

Jayne Stillman: MA Education module 6.

Methods of educational enquiry module.

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How can I use what is within me and my influence and achievements in the arts at Westwood St Thomas school to interface my career progression as a County inspector for art?

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How can I use what is within me and my influence and achievements in the arts at Westwood St Thomas school to increase my understanding about and interface my career progression from a teacher to a County inspector for art?

Abstract:

A change in a profession from teaching to working as a LEA County Inspector/Adviser is a sudden shift in parameters for facilitating and disseminating good practice. How the life affirming energy from one educational role to another can interface and result in inspiring others and creativity is the journey that this study will follow. It is systematic enquiries that identifies how one's unique code of beliefs and values that are tacitly held can be developed and influence, change and inspire another community. The methods that are used to gather the data to inform the research are significant as they shape the findings and interpretation about the enquiry. Ethical issues, validation of data and presentation of the research are crucial considerations to producing a successful enquiry.

Introduction and context:

After seven years of teaching art and design in secondary schools and with experience of liaison with other schools and the community I reviewed my career and skills and started to think about my next move. I was Head of the Arts faculty at Westwood St Thomas' School¹ and I had taught there for six and a half years. These had been very happy years with many opportunities and celebrations of the arts. I felt that my departure would not be to another school and possibly not being a teacher but I was unsure as to what job would unite all of my strengths, experiences and achievements and be the one for me. I guess this thinking took place between 2002-3.

It was just by luck that I had seen a friend who left the same school as I was in, to become a Local Education Authority (LEA) consultant and she suggested looking in the Times educational supplement for vacancies in the LEA. Two days later I did and what was to become my new job was advertised. I was appointed to the post of County Inspector/Adviser of art and design for Hampshire. I have a possible 550 schools to work with across all phases of education for 4-16 year olds.

I am now in a position to shape and direct art education in a large county and to be an influence on what can be achieved and happen. This is an exciting time and one were the transition involves me suddenly being the equivalent of a senior manager in a school. Judi Marshall's (1995) account of women's lives exploring career and life changes talks about challenges and curiosities in moving to a new institution. I greatly empathise with this but I also feel that change is also something that can be refreshing. As an artist I suppose it can be likened to having a blank canvas and making a mark. I need to find my feet first and get a feel of what is what and then I can audit for ideas and vision of

¹ Westwood St Thomas' School is an unusual comprehensive school in that the intake can be affected by the single -sex grammar school provision on the other side of the city. The overall ability of the student cohort is well below that of a typical comprehensive school. We are a 13-18 upper school with approximately 700 students and serve the immediate largest housing estate in Salisbury, the nearby town of Wilton and the surrounding rural area. The Ofsted report, October 1997 comments about our students thus, "Whilst all students are well cared for, many experience a variety of social and economic disadvantages in their backgrounds."

what I want for art and design in Hampshire. In preparation for this I felt that it would be helpful to use this methods of educational enquiry assignment to plan a research enquiry that will identify characteristics from my successful teaching and translate them to my new role. In this enquiry I will seek to acknowledge and identify what made me an effective practitioner and how I can use these findings to interface my position as an Inspector / Advisor. These connections will permit me to employ elements of good practice from my 'comfort zone' as a teacher into my new capacity and affect teaching, learning, schools and communities.

As I embark on my change in employment and a new direction in my career and as I review my position as an educational researcher I feel now is the place to consider my practice and embodied values and how this can inform my future influence. In order for this to be able to happen I need to deduce what my core values are and reflect on my effective practice to date. Self-realisation and examining are deeply personal and this feeling is even more concentrated when asking others for their opinions. This piece of writing will assist me with a plan of how I will approach my research and dissertation and help to focus and organise my approach to life as an Inspector / Adviser.

This poses questions about how well do I know myself and who is the best judge of this? This assignment is building on my previous action research assignments about my teaching and managing and reflecting on my current practice (Stillman 2001/2002/2003). Connelly, M and Clandinin, DJ (1999) reflect on, 'personal practical knowledge' this refers to teachers' experiences and knowledge as being integral to shape professional identity. I support this but I would want to add and research the idea of my spirituality, what is within me that ultimately influences what I do and what happens.

