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## **Who owns educational research? Disciplinary conundrums and considerations – a challenge to the funding councils and to education departments**

### Introduction

In this article we present our experience of working as academics and researchers in education departments in the UK. Our particular concern is the way in which educational research is funded as well as where it is situated. We consider that inter-disciplinary research, while being encouraged by research councils, is also made more difficult by these same research council's funding structures. We consider that this has an effect on defining what educational research is and could be. We argue that this is important not only in relation to the range of disciplinary perspectives that can be drawn upon within educational settings, for example, the need to engage with disciplines such as English, History, Philosophy, Music and Fine Art, but also in relation to methodological understandings of how research should be conducted within educational settings. We suggest that this approach has served to limit the scope of where educational research can take place. Educational research in its broadest sense can take place within classrooms, but also in homes, community centres, parks, youth contexts, beside ponds, within music performances, and in artists' studios. By widening the argument about what educational research should be, we are also widening disciplinary and epistemological structural arguments.

We begin by describing our experience of the Economic and Social Research Council, and then move on to the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Our central argument is that education as a field is badly served by a division across the Research Councils

of the UK, and there needs to be a wider recognition of the way in which both methodological and theoretical perspectives within education departments can be informed by arts and humanities' perspectives as well as the social sciences. We are concerned that innovative, engaged research is slipping through a net that means a much more narrow understanding of education is promoted by Research Councils UK. This situation is not duplicated in other countries, with notable examples of cross disciplinary research in education emerging both in Australia and the US, in particular. In this article, we hope to begin a similar shift in the UK. Both of us have first degrees in English and our doctorates were in social anthropology (Kate) and sociology (Bethan). However, we have drawn on a range of disciplines to conduct our research. While Bethan has developed a lens from literary and hermeneutic theory, Kate has drawn upon relational arts practice together with aesthetic theory as well as collaborative ethnography to conduct her studies. We share an interest in the New Literacy Studies, linguistics and literary theory. Together we present some examples from our own research practice and offer a challenge to Research Councils UK, as well as education departments, to consider the way research is funded and supported within Universities. We outline particular disciplinary perspectives we have taken in the field of educational research including literary approaches and embodied, situation and aesthetic approaches. Disciplines such as philosophy, English and art theory are considered as useful modes of enquiry in educational contexts. We take as our key exemplar and model for the future the AHRC-led Connected Communities programme, which is currently making significant inroads in supporting cross and interdisciplinary research within communities that is, in many cases, community led and directed. It represents a challenge to conventional conceptual frameworks of what educational research is, and should be, and should be taken seriously by those

working in Education departments in the UK.

### The ESRC and AHRC

England has two major funding bodies for research - the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social-Sciences Research Council. There are other places to go if you want to carry out research such as Leverhulme or the Gulbenkian Foundation but the AHRC and the ESRC are government backed. As it says in their titles, one funds the arts and humanities the other the social sciences. Education has traditionally fallen under the latter. The reason for this is two-fold: it is generally considered a social science and anything which involves, for example classroom observation, is counted, according to the AHRC, as non-arts based. Any research, then, that takes an arts-based approach to education is presented with a problem in relation to research funding criteria.

In a recent proposal, for example, for the ESRC, which looked at the teaching of English in Scotland and England, (Marshall et al, 2012) the research bid attempted to say that close reading, of the materials collected, which was based on critical appraisal, would constitute a major part of the data collection one reviewer wrote:

As a mere social scientist I find it hard to follow the proposal's account of how connoisseurship and critical appraisal will be used as methods of research, that is as ways to collect data that answer research questions: does authenticity translate as validity.

Now it may well be that there were other reasons why the proposal was turned down.

It might be that we were unlucky with the reviewer. It may be that the proposal itself, was deemed at the final stage, poor. Nevertheless the review exemplifies part of the problem. To begin with they describe themselves as a 'mere social-scientist' contrasting this with the proposal's desire to use 'critical appraisal'. The use of the word 'mere' hints, at the least, at self-deprecation, and at the worst a kind of sarcasm, given that the reviewer's 'mere social science' is set, somewhat ironically, against the arts notion of 'connoisseurship'. Then there is the key to the question 'does authenticity translate as validity', which is very much the response of a social scientist. It is asking specifically about the validity of the research and with that question it contains the implicit notion of reliability as well. This, the reviewer seems to argue, cannot be decided by nice ponderings of critical appraisal; 'authenticity' can only be a secondary, subjective issue and, while important, it is not the same as 'valid' research.

Their views are reinforced by the final board meeting of the ESRC where one introducer comments, 'It might be wondered why a project that appears to reject social science is applying for funding from a social science funding body. There are plenty of other sources for arts-based grants'. In fact there are not 'plenty of other sources for arts-based grants'. The AHRC, for instance, does not look at classroom-based research seeing it as a social science. And herein lies the problem. We were not rejecting social science per se, just choosing a methodology that was, in this case, arts based.

