How am I Creating a Pedagogy of the Unique through a Web of Betweenness with a New Epistemology for Educational Knowledge?
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Introduction

I am director of the M.Sc. programme in Education and Training Management, a two-year part-time programme run by the Department of Education Studies at DCU. The programme consists of an eLearning strand and a Leadership strand. I co-ordinate and teach on the eLearning strand of the programme. Participants on the programme are drawn from wide fields of education: primary, secondary, further, higher and adult education sectors, corporate training, industry, nursing, Government departments and other state agencies. Previously, I coordinated and taught on the MSc. Computer Applications for Education in the School of Computer Applications, DCU from 1999-2002.

As a director of a postgraduate programme in Education and Training Management (E-Learning strand), I have the advantage of having perspectives upon developments in technology and education. My experience in either direction, informed by the increasing flow of literature about practice-based research, has enabled me to secure a fuller understanding of the continuingly crucial role of the teacher and the importance of teacher/student collaboration in the learning process. It has also enabled me to see that ICT, far from displacing the teacher, opens up new creative possibilities for participants provided that they see learning as a collaborative process not only involving teacher/student dialogue but with a wider dimension of student/student dialogue moving toward a 'web of betweenness' that ICT can facilitate.

ICT has been used to complement and support my pedagogy as it unfolds. Some examples in the context of this paper include:

• digital video to record teaching and supervision and reveal tensions and living contradictions when values could be lived more fully;
• online learning environments that have sustained ongoing dialogue among practitioner-researchers with evidence of reciprocal educational influences in learning;
• desktop videoconferencing that has opened up the classroom environment and provided opportunities to share our knowledge with others with reciprocal influences in learning;
• multimedia and web-based artefacts with supporting text provide evidence of how

practitioners are developing living standard of judgement through their educational enquiries.

Higher Education in Ireland

In 2001, Malcolm Skilbeck was commissioned by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) of Ireland to write a report on higher education in Ireland. In his report, entitled `The Challenge of Higher Education in Ireland`, Skilbeck drew attention to the challenge for higher education staff; "New and improved ways of teaching students is one of the challenges facing higher education staff" (Skilbeck, 2001, p. 73). He points to weaknesses in institutional policies; for example, despite general recognition of the centrality of teaching, many institutions have failed to make teaching excellence an important factor in career advancement and recognition (Skilbeck, 2001, p.87). He refers with approval to Trow's perceptive remark that "almost everything in a university depends on the inner motivation of teachers – their sense of pride, their intellectual involvement with their subjects, their professional commitment to the role of the teacher, their love of student or of learning" (Trow, 1989, cited in Skilbeck, 2001, p. 87). He expresses the fear that institutions have not fully understood how teacher commitment can be enhanced by appropriate institutional recognition. He sees shortcomings in the methods of teacher appraisal and contrasts these with institutions' relative ability to appraise and recognise the achievement of research excellence. Skilbeck pointed out that, unlike teaching, research has widely accepted criteria for assessing its performance. Skilbeck claims that there is a widely held view that "a vigorous, broadly defined research culture should pervade all parts of the university and that there should be a constant endeavour to engage students in all levels in critical, systematic inquiry – which is the essence of research" (Skilbeck, 2001, p. 94). This is to be applauded but a greater recognition of the process of disseminating the research urge, and the problems that can be encountered in doing so, would provide a better balanced statement of the Universities' raison d' etre. On the other hand, Skilbeck recognises that universities have been putting in place various procedures for the better recognition and strengthening of teaching. He highlights the possibilities offered by new technology: With the advent of technology-rich teaching on a large scale there are many opportunities for creative and innovative teaching and new relationships both with students and the shifting world of knowledge (Skilbeck, 2001, p. 89).

