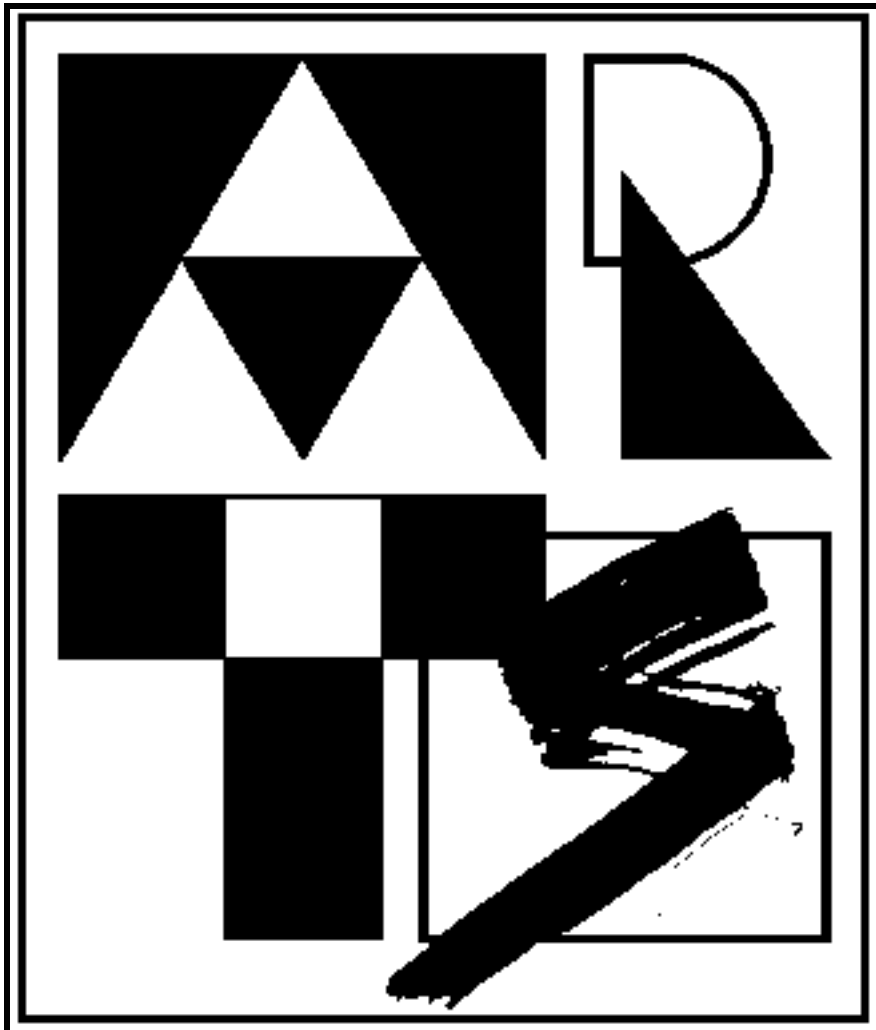

GETTING STARTED IN ARTS EDUCATION RESEARCH

by

Robin McTaggart



Studies in Education and the Arts - No. 1

**GETTING STARTED IN
ARTS EDUCATION RESEARCH**

Studies in Education and the Arts

Editorial Board

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ARTS ED PRESS

Studies in Education and the Arts

Series Editors: Lee Emery, Barbara van Ernst & Robin Stevens

Cover Design: Lisa Castricum

Published by Arts Ed Press,

c/o Dr. R. S. Stevens,

Faculty of Education,

Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria 3217.

Studies in Education and the Arts No.1

Getting Started in Arts Education Research

© Robin McTaggart 1991

First published 1991

Produced on a Macintosh Computer using PageMaker version 3.0 (Aldus Corporation, 1985-88) in 12 point Times font.

Printed in Australia by Deakin University Printery, Geelong, Victoria 3217

Distributed by Deakin University Press, Deakin University, Geelong,

Victoria 3217, Australia.

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

McTaggart, Robin, 1946-.

Getting started in arts education research.

Bibliography.

ISBN 0 646 06270 0

1. Arts - Study and teaching - Research. I. Title.

(Series: Studies in education and the arts; no.1)

700.7

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STUDIES IN EDUCATION AND THE ARTS

An occasional series of monographs and collected papers devoted to scholarly examination of and support for teaching and educational research in the arts.

In recent years there has been a most welcome increase in both political and societal awareness of the arts as part of the Australian educational system. Recent initiatives such as the establishment of the National Affiliation of Arts Educators (NAAE) will hopefully continue to promote not only of an awareness of the arts in education but also an awareness of their value as part of the general educational process. Within the respective disciplines of music education, drama education, dance education, media education and the visual arts education, there has also been a growth of professional self-esteem in recent years, particularly with the burgeoning of research in several of arts education areas.

In support of these developments (particularly at the professional level), members of the Editorial Board of *Studies in Education and the Arts* have felt the need for the publication of an occasional series of monographs and/or collected papers devoted to the scholarly examination of and support for teaching and educational research in the arts. The rationale adopted by the Editorial Board for the publication of this series is to promote an awareness and development of research in the various arts education areas as well as to promote discussion of current issues in arts education practice. Accordingly the series will aim to support research and discussion in arts education by publishing papers on research methodology, theoretical and philosophical discussions, case studies, research reports, bibliographic studies, and general background papers. One of the policies adopted for *Studies in Education and the Arts* is to promote links between research, theory and practice in arts education. As well as discipline-based studies in music education, drama education, dance education, media education and the visual arts education, it is hoped that the series will also include monographs and/or collected papers on related / integrated approaches to arts education, evaluation and assessment in the arts, curriculum development and pedagogical studies, arts therapy, and studies on imagination, thinking and cognition in the arts.

EDITORS' PREFACE

Most people first come in contact with educational research by reading about the efforts of others. The first part of this book orientates the reader to doing just that with a critical eye. The discussion between members of the Editorial Board of *Studies in Education and the Arts* which follows in the second part raises some issues more directly associated with doing research in arts education. Later monographs in the *Studies in Education and the Arts* series will explore particular approaches to arts education research and some other issues in more detail. For those who wish to explore research methodology more immediately, an extensive list of references to different approaches to educational research is provided at the end of the paper.

The Editorial Board wishes to express its thanks to Dianne Alderson for her transcription of the taped interview (which forms Part Two of this book) and to Lisa Casticum for her cover design.

Lee Emery
Barbara van Ernst
Robin Stevens

September 1991

GETTING STARTED IN ARTS EDUCATION RESEARCH

PART ONE

An overview of research approaches

Most educational enquiry is reported in written form in research journals, professional journals, books and other venues. Other kinds of reporting such as photography, film and videotape are sometimes used, perhaps less often than they should be. No matter how educational research is reported it is important that it is not simply believed, but studied carefully. Different kinds of enquiry obviously should be appraised using different criteria, but there are some general points which should always be considered. I do not want to pretend that there is any neutral way of looking at research (or anything else). In educational research, as in other social sciences, preferences for viewing the world in certain ways are apparent. A research report is a form of communication which may be used by researchers and others to persuade and influence. It should be viewed therefore as a discourse of power as well as an effort to document justified knowledge.

I have tried to work at a level of generality which allows fair treatment of all approaches, but you may be able to identify my own preferences from the way I have phrased questions and issues. If so, that is a good thing because it will demonstrate that you are developing a critical eye for the works of education researchers.

The appraisal of educational research reports can occur at several levels. We can ask:

- Is this research report a clear description of the study - of the conceptualisation of the problem or issue, of the design and conduct of the research, and of the findings?
- How is this a good example (or otherwise) of this kind of research?
- How is this research appropriate (or otherwise) to the kind of problem or issue which has been posed?
- Is this research based upon an appropriate conceptualisation of the problem or issue?
- Are the findings of this research justifiable as knowledge and as a contribution to the improvement of education?

In this discussion I will not try to differentiate between these levels because each of them will always be relevant and should always be kept in mind. For example, it would be rather silly to praise a research report which very

clearly described a brilliantly conducted experiment if the whole problem had been conceptualised in a racist way. Unfortunately, there are real examples of such folly. It can be demonstrated, for example, that the performance of indigenous people on certain Piagetian tasks is 'inferior' to that of Western children of the same age. This has sometimes been taken to mean that indigenous children are 'slower' or 'inferior' in their 'intellectual development' than Western children. Of course, it is the conceptualisation of the problem which is at fault. Both the idea of 'intellectual development' and the tasks which are used to test it are distinctively Western in quality. So what the research shows is simply that Western children are more Western than indigenous people, which is not exactly a major discovery. Worse than that, such research confirms the racist premise on which it was founded.

