Honan, E, (2003). 'Research or professional development', Paper presented at NZARE / AARE Joint Conference, "Educational research: risks or dilemmas", 29th November – 3rd December, 2003, Auckland, New Zealand.

Research or Professional Development?

Abstract

Generally, teachers' contact with academics tends to take two forms: either they are the 'subjects' of research which is done on or for them; or they are the recipients of professional development which is again done to or for them. In both cases the teachers are positioned in relatively passive and powerless relationships.

This paper describes a research project undertaken in 2002 wherein I explored the possibilities of constructing research as a collaborative project between academics and teachers. In this project I attempted to establish a relationship with teachers as co-researchers who conducted parts of the research process themselves, including data collection and analysis.

This paper explores the differences in perceptions of this research relationship and reflects on the contradictions in the statements made by the teachers during discussions on the benefits of the research project. These contradictory statements have led me to ask questions of myself as an academic and a researcher, and of the research process I designed. These questions are the focus for this paper and include: Was I engaging in 'research as usual' under the guise of engaging teachers in co-researcher practices? What kinds of discourses were operating in our discussions and how did these discourses work to position the teachers? How am I implicated in the construction of these positionings?

Research or professional development

Introduction

Kincheloe (2003, p. 3) has described the current educational age as one of "mediocrity" where new managerialist practices and the drive towards standardisation of student outcomes has led to the "technicalizing and deskilling" of teachers' work (see also Apple, 1986; Apple & Jungck, 1990; Lather, 1994; Robertson, 1996, Smyth, 2001). This paper is concerned with constructing an alternative view of teachers' work, a view that presupposes a rigorously theoretical engagement with educational epistemologies by teachers as they engage in their professional work. This view draws on an understanding of teachers as bricoleurs (Honan, 2001, 2003; see also Hatton, 1989) who take advantage of subject positions, discourses, theories and practices that are made available to them, to construct meaningful assemblages of praxis, or bricolage, to improve students' learning outcomes. The bricoleur is active in her composition, ordering and arranging of practices drawn from diverse sources: syllabus and curriculum documents; teacher resources; other teachers; preservice and inservice teacher education. Teachers who engage in this bricolage work do not simply 'resist' the top-down approach of many educational imperatives; instead they make "secondary adjustments" (Ball, 1994, p. 19) in order to make sense of such bureaucratic decisions in relation to their own classrooms and their own teaching.

One method that can be used in the construction of this alternative view of teachers' work as bricolage is to engage teachers as 'reflective researchers'. Research projects that involve teachers as co-researchers move beyond the action research models developed in the 1980s (see for example, Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). There is an immediate need for models that put into practice the theoretical frameworks related to the construction of teachers as reflective researchers (Goodson, 1995; Kincheloe, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, forthcoming/2004). Calls for critical research that involves teachers as agentic and active participants in qualitative inquiries into their own practices recognize the complex nature of teachers' work and assumes that this work is based on the intertwining of theory and practice into praxis (Butt et al, 1992; Goodson, 1995; Kincheloe, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004/forthcoming; Zeichner, 1994). Research that provides insights into such praxis actively contributes to the reconstruction of "teaching as intellectual work" (Smyth, 2001, p. 197). Such research also contributes to the development of new relationships between members of faculties of education and the teaching profession, as it shifts the emphasis away from the construction of academics as 'experts' towards collegial, ethical and agentic collaborations between different groups of educators. The research project that I describe in this paper was designed to contribute to this growing field of research involving teachers as critical, reflective co-researchers.