This sharp methodological distinction between social sciences and the arts in the UK is being challenged. A conference based on Arts-Based and Artistic Research met for

the first time in January 2013 and is meeting again in January 2014 in a conference entitled Arts-Based Research and Artistic: Research: Insights and Critical Reflections on Issues and Methodologies. It is being queried in the US as well. Although the type of educational research in the States has traditionally been social science orientated, with a tendency to quantitative research, nevertheless arts based research is not completely rejected. One of the chief advocates of arts-based research is Elliot Eisner. Between 1992- 1993 he was president of the American Education Research Association and they, in turn, are now attempting to put a special interest group dedicated to the his scholarship.

On occasion the ESRC does take the approach of Elliot Eisner (we will discuss his contribution to arts-based research later in the article). The Teaching and Learning Research Project, funded by the ESRC, claimed to want innovative research methodologies. In a paper written as a result of a project funded by the TLRP, 'How teachers engage with Assessment for Learning: lessons from the classroom' (Marshall and Drummond, 2006) Bethan used Eisner as part of her research methodology in looking at classroom practice. But this is rare and it was not declared in the ESRC research proposal, only that we would be innovative methodologically.

### The nature of English and Educational Research

Of course a look at research methodology is not new. The way we perceive the object that we are going to research, the methodologies we employ and the way in which these are contentious, particularly in qualitative research. We argue between the qualitative and the quantitative; the nature of objectivity and subjectivity; the wish of policy makers for decisive findings and the tendency of those involved in research to,

at best make the issue look complicated and, from the policy makers point of view, obfuscate.

Two researchers who have looked at the field of educational research in particular are Stronach and MacLure. Stronach declares in the title of his book that ‘Method Made Us Mad’ (2009) and MacLure talks of ‘The Offence of Theory’ in the title of an article in she wrote in 2010. In another she speaks of the baroque method that is like a ‘bone in the throat’ (2006) and then goes on to describe the article with the phrase as ‘some uncertain thoughts’. The idea then that educational research resists novel approaches or is reticent to take on something new is, therefore, untrue. Even if the titles of these works suggest that we may choke on the novel or that it may drive us to lunacy, still these attempts at looking at the world of education through different lenses have still occurred. And yet even these two researchers still take a loosely social science approach.

If we take MacLure (2006) as an example and look at her article on the baroque she takes the entity that she is considering and perceives it in a baroque fashion. She takes the classroom and comments on the fact that its size, its significance can be seen in a number of different ways. She contemplates the cabinet of curiosities and writes that again objects can be hidden from view and then revealed suddenly, as can happen in research: ‘A baroque method would respect the recalcitrance of the object of study—not only its complexity but also its capacity for resisting social explanation and for unsettling the composure of researchers’ (ibid. p734). So,

A baroque method might therefore find complicating, disconcerting ways of

engaging and representing educational scenes. It would recommend disruptive writing, which intentionally undermines its own self-certainty, interferes with the hierarchical disposition of its conceptual structures, and blurs the illusory transparency of its access to the world (p734).

In so doing she asks the reader/ researcher to put on hold set ways of exploring reality but it is a methodology for understanding what goes on in an aspect of the educational world. And while it borrows from an arts based approach and the desire to see that Baroque return to modern culture (Lambert, 2004) MacLure occupies a social scientists slant on it in that she wishes to employ Lambert's approach methodologically.

In some respects our want to see the arts as having a place in educational theory is somewhat similar to MacLure's need for the disruptive nature of the baroque as a way of looking at, for example, the complexities of the classroom. Yet the arts, or the critical, analytical nature of the arts, might be said to be systematically excluded from the world of social science. And this brings us to the tools of English criticism. It is strange that a subject renowned for analytic work should be not so much scorned but systematically overlooked in favour of a social science approach in education.

English, as a school subject, surfaced somewhere in the mid nineteenth century though study of books, all be it for oral work, dates further back to the Dissenting academies and schools (Marshall, 2004). It emerged in Universities towards the end of the nineteen hundreds – University College London ran a degree for example (Doyle, 1989). There have been great squabbles as to what constitutes English both at University and school level (see Barnes et al, 1984; Creber, 1990; Davies, 1996 and



Marshall, 2000). Battles have been fought over what and how we teach (Marshall 2000 and 2004) yet whatever position is taken criticism or textual analysis of some sort is seen as essential to the subject.