So, the appraisal of educational research requires sensitivity to the very important ethical and political dilemmas researchers always face (though they may not always be aware of them themselves). Research always serves some interests ahead of others. For example, what is most useful to policy-makers is not likely to be as useful to teachers. What some social theorists find exciting and interesting may not be much help to the principal of a school. The collection and analysis of information of any kind may even be destructive, at least for some of the people involved or affected. Who gets to know what about whom is a very important matter in all social enquiry. This does not mean that research is merely the manipulation of knowledge for particular political ends, but the ethics and politics of research are issues which require scrupulous attention.

To structure the discussion I will use the following general foci:

- the purpose of the research (and of *this* report itself)
- the intended audience for the report
- justifying the study
- the design and conduct of the study
- the analysis and presentation of information
- validity
- the relationship of the study to understanding and improving education

The purpose of the study

Three kinds of purpose

All research is directed at informing, but it does so in several different ways. It may seek to develop an *explanation* of how certain events come about. For example, it may aim to explain just how it is that some children learn spatial concepts more readily than others. This kind of research is

usually quantitative, and seeks *generalisations* which can be used to guide subsequent action. It is often referred to as *empirical-analytic* research. Because it seeks general principles it may be more useful to people with a general role in education, for example, overall policy in mathematics curriculum development. This kind of research is sometimes regarded as more 'objective' because of its emphasis on measurement of variables. However, it is *not*. The selection of variables (which are defined in ways which enable the *qualities* of things to be quantified) is not a value-free activity. Neither is the search for general principles. Such a search means that certain interests (for example, those with system-wide powers looking for standardised ways of conducting and *controlling* education) are served ahead of others (for example, a teacher with a student who is unable to understand a mathematical problem even when a well-supported general principle is used in teaching). All research has subjective elements, the differences between kinds of research simply reflect the way in which this subjectivity is disciplined, for example, by agreed ways of working and the accessibility of the act of research to scrutiny and critique by others.

Another kind educational research may be directed at improving *understanding*. This research is usually referred to as *interpretive* (or '*hermeneutic*') research and embraces a wide variety of approaches including phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, ethnography and history. This research has a particular emphasis: it seeks to understand what is happening in the terms in which participants in events actually understand the events themselves. By documenting carefully the ways in which participants talk about their work, the social structures and social relationships which shape the way they exist and relate to their work, and the nature of the practices people are actually engaged in, interpretive research creates understanding by connecting with the readers' own experience in various ways. The term *naturalistic generalisation* expresses the way in which we use the experience of others to develop our own understanding and to guide our own actions. We make use of the specific knowledge presented by others, but take care to act in accordance with our own aspirations and the possibilities and constraints of our own work contexts.

Interpretive research itself can be subdivided into two broad categories. The category which emphasises the *meanings* participants actually bring to bear on their lives (and which obviously constitute their lives at the same time) is often referred to as *phenomenological* in character. Phenomenologists aim to document 'multiple realities' – to understand and describe people's lifeworlds as the people themselves describe them. The second general category of interpretive research is called *critical* research. It is a development from the first because it seeks to explain *why* it is that particular meanings have importance in the social or educational context which has been studied. In particular, critical research seeks to understand

how the distribution of power shapes the way in which the world is understood. An emergent third kind of interpretive research, *post-structuralism* or *postmodernism*, is even more radical in its criticism of the role of research in the distribution of power. In the more extreme versions of this general view, research is nothing more than an enactment of power relations, legitimating and forging power distributions rather than moving towards some 'truth' or even some less 'distorted' view of the world which can be captured in language. This is a very complex discussion about the convergence of knowledge and power which cannot be pursued in detail here.¹

Some examples demonstrate how the process of *critique* (which gives critical research its name) can expose distortions in people's understanding of the world. For many years it was believed that people of negroid extraction were less 'intelligent' than caucasians. Some of the evidence presented to support this theory suggested that negroid brain cases were smaller in volume than caucasian ones (on average). Some time later it was revealed that the actual measurements of volume were wrong – actually distorted to prove the theory. Because caucasian researchers controlled the powerful knowledge production institutions of anthropology, these findings went uncontested for a long time.

Another more subtle example of this kind of distortion concerns the concept of 'intelligence' itself. Because of its associations with the world of biology, intelligence was sometimes considered to be a *biological* concept. This gave it some special status and allowed 'level of intelligence' to be used as a way of categorising children for schooling purposes. This practice gave some students considerable advantages over others. Black, working class and female students were disproportionately denied resources and access to higher education. It was not until 'intelligence' came to be understood as a *political* and *economic* concept that its capacity for perpetrating injustice and distorting the way we understand 'ability' was revealed. If 'intelligence' is biological in character there is not so much we can do about it. If however, 'intelligence' is cultural, partly a function of opportunity to learn on the one hand, and partly an instrument for the distribution of economic and political advantage on the other, our understanding of it is amenable to change. Instead of assuming that achievement in school is pre-determined, researchers can begin to identify ways in which certain students are *denied* achievement because of the mismatch between their own lives and the culture of the school, for example. Note that the meaning of *one word* here helped to institutionalise a whole framework of discourse, of research and educational practice, and of distribution of power and advantage.

¹ See especially Lather (1991) for an introduction to this discussion. Several titles in the list provided at the end provide quite useful expansions of the Lather introduction.

As you can see, the commitment to critique is a very complex task indeed because the language, practices and power relations of society generally are those *within* which research constitutes its problems. It is clear that people's general relationships with nature and material things (economic conditions) and with each other (social conditions) are important, as are the content and structure of their communication (linguistic conditions) and the personal and cultural precursors of all these (biographical and historical conditions). Much educational research now uses social class, gender, race and their historical and economic roots as key points of reference for explaining why it is that people think and act the way they do. For example, all of these points of reference are important for understanding why it is a poor black girl in the United States says 'I know I will never be any good at math.' The term *critical hermeneutics* is also used as a general rubric for this category of research but terms such as historical (or dialectical) materialist analysis and feminist materialist analysis may be used to identify different emphases (or guiding rubrics).

Both empirical-analytic and interpretive research privilege the role of the professional researcher. Both tend to be research done *on* or *about* people by others with research skills. A third kind of research (which might utilise some of the techniques of the other kinds, especially interpretive research) involves people conducting research on themselves and their work and for themselves and those they work with. This kind of research is often called participatory research, action research, or, combining both implicit principles, *participatory action research*. This kind of research focuses on the concrete particulars of social or educational work – analysing the ways in which *changes* in discourse, in social organisation and relationships (power), and in practice, improve educational work. The fundamental purpose of participatory action research is to allow *participants* to develop improvements in their work and the theory (rationale and understandings) which guide and inform it.

Because improving education requires active and informed participation by people working at all levels, their perceptions of what is happening and how it might be improved are very important. For this reason, action research tends to use the techniques of interpretive research, especially those of critical hermeneutics because, to improve educational work, it is often necessary for people to see the ways in which their self-understandings have been distorted by habit, custom, tradition and the *imposition* of meaning. However, the equally important feature of action research is the use of strategic action to improve things. That is, action research involves people in deliberately changing their own action in the light of collective reflection on the failings of current education work and previous attempts to change. This collective reflection is informed by data

collection on the one hand and the collective invention of new possibilities for personal and collective change on the other.

Looking for purposes

Because research reporting is subject to space constraints, purposes are not always explicit and often are quite cryptic. Some researchers may assume that their purposes are self-evident, but this is not only a problem for the reader, it is often a case of self-delusion. Purposes should be clearly expressed. Often there is a need to discriminate between the purpose of the research to which the preceding paragraphs refer, and the purpose of a particular research report. Readers will need to examine any research report carefully: first, to look for any reference to its purpose(s); and second, to analyse carefully where this kind of research fits in the general categorical system above. Remember that research reporting is not merely drawing the attention of an amorphous public to 'truths' unveiled by expert researchers, but is part of a 'knowledge production' system which favours the interests of some audiences over others. The fundamental questions here concern how the problem or issue addressed by the study was described: how was it a problem or issue and for whom?