The project

During August, 2002, staff at a small Catholic school in Melbourne invited me to work with them to find ways in which they could improve their literacy teaching. The four women teaching Grades 3 – 6 met with me and their deputy principal to discuss the development of a school based project for 2003 that would focus the school's attention on literacy teaching and learning. I suggested that a pilot research project could be undertaken during Term 4, 2002, and that this project would assist them in developing their skills as researchers, while giving them a direction to follow in their school based project the following year. I decided to use the 'four resources literacy model' as the framework for this research, drawing inspiration from Freebody and Luke's words:

> One of the strengths of the "four resources model" is that it attempts to recognise and incorporate many of the current and well-developed techniques for training students in becoming literate. It shifts the focus from trying to find the right method to whether the range of practices emphasised in one's reading program are indeed covering and integrating a broad repertoire of textual practices that are required in new economies and cultures. The model, then, is a map of possible practices (Luke and Freebody, 1999)

The four resources model, as explicated by Freebody and Luke (see for eg Freebody, 1992; Luke and Freebody, 1997; Luke and Freebody, 1999; Freebody and Luke, 2003), provides teachers with a framework to investigate their current literacy teaching practices while also providing an overview of the particular resources that "participants in literacy events are able to use" (Freebody and Luke, 2003, p. 56). These four resources are breaking the code of texts, participating in the meaning of texts, using texts functionally, and critically analysing and transforming texts. Teachers who use the four resources model are able to use the model to examine their current practices to find out if they are helping students to use all four repertoires of practices or if they are focusing only on one or two. The research project described in this paper involved four teachers undertaking this investigation of their own practices, mapping the existing practices onto the four resources model, and trialling strategies and teaching practices that would 'fill the gaps'.

The research was organised around the release of the teachers from their classrooms. We met as a group over an eight week period during Term 4 of the school year. There were four whole day meetings, one half day meeting, and one after school meeting. During our meetings I asked the teachers to spend time writing about their responses to issues raised. I also tape recorded part of the discussions and their reflections on the process at the end of the eight weeks.

We began the project with a discussion that centred on the question, 'why do we do the things we do?' I asked the teachers to brainstorm the factors that had influenced their teaching practices and then to write about their responses to this question. I asked the teachers to collect data on their current teaching practices. The teachers decided how and what they were going to collect. Some used their planning documents, student worksheets and/or information they had collected for ongoing assessment of student work, while others made notes about their teaching practices while they were actually engaged in teaching. My only guidance here was to insist that they provided detailed information about their teaching practices in the data they collected.

After the teachers had collected this data, I introduced the four resources framework. I gave the teachers two papers to read where Allan Luke and Peter Freebody explained the four resources model (Freebody, 1990; Luke and Freebody, 1999). The teachers drew on their readings of the two papers, the framework, and on my explanations of the four resources to develop a set of shared understandings about the model. We discussed examples of activities that would assist students to develop one or other of the resources and we talked about the kinds of balanced literacy programs that could be the result of using the model. The next stage of the research process was to map the strategies that the teachers currently used, collected in the data collection phase, onto the four resources framework. The teachers and I worked together to decide which of the four resources was being encouraged by each particular teaching strategy they described as being used in their classrooms.

There are some important points that can be made about the teachers' practices from the construction of this map, and the discussion that surrounded the construction. First, the emphasis on code breaking in their current teaching was quickly recognised by the teachers. They drew each others attention to the growing list of practices under the *breaking the code* heading, while at the same time noting that they had not been previously aware of this emphasis. So the mapping exercise shed new light on the teachers' existing practices.

Second, the teachers were aware that the practices listed under the *participate in the meaning* heading grew out of work they had previously done using a language experience approach. The language experience approach encourages teachers to plan shared activities such as excursions so that literacy teaching can build on the shared knowledge and experiences gained during such activities. So the mapping exercise assisted teachers to see how their theoretical beliefs about literacy informs their practices.

Third, the teachers saw that they were not encouraging students to *critically analyse and transform texts*. Making visible this gap helped teachers to think critically themselves about their own practices. So the mapping exercise not only helped the teachers see their practices in new ways but also helped them to identify where they might strengthen their work. This then is much more than just a reaffirmation of teachers' work – the mapping exercise provided the teachers with the impetus needed to create and transform new practices.

The next stage of the process was directed at the creation of new practices, as the teachers worked to discover ways to teach students how to critically analyse and transform texts. However, this search for new practices once again depended heavily on the teachers' existing professional knowledge. From these discussions and searches, the teachers devised practices that could be trialled within a two week period in their classrooms.