This is not to say that ‘practical criticism’ as advocated by Leavis and Richards should be the norm, whereby we understand what a writer intended by our reading, but that close reading of a text, whether we take for example, a New Historicist perspective or a structuralist one, a feminist take or queer theory – each one relies on detailed textual analysis. Indeed some have argued, that in an attempt to become too theoretical we are in danger of losing that essence of English study (see for example Sutherland 1996).

Part of what one learns to do on an English degree is to take apart what we have read and in so doing gain more insight into what we think the text is about. And as teachers we are trying to show pupils ways in which this can be done. Again we can get lost in whether we are taking, for example, a reader response view (Rosenblatt, 1994 and Fish, 1980) a genre perspective (Martin, 1992; Halliday, 2014; Cope and Kalantzis, 1993) a critical literacy view (Morgan, 2002) or even a Leavisite stance. What is important for now is to see how each asks that we look at the language closely.

But it is also important that English is seen as an arts subject. There are many ways of looking at language that have a social science inclination. The chief amongst these is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis can be subdivided and disagreed over too. Gee (2014), for example differentiates between Discourse with a capital D, to mean

‘language as other stuff’ and discourse within a little ‘d’, which is purely linguistic in mode, thus attempting to differentiate from the linguistic form of discourse analysis. Yet however one chooses to define it discourse analysis it relies on a systematic reading of a text that does not allow for anomalies. It looks for linguistic patterns. Even if anomalies appear they do so as part of the linguistic pattern that has been determined rather than as a curiosity that is worth exploring.

If we take a purely anecdotal example of a third year examination in linguistics we will see what that can mean. A group of thirty-five, third year undergraduates were given a text by Macaulay on the Long Parliament. They were asked to write on what they found unusual about the text. All of them bar one did a discourse analysis on the text pointing out feature and patterns that they found within it. The one exception wrote that it was an unusual piece because although it was ostensibly a history text it was written like a story. Because the examiners were troubled that only one student had identified this major feature of the text they gave it to a sixteen year old studying for an English GCSE exam and asked her to complete the paper as if it were one of her exams. She immediately wrote of the text's narrative qualities, the same answer as the only third year student who had identified this feature. Something about a linguistic approach prevented the vast majority of students seeing, what to an English student was obvious.

It may be, again, that the fact that you are giving a text to language students where the dominant view will be a linguistic one, which indeed it was, demonstrates nothing. But in a way that proves the point. If you ask someone to look at a classroom – be it linguistic, sociological even postmodern, as MacLure (2006, 2010) or Stronach

(2009) do, you tend to get that point of view dominating the analysis. You need, therefore to encourage multiple readings of a classroom, including the arts, because they may have something different to say.

In a chapter of a book entitled 'The Roots of Connoisseurship and Criticism' Eisner wrote that, 'Educational connoisseurship and educational criticism make plain the importance of forms of representation other than those used in traditional social science' (Eisner, 2002. P e-7), (social science being the field of work in which he believes education sits). He had already written a book called *The Enlightened Eye* in 1991 partly because he wished to include the arts within the discipline of educational research. In it he claims that the arts allow for the 'expansion of perception and the enlargement of understanding' (Eisner, 1991, p. 113) and should therefore be an essential part of educational research. He also writes of the need for connoisseurship. Vars, writing about the need for connoisseurship claims that it is 'the ability to make fine-grained discriminations among complex qualities' and quoting Eisner goes on to say that 'Criticism is the connoisseur's disclosure of those perceptions "so that others not possessing his level of connoisseurship can also enter into the work"' (1975, p. 1)' (Vars, 2002, p70).

The notion of connoisseurship can be seen as controversial even from an arts perspective in that it can be seen as elitist. One person's idea of good might not be shared with others. This though could be seen the essence of arts based criticism in that the 'connoisseurship' of one critic can be plausibly disagreed with by another. That is why the social scientists have systems of research methodology that are meant

to do away with the subjective. Yet even arts based criticism needs evidence to support its ideas.

In a more recent publication with Tom Barone, *Arts Based Research* (2012) Eisner returns to the dilemma facing anyone who wants to consider the arts within the world of education as a social science:

The preoccupation with what we think of as misguided precision has led to the standardization of research methodology, the standardization that uses the assumptions, and procedures of the physical sciences as the model to be emulated (Eisner and Barone, 2012 p2).

By contrast they advocate an arts based research, which again they 'define as a method designed to enlarge human understanding. Arts based research is the utilization of aesthetic judgment' (ibid. p8). This is because 'paying close attention to the nuances that flow from the perception of qualities becomes a critical feature' (ibid. p 11). If we take an English critic we will see what this means. In Tom Paulin's book, *Minotaur: Poetry and the Nation State* (1992) he quotes Wordsworth's *The Prelude*:

How quickly mighty Nations have been formed,  
From least beginnings; how, together locked  
By new opinions, scattered tribes have made  
One body, spreading wide as heaven.