Assessing Quality in Applied and Practice-based Educational Research

There is a growing recognition of the need to see a closer link between research, practice and policy. There is a recognition of the need for research to contribute to solutions and thus the idea of evidence informed policy and practices have gained support. This is evident in a recent framework for discussion document called 'Assessing Quality in Applied and Practice-based Educational Research by Furlong and Oancea (2005) at Oxford University, UK. In their report, the authors point out that traditionally it has been assumed that there is a distinction between the worlds of research and the worlds of policy and practice. "The world of research was based on explicit, systematic work aimed at the growth of theoretical knowledge" (Furlong and Oancea, 2005, p. 5). On the other

hand, "practice and policy were seen as taking place in a world based on tacit knowledge and practical wisdom" (ibid). This new recognition of the research/practice and policy relationship is written in to the UK Government's RAE 2008 which states that researchers should be able to submit applied and practice-based research that they consider to have achieved 'due standard of excellence'. Within the UK, the RAE – Research Assessment Exercise is one of the most important definers of research quality. It bears repeating that: "Where researchers in higher education have undertaken applied and practice-based standards of excellence, they should be able to submit it to the RAE in the expectation that it will be assessed fairly,
against appropriate criteria" (RAE 2008, par. 47)
(http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/farren/ch2.pdf).

A Dialogue with the Literature on Pedagogy in Higher Education

Although higher education is beginning to include a wider and broader range of students, Zukas and Malcolm (2002, p. 1) assert that adult education is still regarded as belonging to a separate sphere from higher education proper even when adult education is provided through universities. They found that the new specialism of teaching and learning in higher education had developed without reference to adult education. Neglecting the strongly self-motivated adult learner has tended to impoverish many current approaches to teaching and learning. Zukas and Malcolm (2002) emphasise the political roots of adult education whose promotion has so often been imbued with a strong sense of social purpose. By contrast they claim that the focus of higher education pedagogic writing is on `teaching and learning,` as if it was a
subject in its own right (http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/farren/ch3.pdf). They are nevertheless alive to the emergence of commentators holding a broader view and point to such writings on critical practice as Barnett`s (1997) work on higher education and on `critical being`. They also refer to writers such as Webb (1996), Walker (1999) and Rowland (2000), each of whom considers the `why` of higher education rather than only the `how`.

Barnett claims that professional life is now becoming more than the handling of complexity i.e. managing overwhelming data and theories, it is also about handling multiple frames of reference – a condition he calls supercomplexity. Supercomplexity arises when we are faced with conflicting frameworks with which to understand a situation. Barnett asserts that the main pedagogical task of a university is not to transmit knowledge but to develop in human beings the attributes appropriate to conditions of supercomplexity (2000, p. 164). In order for this to become a reality, he claims that a 'higher education' must embrace three dimensions of being: knowledge, self-identity and action, in its pedagogies. In other words, new methods of teaching for supercomplexity is that the student should have the space to develop her own voice (http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/farren/ch3.pdf).

Developing use of ICT in Higher Education

With the developments of the Internet and advances in networking a unique opportunity for interactive education has emerged that can be offered at a distance and to a large number of people. These developments have opened up the possibility of collaboration with experts worldwide. The added value of the internet and its potential to deal with different forms of representation, such as, graphics, audio, video and moving images opens up to other forms of representation beyond text.

In contrast with the evident potentiality and dynamism of the new technology, studies of its impact upon teaching practices in higher education indicate that, as yet, teachers in general are making use of email and web resources but more advanced technologies, such as online learning environments and wireless solutions are only being used to a limited extent. Few in higher education are dealing in a practical manner with the new technology's central ideas about the handling of knowledge.

An international comparative study on Models of Technology and Change in Higher Education was carried out by the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies and the Faculty of Educational Science and Technology of the University of Twente in the Netherlands (Collis & van der Wende, 2002). The findings of the study show that institution wide technological structures are now in place. However, rich pedagogical use of the technological infrastructure is still in development. The strategic use of ICT for different target groups still needs to be considered explicitly. Institutions are still focused on school leavers as their target group. However, many institutions lack a strategic view on using ICT for these new groups of learners and the development of institution-wide ICT strategies is still in development. It is clear that the strategic use of ICT for the diverse range of students in higher education will require explicit policy developments (http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/farren/ch4.pdf).

If new policies are adopted and new strategies devised, emphasis will then have to be directed toward the appropriate pedagogical use of the technology infrastructure that may become increasingly available. How to secure the richest pedagogical use of that technology infrastructure will move centre stage as one of the most important issues to be addressed. This, and the use of e-learning in general, are matters that are treated in the study by Van Merrienboer et al. (2004, p 13). These authors point out that the central concept in handling of e-learning currently tends to center up 'content'. The authors regret that forms of e-learning that emphasise the active engagement of learners in rich learning tasks and the active, social construction of knowledge and acquisition of skills are rare. In other words, the potential of the new technology to transform the teaching/learning environment is still far from being realised in the institutions of higher education.