Audiences

The identification of the purpose of research inevitably involves stating the problem or issue the research seeks to inform. This leads to the question of whose problem or issue forms the focus of the study. This might be apparent from the way the study is designed, but it will be most evident in the intended audience. The audience which is intended can often be identified by the actual audiences mentioned in the report, by the venue in which the research is reported (compare reporting to an erudite research journal with reporting to a meeting of teachers at a local school), by the actual problem which is addressed, and by the language which is used to report the research. Unfortunately much educational research is directed to a relatively narrow audience, all too often to other researchers rather than people more directly involved in educational practice. You should ask: 'Who is or might be the audience(s), and how does this paper address their needs?' It is important also to ask which other audiences might or should be considered, and how the research might have been conducted so that it addressed their concerns as well as those of the particular audience which has been attended to.

To sharpen the issue here you might ask yourself how people are expected to make use of the findings of the study. If this study were to be believed, what inferences could be drawn from it for educational practice? In particular contexts? To test this out beyond your own experience you

might show the report to people in different roles (teacher, principal, curriculum consultant, parent, system administrator) to see how they would interpret the relevance of the study to their work.

Justifying the study

All research makes an effort to build upon what is already understood. This means that any study should justify itself in four key ways. It must demonstrate:

- (i) an understanding of other relevant work in that *substantive field*, for example, drama education, mathematics education, curriculum theory, or educational administration (that is, the term 'substantive' is used to distinguish these considerations from those concerned with research 'method' and 'technique');
- (ii) an understanding of the *methodology* which might be appropriate to the problem, recognising that the problem itself is defined in part by the methods and techniques which are used to study it;
- (iii) that the problem is not merely a problem in the literatures mentioned, but that it is a problem which has ramifications for, and in some way is derived from educational practice; and
- (iv) how the problem is informed by the personal research or other professional and personal experience of the researcher(s) – explaining how this educational problem became a problem for *them*.

Each of these considerations will be evident in a particular study to different degrees. Extensive justification of the general approach to the research used in a study – for example, a defence of the interpretive approach – will not usually be found in a report of the study unless it is a very extended piece such as a book or a doctoral dissertation. Such arguments may also appear in literature which specialises in the problems of methodology. The best we can expect in relatively short reports is appropriate reference to the literature which actually justifies the general approach. It should also refer to key methodological influences on the design and conduct of the study and on the particular techniques (such as survey design, interview strategy, or discourse analysis, for example) which were used to generate information for the study.

Even though a study may refer to other literature to justify its methodological and technical features, it should be quite explicit about how the actual practical conduct of the study came about. Why and how certain kinds of information were collected, analysed, and studied should be justified clearly in the report.

The study should not only refer to methodological literature. Method cannot be divorced from substance so the intellectual progress made towards the formulation of this particular research problem or issue must be evident also in the study. That is, other research and theoretical developments in this area should be referred to as well. Nevertheless, other published research which is relevant need not always be identified in advance. Especially in interpretive research and action research the relevance of other studies will not be apparent until this particular research begins to articulate issues for further exploration. That is, in interpretive research and action research the literature is not so much a *source* for the problem studied as it is a *resource* for its ongoing exploration.

In all research reports it is important that both method and the substance of the study document and reflect an awareness on the part of the researchers that others have engaged the same kinds of problems. It is important that people understand problems for themselves, but it should not be necessary for everyone to 're-invent the wheel'!

It is also reasonable to expect educational researchers to consider the relationship of their work to the concrete particulars of educational practice which includes a broad range of activity – for example, such things as policy formulation as well as how aesthetic concepts might be taught to seven-year-olds. Of course, some educational enquiry may delve deeply into the abstraction of social theory in its search for explanations about why education turns out as it does in a particular cultural context. This does not exonerate it from considering what its relationship to concrete events is. The elaborate social theory which helps to explain *why* a poor black girl anticipates she will never understand mathematics is little help if it does not provide some basis for action – to help the child change her self-defeating belief about her ability *and* to help her learn mathematics.

The design and conduct of the study

The *design* of the study may not have been specified in advance because some studies deliberately change the way in which information is gathered as it becomes more obvious which information it is important to collect, analyse, understand and explain. A very demanding test suggested by some is whether the reader could actually replicate the study from the information provided. For many kinds of study this is the wrong kind of test because an important aim of the research was *responsiveness* to the issues and problems which the participants' views and the information collected began to suggest. Issue and problem-definition is ongoing. In these studies it is more important that readers are given a strong sense of the methodological dilemmas the researchers faced and the ways in which these were resolved. Specification of the procedures used is often helpful,

but it falls well short of offering the reader a vicarious experience of what it was like to confront the methodological issues of the study in person.

Whether the design of the study was established from the beginning or responded as issues and problems developed, it should be clear in the report just how and why information was collected and analysed. In most research, some information is collected which is not used or which receives only cursory attention in the study. Readers should look for an explanation of this in the report, but also be imaginative about what other kinds of information should have been considered.

It may be helpful to consider other research which has been done in this area to see whether other researchers have discovered things which these researchers should have taken into account. These things may be methodological or substantive in nature. This raises an important point about educational research: it builds upon traditions of enquiry (perhaps even by rejecting them). This means that it will be difficult to evaluate a research report without some knowledge of other research – its methodology and its substance – in the area.

It should be clear in the study just how information was analysed, and why information has been presented in particular ways. In quantitative studies for example, it is not sufficient to note that an analysis of variance or some other standard statistical procedure has been conducted. It is important that a statistical procedure has been carried out correctly of course, and that it was the appropriate procedure for the problem specified. But even more important is how the actual measures which give the figures were conducted and what they stand for. We often find measures of 'musical achievement' or 'music literacy' which appear to stand for things which can be counted. But how is the response to a test question a measure of a 'bit' of knowledge about the theory of music for example, the same 'size' as another 'bit' of musical knowledge? And how can we be justified in adding these 'bits' together as if they were in a single line standing for a continuum of musical knowledge? It is very important to understand just what the 'tests' might be measuring and to be aware that 'achievement' and 'literacy' and the like are not absolute concepts but depend very heavily for example on contextual and cultural conditions. What the 'variables' *mean* is something which requires careful attention.

Studies which recount people's views must be studied carefully too. The *meaning* of what is said in an interview (or in response to an 'open-ended' survey question) for example is very contingent on the conditions under which a question is asked.

For example, the person's words may be affected by:

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- How (or whether) a question was understood: whether the interviewee actually understood the language of the question (especially important when interviewing children or people whose first language is not the one being used in the interview).
 - How questions were interpreted (for example, consider the different meanings the term 'discipline' might have to different people)
 - The relationship of the questioner to the respondent (for example, relative status, gender, race, social class, age, difference or similarity of these).
 - The conditions of the interview (for example, the confidentiality of the responses, the purpose of the interview, other factors to do with the risks of disclosure).
 - The interviewee's perception of the relevance of the interview and the study to his or her own aims (for example, consider why a teacher should spend an hour being interviewed just to help someone whose work is directed at reducing the number of teachers employed in a school district).

That is, in appraising educational research it is very important to look beyond the surface meanings of information presented. Information presented will always be influenced by the conditions of its collection and selection, as well as the nature of the questions being addressed. It is very important to understand *why* certain kinds of information were sought, the *means* by which the information was sought, and the effect of each of these on the findings of the study.

Analysis and presentation of information

All research reporting involves the selection and reduction of information. Statistical procedures are used most often to indicate *generally* what is the case given certain assumptions:

- That the operational definition of each 'independent variable' stands for what it purports to in an appropriate way. For example, comparing the 'effects' (on some 'dependent variables') of different 'curriculum packages' is a very shaky procedure because it is not clear just what is being compared.
 - That other variables (including the dependent variables) in some way appropriately 'represent' the population of relevant things. For example, what is meant by 'achievement' in particular arts education areas?
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- That what is *general* is what is important. For example, it *may*¹ be *generally* true that daily reciting multiplication tables causes children to be quicker and more accurate in elementary computation, but it may not be any help at all in developing the computational accuracy of a particular child or class. Indeed, it may be completely counter-productive. That is, the process of finding features about which generalisations can be made may lead to a selection of the trivial because important things to know are fairly specific to each classroom or school (for example, specific to each child's prior experience of this branch of mathematics)

In research which involves statistical analysis, many readers do not have the technical expertise to judge whether procedures have been selected and conducted appropriately. This is unfortunate and it may be necessary to rely on other expert advice. However, much important critique of quantitative research can be conducted by raising questions about the adequacy of the ways in which variables have been defined and measured, and by trying to work out alternative ways of explaining causal effects or other relationships reported.