He goes on to say ‘Punning subconsciously on Locke as a pointer to Rousseau’s theory of social contract, Wordsworth identifies nature with spirit’ (ibid., p1 – 2). To begin with he is writing a book on the nation state and is using Wordsworth as an example of a poet who is considering this in some way. Next he is citing two of the major writers on the nation state and social contract, Locke and Rousseau, partly and, possibly, because their views are not wholly compatible. Then he is asking that you know this when you read what he is saying. But Paulin is also making assumptions, which may worry the social scientist. His view of Wordsworth identifying ‘nature with spirit’, is part of the pantheistic notion that Wordsworth held, but it is also based on Paulin’s view that Wordsworth has ‘subconsciously’ punned on Locke’ and that this is a pointer to ‘Rousseau’. Paulin cannot know that this is true. It is an assumption on his part, but it is an assumption based on evidence within the text. Condensed then in that one sentence is a critic who is ‘paying close attention to the nuances’ (Eisner and Barone, 2012 p11). Hinted at, or clearly told, Paulin has conveyed the views of Wordsworth, Locke and Rousseau. This is what critical appraisal and connoisseurship can do even if they do not obey the ‘standardization of research methodology’ with its ‘misguided precision’ (ibid., p2).

Much of Eisner’s work is based on John Dewey, in particular, a book which he wrote called *Art as Experience* (1932/2005). Dewey saw art as entirely about our ability to see things aesthetically, as about ‘interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world’ (Dewey, 1932/2005, p45). But he saw more. Art, he claimed was also about people producing or creating works of art as well. For him artistry interwove these two elements – the ability to appreciate something as an audience and the ability to create or produce an artefact. The artist, then, is a person can stand within an

experience and outside it simultaneously. In so doing they have a dual perspective which enables them to position themselves as both as the audience and creator at the same time. 'To be truly artistic,' Dewey wrote, 'a work must be aesthetic – that is framed for enjoyed receptive perception' (ibid. p49). The 'art' of the critic or connoisseur is to be that receptive perceiver exercising 'aesthetic judgement' (Barone and Eisner, 2012, p11).

And this is what differentiates any form of linguistic or discourse analysis or from English. Part of the strength of English is that you can approach a text from a myriad of different points of view including, on some occasions the most obvious. There is no system other than the one which you have chosen to adopt at that moment. It is this, however, that makes it so problematic from a social science perspective. It appears idiosyncratic and subjective.

### **Why an arts-based approach? The Case of Connected Communities**

So what does the Arts and Humanities Research Council have to offer? The AHRC has its core mission support for arts and humanities research but recently has taken a route into a much more engaged, community led form of research. The Research Council's Connected Communities programme is a cross-council programme which is supported across many of the research councils but is led by the AHRC. The programme was launched through an initial summit event in 2010 where academics were invited to attend for two days, and work together to prepare funding proposals. The key requirement was the need to engage with community groups, in many cases as co-researchers, and also to have the arts and humanities at the core of the research projects. Academics were encouraged to form cross-disciplinary groups including community organizations. These groups might look at a particular question or

problem drawing on arts and humanities perspectives. The funding required in many cases that the research was community led or directed, or co-produced. While research agendas and questions tend to come from Universities, this programme encouraged researchers to work with communities to generate research that was helpful and relevant to them. For example, In Kate's initial projects ('Writing in the Home and in the Street' and 'Social Parks') her research concepts and framing came directly from her experience of working with young people in a community library and in a park. She drew on this experience to formulate a research agenda with the youth service, young people and library staff, rather than impose her own research agenda on them. In 'Writing in the Home and in the Street' she worked with an historian, a literary theorist, an artist and, in the case of the 'Sparks' project, a contemporary scientist, a town planner an anthropologist and a designer. These groups generated research which was emergent, complex, messy and lead to community co-produced outputs, problems and further questions.

The first, small scale and exploratory projects the Connected Communities programme funded included scoping studies on topics such as, 'Community-based participatory research: ethical challenges', 'Temporal Connectivities, a Scoping Study on Time and Connectivity' and a number of reviews and studies of the meanings and conceptual frameworks around community<sup>1</sup>. However, in some cases, the team that was funded included more social science academics than those from the arts and humanities. In the second round of scoping studies, music, faith, film, post colonialism, identities, culture, narrative, linguistics, theatre, came to the fore and the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Connected-Communities/Scoping-studies-and-reviews/Pages/Scoping-Studies-first-round.aspx>

traditional arts and humanities core subjects became entwined within new questions of community identities, volunteering, participation, engagement and citizenship<sup>2</sup>.