My Research Perspective

In 1995, Schön advocated the need for a new epistemology of practice (Schön, 1995) and suggested that this new scholarship would take the form of action research. However,

Schön pointed out two impediments to legitimizing the kinds of action research associated with the new scholarship in the Academy. Firstly, the power of disciplinary in-groups that have grown up in the academy around the dominant epistemology. Secondly, the inability of scholars to make their practice into appropriately rigorous research (Schon, 1995, p. 34).

In the self-study that is a central feature of this research enquiry, my educational values emerge as guiding principles in my practice. I intend to analyse my educational influence in terms of the transformation of my embodied knowledge into public knowledge, by showing my educational influence in my own learning, the learning of others and on the education of social formations. By education of social formations, I refer to meaning of living values that carry hope for the future of humanity in social organisations (Whitehead 2004b). I relate to Bertrand's claim that knowledge comes first out of uncertainty or a question: "Knowledge is the opposite of the demonstration of a rule and it has nothing to do with the bureaucratisation of ideas. It is an awareness, a sensitivity to life, to things that cannot be known, to uncertainty" (Bertrand, 1998, p. 117). He believes that we have to rely on our imagination, or we risk believing that textbook, and the media, such as TV and movies show us real life. My view of educational research is that it is about improving education and at the same time contributing to knowledge. Rather than focusing on the notion of a generalisable theory, I work with the idea of theory as situated in practice, explaining and energising human exchanges in transforming social contexts (http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/farren/ch5.pdf).

I believe that values give form and meaning to our personal and professional lives. An awareness of one's ontological position is a vital step in clarifying the meanings of one's values as they emerge in practice. Smith (2001, p. 271) asks, 'Why should it be important to consider the question of what sustains us?' This question suggests that we should reflect on the significance of our values and that in answering the question we would articulate the values that provide meaning to our personal and professional lives. We are always emergent beings with further potentiality. We are always in process of becoming. The values that have emerged in the course of my practice, as higher education educator, include a commitment to a 'pedagogy of the unique' and weaving a 'web of betweenness' (O' Donohue, 2003).

Pedagogy of the Unique and Web of Betweenness

`Pedagogy of the unique` expresses my belief that each practitioner-researcher has a particular and distinctive constellation of values that motivates his/her enquiry and that sets a distinctive context within which their own enquiry proceeds. This is based on my belief that teachers brings to their learning their own previous life knowledge and experience. In the context of my 'pedagogy of the unique', the dialogic processes reflect my growing openness to learning and relearning with others, and reveals my belief that education should be a democratic process that gives adequate "space to each participant to contribute to the development of new knowledge, to develop their own voice, to make their own offerings, insights, to engage in their own action, as well as to create their own products" (Barnett, 2000, p. 161).I demonstrate how I have

intimately related teaching with learning processes by providing opportunities for participants to accept responsibility for their own learning and to develop their capacity as learners.

The Celtic spiritual tradition is among the most ancient in Europe and has its origin nearly 3000 years ago. The Irish philosopher, John O`Donohue, understands spirituality as being intimately linked with inter-personal relationships and the community. He does not see community as something that is produced but believes that it has to be allowed to emerge: "True community is not produced. It is invoked and awakened. True community is an ideal where the full identities of awakened and realized individuals challenge and complement each other. In this sense individuality and originality enrich self and others" (O` Donohue, 2003). Each individual's uniqueness can enrich the community. O' Donohue's conviction that a 'web of betweenness' generated a collective bonus is reminiscent of the economists' notion of 'total factor productivity' – the unexplained residual productivity created by a combination of favourable factors. His idea of community however extends beyond the social community to the idea of a community of spirit and relates more strongly to the educational values I discuss than the economists' residuals: "The human self is not a finished thing, it is constantly unfolding" (O' Donohue, 2003, p. 142). I have used the notion of a 'web of betweenness' as a way of expressing my understanding of 'power with', rather than 'power over' others (http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/farren/ch1.pdf).