Looking for plausible alternative explanations is important, and is a strategy of critique applicable to all kinds of research which makes claims of a causal kind.

Much qualitative research also seeks explanation, though through different interpretations of the concept than that used in quantitative, empirical-analytic enquiry. Qualitative approaches to educational research often aspire to explanations which form the basis for *reasonably justified belief*, in some ways analogous to the standards of proof applicable in courts of law. In many cases, qualitative approaches to enquiry do not seek to present explicit explanations or understandings at all, but instead present evidence and conflicting interpretations so that readers may form their own conclusions and make use of the analysis of issues to inform their own actions in their own particular contexts.

Qualitative researchers also select and reduce information in various ways. It should be clear to the reader that information has not been selected in ways deliberately to bias or pre-empt certain interpretations – by the researchers themselves or by readers of the report. Remember that information is not 'neutral', and that it can be presented to inform or to persuade. Be careful of the latter. You should look for evidence that the researchers have been fair and balanced in their interpretations. One test of this is whether alternative explanations and contrary information have been

¹ Some of my mathematics education colleagues will cringe at this *invented* example.

sympathetically presented and considered in the report before the interpretations finally preferred by the researchers have been settled upon.

Try to work out why certain quotes have been used. If the quotes are from other published works, are they simply an appeal to authority or do they indicate that the writer is aware of the arguments which the quoted author was advancing? Is the writer seeking to impress or to inform you? It is important for the writer to provide ways for the reader to see where some of his or her ideas are coming from and that they have a working knowledge of other writings in the field (substantive and methodological). That is, research reports ought to give you a map of where the writer has been conceptually, and a rich understanding of the direction now being taken.

If the study is an analysis of the existing literature and documentation on a topic, it is particularly important that no other relevant published work has been ignored. This means that the reader of research is committed to some independent work to check out the state of the field. Remember that it will not often be possible to judge the quality of a report without considerable understanding of related work.

Some educational research relies heavily on the analysis of documents; for example, historical records, policy statements, newspaper accounts and similar writings associated with education. It is usually desirable that educational research of this kind goes back to 'primary sources', the original documents themselves, rather than depending upon aspects of them quoted by other authors ('secondary sources'). Using primary sources is one guarantee that biased selection or misinterpretation of primary sources by one author is not passed on and confirmed unwittingly by others. In similar vein, serious policy analysis should develop its interpretations of documents with interviews with key people (policy-makers themselves, teachers, and others involved and affected) wherever these people are available. This is not possible in historical enquiry, but *triangulation*, examining both information and interpretations from different perspectives, is still essential.

Much qualitative educational research uses interview data, and how this is presented in the report is an important guide to the quality of the study. It should be clear why particular quotes are being presented, and the way the information was sought (for example, exactly how questions were asked). It is important to know quite a lot about the speaker and the context of his or her words. It is usually important to know how these comments relate to comments other people made about the same topic or issue. If a student was quoted as saying something about how art was being taught in a school, it would be important to know what others (for example students, teachers, consultants and artists-in-residence) were saying about it.

In short, when reading any educational research it is important to think about the reasons why certain information has appeared in the report. Of course, information is usually presented to support findings or claims, that is, in order that certain *inferences* can be made. The justifiability of findings and claims invokes the idea of *validity*.

Validity

Though some researchers may claim the validity of a complete study, the question of validity actually applies only to inferences or claims. In empirical-analytic educational research there are finely differentiated kinds of validity which refer in general to the legitimacy of the claim that a particular measure actually measures what it is supposed to measure. Some kinds of validity can be illustrated with an example of an achievement test in visual art. The questions we might ask of it include:

- Does it actually look like it measures achievement in art (*face* validity)?
- Does the concept 'achievement in art' seem like a unitary, comprehensible quality which it makes sense to break down into components (*construct* validity)?
- Does it adequately and representatively sample all of the things which make up this construct called art achievement (*content* validity)?
- Do test results correlate highly with other measures of the same construct (*criterion* or *predictive* validity)?

Empirical-analytic research generally tries to identify causal relations between 'variables' (like art achievement). Experimental or quasi-experimental designs aim to identify specific 'cause' and 'effect' by 'controlling' the effects of other variables. Two further kinds of validity are relevant in this kind of research – internal validity and external validity. *Internal validity* concerns the extent to which alternative causal explanations are ruled out by the design of the study. It addresses the question: 'Did this variable really cause this effect on this other variable'. Internal validity is established by ensuring that the effects of other variables than the ones in questions are *controlled* – usually by randomly allocating experimental 'subjects' to groups (or by a statistical procedure which effectively makes the groups equal with respect to that variable).

External validity has two key aspects: 'Do these variables and causal inferences about them actually stand for something about the constructs, *and* is this phenomenon generalisable? Let us illustrate the issue of external validity with an example. I will use a simple experiment with randomly constituted groups (to eliminate threats to internal validity) so we can. The experiment compares two different teaching methods, discovery

learning (Group DL) and didactic teaching (Group DT) on children's mathematics achievement measured by a test.

In summary, the experiment looks like this:

	Group DL	Taught by method DL	
All students in a school	Random selection of two groups with 20 students in each		Compare results on math achievement test
	Group DT	Taught by method DT	

Suppose Group DL performed better. Could we say that discovery learning promoted mathematics achievement?

Here are some questions we might ask which probe the issue of external validity:

- How true would this finding be for other students in other schools?
- How well did the teaching methods actually represent 'discovery learning' and 'didactic teaching'?
- Was the *only* difference between two group 'treatments' the difference between 'discovery learning' and 'didactic teaching'? For example, was the teacher more enthusiastic about discovery learning?
- Did the students detect that there was an experiment in progress and react differently to the treatments because of the experiment itself?
- Did the students try differently from their ordinary efforts just because it was an experiment (for example, working harder than usual and raising achievement in both groups differently from what could be expected in ordinary classroom work)?
- Did the test favour one of the groups (for example, by de-emphasising things best learned by didactic teaching)?
- Was the test a test of 'mathematics achievement'?

All of these questions are relevant when appraising the 'truth claims' of empirical-analytic research.

As you will already suspect, concerns about validity are just as important in interpretive and action research, but the ways of establishing validity are not reduced to the procedures evident in empirical-analytic enquiry. The basis of validity claims in interpretive enquiry are much more diverse. Some ethnographic approaches, for example, require strict regimes for the analysis of key (usually repeating) themes in responses to interviews,

giving the researcher the primary responsibility for ensuring defensible selection and interpretation of information. Other more naturalistic and phenomenological (and some would argue, more democratic) approaches give responsibility to participants to verify that both observations and interpretations are defensible. In naturalistic 'case study' approaches to evaluation, for example, the criteria of *fairness*, *relevance* and *accuracy* may be used by researchers and study participants *together* to establish the validity of the study (*participant confirmation*) as well as to protect participants from the release of potentially damaging information.

Because of the diversity of approaches to establishing the validity of inferences and claims in naturalistic enquiry it is reasonable to expect an account of the rationale for the validity of the particular study.

Basically the question of the validity of any study concerns whether the findings presented seem to reflect the evidence which has been collected (not merely presented). You should ask whether you could argue with the study's claims on what has been presented, or on other information you are familiar with. The report should deal with the relevant supporting and contrary arguments adequately. The writing of the report should be clear, logical, concise, and articulate – the onus is on the researcher to make his or her work comprehensible to its intended audience. Especially in the case of educational research, audiences should generally be as broad as possible. It is unlikely that education can be improved if people at all levels do not understand inferences which might be drawn from research findings.

You should also consider the politics of research in this context. If we view the world of education as a collection of multiple realities, each reality constructed by rich personal experience in a complex web of social relationships, we are beginning to recognise that people live and conduct their educational lives as if there were *many* truths. Each truth must have some substantive defence; that is, truth is not simply what one group of people say it is without some appeal to evidence. But each claim also serves some interests ahead of others. A claim that something is 'generally (or, worse still, *universally*) true' should be treated with some scepticism for it is likely to serve the interests of those with overview (and supervisory) responsibilities over others. That is, the search for what is generally true may be used to impose one view of reality (that of system administrators for example) over others, confirming and compounding existing positions of advantage. And, if many 'variables' (that is, system conditions) must be held constant to establish such general causal relations, are such general truths merely enshrining existing patterns of social organisation and the injustices they sustain (for example, through racism and sexism)?