Methodology

The approach that I have chosen to use to complete this enquiry is one of Action Research. This is because it is the method that I have used predominantly for my research to date. It is one that is systematic and that has a clear worthwhile purpose with that of my realisation of changing boundaries and professions and making some connections with interfacing past and future practice and also research. Carr and Kemmis 1986 (In McNiff 1994 p.2) describe Action Research as, 'A form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants (teachers, students or principals for example) in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of a) their own social or educational practices, b) their understanding of these practices, and c) the situations (and institutions) in which these practices are carried out.' Although my role has now changed I interpret myself as being in a position of being a teacher and becoming an Inspector/Adviser and using this to improve my educational practice.

Action Research is essentially a self-reflective process. It requires me to consider my own practice for educational improvement to ensue. One of the main features of Action Research as purported by McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2000) is, 'Putting the 'I' at the centre of the research.' To use the first person allows ownership of the research study and its unique content to unfold. I have made a decision to research about me changing jobs, that is the action. I am therefore stating that I hope my enquiry will improve my practice

and effect that of others, this is the research. I have to put myself at the front of the action and research. 'Empowerment' is considered by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001 p.233) to be a means for the reflective practitioner to achieve professional autonomy through professional development. Certainly this is my aim to take control of my research and so to be a more effective professional and subsequently able to empower others. The outcomes of my enquiry will enable me to be a more effective educationalist and identify new approaches and directions it will be as Clarke, A and Erickson, G (2003 p3) suggest, 'Learning that is in a state of evolution'. I perceive that my research will grow with me as I go to work each day and plan for innovative practice in art and design education. I consider research to permit the enquirer to be able to have an insight and to be at the forefront of discoveries and new initiatives.

To start my action research project I had to determine my research focus. This seemed to evolve with me as my other enquiries have. It is my current situation, that of an employment change and how I can ensure that I affect a new location with new teachers and learners? I spoke with colleagues during an MA session about it and then with my tutor² to pinpoint my focus.

My methods for this enquiry will be videos, interviews, questionnaires, e-mails, observations, and discussions with my MA group, photographs and my diary. I will discuss each of these methods for collecting data and how they can assist my research. My rationale for this enquiry is improvement and to get data from my past and future employment that will permit me to influence my new job. Through sifting the evidence I should be able to make judgements about how my data can strengthen my ideas and what further data needs to concern. The essential need will be that I review the data and evidence gathered and refine it into manageable parts.

In MA sessions³ we usually record the evening on a video camera. These serve as a record to any member of the group and it is possible to obtain copies for individual use. I feel that there is value in reviewing my thoughts in previous sessions on how I felt that my practice would move during my transition time. It will also permit me to have the opportunity of hearing the other voices from the group who have grown with my previous assignment and may well be able to offer some reflection or analysis. As I have started to write my research I would like to go to a group meeting in order to validate and review my findings. I will be flexible initially in my interpretation of the video, there is some value in organic growth and as McNiff, J et al. (1996) say, 'Be prepared for the unexpected.' The filming may detect some new angles for research that will better improve my research with different considerations.

Before leaving the school I will develop a questionnaire (FIG2) to deduce some information to review and then perhaps follow up with an interview or a

² Discussion with Jack Whitehead on 14th June, 2003 and during summer school 8/7/2003.

³ During MA sessions the video camera is usually always running. Previous and future sessions will be vital to show how my research and understanding has progressed or not. The sessions are on a Wednesday evening and enable teacher researchers to work alongside Jack Whitehead and Sarah Fletcher to consider, analyse, validate and share thoughts about the groups' research.

telephone call. Travel and time is a factor that I have to consider with my research because I am no longer visiting the school every day and so specific appointments would need to be made to follow up questionnaires. As I know that this questionnaire had to target those people whom had worked with me and knew the work of the art department. I really need them to respond it is necessary to consider as Oppenheim (2001) identified, 'The ways in which we approach respondents are therefore of paramount importance.' I really want these questionnaires to be a foundation for the future research. I identified key recipients, they were generally those people who became involved in some way with the arts activities and whose opinion I felt would be honest and informed. I also planned that I would give a separate attachment with the questionnaire this reflects the advance warning consideration that Oppenheim (2001) considers. I also felt that it just personalised the request and that I may get a better response from this. I will distribute about thirty questionnaires and I imagine that the response that I get back to be approximately sixty percent. This sample should be sufficient data from which to identify further investigations.