Methods

In creating my 'pedagogy of the unique' through a living educational theory approach to research, I provide evidence to show my educational influence in my own learning, the learning of others and in the education of social formations. The methods I use to validate my claims include:

Living Educational theory accounts of learning involve expressing concerns when educational values are not lived in practice, imagining a way forward, gathering data, evaluating practice on effectiveness of actions, modifying plans in light of the evaluation. Whitehead (1989) has formulated the following action reflections cycle for presenting claims to know one's educational development as one investigates questions of the type; 'How do I improve the process of education here?'

• I experience problems when my educational values are negated in my practice
• I imagine ways of overcoming my problems
• act on a chosen solution
• evaluate the outcomes of my actions
• modify my problems, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluations and the cycle continues).

Whitehead has further refined the above planner into the following action plan (McNiff, 2002, p. 72):

• What is my concern?
• Why am I concerned?
• What do I think I can do about it?
• What will I do about it?
• How will I gather evidence to show that I am influencing the situation?
• How will I ensure that any judgements I make are reasonably fair and accurate?
• What will I do then?

Winter's (1989) Six Criteria of Rigour include dialectics, reflexivity, collaborative resource, risk, plurality, theory, practice and transformation.

Habermas' (1976) Criteria of Validity include four criteria of social validity, i.e. comprehensibility, truth, rightness and authenticity.

Enquiry One: Online Learning Dialogues

In this enquiry, I show how I initiated the use of online journal writing during the Network Information Management module (2001) – a module on the M.Sc. Computer Applications for Education. I used an action research planner (Appendix B, http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/farren/appa.pdf) to outline my own educational concern as I reflect on my teaching on the module. In this enquiry, I will focus on the use of the action research enquiry undertaken by one of the participants, Ann Marie Mee (http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/farren/ch6.pdf).

The purpose of online journal writing was to provide participants with the space to articulate their educational development as they developed artefacts for use in their teaching. I hoped to provide a learning environment that would encourage deeper learning, where participants would have the opportunity to reflect on their practice in a shared collaborative space. I believed that the 'living educational theory' approach would provide a framework and enable each participant to question his/her own underlying assumptions and values. I believed that this would allow participants to develop a more personal relationship with their practice and develop their capacity for self-assessment. Rogers underlines the importance of self-assessment. He believes that external evaluation does not make for personal growth: "The more one can keep a relationship free of judgement and evaluation, the more this will permit the other person to reach the point where he recognizes that the locus of evaluation, the center of responsibility, lies within himself" (Rogers, 1961, p. 54). This relates to my educational value of helping the participants to become responsible for their own professional development by developing the capacity to make decisions about the goals, content, process and assessment of their learning, by developing a sense of their own contribution to practice-based research.

Initially, I was not sure how I was going to support participants to bring about their reflection on practice, and I was not sure of my role in encouraging them to do so. I sent the following emails to my supervisor, Dr. Jack Whitehead.

Email: 12th October 2001

I would like participants to keep a diary as part of their project work in building web curriculum material. Hopefully they will be able to show improvement in learning through use of the artefact in their teaching. I wonder what forms of reflection are appropriate? In my research do I need to create a framework myself or use existing frameworks? An existing framework for reflection includes three key elements to reflection (Boud, 1985).

1. returning to experience;
2. attending to feeling;
3. re-evaluating the experience.

I am probably looking for something that allows them to reflect each week on whether I lived my values (embodied) in my practice but not sure if that gets to their reflections on their own learning?

In a later email, on 15th October, I wrote the following to Jack:

Email: 15th October 2001

Perhaps it is not a weekly reflection on each of my lessons but exploring my influence in helping participants to create their own living theories as they work at improving the quality of student learning. It may be that they will only have time to develop material this term, and might not have time to think of how artefacts could improve student learning. However, they still will need to think about how they might be able to improve student learning through use of artefacts. Perhaps their reflections will be on their work with students and their own development posted each week to WebCT with my response to each of them. So I would be responding to their work as they try to improve the quality of learning for their students. Their reflections would be their work in progress as they attempt to develop curriculum based material for the internet in order to improve the quality of student learning - now does this make sense?

In an email response, Jack Whitehead responded by encouraging me to look over the emails that I sent to him on 12th and 15th October 2000 to see the developments in my own learning.