The programme is now in its fourth year and the plethora of projects funded show the range of possibilities of an arts and humanities approach to community generated research. On the Connected Communities' leadership fellows website the programme describes itself here:

The AHRC is leading on Connected Communities, a cross-Council programme designed to help us understand the changing nature of communities in their historical and cultural contexts and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life. The programme seeks not only to connect research on communities, but to connect communities with research, bringing together community-engaged research across a number of core themes, including community health and wellbeing, community creativity, prosperity and regeneration, community values and participation, sustainable community environments, places and spaces, and community cultures, diversity, cohesion, exclusion, and conflict.

(<http://connected-communities.org/> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2014)

However, what is notably lacking in this description, is the word 'education'. Of the projects listed on this website, which amount to about 90 projects, (about a third of a total of nearly 300 projects funded through this programme) only six explicitly described working with schools. Schools are key sites for community engagement and

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<sup>2</sup> The list can be found here: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Connected-Communities/Documents/CC10-list-of-awards.pdf>



the concepts of health and well-being, creativity, cultures, diversity and cohesion and can all be found with the site which is a school. Schools are placed in all communities and all children in most communities attend them. The making of schools is a cultural endeavour. Educational theory is concerned with culture, participation and learning, inclusion, social class, cohesion and diversity but the Connected Communities programme has not seen schools as an initial focus for their research funding. Keri Facer, one of the leadership fellows for the Connected Communities programme does work in an Education Department and has written on educational futures (Facer 2011) but in the main, the broad focus of the programme is on communities outside schools.

Kate has worked mainly with young people in out of school settings including community libraries, homes and parks as well as with young people within schools. This has enabled a way of recognizing the informal and situated nature of young people's encounters with learning, whether it is fishing by a pond, writing in a home, playing the fiddle or singing songs in a Saturday club. By listening carefully to young people's modes of expression, ways of knowing and understanding and aesthetic appreciation and transformation through everyday meaning making, new glimpses of creativity and improvisation can be gleaned (eg Pahl 2012, 2014). In doing so, Kate has drawn on a lens from US based researchers such as Glynda Hull and Lalitha Vasudevan, situated within educational contexts in universities, who themselves are engaging with aesthetics and ways of knowing from literary theory (Hull and Nelson 2009, Vasudevan 2011).

In these studies, aesthetic theory can be brought into an understanding of young people's engagement in texts, and ways of knowing can become embodied and

situated when confronted with young people's creative and improvisatory practices (See also Hallam and Ingold 2007, Willis 2000, Ingold 2013). These moments of engagement echo the work of the late Martin Hughes in recognizing informal learning settings and contexts, and are important sites for educational research (Tizard and Hughes 2003). What has made it chiefly possible for Kate to do this, however are collaborations with colleagues from Philosophy, English literature, Archaeology and History together with sustained research collaborations with artists and poets. These kinds of groupings have opened up ways of knowing that have also enabled her to look at learning differently.

### The Dilemma

So why are education departments not cross Faculty departments, where the arts and humanities are recognized, and why do the ESRC and AHRC persist in finding it difficult to fund complex, messy, cross disciplinary research that focuses on young people and adults' experiences of learning in many settings? Some of this is the determinism of scholarship. Because Education departments in the UK are situated in Social Science Faculties, in the main, working across disciplines, with colleagues from the arts and humanities, is made more difficult. Schools are seen as places where social science theoretical perspectives are inherently useful and applicable. Social science has mapped communities and schools as being where that activity takes place, whereas arts and humanities researchers are more likely to be found in museums, galleries and everyday and, anthropologically, in parks, homes, historical sites and monuments. This deterministic mapping of sites onto disciplines is naturalized within research assumptions.

The difficulty is also within the way in which education as a field has been perceived.

The predominate tone of the BERA journal has tended to social science. The journal describes itself as interdisciplinary but begins with a social science oriented model of research,

The Journal is interdisciplinary in approach, and includes reports of case studies, experiments and surveys, discussions of conceptual and methodological issues and of underlying assumptions in educational research, accounts of research in progress, and book reviews.

([http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/eresources/shef.ac.uk/journal/10.1002/\(ISSN\)1469-3518/homepage/ProductInformation.html](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/eresources/shef.ac.uk/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)1469-3518/homepage/ProductInformation.html) accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2014)

Where the arts as a field is seen as useful it is seen as a mechanism for engagement or as a site for sociological enquiry. For example, taking a recent article on the arts in the BERA journal, Robson (2014) identifies, through observational work, creativity in children's learning and behaviours. The study, concerned with identifying and promoting young children's creative thinking however, invokes social science infused paradigms in order to justify a way of knowing and thinking about creativity that is observation based:

There are, of course, issues of validity and reliability here, particularly given the inferential nature of observing behaviour, and imputing creative thinking to it. However, in both respects, the combination of observation with video recording is particularly helpful. (Robson 2014: 126)

The study is sensitively conducted and framed. However at no point does the author consider artistic methodologies, such as the studio method described below, or modes of enquiry that might draw from artistic creative thinking, as a way of justifying the study. It remains situated in the realm of the social scientific literature on observation,

albeit with a focus on creativity. The article draws on the work of Burnard et al (2008) in identifying the conditions for growth for creativity.