FIG2: Questionnaire designed to evaluate possible future data.

Jayne Stillman.

As I am moving on from Westwood and I am about to start my dissertation I would value your comments about my influence on the art here. It maybe that I will have to get back to you in the future to discuss your thoughts more. These ideas must be honest. Your perceptions maybe used to inform my enquiry if this is OK?

- What are your thoughts about the art department in your time at Westwood St Thomas School-since you have known it?
- How do you believe that I have influenced the art department and creativity (negative and positive comments please).
- Is there something that I could have done better?
- Why do you feel that the influences and thoughts that you have stated above have happened?
- Is there something that I could have done to have improved art education at Westwood St Thomas School and in the community?
- What would you say my strengths have been whilst teaching and managing art at Westwood?
- What would you say my weaknesses have been whilst teaching and managing art at Westwood?
- Have students benefited from me being at Westwood?- How?
- Have the community benefited from me being at Westwood?-How?
- Have my colleagues benefited from me being at Westwood?- How?
- Please comment on the following statement:
'I have influenced others art education through exercising my own aesthetic values and beliefs.'

Thanks so much for your time.

Would you be happy for me to use your name? Yes or no (please delete).

The wording that I used in this questionnaire design was a mix of open questions and comment on questions. I felt that where possible I wanted to elicit from the recipients their perceptions and views. Anderson, G et al. (2002) suggests to be cautionary about these approaches as it could, 'Tend only to evoke responses from those with extreme views.' I appreciate this thinking but my plan was to select the respondents of these questionnaires so as to inform my future research and I had to ensure that they would be

reliable. I aimed to address the 'content validity' Cohen et al. (2001 p.109) factor that refers to the depth and breadth of the sample questions on the questionnaire. Many of the recipients were to be colleagues or community who had been very involved with me in the art department and so I could address questions quite specifically and tailor them to the situation, I knew these people.

As I review the questionnaires I hope to identify some candidates to be interviewed about their views of my effect on the arts. This will also need to address the issue of moving on to work in a new local LEA and identify some key people to review my impact and progress in the arts as an Inspector. These people are unknown to me as yet but should gradually become apparent. From the responses of the interviews I will review the questions to inform a new set of considerations I would conduct a standardised format for these as Oppenheim (2001.p65) discusses. I think that to have set questions will permit for a better comparison. I would also have to conduct some exploratory interviews from both sources of my previous and current employment. I also feel that there should be a range from the sample of people of different ages and different capacities. Some teachers, some not and some managers and some not. The nature of this enquiry also requires me to meet with a governor and perhaps students. The purpose of these would be to understand other issues and develop ideas and research hypotheses as Oppenheim (2001.p65) comments about. Interviewing in this way will of course permit me access to different thinking and contemporary needs.

All interviews would ideally be recorded using a digital camera and then transcribed in parts to isolate the information that I wanted to utilise. Oppenheim (2001.p65) also says that exploratory interviews can, 'greatly broaden and deepen an original plan for research'. At this stage of the research I think this will greatly enhance the study with new dimensions and hypotheses. As time passes and I work more as an Inspector/Advisor I will be able to ask about what I have been able to help teachers with and can do in the future and evaluate my impact as McNiff, et al (2000) comment on. At the centre of this is essential to keep reminding myself that it is I investigating the work that I do and ensure that the 'I' is focussed on.

As the period of my research proceeds I will keep a diary to record my thoughts, feelings and observations. Mc Niff, J et.al (2000) gives suggestions for organising the diary. The 'timeline' appeals to me with dates and times to log entries. I feel that this will show my development and how I feel that I am progressing with time. This self-reflection will also greatly assist me to consider my new role. I would also like to keep a visual diary as I feel this will greatly contribute to the findings and support the subject of the arts in the research enquiry. This can be done with a digital camera but ethical issues will have to be considered to.