Email: 15th October 2000

I like what you say about the portfolios developing together with your responses. I wonder what idea of a 'curriculum' is implicit/emerging in your practice. I feel it's very close to the idea that individuals are creating their own curriculum through an engaged relation with the 'given curriculum'. I'm thinking of a curriculum in the sense of a curriculum vitae meaning the course of one's life.

On looking over the emails again, I was able to see developments in my own thinking

and understanding with regard to how I could begin to integrate online learning journal writing into the Network Information Management module.

Ann Marie Mee, a Science teacher and participant on the M.Sc Computer Applications for Education used an action research approach to help her focus on a concern in her own practice and to articulate how she intended to gather data in order to provide evidence of how she was trying to improve student learning. In the account of Ann Marie's learning, I have shown the processes involved as I support her efforts to articulate her own learning through use of online journal writing. (http://webpages.dcu.ie/farrenm/science.pdf). The online dialogue shows examples of interactions between myself and Ann Marie. It is interesting that none of the participants responded to one another's journal entries during the module. It is evident from some of the journal entries, on the other hand, that they did refer to other participant's journals. We did not set any ground rules on this at the start of the module, e.g. length of journal entry or number of journal entries per week.

On reflection, I concluded that excessive teacher/participant dialogues crowded out broader conversations and the development of a real sense of online community of practice. The online forum did not amount to a truly collaborative learning environment. Although from the online learning dialogues it was evident that each participant was deeply engaged in the process of his/her own personal learning, collaboration and peer-to-peer interaction did not seem to be happening through the online learning forum. However, Ann Maire made the following comment 'The failure of the class members to communicate online was probably because it was easy to communicate 'face to face' or by phone. Or maybe there was still an element of regarding you in the 'traditional' role of the teacher'. Participants were using the latter to articulate their concerns and were sharing their learning with me while I was responding to each to help move their enquiries forward. Nevertheless, this was an improvement on my previous use of the online environment that had previously been limited to course content delivery and circulation of weekly notices to participants.

Enquiry Two: Collaborative Online Learning Dialogues

The focus of this enquiry is the Collaborative Online Learning Environments module that took place in semester one, year two of 2003. In the previous enquiry, I demonstrated how I made use of online learning journal writing. This provided participants with opportunities to document his/her learning and educational development through the use of an online learning environment. I noted that, at the end of the module, I was aware that the online dialogue had taken place chiefly between myself and each participant rather than with the group as a whole and there had been minimal student/student dialogue.

I was determined that I would endeavour to bring about a more collaborative approach during the Collaborative Online Learning Environments module, hence the

name change from Network Information Management to Collaborative Online Learning Environments (http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/farren/appc.pdf).
At the start of the Collaborative Online Learning Environments module 2003, I suggested to the group that we would make use of the online learning environment to document concerns in practice and work through an action research process (http://www.bath.ac.uk/~edsajw/farren/ch8.pdf. I explained that I had used the online learning environment to document learning in the past, but that dialogue had mainly been between myself and participants. I showed, through examples, how I had made use of the online learning environment during the Network Information Management module in 2001. I suggested that we could try to use the online learning environment in a more collaborative way. I explained to the group that the online learning journals were not assessed, however, my past experience had led me to believe that each participant found it useful to document his/her learning throughout the course of the 12 week module and that this helped them in the final presentation of the main assignment.

The purpose of the following enquiry is to explore some of the social dimensions of participant learning during the Collaborative Online Learning Environments module between October and December 2003. During a classroom session, I discussed with the group how we could make use of online learning in a more collaborative way involving shared understanding and how we could bring about a more collaborative approach in general into our work contexts. As a follow on from the class discussion, Darragh Power, a participant on the programme, initiated a new online discussion forum called 'Politics'. His grappling with his concern and our discussions with him online, reflects my value of the significance of the 'web of betweenness' in my pedagogy of the unique. Pedagogy of the unique is a standard of judgment that recognises the importance of singularity and a 'web of betweenness' is a standard that recognises the relational dynamic of human existence. In the online dialogues, it is evident that problems were not shared solely between myself and each participant, as in 2001, but, in a more collaborative way, among participants themselves. It is evident that there was more a sense of `betweenness` in the forum as participants responded to each other`s online journal postings. The fostering of such `webs of betweenness` is an aspiration that for some time had lain at the back of my teaching mind. My commitment to this endeavour reflects my belief that learning is a social interactive process involving members of the class as a community of sharing participants who can develop new understandings through dialogue. My wish to create an environment where learning might be a social process rather than the absorption by students of pre-set content signified the living of my educational values in practice (http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/farren/ch8.pdf).