After the two weeks of trialling new strategies we met to discuss the problems and successes experienced in the classroom. We then began the task of creating a list of strategies that could be used to encourage students' development of all four of the literacy resources. This was a long and complex task that involved many drafts until all the teachers were satisfied with the final list.

During our last meeting together I asked the teachers to reflect, in both written and oral forms, on their experiences during the project. I asked them to consider not only the content of the project, that is the investigation of their current literacy teaching practices and the use of the four resources model as a mapping tool, but also the process of the project, including issues related to time, organisation, number of participants etc. The remainder of this paper focuses on the responses teachers gave to questions related to the differences between research and professional development.

The teachers' responses

I believe that one of the impediments to the construction of a collegial relationship between teachers and academics is the history of professional development and research as sites for any engagement between these two groups of educators. Unfortunately relationships between teachers and academics within these sites are often characterized by the construction of an expert/novice binary, in that the academics are constituted as either expert holders of official knowledge delivering that knowledge to teachers, or as expert researchers who need the cooperation of teachers as research subjects in order to conduct projects that may have some

implications for educational policy developments in the future. Implicated in this historical relationship between teachers and academics is "teacher education's history of ineffective incorporation of research into professional education programs" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 40). Kincheloe says that:

> Teachers involved in on-site action research projects often have difficulty adapting their teacher education-inculcated notion of research in education into the context created by the teacher research proponents. Even after their involvement in educational action research, teachers are reluctant to say that they really did research (2003, p. 40).

To try to get a sense of the teachers' understanding of their own engagement in the research project, during the reflection interviews I asked the question, 'did you see this process as research or professional development?' Their answers point to the complexity of trying to tease apart these two different relationships between academics and teachers.

> *Lavinia: I see the research has helped the professional development but I see it as research because you basically asked us to collect data, to analyse data, to talk about data, and then come up with recommendations for the next time… I think the research side of it was important.*

It would seem that here Lavinia understands herself as a co-researcher because of her understanding of the nature of the research process. Collection of the data and analysis of the data were undertaken by her so she knows that she was a researcher.

> *Isobel: I don't know how you separate the research and the pd, because it was pd, it was professional development but we also based it on somebody's research. I think it was myself as a teacher receiving pd based on the research and a little bit of the research process.*

Here Isobel is drawing on her past experiences of professional development programs that are informed by research. The research done by somebody else (i.e. Freebody and Luke) was more important to her than any process she engaged in.

> *Jenna: I suppose I didn't look at it as research. I came on board looking at it as professional development because I know when I signed up it was, for me, well I'm coming here, I'm hoping to learn about something new hopefully or take away with me strategies or even look at things in a way that I hadn't looked at before. I didn't see it as research. I mean with research I thought it was more your angle, it was something we were helping you with but I saw it as two focus where I saw it as well, we'll help you with your research and you're helping us to highlight the different strategies we could use in the classroom. For me that was going to be the purposeful thing.*

Jenna describes what I would call 'research as usual', where an academic invades a school for her own purposes, and attempts to 'give something back' to the teachers as a gift for being involved. While this would seem to be a cooperative exercise, it highlights the unequal relationships between academics and teachers during these types of research projects.

> *Tara: I think it's a bit of both but I think the difference is, in PD you get given a whole lot of in a day or something you get given a whole lot of information and it's all theoretical. And the difference is we've been given a lot of theoretical information as well but we've been able to use all our practical experience and we've had time.*

To Tara the difference between this project and her previous experiences lay more in the time and content than in the process. Like Jenna's comments, Tara also points here to the unequal relationship established between academics and teachers, where the teachers are receivers of packages of information.

Comment such as these have led me to ask questions of myself as an academic and a researcher, and of the research process I designed. Some of these questions include: was I engaging in 'research as usual' under the guise of engaging teachers in co-researcher practices? What kinds of discourses were operating in our discussions and how did these discourses work to position the teachers as both co-researchers and teachers receiving professional development? How am I implicated in the construction of these positionings? What follows is my attempt to provide initial answers to these questions.

