem to be an agreed definition (Stake, 2000; Jones and Lyons, 2005). This study as a 'case study' was both a process of inquiry and a product of the inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

This study did not aim to be directly generalisable. Generalisability refers to 'the degree to which the findings are applicable to other populations or samples. It draws on the degree to which the original data were representative of a larger population' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, P. 786).

Not only is generalisability always an issue with case studies, due to the size of the case and the uniqueness (Gomm, Hammersley and Foster 2000), it is also a positivist principle. There is a debate within qualitative research as to whether qualitative research studies should attempt to fulfil a unified paradigm as a measure of quality (Rolfé

2006). Whilst some qualitative researchers have attempted to achieve rigour through the application of strategies of validity and reliability (Morse et al 2002), others have concentrated on 'trustworthiness' (Sandelowski 1993) through making a researcher's practices visible and therefore auditable. The responsibility for judgement as to whether the study is trustworthy is therefore with the reader of the research rather than the researcher.

Case study trade-offs

Whilst 'authority' was sought from the authenticity of the case of student nurses' use of ICT, as a researcher I attempted to represent the case authentically. One of the ways this was achieved was to send the transcriptions of the research interview to the interviewee for agreement for accuracy of the account given. The final analysis derived from the interview data was sent to each interviewee for comment upon authenticity or in lay terms – does this reflect your reality? Sandelowski (1993) would regard such practice as not only unnecessary but a 'threat to validity/credibility'. Through the nature of reality being multiple and constructed we should not expect others to deliver the same categories or themes from the research data. In attempting to achieve reliability we could be disregarding 'validity or meaningfulness of the findings' (Rolfé, 2006). Rolfé (2006) is in support of Sandelowski (1993) and suggests that qualitative researchers should resist the adoption of validity criteria and focus upon the consumer of the research. The quality of the research resides in the written research report and therefore the judgement of the reader, thus 'validity is achieved through consensus on each individual study rather than by the blanket application of predetermined criteria' (Rolfé 2006, PP. 305).

A case study methodology does not dictate a method for data analysis. Therefore, the analysis of the transcriptions took place through line by line significance. Initial coding followed by focused coding of identified themes from the data.

Constructionism and case study

Constructionism is a way of building parts of a whole and applying judgement upon the appropriateness of these parts (Seely Brown, 2005). The conceptual framework for this study utilised a range of theoretical perspectives to achieve a constructionist approach. In this respect choices were made about the most appropriate theoretical perspectives, such as a focus on the information society and where 'learning society', knowledge management (KM) and 'knowledge

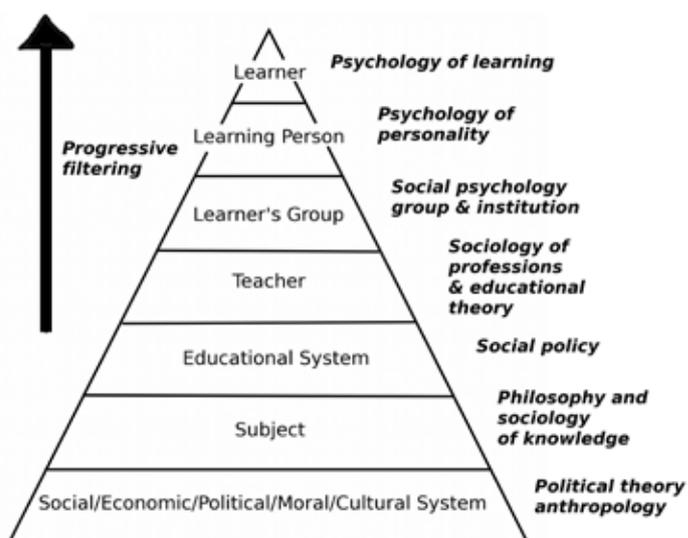


Figure 1: Cultural considerations for the study. Adapted from Atherton (2005)

ecologies' (Pór, 2001) fit in relation to the social, economical, political, moral and cultural conceptual framework for this study (Figure 1). It was acknowledged that not all theoretical perspectives were covered and rationale was given for not including, for example, activity theory (Engeström, 2001). Therefore constructionism was applied in terms of both the process and the outcome of the case study.

Conclusion

This paper critically reviewed the case study as a design for research methodology. A 'case' is made for the case study design in my thesis for my professional doctorate in education (EdD). My study was on 'student nurses' information and communication technology (ICT) use in the clinical practice environment'. The case study methodology (Benedichte Meyer 2001) has allowed a range of research methods to be focused upon a phenomenon (student nurses' use of ICT in nursing practice), and the constructionist process of analysis has led to the interpretation of meaning in relation to the conceptual framework. Although there can be challenges in defining what is 'the case', a case study approach has allowed for an holistic view to be taken and for the 'case' to be grounded in the wider societal and pedagogical system. The case study in my research context did allow for a creative and flexible approach in research design methodology.