I believe that dialogue is fundamental to the learning process. It is a way of opening up to questions and assumptions rather than accepting ready-made solutions. It is about mutual participation. In dialogues, I believe that we attempt to develop our individual educational practices in collaboration with others. Through the use of ICT, in this case, a collaborative online learning environment, I believe that we can activate wider dialogue and for those committed to learning as a social project, get closer to the meanings of our embodied values. I believe that I have shown through my practice how I

have developed the capacity of participants to engage in dialogue through the use of ICT and to accept increasing responsibility in developing their practice-based research in collaboration with their peers. I hope that these documented accounts of the development of a new approach to teaching practice can bring to life the strengths of a 'web of betweenness' and how it has supported my development of pedagogy of the unique. The multimedia and web based artefacts that have been developed by participants relate to their own questions and concerns. My website hosts the coursework of participants and this research work is being shared and built upon by other participants on the programme and indeed accessed by the wider public (http://webpages.dcu.ie/~farrenm/currentwork.html).

Supporting Practitioner-Researchers in Masters Degree Research

As a researcher, I support practitioners on the programme in bringing their embodied knowledge and values into the public domain as they design, develop and evaluate multimedia and web based artefacts for use in their own practice contexts. This also involves the supervision of Masters degree 'living educational theory' dissertations.

My continuing commitment to supporting action research studies/enquiries is a consequence of the importance I attach to providing participants with the opportunity to choose a research methodology that allows them to ask, research and answer the question, 'How do I improve my practice?' For those engaged in a knowledge industry, incessantly working with ideas and perceptions, this question has almost primordial significance and wide implications. As a supervisor of action research studies/enquiries, I see how vital it is for each practitioner to repeatedly question his/her underlying assumptions and articulate the values that gave meaning and direction to his/her life and work in education (http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/farren/ch7.pdf).

During the supervision of masters degree research, I organise group validation meetings in order to encourage each participant to discuss his/her research and to provide evidence of how each is attempting to improve his/her practice. The purpose of this validation is to give each participant the opportunity to present evidence of his/her learning and influence on the learning of others, through a peer validation meeting. A validation group is an integral part of action research. The purpose is to develop the capacity of each individual to produce an account of his/her learning and submit it to a validation group in order to strengthen the validity of the accounts and to benefit from the ideas of others on ways to move learning forward.

From January to June 2002, I supervised four masters degree students, Fionnuala Flanagan, Chris Garvey, Bernie Tobin and Mairéad Ryan. Each was carrying out research into his/her own educational practice. In order to provide the participants with the opportunity to make the research public, I arranged a validation meeting through a videoconferencing link up with Dr. Jack Whitehead, University of Bath. I believed that it was useful to bring in an international expert in action research who would listen and respond to each enquiry and provide constructive feedback on the research. This represented part of my own endeavour to live my values of

collaboration and dialogue in the learning process. As for participants, the videoconferencing link up further challenged them to consider the data that they needed in order to present evidence that they had improved student learning.

The following extract is the dialogue between Chris Garvey and Jack Whitehead during the videoconferencing link up – http://webpages.dcu.ie/~farrenm/chrisjack.rm. Thus Jack Whitehead provided a steer for Chris through this dialogue. His chief contribution was encouragement, support and reassurance based on his experience of iterative, cyclical, action research processes and their eventual outcomes. His indicative advice avoided prescriptive intervention that might have appeared to transfer ownership of the enquiry from supervisee to supervisor. This helped Chris to reflect on his own learning in the research enquiry. It also helped him to consider the data he had collected and determine whether he could show evidence of improvement in student learning. This was to be the focus of the next validation meeting between myself, Chris, Bernie, Mairéad and Fionnuala.