Relationship of the study to understanding and improving education

The purpose of all educational research is to inform *and* improve educational practice. That is, educational research is research *for* education. Every educational research report should be explicit about the ways in which inferences drawn from it might affect educational practice. Obviously, we cannot be too literal about this. Some kinds of research might affect educational practice in rather indirect ways. Nevertheless, it is important that educational researchers regard practice as an important point of reference in their work. How ancient Etruscan funeral orations were taught is interesting, but its relationship to modern educational theory and practice needs to be *demonstrated* if it is to count as *educational* (rather than say, historical) research.

Educational researchers need to establish the relevance of their work. In turn there is a need for educational practitioners to justify *for themselves* that the knowledge claims of others have some legitimacy in their own work. That is, no educational practitioner can justify his or her own work by claiming that someone else's research creates some moral imperative (or excuse or reason) to act in a certain way. As educators, we are all responsible for our own actions and for our own theories of what we are doing. That responsibility can only be realised through careful collective study of our own work – the way we conduct educational practice, the way we conceptualise it, and the forms of social organisation and relationships we construct (and resist). In short, all educational research produces knowledge claims which others must test for themselves in their own work. That is, all educational research must eventually pass the test of action research. Is the study you are appraising defensible enough that it raises challenges for educational theory and practice – and yours in particular?

PART TWO

Talking about arts education research

This section is an edited transcript of a discussion at Deakin University between Robin McTaggart, the author of the first part of this book, and members of the Editorial Board of *Studies in Education and the Arts*. Robin McTaggart is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Deakin University and Editorial Board members are Lee Emery from the Institute of Education at University of Melbourne, Barbara van Ernst from the Faculty of Teacher Education at Victoria College, and Robin Stevens from the Faculty of Education at Deakin University. The purpose of the discussion is to develop some of the ideas presented in the first part of this book in the context of arts education. Robin Stevens leads off the discussion:

Robin Stevens:

Do you think that research in arts education can take its place in the mainstream of educational research – or is it something quite apart?

Robin McTaggart:

Yes, research in arts education can and should be seen as part of the wider realm of educational research. The reason that this is even a question for us is due to the imperialism of a particular kind of research which has emphasised quantification and measurement coming out of the behavioural psychology tradition. This has not only dominated arts education research, but it has also dominated educational research in general. It is only in relatively recent times that people have become interested in qualitative kinds of research in education as the stranglehold of psychologists on education has been broken. Now, arts educators rather more than other people have been put off by the statistical bent and ideology of research because they've always been interested in the exploration of quality, and it is really qualitative research which gives expression to that kind of aspiration. So it is no surprise to me that arts educators are finding that qualitative approaches to educational research are more to their liking, more akin to the sorts of things that they are accustomed to doing, and more like the way in which arts practice has some currency in the community generally. Pierre Bourdieu, a critical theorist, once said that art criticism created the 'public meaning' of art. I think arts educational research is an avenue for helping to create the public meaning of arts education. Educating the public doesn't require the production of statistical reports but rather requires accounts in natural language, which actually explain the activity of arts education and explain why it takes the particular forms that it does. So arts educators were bullied out of doing research.

Barbara van Ernst:

So that leads into the idea of documenting practice rather than something that's remote and academic. Can research really be something 'on the ground'?

Robin McTaggart:

One of the things that's happened with statistical approaches to research has been the differentiation of the role of the researcher as a measurer of things that happen in classrooms or systems or whatever, and the roles of people who are actually practitioners of art or of arts education. One of the effects of doing research in qualitative kinds of ways, is to democratise the relationship between the researcher and research. When people are doing quantitative research they typically go into their research field with categories of their own, and try and use measurements to see how much of particular qualities are evident in the field. What qualitative researchers do is to work much more closely with participants in the research project in the field to try and work out together ways in which, for example, arts education can be described and characterised. There's a democratic impulse there, but it is an exploratory kind of impulse as well, so that practitioners of art or art education work with researchers to work out what arts education is, and at another level of analysis, why it actually takes the particular forms that it does.

Barbara van Ernst:

That's interesting, because I was going to ask you where researchers and practitioners meet. You're suggesting that they really shouldn't be separate, that in fact there is a lot to be gained by their working together towards greater understanding.

Robin McTaggart:

Yes. A lot of the work I do in research is called action research where there is much less differentiation between the role of the researcher from the academy and people working in the field. There has been a strong resurgence in research methodology of arguments for thinking about practice, and documenting practice, and theorising practice by practitioners themselves. Now that means there is a role there for everybody, it doesn't matter what your practice is. If you think you are a policy maker, for example, you've got a practice to reflect upon and document and articulate. The same thing applies for the classroom teacher – there are many things that happen in classrooms which raise very complex theoretical and practical issues about what the nature of arts education is meant to be for kids. People who are teaching art or the arts or aesthetics, whatever handle we like to put on it, have a commitment to study and reflect on their practice and work with others to clarify exactly what does happen when you try and do things in classrooms and systems in particular ways. Advocacy for that approach to research – looking for theory out of the study of concrete practice – has developed enormously in a wide range of

movements in recent times under the 'action research' or 'participatory research' kinds of rubric. These approaches are an inevitable extension of what we call interpretive research in this sense. When interpretive researchers went into the field and began to search for the meanings that people actually use in negotiating their work or every day life (in anthropology for example), that was a mark of respect for the way in which people actually engage their own worlds. So there's a significant change in the role of the researcher once the meaning systems that people are applying in their own work and worlds are taken seriously.

Lee Emery:

Well, perhaps you could expand on how arts educators would go about deciding on an appropriate methodology or approach to research.

Robin McTaggart:

It is important that arts educators actually draw upon *all* of the possible ways in which research can be conducted. We've come down with a bit of an emphasis on qualitative approaches to research, but there are situations where some quantitative research is appropriate for arts educators. Sometimes it may be just for strategic reasons – getting money, demonstrating the kids are picking up concepts and know the meanings of words and can produce a test score for example. There may be occasions when that's a useful thing to do.

But I think it is important to keep in mind that the measurement of things implies an understanding of what *qualities* are first. That is, we can't talk about *quantities* of things until we actually understand what *qualities* are. Arts educators are much more interested in the qualities of things and so it seems logical that they would be actually interested in explorations of the nature of things. So we're coming down on the side of qualitative research.

The kinds of research that people can do depend upon the problem that they are trying to solve. It may be that people are trying to get a picture, a portrayal – those terms are instructive – of the kinds of things that actually happen in arts education in a region or something like that. Now a naturalistic or interpretive researcher could go to schools and write portrayals of the kinds of things that are happening in classrooms and schools – not merely just producing 'nice' images of the sorts of things that happen, but documenting issues and the struggle that people who are interested in teaching the arts have in engaging the bureaucratic structures that schools typically exist in. There are obstacles to their work just as there are possibilities created by institutional organisation. So it is the research question in a sense that drives the selection of methodology. People might be interested in the *organisation* of the arts classroom. Now, a strict and fairly 'scientific' kind of ethnography might be appropriate for

that. You might actually want to engage in quite detailed description of how things are organised and not worry too much about what the meaning system the art teacher has in terms of what kinds of arts education is happening and its justification. That may not be so important. It would be appropriate to do that kind of descriptive ethnography of what it means to have 'organisation' in an arts classroom.

Lee Emery:

You seem to be suggesting that meaning systems are always important though?

Robin McTaggart:

Generally speaking, in education we're much more interested in what the nature of the arts experience *is* for kids in the class room, what the nature of trying to teach art to kids *is* for the teacher, and how parents actually understand the arts experience the kids are having at school. Those kinds of questions are much more likely to be questions for arts educators and arts education researchers. The reasons that they're more likely to be good questions is because those very interpretations of what is happening to you are important in working out whether you're actually getting an education or whether you're acting as a decent teacher. If arts classes are a misery for the kids then it is not likely that they are going to pick up too much in the way of arts concepts. So kids have to enjoy it, engage it, find it challenging and all those sorts of things.