References

- Atherton, J.S. (2005) *Learning and Teaching: Cultural Considerations in Learning*. Available from: <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/culture.htm> [14 Jan 2008].
- Benedichte Meyer, C. (2001), *A Case in Case Study Methodology*. *Field Methods*. 13: 329-352.
- Brophy S. 2008 Making the case for case study research. *Kai Tiaki Nursing New Zealand*. 14 (11): 20-22.
- Bryman, A. (2004), *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. and Y. S. Lincoln. (eds.) (2000), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Engeström, Y. (2001), *Expansive learning at work: toward and activity theoretical reconceptualisation*. *Journal of Education and Work*. 14(1): 133-156.
- Gomm, R., Hammersley, M. and Foster, P. (eds). (2000), *Case Study Method. Key issues, key texts*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Jones, C. and Lyons C. (2005), *Case study: Design? Method? Or comprehensive strategy?* *Researcher*. 11(3): 70-76.
- Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. (1994), *Qualitative data analysis*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Morse, J.M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., and Spiers, J. (2002), *Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research*. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 1(2): 1-19.
- Pór, G. (2001), *Knowledge ecology and Communities of Practice emerging twin trends of creating true wealth*. Keynote presented at Knowledge Fair 98. Available from: <http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/kd/kecop.shtml> [18 Jul 2005]
- Rolfe, G. (2006), *Methodological Issues in Nursing Research. Validity, trustworthiness and rigour: quality and the idea of qualitative research*. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 53(3): 304-310. Available from: <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2006.03727.x?prevS> [21 Sep 2006]
- Sandelowski, M. (1993), *Rigor or rigor mortis: the problem of qualitative research revisited*. *Advances in Nursing Science*. 16(2): 1-8.
- Seely Brown, J. (2002), *Growing up Digital: How the Web Changes Work, Education and the Ways People Learn*. *USDLA Journal*. 16(2). Available from: http://www.usdla.org/html/journal/FEB02_Issue/article01.html [7 Mar 2003]
- Stake, R.E. (2000), Case studies. pp.435-454. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds). *Handbook of qualitative research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.
- van Heugten, K. (2004), *Managing Insider Research*. *Qualitative Social Work*. 3(2): 203-219.
- Wenger, E. (1998), *Communities of Practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yin, R.K. (2003), *Case Study Research, Design and Methods*. 3rd ed. Applied Social research Methods Series, Volume 5. London: Sage Publications.

**Education '09
GovNet's 5th Annual Conference**

21 May 2009
QE II Conference Centre, London
www.govnet.co.uk/education

2009 AERA Annual Meeting: 'Disciplined Inquiry: Education Research in the Circle of Knowledge'

13-17 April 2009
San Diego Convention Centre, San Diego, CA, USA
www.aera.net/Default.aspx?id=5348

ECER 2009 – "Theory and Evidence in European Educational Research"

28-30 September 2009
University of Vienna
www.eera-ecer.eu/ecer/ecer-2009-vienna

FERA 2009 – Researching Practice – Work Based Research in the Learning and Skills Sector

15 May 2009
Institute for Work Based Learning, Middlesex University
www.fera.uk.net

Education in a Changing Environment

International Conference
15-16 September 2009
University of Salford
www.ece.salford.ac.uk/

British Educational Research Association Annual Conference

2-5 September 2009
Manchester University
www.bera.ac.uk

SCUTREA 39th Annual Conference: Really Useful Research? Critical Perspectives on Evidence-Based Policy and Practice in Lifelong Learning

University of Cambridge
7-9 July
www.scutrea.ac.uk

EDULEARN09: International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies

6-8 July 2009
Barcelona, Spain
www.brighton.ac.uk

Brighton Education Research Conference 2009

University of Brighton
20 June 2009
<http://109.cg-conference.com>

5th International Conference: "Lifelong Learning Revisited: What Next?"

23-26 June 2009
University of Stirling

Education Research Seminars for R.Ed
Rethinking Context in Comparative and International Education

Tuesday, 31 March
Professor Michael Crossley (University of Bristol)

How do professionals construct meaning during online and blended courses?

Wednesday, 22 April 2009
Dr Shalni Gulati (City University)

Lessons learned from engaging the public in research

Tuesday, 28 April 2009
Professor Val Hall (University of Brighton)

Doctors, teachers and researchers: a social history on a curriculum change

Wednesday, 6 May 2009 (12.30pm)
Cristina Briani (Research Student, University of Brighton)

Developing a new narrative theory of learning and action

Tuesday, 12 May 2009
Professor Ivor Goodson (University of Brighton)

Congratulations are due to the following students upon the recent completion of their doctorates: Mike Hayler and Mel Norman (School of Education), Juliet Millican (Community University Partnership Programme – Cupp).

Yvonne Hillier delivered a paper at the SRHE Annual Conference in Liverpool in December 2008, entitled "Valuing the vocation: International Perspectives on Vocational Education and its pedagogy". The full paper is available on the SRHE website.

Carol Robinson has written a chapter entitled 'Learners' voices and the personalisation of learning', which will be included in the forthcoming 2nd edition of Learning to Teach in the Primary School (Arthur J, Cremin T and Wray D (Eds), Routledge)

Carol Robinson was asked to give a Keynote address to the East Sussex Learning Network in March, entitled "Engaging with Learners: Listening to learners' voices".

Brian Marsh presented a paper at CAL '09, on the research he undertook on the University of Sussex's InSTEP (In-School Teacher Education Programme).

New book – "Higher Education and Capacity Building: 25 Years of Higher Education Links Programmes", edited by David Stephens, will be published on 1 April by Symposium Books (Oxford), and will be launched at the British Council in London during the summer.

David Stephens has been undertaking the first phase of a funded thematic evaluation of Save the Children Norway's Quality Education Project, implemented in Ethiopia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.