In guiding the deliberations of this validation meeting, I kept in mind the general aim of developing each participant's living educational theories, having regard also to Habermas' (1976) four criteria of comprehensibility, truth, rightness and authenticity. Before the validation meeting, I asked each teacher-researcher to relate his/her presentation to the following questions. At the validation meeting, each teacher had 45 minutes to present his/her research within the framework of the following questions;

1 Are the descriptions and explanations of the teacher-researcher's learning comprehensible?
2 Is there sufficient evidence to justify the claims being made?
3 Are the values that constitute the enquiry as 'educational' clearly revealed and justified?
4 Is there evidence of the teacher-researcher's educational influence on the learning of others?

Validation meeting, June 2002.
From left: Chris Garvey, Bernie Tobin, Mairéad Ryan,
Fionnuala Flanagan and Margaret Farren

The following video clip (http://webpages.dcu.ie/~farrenm/chrisvalidatear.rm) is meant to convey the relational dynamic of the various contributions in the validation discourse, i.e. the web of betweenness as well as the engaged and appreciative responses of each individual to the others' contributions. This video clip was taken at the end of the validation meeting, Chris asked for clarification on the action research cycles. The presence of the other participants helped Chris to see how his learning could relate to the action research cycles. The explosion of laughter, at the end of the meeting, reflected Chris' acceptance of belonging to an action research community and the quality of empathy binding the community together. I believe that empathy among participants and between them and the teacher-educator is worth striving for. The masters dissertations can be accessed from (http://webpages.dcu.ie/~farrenm/dissertations.html).

The 'web of betweenness'(O' Donohue, 2003) in the validation meeting is characterised by a process of democratic evaluation where the unforced presumption of reasonable response holds sway in the conversation. The pedagogy of the unique is characterized in the recognition that each individual has a particular and different constellation of values that motivates his/her enquiry, as well as being situated in a distinctive context within which the enquiry develops.

Generating Data and Evidence in relation to 'Living Educational Theories'

The following data sources are used to provide evidence of the standards of judgements used to demonstrate how I have strengthened participant learning through an action research approach.

Accounts of practitioner-researchers research work can be downloaded at
http://webpages.dcu.ie/~farrenm/currentwork.html and
http://webpages.dcu.ie/~farrenm/dissertations.html.

The accounts show how each participant is improving his/her learning and bringing about improvement in student learning through an action research approach.

Multimedia Accounts of Learning for Masters Degree Research

The following abstract from Yvonne Crotty`s (Crotty, 2005) dissertation shows how she has made use of multimedia accounts of learning to expresses her pedagogy of the unique through a web of betweenness.

How Do I Create A Visual Narrative That Contributes To My Learning And The Learning Of Others?

The focus of my research is the development of a video artefact that represents the non-national students in my school. A recent survey carried out in the school reported traces of racism among the staff and students. My rationale for developing the video was to provide the opportunity for non-national students to communicate and share their culture to a wider audience. The unique features of video gave the student the opportunity to reflect and improve on her own performances.   In my enquiry, I trace the developments in my own learning as I plan, produce and edit the visual narrative `A Picture Paints a Thousand Words`, in collaboration with the students. Through being a participant myself in the process of learning, I was able to encourage and support student learning. My research consists of two action research cycles. In cycle one, I demonstrate how I guide and encourage each student to present herself, through the use of video. In cycle two, I provide evidence to show how the video has influenced the learning of a wider audience. My educational values of creating a safe environment where students feel valued, appreciating the different forms of intelligences and using music as a way of breaking down barriers have been lived out through the production of this visual narrative.

Validation meeting (2005): From left: Yvonne Crotty, Miriam Fitzpatrick, Hazel Mullen, Patricia White.

I am conscious of the need for participants to have the space to develop his/her voice. I

try to provide space, both in the classroom and online, where people can create knowledge in collaboration with one another. I believe that dialogue is fundamental to the learning process. It is a way of opening up to questions and assumptions rather than accepting ready-made solutions. It is about mutual participation.

I hope that my influence is seen in the opportunities I provide for participants to critically reflect on their learning through peer validation meetings. I have endeavoured to involve participants in dialogue with myself, one another and others. Through the supervision process, I clarified my values of collaboration and dialogue and I also showed the meanings of my own embodied values through use of video clips. These values have now been transformed into communicable standards of judgement. Evidence of my influence in the education of a wider social formation is shown by the fact that research using a `living educational theory` is now firmly established as an accepted form of research in DCU http://webpages.dcu.ie/~farrenm/dissertations.html.