The only way we can find out whether kids are interpreting their arts education lessons in appropriate ways is to *ask* them. We actually need quite sophisticated interview methodologies to work out just what it is kids are picking up affectively or cognitively with respect to their arts experience. What are the concepts that they actually bring to bear when you ask them to critically analyse a painting, for example? We would like to know, for example, whether children can actually identify the sensory aspects of a painting; identify the technical features in a painting, and look at the way in which shapes and formal properties are used to create a particular expressive effect. That requires a fairly sophisticated interviewing approach. You can't find it out any other way. So probing the phenomenology of the kids' experience is important if we want to find out whether or not arts education is jelling for them in the way that we would hope it would.

Robin Stevens:

One of the difficulties that I think we have with any sort of research is the terminology. I think terms like 'phenomenology' and 'hermeneutics' tend to be a bit of a mystery to most teachers who are wanting to get into research. I wonder could you explain the origins and the meaning of the term 'hermeneutics'?

Robin McTaggart:

They're formidable terms for everybody, me too! The term hermeneutics really applies to a discipline that was used in the interpretation of biblical text. It's the discipline of unfolding the intended meaning of the biblical text. It's a 'clever' term of course and people use it to show off. In fact, it is a methodology that is used in a way that I have already alluded to, looking for the meaning systems that people actually have about the way in which they do their work, and the term 'phenomenology' overlaps quite considerably with the term 'hermeneutics'. Phenomenology tends to be, as the name suggests, a way of looking at events in the world as they actually represent 'phenomena' of a particular kind for a person – the way in which certain things are actually interpreted. There are obviously quite different interpretations of the same object – if we could indeed agree that there was the same object. That's the problematic of the issue. It ranges from simple things like when people see a car accident – there are a whole range of interpretations of what went on. Now in the arts, there is obviously quite a range of interpretations that one can make of the nature of any arts production. I suppose the discipline of criticism is really aimed at coming to some set of agreements about the criteria by which art works could be judged. To actually do a critique, one has to in a sense, get into the mind of the artist to see what is expressed in the work. In what sense is *this* an expression of some kind of intent? Now, people in this room are better judges of that sort of thing than I am, I suspect.

Lee Emery:

Well, perhaps can we tease that out a bit, the whole issue of terms. Can you tell us how you used the term 'qualitative research' and how that fits with 'ethnography' for example? Are these terms used interchangeably or are there different meanings attached to them?

Robin McTaggart:

Many of these terms are used somewhat interchangeably. I suppose that one could say that qualitative research was research that wasn't quantitative. We can easily understand what quantitative research is. Qualitative research embodies history (which might have some quantitative aspects to it of course); it covers case study approaches to evaluation for example, it covers ethnography, it covers phenomenology, and it covers hermeneutics (although hermeneutics is sometimes used as a generic term in a rather similar way to qualitative research). So it is a rather more generic term. Ethnography and phenomenology are sometimes used interchangeably, but ethnography differs from phenomenology in that it is much more literal, scientific, much more concerned with the description of the 'object world' in which the person works and so on. Now, that's one end of the ethnographic scale. It's very much like the study of animal behaviour for example, in natural conditions. We call that ethology

normally, but that end of ethnography is very much like that, where meaning systems are not so important. It is like describing human beings' behaviour as if they were animals, so to speak. The identification of patterns of organisation and ritual and all that kind of thing is that end of the ethnography scale. At the other end of the ethnography scale, there is the search for meaning and so it is at that end we'd be looking at using the term phenomenology, which is about engaging the meaning of systems that people are using to construct and explain the way in which they work, play or interact with others, whatever! Interpretive research is another generic term that roughly matches qualitative.

Lee Emery:

What does the term 'naturalistic generalisation' mean?

Robin McTaggart:

The term 'naturalistic generalisation' is a much narrower term that actually is used to provide an alternative conceptualisation of the idea of generalisation to contest the monopoly of *generalisation* that the statistical sciences have. The idea of statistical approaches in the empirical / analytic science is to make generalisations – 'this is how kids best learn art!' Empirical-analytic researchers search for generalisations that apply to all kids at all times, generalisations which are ostensibly meant to help every individual teacher put on a decent arts lesson. It sounds silly when you say it that way of course because there's no attention to the particular needs of particular kids and so on, even though I have slightly caricatured it. That's part of the problem of that notion of empirical/analytic research – searching for generalisations. It doesn't always seem to be production of knowledge which is useful for the particular situation that you are in.

The term 'naturalistic generalisation' comes out of the case study literature – it is a term that was used first by an evaluation specialist called Bob Stake and the idea of naturalistic generalisation is this. When we actually write a case study, the purpose of providing intimate detail of what is happening in the situation that we're portraying is so that people in other situations can look into the case study and have a 'surrogate experience' of what it is like to be in this particular case themselves. They can look at the case and say 'Well, this is like my life in these kinds of ways but it is different from my life in these other kinds of ways'. So I can look at this particular case and I can say that because this is not the same as my situation, I can't generalise from it and say all of these things are applicable, and therefore I can do the same thing. However, I *can* selectively interpret and use the information in the interpretations that are there and say, 'This is what I need to do in my situation'.

This is 'naturalistic' in the sense that that's how we do everything. We actually accumulate experience and whenever we make a decision to do

anything, it is against the fabric of a whole lot of cases in our own lives that do have similar aspects to the situation we are in now, and different aspects to the situation that we're in now. We can actually 'generalise' in a sense from that previous experience and say, 'Well, this is what I will do now'. In the same way, we can use the experience of others, in the example we're using, expressed as a case study, to generalise.

Some people prefer to use the term 'extrapolate' for that particular activity and sometimes it is clearer if you do use that term. The use of the term 'naturalistic generalisation' is a deliberate effort to contest the monopoly of the concept of generalisation that's applied in the empirical / analytic sciences. I will just make one more little point there: Whenever we read an empirical / analytic science report that tells us that this is generally true, we actually interpret that in the same way as we interpret our own experience. We don't unconditionally accept these as truths that we will implement in our own practice. Even if we do, we don't accept such truths for long, because they tend not to work, and there's always adaptation of any idea as it is realised in practice. Even in the case of this blanket use of generalisation, in our own experience we don't really believe that we're doing that anyway. So, the contestation about the meaning of generalisation is a worthwhile struggle because the empirical / analytic form of generalisation is a monopoly that can't be sustained.

Barbara van Ernst:

Robin, you've talked about the democratisation of the research process and you've also talked about a much wider definition of what constitutes research. What are the implications for the report writing? Has it broadened the acceptance of what constitutes a research report, or are we still battling with a traditional five or six or seven chapter account?

Robin McTaggart:

Research that is quantitative in nature is really oriented towards particular audiences – audiences of policy makers that actually have to generate system wide decision and system wide practices. Its language is not usually appropriate. Its findings are not usually appropriate for people in situations where particular things are much more important. Now those reports can usually be fairly cryptic because they just come up with some generalisations which say such and such is true. In fact behind them there's a whole lot of data handling and so on that is hidden away. Qualitative research reporting tends to be longer in nature and it is longer deliberately. It actually seeks to provide a rich description, detail that people can actually interpret in terms of their own experience, so they can actually go through that process of naturalistic generalisation.

To give someone a surrogate experience, you actually have to build in descriptions of what the context is like: what the paintings on the wall are,

what the noise level in the room is, the smell of spaghetti wafting up the hall from the cafeteria – all of those kinds of details are actually quite relevant to offering someone a surrogate experience of what it means to try and teach a group of adolescents to analyse a painting critically, for example. In my own research I've watched someone try and teach aesthetics concepts to a group of adolescents while the smell of ravioli wafted up the corridor and it had a significant effect on the way in which the lesson went. Those kinds of things, whilst they may *seem* trivial, are actually quite important in understanding what it means to give expression to an educational idea in a classroom. Many contextual things are relevant. So reporting tends to be longer, it also tends to be much more interesting.

One of the things that people who are interested in naturalistic or qualitative research have to do is to develop their own writing skills so that the aesthetic quality of their writing actually improves. The other thing that I should say here is that we are locked in to thinking about the production of research reports, too. We over-emphasise the value of reports. If we are actually talking about research where people are working closely together and thinking about what arts education in a school means, for example, teachers trying out things in practice and video taping themselves so they can actually see what does happen when you have conversations of this kind, reporting may be less important. Questions like, 'Is my teaching gendered in any way?' require that close level of analysis of what goes on. When people are actually talking together and producing little reports like that, the idea of an end report being the product of the research is a bit spurious. A whole lot of things are actually happening that give expression to the findings of the research as they go along because people change their practices as they develop their understanding.