The academic as expert

In a paper reflecting on the collaborative work undertaken by academics and teachers in one significant research project, Grundy and her colleagues point to a "history of school mistrust of academics" (Grundy et al, 2001, p. 207) as one of the impediments to the development of collegial relationships. In their attempts to breakdown this perceived mistrust, the academics in the project attempted to reject the "role of the 'expert', the outsider who has the knowledge and provides the answers" (p. 208). In reflecting on my own rejection of this 'expert' role, I reassured myself that I had never intended to take up this position. I revisited the funding application I completed, where I described one of the aims as: ' to support teaching staff at one school as they undertake research to inform improvements in their literacy program'. The synopsis of the project in this funding application included the point that the project 'will involve teachers investigating their own practices with guidance from Dr Honan, and teachers and Dr Honan working together to investigate the changes in pedagogical practices that occur after the introduction of the four resources model'.

Such admirable aims, and rejection of the position of expert, are contradicted, unfortunately, through a close examination of the discourses operating in the conversations I had with the teachers, as evidenced in the transcripts of the tape recordings. For example, in the following transcript extract there are many indicators of the expert status I hold:

Eileen: *So do you think that's part of teaching generally?*
Jenna: *Very much so now at the moment*
E: *What do you mean now*
Jenna: *Because I think these days the focus is more on how children learn best and we know so much more about different learning styles and we're wanting to know more about it so we're gearing ourselves towards that*
E: *Lavinia did you want to say something?*
Lavinia: *I agree with Isobel I think that often you can make changes .. and you are very motivated and it the work's really hard but you work at it but then it becomes really hard work – there's a lot more preparation – and sometimes it slides and you have to keep that motivation level up to maintain it – so I think change often requires a lot of motivation on your part and a lot of good resources and good strategies- otherwise it is a very difficult situation*
E: *Tara?*
Tara: *Umm because that's what's happened in my classroom because I'm not really sure what they did in the first half of the year so we came in and kind of created a different environment for them and um I guess*

because I've done that before it wasn't as hard for me and it's taken them a little bit of time but they've been able to get into a routine and I think you have to get to know those children my children don't like lots of change, but yeah like introducing just one thing, one activity going through that and then they get comfortable with that type of thing, it works. If you're introducing everything at once it gets too difficult I think

E: *But do you think that's for yourself as well as a teacher?*

Tara: *Yeah*

In this extract, I act as director and manager of the discussion. I ask the questions (do you think that's part of teaching generally?', I direct who responds and when they respond (Tara?), I probe for further explanations (what do you mean 'now'?), and I attempt to steer the discussion in the direction I want it to take (do you think that's for yourself as well as a teacher?). This is only one small example from the transcripts, but the complete set of transcripts provides many such interactions. The turn-taking, direction of discussion, and management of responses, are generally also examples of common classroom interactions between teachers and students (Edwards & Westgate, 1987). This is quite a telling analogy, as I was a primary school teacher, and I am employed now as a teacher educator. It would seem then that the co-researcher relationship I wanted to establish with the teachers in this project was infiltrated by the discursive positionings more in common in relationships between academics and teachers, or teachers and students. In both cases, the ascendant position is that of expert, the holder of power(full) knowledge (Honan, 2002).

Research as usual

Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel (2004/forthcoming) have described one of the key points that distinguishes teacher research from that led by academics as "that teacher research must flow from the *authentic* or felt questions, issues and concerns of *teachers themselves*". Most importantly they see this point as being compatible with guidance and formal suggestions offered by academics. It is how the relationships are formed and conducted between members of the research team that identifies the work as teacher research. I believed that the invitation to work with these teachers helped to establish the collegial and co-researcher nature of this particular set of relationships. I intended that the research project was organised in such a way that teachers' 'authentic questions' were being addressed while they were being guided in the conduct of the research process by myself as academic researcher. The description I have given earlier in this paper of the research project processes contradicts my claims in this area. For example, the use of the singular personal pronoun in my description of the project indicates the number of decisions made by myself without consultation with the teachers:

- *I suggested that a pilot research project could be undertaken*
- *I decided to use the four resources framework*
- *I asked the teachers to spend time writing*
- *I tape recorded part of the discussions*
- *I asked the teachers to brainstorm*
- *I asked the teachers to collect data*
- *I introduced the four resources framework*
- *I gave the teachers two papers*
- *I asked the teachers to reflect*

Here I am not claiming that a stylistic, grammatical alteration from singular to plural personal pronouns would change the constitution of myself as expert. Rather, my use of the singular pronoun signifies the power(full) position I maintained, both during the research process, and

in the reporting of the process. It signifies that the process, while taking on the superficial gloss of the teacher as researcher rhetoric, continued to uphold my power(full) position as expert academic.

Academic as colleague

In contrast to this reading where I have presented myself as academic expert, Lavinia, one of the teachers involved in the project, positioned me as a professional colleague in some of her comments about the research process.

> *Lavinia: I've never been involved in a process where there's an end product like this and you're going to publish it so it's an interesting process. I really enjoyed it. I think that it's got a lot to do with you, very laid back way that makes people have to think about it~~.~~ gives people scope to feel that what they're saying is beneficial and of benefit. Because what you're doing is not saying well, I have an end product, I've already written it, you're saying whatever the end product is it's worthwhile because the whole lot of us went through that process not just …I like that you've challenged us, if someone says something that you think, I don't really agree with that, then you've said, oh I don't agree with that but you've never I don't think it's ever been a put down, like I know more because I've done more, it's more a well have you ever thought of.*

Here, Lavinia constitutes me as a co-researcher who engages in discussions that allow teachers scope to consider thoughtfully their current practices. While providing opportunities for teachers to extend their thinking, this co-researcher undertakes such challenges in such a 'laidback way' that teachers feel comfortable in offering their own opinions. Lavinia's positioning of me as this collaborative co-researcher may be due to our closeness in age, our common experiences in classrooms and schools that were identified during our meetings, and her own acceptance of some of the challenges that I provided during our discussions.

In the reflexive analysis I have undertaken here, I have found that it is far easier to critique one's own constitution of a particular subject position than to analyse how oneself is constituted by others. Turning the reflexive I/eye (Davies et al, 2003/in press) on my own utterances has been surprisingly painless (even enjoyable!). I have found it difficult however, to analyse the constitution of myself here as professional colleague. Indeed I have found it viscerally discomforting to read these words of praise. Such discomfort may be an example of how my own historical autobiographical take up of particular storylines (Davies, 2000) informs the constitution of my subject position within discourses in which I am presently located. In other words, the storyline within which I was constituted as a child, a Catholic girlhood storyline of selflessness and avoidance of praise, has infiltrated my reading of Lavinia's comments, and has contributed to my discomfort.

Conclusion

Turning this reflexive gaze on my own contributions to the research project I have described has allowed me to examine some of the hidden implications of attempts to develop new relationships between academics and teachers. The rhetoric and assumptions that circulate among teacher educators around the development of teachers as researchers has unfortunately resulted in the uptake of empty slogans, in the way that Zeichner warned of during the 1990s:

> In the last decade, the slogans of 'reflective teaching', 'action research', 'research-based' and 'inquiry-oriented' teacher education have been embraced

by both teacher educators and educational researchers throughout the world (Zeichner, 1994, p. 9).

One way of avoiding a simplistic approach to the undertaking of research by academics and teachers as co-researchers is for academics to examine closely the discourses in which they locate themselves as they go about engaging in this research. This would entail turning a reflexive, critical gaze on how the outcomes of projects have been affected by the academic's own subject positions. Such critical examinations could result in the development of research that recognises the complex theoretical work that teachers do, and engages both academics and teachers in collegial relationships that will result in research that has significant impact on the improvement of quality learning outcomes in schools.

References

Apple, M. W. 1986, *Teachers and texts. A political economy of class and gender relations in education*, Routledge, New York.