This work came out of the immense amount of qualitative research studies funded through the Creative Partnerships project. In this programme, much useful research was conducted about the impact of artists in schools. However, the methodology and approaches used by academics to evaluate or consider the role of the arts was less likely to be arts based. Social science was still employed to understand and recognize what artists brought to schools (eg Galton 2010). What we have identified that is required is a turn to a more explicitly focused arts-based methodology to understand education processes and practices. Below Kate describes some Connected Communities projects she has been involved with, and outlines how arts based methodologies have led her to a more nuanced understanding of educational processes and practices. This leads us to an argument about the need to make these approaches more visible to funders across the AHRC and the ESRC.

### **Arts methodologies in educational contexts**

In a series of projects funded by the AHRC –led Connected Communities programme, an arts and humanities perspective was brought to bear on what could be described as ‘educational’ contexts. <sup>1</sup>While not all of these projects were directly conducted within schools, all were concerned with experiential and tacit knowledge, ways of knowing that were not dependant on social scientific categories or modes of enquiry. The projects were conducted with academics from English, History, Music, Philosophy as well as Education together with artists, musicians, poets and community researchers from the youth service, anglers, teachers and young people. We engaged in

collaborative processes of enquiry drawing on methodologies that included collaborative ethnography, oral storytelling, writing, film-making, music making, poetry, philosophical reflection, dance and reverie. We projected films that were made by young people onto the wall of the youth centre in a park, went fishing, wrote poetry, produced books and performed music. The processes and practices of doing these things however, were also subject to research enquiry that led to insights about learning, transmission of knowledge, skills and cultures and ways of knowing that were applicable to the field of Education.

Identifying the conditions for growth for this kind of work to take place has been itself a mode of enquiry. In joint publications (Pahl and Pool 2011, Pahl, Pool and Steadman-Jones 2012, Pahl and Pool, in press), we have begun to identify ways in which as academics we have had to ‘let go’ of traditional modes of enquiry, the ‘case study’ the interview, the survey, and instead plunge into a situated, open and emergent form of enquiry. In doing so, we have been helped by work in the field of post-modern emergence (Somerville 2013) relational aesthetics (Kester 2004, 2011) practice as research (Barrett and Bolt 2007) and embodied and situated forms of anthropological practice (Ingold 2011, 2013, Pink 2009). We have had to abandon the edifices of social science research and resort to the ‘mess’ of the emergent and messy research life as it has lived, often dissolving our methods in the field to make sense of it. In doing so, we were helped by the work of John Law (2004) who in his book ‘After Method’ suggested that methods, and even more so, their practices, constructed the reality they purported to describe. In doing so, we have returned to Eisner’s understanding of arts based methodologies as producing a more complex, subtle and experiential mode of inquiry (2002:19). This can be understood as a mode of knowing

that can be drawn upon in all reflective practice contexts. Eisner was able to articulate this way of knowing in order to propose a much broader understanding of educational processes and practices. It is this vision that we draw on here.

When thinking about methods, the focus in these projects was the way in which different kinds of knowledge surfaced across the project, and hierarchies of knowledge were de-stabilized. The concept of academic as 'knowing best' was contingent within a wider structure of thinking. For example, within the 'Communicating Wisdom: Fishing and Youth Work' project a group of us worked with young people to explore the experience of fishing. Wisdom, in this case, the lore and understanding of fishing, could be found within the anglers, or within the young people. We also read 'The Compleat Angler', by Izaak Walton, originally written in 1653, as well as poems about fishing. We also engaged with (and in the case of Johan Siebers' work, translated) Bloch's treatise 'On Wisdom' and read Bloch's 'Traces' (1969/2006). In our project proposal we said the following:

We aim to consider, from an explicit arts and humanities perspective, the role of fishing in youth work. In fishing practices, opportunities for the inter-generational communication of wisdom can be activated, which, however, carry their own temporal organization. The arts and humanities are particularly well-placed to articulate the experiential dimension of the practice of communicating wisdom in communities.

