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# Respecting the Struggle: Deciding What to Research and Why

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## Introduction

In the spirit of making connections, I begin by referring to the keynote talks by Erika McWilliams and Bill Green. They both link to what I am addressing here – the circumstances of education research knowledge at this time in history. Both authors take up the issue of knowledge-building through research in education and how to regard it productively and hopefully as we move forward.

McWilliam challenges us to rethink the linear-cumulative educational process model and to take up the analogy of the knight's move. She encourages us to think about how education researchers can build knowledge within tessellated partnerships as methodological alliances from outside as well as inside education. Bill Green spells out how building educational knowledge can be thought of as an impossible, never finished enterprise. Yet, rather than regard this condition as a negative, he construes it as the place for action. His focused meditation on "practice" encourages us to embrace the communicative gap between teachers and students as a site of action, learning, and possibility.

I mean to add a third dimension to their treatises on education knowledge by focusing on its production and dissemination as constructive acts by interested people. That is to say, I will spend some time looking at the work we do as researchers. I will lay out a framework to give us pause to consciously reflect on how we create knowledge and for whom.

Talking about my scholarship to Australians is more than a bit nerve wracking. It is rather like bringing coals to Newcastle because Australian scholars have fueled my own development. Two scholars in particular were early defining influences: Bronwyn Davies and Annette Patterson. A study in the 1980s by Bronwyn Davies and Kathy Munro (1987) showed me how I could see classroom activity from the point of view of a student ethnically and culturally positioned as a minority and an outsider. Not only that, the study illustrated how to view as quite sensible from the child's perspective

what to a teacher might seem like antisocial and problematic behavior. For me, that application of a critical lens and persuasive methodology was evidence that a particular research approach could be transformative. Then, I encountered concrete evidence that theory and practice can work together to inform teaching and curriculum. The Chalk Face Press series of critical approaches to text, by Bronwyn Mellor, Marnie O'Neill and Annette Patterson (Mellor, Patterson & O'Neill, 2000; Mellor, O'Neill, & Patterson, 2000; Mellor & Patterson, 2001) showed me that materials with sound theoretical orientations can be respectful of and useful for practitioners.

In this paper, I will speak to the conference theme – “Inspiring Innovative Research by Creating Global Networks”. I will launch an argument for not only the inevitability but also the ethical imperative for researchers to disseminate their research-produced knowledge to education stakeholders through accessible global resource networks. Drawing from philosophy, research and my own work, I will explain the stance I advocate we researchers should assume to do so, and the difficulties of that charge. I will assert that as researchers we are well advised, and should not be disheartened, to describe what we do as “standing on quicksand” and “twisting in the wind”. There is opportunity to be seen and seized in this condition.

## Choosing a Place to Stand

Utilizing post-modern ways of thinking and critical stances, Australians have contributed intellectual and research tools for deconstructing unfair and unjust schooling policies and practices. For example, in Australia your intellectual history has directed you toward critical theories to reshape teacher education much more comprehensively than has happened in the U.S. In the last decade, under “No Child Left Behind” legislation (2001) (United States Department of Education, n.d.), the volume of critical theorists’ voices in the U.S. has lowered considerably. As one of my doctoral students said to me, “Critical approaches seem to have gone out of fashion if you are building a career in education.” My teacher certification students were similarly discouraging when they told me “Please no more multicultural and diversity stuff. Can you just tell us how to teach our students to read and write for the big tests?”

In my teaching and research I continue to work against these stances, by working **with** them. I have come to believe the meta-narrative of *struggle*, originating in the U.S. eras of the civil rights movement and Vietnam, my formative years, remains a useful frame for contemplating the role of the education researcher. In no way do I mean to suggest that I endure the struggles sourced from slavery, the oppression of indigenous peoples, or the violence of war. Rather, as a member of the societies in which these conditions exist, it seems to me that my choice is either to join those who struggle or be lumped with what they struggle against. I might sound old fashioned in this post-millennial,

postmodern 21st century world. Yet I maintain that the frame of struggle remains relevant for education professionals, even though what it means to struggle has evolved. To understand this evolution, I borrow from philosopher Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth's (2001) discussion of agency in the discursive condition. She says,

During a bygone era of modernity, political activists used to talk about trying to make a difference, as if exceptional intervention were requisite to "action". But in the discursive condition it is impossible not to make a difference. "We are difference" as Foucault says (21); the real question then is, do we make the difference we intend? (p. 47).

Mulling over this perspective and its implications has led me to view my professional struggle as one of keeping important frameworks and premises alive during the current epoch. This effort means not only being able to maintain worthwhile theoretical frameworks and epistemologies in research and literature about public education. It means interpreting those frameworks to produce accessible and usable knowledge for practitioners, policy makers and researchers in current times. A similar call was eloquently made by another influential Australian, Allan Luke (2003), in his pursuit of language-in-education policy. Such a position requires thinking about the knowledge I produce through my research and how I disseminate it. A principle for that orientation could be stated as: "The kind of research one does is inextricably linked to how one engages in keeping one's voice and scholarship alive and relevant in whatever political and societal conditions come our way."

So, what can I contribute here? I do my research on another continent. How can I as a literacy researcher focused on issues of access and equity in literacy schooling in the U.S. say something broadly useful to schooling in Australia? How can I, located in English Education, literacy, qualitative research, teacher education, rhetoric and composition, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, speak to education researchers in other disciplines with other frameworks and methodologies?