Much of my correspondence in my new job is on e-mail, telephone and meetings. I will keep my diary to record these e-mails, observations, and discussions with my MA group and also a video recording where possible to exercise different methods of enquiry and collecting evidence. I think there is

a real concern to do things appropriately and with respect. I will have to evaluate my practices and consider my interpersonal skills and the ethical considerations. Ensuring validity at every stage of a piece of research is essential. Cohen et. al (2001 p.115) say, 'Validity is essential if the researcher is to be able to have confidence in the elements of the research plan, data acquisition, data processing analysis, interpretation and its ensuing judgement.' I think what will be crucial is to have a timeline, organisational skills and a clear plan for the research and so time for evaluating and sifting is allowed for. I have considered below my forward planner for my dissertation study as suggested by McNiff et.al (2000).

Schedule for Action Research Project:	
Jayne Stillman: How can I use what is within me and my influence and achievements in the arts at Westwood St Thomas school to increase my understanding about and interface my career progression from a teacher to a County inspector for art?	
Time plan: September 2003-May 2004- approximately 35 weeks	
Task undertaken	Timing
Preparation	
Identification of research area	Weeks 1-3
Initial reading undertaken	Weeks 1-5
Consideration of ethical issues-written statement of intent	Weeks 1-5
Resourcing	
Budget drawn up	Weeks 1-3
Working with other people	
Discussions with management and schools	Weeks 1-2
Invitations to potential groups of participants	Weeks 8-12
Invitations to possible validating group/ MA group	Weeks 8-12
Doing the project	
Identification of research study	Weeks 1-5
Production of values and mission statement	Weeks 3-5
Gathering of evidence 1	
Identification of indicators	Weeks 6-18
Imagined solutions	
More literature review	Weeks 6-18
Gathering of evidence 2	Weeks 18-24
Evaluation of evidence 2	Weeks 24-25
Convening of validation –validation group/MA group	Weeks 24/25
Production of dissertation (Claim to knowledge)	Weeks 26/32
Evaluation	Weeks 32/35

FIG 1: My Schedule for Action Research Project. September 2003-May 2004.

As I collect the data I will have to monitor it and keep the ideas organised and coded so that I am systematic with my research. McNiff et. al (2000p81) suggest 'Encoding' and 'Labelling.' As I am now a home-based worker I think this type of system will be imperative as research will have to be stored when not in use and it would be time saving to be able to identify information with an

indexing system. To monitor the process of my Action Research I will need to validate it. In order for this to happen I will need voices from either side of the net. I will use the MA group and my mentor and line manager in my new profession. This will have to evolve over time as until I get to know colleagues it may be difficult to be able to comment and be a 'critical friend' McNiff et al (2000).

How do I apply the methods that I am going to consider and also use this schedule? In order to do this I particularly like the model seen below (FIG 2). The 1990 Griffith's action research model has three loops that consider planning, execution and fact finding. The inner loop considers reflection in action. The outer loop associated with long term reflection and the middle one with systematic and ongoing observation. I feel that this cycle of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, planning distils the data and evidence required enhancing the research. The framework of reflection and review permit the vital information to be collated and time for analysis. Anderson (2002) considers the generic steps in the planning and research processes, this makes the sequence very logical and with a definite structure. I particularly support his advocating a SWOT⁴ analysis, as it is a good way of separating all the different contributions of the research and categorising their place in the enquiry. Interpretation of data is essential as soon as possible so that future directions may be considered promptly.

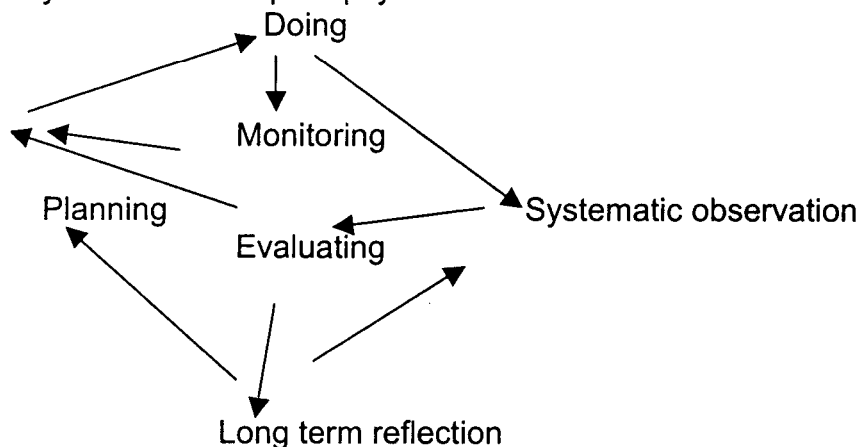


FIG 2: Griffiths' 1990 action research cycle. (McNiff, J. Lomax, P. and Whitehead, J. 2000).