Part of the project involved writing fieldnotes, which documented sitting by the pond watching young people fishing. I (Kate) immersed in the experience of fishing. Below

is an extract from the fieldnotes:

I felt like the evening went on for a long time. Jean got hungry for her tea. Steve, Dylan and the others sat still and caught fish while I watched moorhens and gulls. The water plopped with flies and fish and glittered in the evening sun. The fishermen brought tea to drink in a thermos and drank it. Sometimes we got cold and put on our jackets but in the sun it was lovely. It was like nobody could drag themselves away from the bank. Dylan was in an amazing rhythm of catching fish. Martin smiled and told me of his early morning fish that day. Jean told me about her worries about her job. I told her I wanted to be a river board man when I grew up. We began a group of figures in a landscape. Jean said the young boys had become totally different through this project, still and absorbed, self confident. (Fieldnotes Kate Pahl June 2013)

In the process of doing the project, young people wrote about the experience. Kirsty, here, describes her experience of fishing,

Kirsty: fishing helps you because it calms you down when you are sat there. What I found, with the pond, when I was watching it, I was really calm just watching the water. When it were like spitting a little bit it looked amazing on the water because it was so peaceful, you could see the little rings just spreading out (Writing November 2013)

Likewise, Jean, youth worker, wrote about her experience of fishing,

Jean: The beauty envelopes you, the sun reflecting on the water, the little midges above the water, reflections in the waves, little frog, birds, and then you get the almighty snake swimming past, as much as the sun shining on the water, we have sat under an umbrella, it were pouring down, we didn't care did we, we were sat in it, weren't we, we didn't care. We wanted to catch a fish weren't we? It were pouring with rain – that's another world, the pitter patter and pouring off edges and then you see it from a different angle (writing November 2013)

In all of these extracts, the aesthetic experience of fishing comes to the fore. Silence, contemplation and stillness as well as beauty, become core parts of what it means to fish. Passing on fishing from generation to generation requires an aesthetic appreciation of what that might mean, how fishing is taught and transmitted. This is a different way of knowing from an instrumentalised notion of skill and wisdom, but is more situated and contingent upon experience. We explored the ways in which skills and experience resided within the anglers, the young people, their families and in the community. We considered the community 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti 2005) as important when setting up the project, and saw the skills, knowledge and experience encoded into the fishing process as important resources for hope and sites of possibility. The project focused on how knowledge can cross between and develop within communities of practice that share a very different vocabulary and sets of priorities. Of particular interest was the way in which different kinds of knowledge surfaced across the project, and hierarchies of knowledge were de-stabilized. The concept of the academic as 'knowing best' was contingent within a wider structure of thinking. Wisdom, in this case, the lore and



understanding of fishing, could be found within the anglers, or within the young people. In a very broad sense, this project was educational in focus.

#### Arts and humanities forms of enquiry

In all of the projects, we (in this case a group of academics, artists, youth workers and young people associated with the projects) identified a core way of working which could be identified as 'studio practice' which seemed to embody an awareness of emergent practice, and joint collaborative thinking and conceptualizations that can address community co-produced research questions or problems. We took the concept of experiential knowledge as a mode of enquiry from Barrett (2007):

Experience operates within the domain of the aesthetic, and knowledge produced through aesthetic experience is always contextual and situated. The continuity of artistic experience with normal processes of living is derived from an impulse to handle materials and to think and feel through their handling. Sensation, feeling and thought are progressively differentiated phases of our embodied relationship to objects in the world. (Barrett 2007:1)

Barratt identified modes of enquiry that lay outside a social scientific ways of knowing and constructing enquiry. She argued for the studio as a form of enquiry, and that 'the impact of practice as research is yet to be fully realized' (2007). She proposed a studio model of enquiry,

...studio production as research is predicated on an alternative logic of

practice often resulting in the generation of new ways of modelling meaning, knowledge and social relations, (Barrett 2007:2).

In the descriptions of the projects below, a much more entangled and contingent view of engaged educational research emerges, which is both situated and community driven but engages with aesthetics, embodied and tacit knowledge and ways of knowing that are connected to the arts. The concept of projects as single authored and the product of one academic also is de-centred in the process of doing Connected Communities' funded projects. Part of the core funding criteria included a commitment to 'co-production' and community co-constructed research. We did draw on sociologically inspired models from, for example Hart and Wolff (2006), and Hart et al (2013) looking at university community partnerships, together with Armstrong and Banks (2011) who, with community partners, explored dialogic co-enquiry spaces. These helped us understand how structure was important to shifting the balance of power between community and university modes of knowledge and enquiry. We also considered more arts focused models including Witkin's concept of a 'holding form' (Witkin 1974) which can be seen as a jointly constructed sensate space to work through ideas. The term 'holding form' names the context that focuses the working through of the sensate problem. To quote Witkin (1974: 181):

The effectiveness of a holding form depends upon its complete simplicity. [...]

The sensate problem itself consists of the structure of sensate disturbance which I have described in terms of 'contrasts', 'discord', 'identities', etc. [...]

The individual produces a form that captures these structural characteristics in

their barest essentials. It is the essential gestalt of the disturbance that is held in the holding form.