Apple, M & Jungck, S. 1990, '"You don't have to be a teacher to teach this unit": Teaching, technology, and gender in the classroom', *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 227 – 251.

Ball, S. J. 1994, *Education reform: a critical and post-structural approach,* Open University Press, Buckingham.

Butt, R., Raymond, D., McCue, G., & Yamagishi, L. 1992, 'Collaborative autobiography and the teacher's voice', in *Studying teachers' lives,* ed I. F. Goodson, Routledge, London.

Davies, B. 2000, *A body of writing, 1990 – 1999*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Davies, B, Browne, J., Gannon, S., Honan, E., Laws, C., Mueller-Rockstroh, B., Petersen, E. B., 2003, in press, 'The magnetic eye/I: the ambivalence of reflexivity, *Qualitative Inquiry*.

Edwards, A. D., & Westgate, D. P. G. 1987, *Investigating classroom talk*, Falmer Press, London.

Freebody, P, 1992, 'A sociocultural approach: resourcing four roles as a literacy learner' in *Prevention of reading failure*, eds A. Watson and A. Badenhop, Ashton Scholastic, Sydney.

Freebody, P & Luke, A, 2003, 'Literacy as engaging with new forms of life: the four roles model', in *The literacy lexicon* (2nd ed), eds G. Bull & M. Anstey, Prentice Hall, Frenchs Forest, NSW.

Goodson, I. 1995, 'Studying the teacher's life and work' in *Critical discourses on teacher development,* ed John Smyth, Cassell, London.

Grundy, S., Robison, J., & Tomazos, D. 2001, 'Interrupting the way things are: exploring new directions in school/university partnerships', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, vol 29, no. 3, pp203 – 217.

Hatton, E, 1989, Levi-Strauss's "Bricolage" and Theorizing Teachers' Work, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*; v20 n2 pp 74-96

Honan, E, 2001, (Im)plausibilities: a rhizotextual analysis of the Queensland English Syllabus, Unpublished PhD thesis, James Cook University, Townsville.

Honan, E, 2002, 'Departmental advisers as official interpreters: Torchbearers and holders of official knowledge'. Paper presented at Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference Problematic Futures: Educational Research in an Era of ... Uncertainty, University of Queensland, 1 – 5 December, 2002.

Honan, E, 2003, 'Teachers as researchers using the four resources model as a map of practices', Paper accepted for presentation at the 48th World Assembly of the

International Council on Education for Teaching, 20th – 25th July, 2003, Melbourne, Australia.
Kemmis, S & McTaggart, R, 1988, *The action research planner* (3rd edition), Deakin University Press, Waurn Ponds, Vic
Kincheloe, J. L., 2003, *Teachers as researchers: qualitative inquiry as a path to empowerment* (2nd edition), Routledge Falmer, London.
Lankshear, C & Knobel, M, 2004/forthcoming, *A handbook of teacher research*, Open University Press, Buckingham & Philadelphia.
Lather, P. 1994, 'The absent presence: patriarchy, capitalism and the nature of teacher work' in *The Education Feminism Reader,* ed L. Stone, Routledge, New York.
Luke, A & Freebody, P, 1997, 'The social practices of reading', in *Constructing critical literacies: teaching and learning textual practice*, eds S. Muspratt, A. Luke & P. Freebody, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.
Luke, A & Freebody, P, 1999, A map of possible practices: further notes on the four resources model, Practically Primary v.4 n.2 p.5-8, [Online] Available http://www.alea.edu.au/freebody.htm [18th February, 2003]
Robertson, S. L. 1996, 'Teachers' work, restructuring and postfordism: constructing the new 'professionalism'', in *Teachers' Professional Lives,* eds I. F. Goodson & A. Hargreaves, Falmer Press, London.
Smyth, J, 2001, *Critical politics of teachers' work*, Peter Lang, New York.
Zeichner, 1994, 'Research on teacher thinking and different views of reflective practice in teaching and teacher education', in *Teachers' minds and actions: research on teachers' thinking and practice*, eds I. Carlgren, G. Handal, & S. Vaage, Falmer Press, London.