Ethics

Implicit to my Action research is consideration about ethical practice. The need to constantly be aware of moral issues and to respect individual consent will thread through my research. This echoes Cohen's (2002) consideration about informed consent concerns, thorough explanation and advice to the subject. If I plan my approach from the outset to always seek permission I should address Oppenheim's (2001 p83) 'basic ethical principle governing

⁴ A SWOT analysis is an exercise undertaken about an area of research that considers its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats it gives the opportunity to identify strategies, tools and methods and then to consider alternatives. I particularly like the example in Woolf, F (1999).

data collection' of no harm to the respondent. As I will be focusing on schools I will have to be aware in the case of children to always gain permission from parents, teachers, club leaders etc. I will be researching in different educational institutions and in different LEAs and it will be essential to get permission from the relevant Head teachers or governors prior to starting the research. I will also have to refer to my own employer's guidelines about this practice and I suspect that standard letters already exist. I support Cohen's (2002) views concerning access and acceptance and that the researcher should consider ethical issues as it allows them to establish their own ethical position. To be open at all times is possibly my own philosophy to approaching this enquiry.

I imagine that my study will contain photography and video of activities. This is so necessary in research about art education as images can show expression and circumstance. Whilst video allows us to see and hear the practice, I also feel it places the research in context. I want my research to present a true account of my practice and I will be mindful of sensitivity in some concerns. Working in many different classrooms will require me to be mindful and diligent to organise for consent

Analysis

In a previous assignment, 'How have I improved my learning and provision for the arts using lottery funding?' (Stillman 2002) I identified my living theory. It had core values. Which were:

- The arts are for all; everyone should have access to them.
- A need to acknowledge the arts and not underestimate them.
- My personal aesthetic needs for design and creativity. I plan that this period of research will build on my embodied values and nurture them to grow with me as an artist, teacher and inspector. To measure how I have affected and interfaced this change in career I hope to arrive closer to knowing my own philosophy and use this to make judgements about my impact and progression. Feldman (2003) is concerned about the validity and quality of self-study but within the MA group and my own research there is a history of good evidence and validation.

At this moment I feel that I am on a road of self-discovery and realisation as I have achieved a goal in my career. It is my strong desire for aesthetics and perfection from within me that shape the things I do and expectations that I have as I approach things. To understand the way that I operate, why, and how it results in learning will assist me to adjust to the many different situations and challenges that I will encounter. The following apposite thought about aesthetics resonates with my own demeanour. 'Art is one of the ways of expressing or presenting to consciousness the divine, the deepest interests of man, the most comprehensive spiritual truths. Yet art must yield to the more explicit truth of philosophy and is destined to fade away. Everything that is beautiful is so only by partaking in something higher (namely mind). In this sense natural beauty manifests itself as only a reflection of the beauty which properly belongs to mind. The universal need from which art springs arises from the fact that man is a thinking consciousness; that is, he makes explicit to himself what he implicitly is; - every movement of the human heart.' (Hegel in Baldwin 1901 page 265). To understand the way that I operate, why, and how it results in learning will assist me to adjust to the many different

situations and challenges that I will encounter. It is my strong desire for aesthetics and perfection from within that shape the things I do and expectations that I have as I approach things. I aim that my findings will identify my embodied values and reflect how these are applied to connect to my new job.

It is my intention that I will write up my research in full to present it as a dissertation of 20,000 words. This will contain data, analysis and critical literature together with my interpretation and learning. I may also produce a shorter summary that I could use to present to a possible future MA group in my new County.⁵ My dissertation will be a personal account that reflects on my own learning and discovery about my influence on art education in Hampshire.