This provided a language for working through an emergent issue. Rather than talk about research ‘questions’ or problems in traditional social science language, we could talk about ‘provocations’. For example, on a project called ‘Language as Talisman’ we were able to use the title of the project as a provocation to consider how language could be used as a protective force within and outside school contexts (Pahl et al 2013). The phrase united the project and served as a starting point for the research. We also recognized as well as Kester’s concept of relational aesthetics and co-constructed conversations that enabled a kind of opening up of spaces for research enabling a more equal exchange of ideas and concepts (2004, 2011).

We also recognized the value of combining a literary and embodied understanding of everyday life with a focus on the meaning making practices of young people together with sociological contextual framing. This was provided by collaborative ethnography, a methodology developed by Eric Lassiter and Beth Campbell in their work in the town of Muncie Indiana in the US (Lassiter 2005, Campbell and Lassiter 2010). Lassiter and his colleagues worked with a particular community in Muncie, Indiana to create a model for research where the community conducted, framed and researched their own concerns and histories (Lassiter et al 2004). By making explicit the framing and decision making around research collaborations, Lassiter and his colleagues could surface ways in which research decisions could be traced within community contexts. At the same time as doing this, we were realizing that our community co-research team could also make decisions about methodologies, and

ways of knowing, a process we were beginning to call co-production.

In writing up this work, collaborative ethnography as a methodology combined with literary and hermeneutic enquiry led to a mode of enquiry that was situated and contingent. Part of this led back to the work of literary cultural theorists such as Richard Hoggart (1957) and Raymond Williams (1989/1957), who engaged, much more broadly, with issues of culture and social processes but drawing on their own, engaged experience within those contexts. Stuart Hall (2007) argued that Hoggart's analysis brought a sociological imagination to an understanding of culture in action, and argued for this kind of writing, engaged, personal, empathetic, located:

...there was the methodological innovation evidenced in Hoggart's adaptation of the literary-critical method of 'close reading' to the sociological task of interpreting the lived meanings of a culture. One says 'sociological', but clearly something more innovative than standard empirical sociological methods was required – nothing less than a kind of 'social hermeneutics' is implied in these interpretive procedures (Hall 2007: 43)

Hoggart's focus on the meanings of everyday culture and on a 'close reading' of that culture offered a form of engaged, materially situated scholarship that was both literary, but sociologically informed. It provided a close attention to detail that became a kind of attentiveness, or a bearing witness to everyday life. If united with a concern for drawing on resources for community change and support, this approach can lever in possibilities for social action. Hoggart proposed a felt, embodied and sympathetic mode of understanding, located in the ordinary, everyday and mundane

but reaching out to a much broader apprehension of what scholarship can and should be in the world (see Pahl 2014).

## **Conclusion**

We would like to suggest a widening of the scope of educational research to incorporate and take account of some of this new emergent work but also a recognition of what the arts and humanities has to offer education, not as a field within education but as an approach and a lens for educational research. Some of it may be fairly conventional close readings of interviews or videos of classrooms, as in Marshall and Drummond (2006). Some of it may be the more innovative (see Pahl and Pool 2011, Pahl, Pool and Steadman-Jones 2012) drawing on postmodern theorists like Somerville (2013) or relational aesthetics like Kester (2004). Both, however, take an arts based approach to educational research which, at present, not recognized by either awarding body or by the field of educational research as it currently stands in Britain. We would like to propose an opening out of the field of educational research, that recognizes literary and artistic enquiry as ‘valid’ and useful ways of knowing and understanding the field of practice, both in classrooms and beyond.

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<sup>i</sup> *Writing in the Home and in the Street* (PI Steadman-Jones, Co-I's Kate Pahl and William Gould with artists Steve Pool, Zahir Rafiq and Irna Qureshi);  
*Language as Talisman* (PI Kate Pahl with Co-Is Jane Hodson, David Hyatt and RA Hugh Escott with artists Steve Pool and Cassie Limb and poet Andrew McMillan);  
*Communication Wisdom: Fishing and Youth Work* (PI Johan Siebers with Kate Pahl, Richard Steadman-Jones and RA Hugh Escott with artist Steve Pool and poet Andrew McMillan);  
*Transmitting Musical Heritage* (Kate Pahl PI with Fay Hield, John Ball and David Judge together with Soundpost, Babelsongs and Arts on the Run)  
*Research for Community Heritage* (PI Bob Johnson with Kimberley Marwood, Brendan Stone, David Forrest and Kate Pahl)  
*Ways of Knowing* (PI Helen Graham with Sarah Banks, Kate Pahl, Andy Deardon, Michelle Bastian, Catherine Durose, Niamh Moore, Johan Siebers, Katie Hill, together with artists Steve Pool and Tessa Holland)  
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