Now I don't want to say that you can do research without producing documentation – I think it is really important that research is documented but I don't want to argue that the product of research is *meant* to be a document that someone else can read and interpret and use in their own circumstances. Reflective teaching, provided it goes through some kind of documentation, has its own products in terms of improved practice, improved understanding of practice, and improved relationships among people in the work environment.

Robin Stevens:

What you're talking about is really action research I think! – so could you end up with a journal or something like that which would document the evolution of the project quite satisfactorily?

Robin McTaggart:

Yes, it would be a 'case study' of how one changes one's own practice with help from others. That would be the straight-forward way to characterise it.

I should just say a little bit more about writing about your work, I think, and this is my own experience as much as it is anybody's but it underpins the whole process writing movement. I think that writing things down is a way of disciplining your own understandings so you actually find out how it is you understand and engage the world. You can get away with things in ordinary conversation, even sometimes critical conversations, with others that you can't get away with when you start to articulate things with the written words, so I'm quite a strong advocate for people writing about their work. However, for arts educators one of the important products of arts education is the kinds of things that people produce as a result of the experience. We don't want to discount the fact that kids are actually producing pretty neat examples of arts work that show, for example, how you use a line to create an aggressive kind of a feel, that show the way in which certain techniques can be used to generate particular expressive sorts of effect, that show the way colour can be used in a similar vein, that show what a bucolic scene really looks like. I mean there are certain kinds of formal characteristics that have to be in a painting to actually make it look like it is a scene of a countryside. Certain colours can't be used, certain colours can; certain organisation of shapes is necessary so that it has those sorts of effects. Now, if kids are learning about the relationship between technique and expressive quality, then the work they do ought to tell some of the story. The teacher's account of arts education of that form is incomplete if all it is is the products of the work. There are many educational issues and things like relationships with kids that need explication to report on the process of arts education, so the products of the work are not sufficient to constitute an *account* of what an arts education lesson might be. I'm being a bit classroom focused here too aren't I?

Barbara van Ernst:
It's good!

Robin McTaggart:
It's good in a way but it is also pretty important that people recognise that the role of the arts education policy maker has these obligations attached to it too. I think policy making is a practice for everybody – I think that's important to recognise. So, reflecting on practice and thinking about the relationship between the way in which administration is conducted and the possibilities for certain kinds of arts education in those classroom situations is very, very important. Analytical work of that kind needs to be done by everybody. So the ethnography of what it means to be an arts administrator is just as important as an ethnography of what it means to teach kids how to play the violin.

Robin Stevens:

There are certain ethical and political dilemmas which researchers face at various times. I'm wondering whether there are any particular dilemmas which are more likely to face arts education researchers than researchers in other areas of education?

Robin McTaggart:

No, they're slightly different but I don't think there's more risk or concern. In all kinds of qualitative research, people are portrayed in ways that are different from their ordinary existence. All kinds of portrayal raise the possibility of exposure. Exposure always changes the risk situation and it is very hard to predict what the risk is going to be. There are some 'celebrated' examples about the way in which people's lives have been wrecked by being exposed in television programs.

There are ways in the methodology for making sure that people own the facts about their lives. If we interview people we have rules of procedure which ensure that people can veto things, that they can contest accounts of conversations on grounds such as fairness, relevance and accuracy. So the participatory ethic in the relationship between researcher and research, whenever that relationship is differentiated in that kind of way means there are ways of working that allow people considerable control over the way in which their work is represented. That's most relevant in evaluation studies, where case studies are produced directly to inform decision-making of some kind. Because evaluation relates to immediate decision making, it relates to immediate concerns that people have. So in evaluation studies in particular which use naturalistic approaches, the negotiation of release of information is very important.

It is less important in situations where you are just trying to do a portrayal of what arts education looks like, or what music education looks like throughout a state. It is possible to anonymise people generally speaking, but it is not always possible if we want to use direct quotes of someone who happens to be the only music consultant in a region. They can be easily identified, and it is important that they actually have control over what is said and their identifiability is an important thing for the researcher and them to keep in mind. In arts education we would want often to use kids' work or artists' work and so on, so there are a few ways in which publicity is more likely to occur in arts education research. But I don't think that there's anything more difficult about it than doing a study of science education for example. There are general concerns there and they are important concerns, but it is also important to recognise that there are ways of working which do address those issues. There is quite a big literature on the politics and ethics of doing research.

Barbara van Ernst:

There are some concerns though with people checking out whether something is an accurate statement or not. You're assuming that they've got an equal knowledge and status with the researcher! That might be true with teachers for example, but if you're working with children, they may not understand the implications of what you're doing or portraying and that makes it slightly more difficult to be able to get the clearance from the subject.

Robin McTaggart:

Yes. With children, as a working principle, I never identify individual children or students if I can possibly avoid it. And, with other informants or people who have been interviewed, I usually offer them the right to have certain parts of their testimony used in an anonymised form, but I generally prefer people to be identified in the sort of evaluation work I do because it actually aids the process of naturalistic generalisation. If you know who someone is, and what their work context is in particular detail, it actually allows you to use your own local knowledge to make more valid extrapolations to your own situations.

People are not always entirely wise about what they should or shouldn't say. As you say, the researcher is sometimes wiser about what is a risk and what is not, and it is always a tricky situation. If someone releases something that you know is going to get them into strife, should you use it? In the practical situation you're confronted with those sorts of dilemmas reasonably frequently. But it is also important to remember, that when you talk with people, they actually say a whole lot of things in their staff rooms, in their schools and so on. A lot of the things which they say might seem to you to be shockingly controversial and risky, they say every day. So it may not be as terrible as you fear. But it *is* important that people have conversations about the release of information, just as we have had now. I've said to people, 'Are you sure that you want to say this, as this could be quite risky to you', and they'll say, 'The only reason I've said this to you is so that you'll write it down and use it. I reckon this ought to be said.' When people say that you are in a slightly different moral bind because they only told you because they're assuming that you would use it.

Barbara van Ernst:

So perhaps it is political and not ethical!

Robin McTaggart:

Both of these!!

Barbara van Ernst:

When you start talking about working *with* people, that puts the slant of co-operation and collaboration on to the research, rather than a senior researcher taking the responsibility, doing the work, and other people becoming subjects, you seem to be talking about teamwork. Could you say a bit more about that?

Robin McTaggart:

Teamwork and co-operation are necessary in qualitative research in the first place. If people won't talk to you there's no research. It is as straightforward as that. And it means that certain things can't be investigated. People just won't talk about some things with you and so it is not always possible to do studies for all of the things that you might be remotely curious about. But that's appropriate because there's a voyeuristic aspect to qualitative research, in any case that should be curbed. Being respectful of what people think, and documenting it and producing reports and so on, is in one sense to make an object of them in the same way that quantitative research can. A respectful relationship between researcher and researched is important.

In my view, the way in which qualitative research naturally moves is towards action research, because if we are actually going to take people seriously when we get their ideas, then why wouldn't we take them seriously as researchers in their own right? Why couldn't they actually study themselves? Why do they need us? Well, we've got a few things that we can help them with and teach them to do and so on, but it is not such a specialised activity that people can't learn how to do it. Their interest in doing it is substantial in the sense that getting an increased understanding of what is happening in their work makes their work more effective, easier, enjoyable and all of those things that increased understanding produces.

So, the idea of working on an action research project, I think is an inevitable result of thinking about what it means to work democratically in symmetrical and reciprocal kinds of relationships with people. Once researchers began to think about giving respect to the 'subjects' of research and regarding them as people who had ideas that were worth listening to, it was not a very big logical leap to think, 'Well, maybe these people could work as knowledge producers themselves.' So qualitative research and action research are much closer together politically and ethically than each is to empirical-analytic research.

Lee Emery:

Is there anything more you would like to add to round off this discussion?

Robin McTaggart:

I think it is important that people engage in the production of knowledge about their work. We are accustomed to thinking about research as an activity of specialists, about it as an activity that you need special training to do on other people. It is assumed that the production of knowledge is not the responsibility of anyone other than this elite group of people, who very often tend to be male, for example, and there are issues there that are quite important. Where people are engaged in a social or an educational practice, reflecting on that practice with others, and trying to develop an improved understanding of how the practice actually works, how it might be improved and what the kinds of social and organisational relations that are necessary in order to give effect to better forms of the work, is the only way that we can actually improve education and arts education in particular.