My research should make my tacit knowledge explicitly available. I perceive that this would also be a valuable presentation to the National Association of Educational Inspectors Advisers and Consultants (NAEIAC) as subject inspectors seldom progress straight from a school and outside of the LEA⁶. Going public in this way and making a contribution to public theory and knowledge is as McNiff et al (2000) describe as epistemology. I understand that by theorising my knowledge I will have developed my epistemology of my professional practice. I would like to think that the outcome of this research would have improved education through my Action Research. That is my aim and if I am successful I will have my own 'living theory' McNiff et al (2000).

The layout of the dissertation will be logical and take a Journey through my transition. I am concerned that the nature of my enquiry of being very personal and searching for my implicit beliefs⁷ and values could become too subjective. However the judgements that I make about the knowledge that I sift and collect will be a product of my own personal critical analysis together with up to date literature to make it at the cutting edge of its subject matter. I would like to feel that my work would be suitable for a brief summary to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport as they have consumed the work of the National Advisory Committee for a Creative and Cultural Education's research. (NACCCE)⁸. My practice reflects my passion for a creative and cultural education and more importantly will be a live record of my embodied values and contemporary practice. I will have to ensure that I can be succinct and at times objective in my selection of data.

⁵ At my interview on 22/5/2003 I was asked if I would consider working with a group of researchers if one was established.

⁶ A meeting with The County Inspector for Strategic Management advised me on 19/9/2003 that I am the second Inspector in thirteen years to progress to my capacity.

⁷ The notion that personal beliefs affect the cognitive processes especially the way people see themselves as learners. Guy Claxton (1990) explores this idea and I did some previous research for my assignment 4 concerning this and so I will have another comparison and opportunity to measure my progress.

⁸ The NACCCE were a unique group of scientists, artists, educators and business leaders. David Blunkett then Secretary of State, set up the group in 1988 for education and Employment and Chris Smith then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. Their terms of reference were to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the creative and cultural development of young people through formal and informal education: to take stock of current provision and to make proposals for principles, policy and practice.

Conclusions and looking forward

Importantly this research will allow me to take account of my own personal and professional learning that has not only occurred in the period of the transition of my employment but has grown from the beginning of my life as a teacher and educational researcher.

I would like to draw on the conclusions of my research to contribute towards a future research group within my new LEA. This will assist with a networking idea that I would like to encourage for art subject leaders. Annually I have to organise a conference and I feel sure that this would be an appealing workshop. I believe that my role could become a facilitator from conducting this research as well as a researcher.

As my area of focus is quite specific I will have to be prudent about sorting the data and analysing it as I progress to ensure that my thinking can move forward. There could be a threat that the subject is too vast and that I have to continue with my theme but perhaps relate it to one area of my practice. A good showcase and measure of my influence would be a conference that I have to organise. This could be considered as a mirror for my interfacing my role and a teacher to Inspector. This research would have worked if it permits me to engage my life affirming energy, skills and passion for creativity to inspire my new audience.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:

Fig 1: My schedule for Action Research Project. September 2003 – May 2004.

Fig 2: Questionnaire designed to evaluate possible future data.

Fig3: Griffiths' 1990 action research cycle.

Jayne Stillman:

In the very first MA meeting I remember describing to the research group my reasons for doing the Masters course. It was to improve my professional development and to make me a better teacher. I am pleased to say my study has afforded me these opportunities and more. Through Action research and analysis of my own practice I feel that my understanding and performance as a teacher and learner has developed. I believe it has benefited the students that I teach and my management of a department and my colleagues through my clear focus of improving my practice and ultimately enhancing both the learning and teaching climate and environment. It is a luxury that my school has invested in us the opportunity for pursuing this Masters degree for it feels like an indulgence of time to be able to reflect about one's practice with colleagues and share ideas and thoughts. There is a great collegiality and trust that has been nurtured through our attendance at group meetings. Each of us have our values and individual enquiries and we each respect and share in the consideration of issues that shape our educational research. My assignments have concerned the teaching and learning of art and its influence to a wider community. My research has enabled me to command my own living theory about my practice and to disseminate my ideas through my classroom, school and beyond.