Educational Values

I mentioned, at a particular stage in my teaching career, I have recognised that in a certain sense I represented myself as a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1989) i.e. holding educational values and denying them in my practice. Through the action research process of experiencing myself as a 'living contradiction' I have been able to imagine a way forward in order to live my educational values more fully in practice.

Learning as relational

I believe that learning is relational. I try to foster and create a collaborative learning environment. In my experience, learning requires the qualities of openness, sharing and trust. In my work with participants, I have tried to articulate my own educational values. This was not easy to do at the start but I realised that in order to enable participants to articulate their educational values, I needed to openly share my values with them. Trust is an important quality in creating and sustaining a collaborative learning environment. I have endeavoured to trust my own embodied knowledge by enquiring into my practice in order to bring about improvement. It would have sometimes been easier to fall back upon didactic methods. I have constantly endeavoured to maintain my trust that each participant would learn in turn to trust their own embodied knowledge as they develop their practice.

Creating narratives of our own learning

I value each participant's creativity, enquiring mind and critical judgement. I believe that it is vital to listen to the needs of participants and to build a curriculum in collaboration with them. Participants come from various contexts and I try to support each participant from where they are starting from in their learning. It is important to provide space for each of the participants to articulate his/her concerns and ideas in the development of practice. I have endeavoured to support practice-based research since

the start of my work in higher education. This has involved risk as I was bringing a new form of scholarship into the academy. I had to justify the methodology and ensure that the research was carried out in a valid and rigorous fashion.

Developing a dialogic education

I believe that dialogue is fundamental to the teaching and learning process and that each participant has a unique contribution to make to a knowledge base of practice. I have sought to highlight how participants have been collaborators in this educational journey, not subjects to be studied. I am conscious of the need for participants to have the space to develop his/her voice. I try to provide this space, both in the classroom and online, where people can create knowledge in collaboration with one another. I have endeavoured to involve participants in dialogue with myself, one another and others. I have tried to support dialogue through face-to-face class sessions, validation meetings, and through the use of a collaborative online learning environment. Through dialogue and trying to understand other points of view – different criteria - I was able to ensure that the participant narratives were legitimated by the academy for award of masters degree.

Communicating teaching as a scholarly activity

I believe that practice-based research is a form of scholarly research. In the course of my Doctoral research, I have reviewed a number of national and international reports concerned with teaching and learning in higher education. I have paid close attention in my research to the various forms of pedagogy in higher education in order to secure a better understanding of the relevant literature. This has enabled me to appreciate the strongly innovative thrust of much of the emerging scholarship dealing with teaching and learning in higher education. I have presented my practice-based research at national and international conferences. I have also made presentations at conferences with participants on the Masters programmes. In each instance, I have benefited from the discussions that my papers have generated.

Using ICT in a creative way

My teaching practice and my research enquiry have been founded on the belief that ICT can be used in a creative way. Participants on DCU postgraduate programmes come from various contexts and I try to support them towards the development of multimedia and web based artefacts for use in their own practice as a substitute for ready made software. I try to keep up-to-date with new developments in technology. On three occasions I have successfully applied for funding from the DCU Teaching and Learning Awards body. These have enabled me to introduce new and emerging technologies into the M.Sc. programmes thereby providing a broader curriculum for participants. I try to involve representatives from industry, education and research in order to develop the programme and its reputation.

Conclusion

My practice-based research enquiry has indeed been a collaborative endeavour that could not have taken place were it not for the participation of students in the creation of knowledge in collaboration with me. I have articulated the educational values that have emerged in my practice and I believe that I have endeavoured faithfully to live these values in my practice. My values can now be seen to be communicable standards of judgement. I hope that my enquiry will contribute to new understandings of the link between teaching and research and how teachers can contribute a knowledge base of practice through use of ICT.

To be a 'higher education' in the Barnett sense, I believe that the curriculum can be a co-creation between participants and lecturers as we engage with the wider curriculum. This has involved listening to the points of view of participants, understanding their particular concerns and context. I hope that I can justifiably claim to have created my 'pedagogy of the unique' through my ontological commitment to a 'web of betweenness'. By this I see learning as relational and ICT as a way of bringing us closer to the meanings of our embodied values.

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