So that process of actually using the documentation and reflection on practice as a way of producing a clearer understanding of what a theory of arts education is, is essential for everybody. It doesn't matter what other knowledge people produce, it is still ultimately the responsibility of the individual person working in collaboration with others, to do moral, educational acts in their work. Now whether they're administrators or classroom teachers, reflection on the way in which that impinges upon the lives of kids, and the development of community generally, seems like something we can't escape doing.

PART THREE

Suggested further reading on educational research

Educational research methodology is a very broad and vital field of study. The following selection is a personal one, reflecting my own professional trajectory rather than a deliberate effort at eclecticism. Nevertheless, I have tried to list key works for different kinds of research¹. The selection also ranges from theoretical contributions which are about methodological justification to more practical 'how to do it' guides. There are many other texts which contend as contributions to the 'language of the field', but these will provide you with a pathway into most of the issues.

Overviews of educational research methodology

- Bredo, E. & Feinberg, W. (1982), *Knowledge and Values in Social and Educational Research*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
- Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1986), *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*, Falmer, London; and Deakin University Press, Geelong.
- House, E.R. (1978), 'Assumptions underlying evaluation models', *Educational Researcher*, 7(3), 4-12.

Empirical-analytic research methods

- Cook, T.D. & Campbell, D.T. (1979), *Quasi-experimentation: Design and Analysis Issues for Field Settings*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston².
- Cronbach, L.J. (1982), *Designing Evaluations of Educational and Social Programs*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco.
- Rossi, P.H., Freeman, H.E. & Wright, S. R. (1979), *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach*, Sage, Beverley Hills.
- Tuckman, B.W. (1978), *Conducting Educational Research*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York.

Interpretive research methods

- Anderson, G. (1989), 'Critical ethnography in education: Origins, current status, and new directions', *Review of Educational Research*, 59(3), 249-270.

¹ I have not included any books on *statistical* methods and procedure.

² For a specific critique of the notion of causality in this argument see House, E. R., Mathison, S. & McTaggart, R. (1989), 'Validity and teacher inference', *Educational Researcher*, 18(7), 11-15, 26.

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- Belenky, M.F., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger, N.R. & Tarule, J. (1986), *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind*, Basic Books, New York.
- Bell, C. & Roberts, H. (Eds.) (1984), *Social Researching: Politics, Problems and Practice*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Bogdan, R.C. & Bicklen, S.K. (1982), *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
- Bourdieu, P. (1971), 'Intellectual field and creative project', in M.F.D. Young (ed) *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for Sociology of Education*, Collier and Macmillan, London.
- Burgess, R.G. (Ed.) (1985), *Field Study Methods in the Study of Education*, Falmer, London.
- Burgess, R.G. (Ed.) (1985), *Strategies of Educational Research: Qualitative Methods*, Falmer, London.
- Burgess, R.G. (Ed.) (1985), *The Research Process in Educational Settings: The Case Studies*, Falmer, London.
- Eichler, M. (1988), *Nonsexist Research Methods: A Practical Guide*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- Eisner, E. & Peshkin, A. (Eds.) (1990), *Qualitative Inquiry in Education*, New York Teachers' College Press.
- Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1989), *Fourth Generation Evaluation*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- House, E.R. (1984), *New Dimensions in Educational Evaluation*, Falmer, London.
- Kemmis, S. & Robottom, I. (1986), 'Principles of procedure in curriculum evaluation', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, **18**(2), 151-155.¹
- Lather, P. (1986), 'Research as praxis', *Harvard Educational Review*, **56**(3).
- Lather, P. (1991), *Feminist Research in Education: Within / Against*, Deakin University Press, Geelong.
- Outhwaite, W. (1975), *Understanding Social Life: The Method called Verstehen*, Allen and Unwin, London.
- Patton, M.Q. (1990), *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- Rabinow, P. & Sullivan, W.M. (Eds.) (1979), *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Roberts, H. (Ed.) (1981), *Doing Feminist Research*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Stake, R.E. (1978), 'The case study method in social enquiry', *Educational Researcher*, **7**, 5-8.

¹ A valuable starting point for ways of negotiating release and establishing the validity of information and interpretation in many kinds of qualitative research.

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- Stake, R.E. (1975), *Evaluating the Arts in Education*, Bell and Howell, Wooster Ohio.¹
- Tawney, D.A. (Ed.) (1976), *Curriculum Evaluation Today: Trends and Implications*, MacMillan, London.²
- Van Maanen, J. (1988), *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Participatory action research

- Brown, L. (1988), *Group Self-evaluation: Learning for Improvement*, School Improvement Plan Secretariat, Victorian Ministry of Education, Melbourne.
- Fay, B. (1988), *Critical Social Science*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Hustler, D., Cassidy, T. & Cuff, T. (Eds.) (1986), *Action Research in Classrooms and Schools*, Allen and Unwin, London.
- Nixon, J. (1981) (Ed.), *A Teachers' Guide to Action Research: Evaluation, Enquiry and Development in the Classroom*, Grant McIntyre, London.
- Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (Eds.) (1988a), *The Action Research Planner* (3rd ed.), Deakin University Press, Geelong.
- Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (Eds.) (1988b), *The Action Research Reader* (3rd ed.), Deakin University Press, Geelong.
- McTaggart, R. (1991), 'Principles for participatory action research', *Adult Education Quarterly*, **41**(3), 1-20.
- McTaggart, R. (1991), *Action Research: A Short modern History*, Deakin University Press, Geelong.
- McTaggart, R. & Garbutcheon-Singh, M. (1986), 'New directions in action research', *Curriculum Perspectives*, **6**(2), 42-46.
- Nias, J. & Groundwater-Smith, S. (1988), *The Enquiring Teacher: Supporting and Sustaining Teacher Research*, Falmer, London.
- Tandon, R. (1988), 'Social transformation and participatory research', *Convergence*, **21**(2/3), 5-14.
- Wadsworth, Y. (1984), *Do it yourself Social Research*, Victorian Council of Social Service and Melbourne Family Care Organisation, Melbourne.
- Wadsworth, Y. (1984), *Everyday Evaluation on the Run*, Action Research Issues Association, Melbourne.
- Walker, R. (1989), *Doing Research: A Handbook for Teachers*, Routledge, London.

¹ Especially Chapter 2, 'To evaluate an arts program', Stake's outline of 'responsive evaluation'.

² Especially Chapter 7, 'Evaluation as illumination' written by Malcolm Parlett and David Hamilton.

Walker, R. & Adelman, C. (1975), *A Guide to Classroom Observation*, Methuen, London.

Winter, R. (1989), *Learning from Experience: Principles and Practice in Action Research*, Falmer, London.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robin McTaggart is Associate Professor in Curriculum, Culture and Media Studies and Acting Director of the Deakin Institute for Studies in Education in the Faculty of Education at Deakin University, Geelong. He taught science in Victorian high schools and research methods at Geelong Teachers' College and then Deakin University. He undertook his PhD through the Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In Australia and the United States, he has conducted evaluation and research studies of action research by educators, discipline-based arts education (with Robert Stake for the J. Paul Getty Trust), arts programs for disadvantaged youth, instructional computing programs for intellectually disabled adults, coeducation and gender equity in private schooling, AIDS / HIV professional development for rural health workers, and Aboriginal education in traditionally-oriented communities. He has also conducted participatory action research and evaluation training workshops for schools, educational consultants, the Victorian Education Ministry and the Department of Community Services and Health in the Northern Territory.

At Deakin University he teaches courses in research methodology, action research and naturalistic case study approaches in program evaluation. He has a variety of publications on democratic approaches to evaluation, action research and reflective practice and on issues in cross-cultural education. In March 1991 he was appointed Lansdowne Visitor at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada where he conducted a series of seminars on participatory evaluation and action research. In December 1991, he visited Thailand to assist staff in the Ministry of Education and Srinakharinwot University in the translation of *The Action Research Planner* (co-authored with Stephen Kemmis and already translated into French and Spanish) into the Thai language. He is currently conducting an Australian Research Council study with the title *Patterns of Pedagogy in Cross-Cultural Aid Projects*. In his spare time he likes cinema, restaurants, Edward Hopper, Steeleye Span, barbecues, red wine and kicking the football with his ten year old son.