### **Assuming a Normative Stance**

It is a daunting task that carries with it the risks of reducing and universalizing. I also run the risk of assuming a norm for what is important that may not exist. As well, ascribing for myself the right to speak about what is important is presumptuous, and, if others take me seriously, it can be dangerous. However, an even greater risk is incurred by **not** taking a consciously "normative" stance. In an era in which migration, globalization, and digital ubiquity coexists with test-driven policies and curriculums, and questions about how to educate teachers to work successfully with students unlike themselves, we researchers, no matter where in the world we do our work, are

challenged to locate normative, contributory and critical stances for what we produce. Concepts and values like, freedom, social justice, human rights, and democracy are our societal heritage. Our stance as researchers has been to a great degree enabled by the theoretical discussions and political struggles of our predecessors. They have made our stances possible in ways that are neither foundational or universal, nor merely subjective and arbitrary. They have provided normative territory on which we can stand. Philosophers of education Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (2008) have well articulated the challenge of critical theorists invested in transformative work:

Cultures and societies over long periods of history have come to agree that certain values, institutions, and forms of social life are valuable enough to struggle and die for and one of the tasks of critical theory is to explicate and defend which normative positions continue to be relevant and vital in the contemporary era. (p. 20)

In preparing my talk for today I read the most recent editions of “The Australian Educational Researcher” and encountered Val Klenowski’s (2009) powerful argument for reclaiming public education. In that piece Klenowski defines a stance for Australian public education as a “humanizing, liberalizing, democratizing force”.

Most state systems in Australia include a vision and goal for public education such as this one by Education Queensland: “to provide a quality public education system that delivers opportunities for all students to achieve learning outcomes and reach their potential” (Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA), n.d.). To achieve this vision public education needs to be reclaimed for the common good in a global era as a “**humanizing, liberalizing, democratizing force**” to realise “the full development of human personality and a strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (United Nations, 1948, as cited in Tomlinson, 2001 , p. 171). (Klenowski, 2009, p. 2, emphasis added)

In that spirit, I offer a way of thinking about the work we do as education researchers by considering the ways we see and construct education knowledge. I offer a view that is in keeping with my work as an ethnographer and discourse analyst, where I interpret telling social patterns that emerge from the micro-elements of representative cases. In this essay, however, though I may speak as a social scientist, I will not be as systematic or comprehensive in my analysis as I like to think I am ordinarily, nor will I build an unassailable argument for generalizability. Rather, my goal is rhetorical. I aim to raise for consideration those choices education researchers make as we go about our daily business. As teachers and other publics repeatedly remind us, we are adept at obfuscating the obvious. Their obvious. So, in this paper I will attempt to

elucidate “our obvious” by offering my own situation as a case for study. I will offer as telling cases three instances of my own work in producing, deconstructing and disseminating knowledge. Two will be large-scale reviews of research and the third will be a web site project. Consider me a purposeful sample. Though I do not claim to be representative; neither am I deviantly outside the norm; however, I leave it to you to decide whether I am a typical case in Australia. My plan is to use my own experiences as a researcher as a theory-based sample case to elucidate “our researcher obvious”.

## **What is Our Job?**

As education researchers, we study a social phenomenon. Education – teaching, studenting, learning, failing, achievement, progress – exists as a network of social structures socially generated, maintained and altered. Even seemingly freestanding aspects of public education such as curriculums and classrooms are fundamentally social in how they operate. These social phenomena are deeply ideological in the sense that dispositions, beliefs, values, and desires are implicated in their creation, sustenance and transformation. In light of this phenomenon, how might we productively regard our job? It is, first of all, “to create knowledge”. The knowledge we create is not representations of what IS in the sense that we describe social conditions that stand separate from our and others’ descriptions. The knowledge we create constitutes the phenomena, by bringing it into visibility. In so doing our knowledge contributes to its reality and to its persistence as taken for granted knowledge. Therefore, knowing as we do that we are in some measure constituting the very things we are studying, a second facet of our job is “to criticise taken for granted views of knowledge”. Also, as knowledge exists only in meaningful suspension among meaning makers, a third consideration is “the dissemination of research knowledge”. All knowledge is disseminated via multimodal media and means. Attending consciously to dissemination means asking: To whom? For what purpose?

If we accept the necessity of a normative critical stance, then our understanding of the socially constructed nature of scientific knowledge about education calls forth an ethical imperative. If we know that the knowledge we generate is partial and that it is received as whole, then it is incumbent upon us to do something with this understanding. We have observed that consumers of education research, such as teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers (and to some extent other researchers) often read the results of social science as representative knowledge –the way it is. Such readings contribute to fixed views of educational realities and of the people who inhabit them, what Foucault (1970) has termed discursive formations. If we accept that this fixed, conventionally empirical reading is not a productive consumption of education research, and that we have some responsibility in the matter, then what can we do as

researchers to intervene in that response? What kind of self-consciousness would produce knowledge that is recognised as useful knowledge and also as partial, qualified and situated?

## **A Framework for Disseminating Knowledge as Recognizably Useful and Partial**

I am of the mind that three interrelated kinds of self-conscious understanding could be valuable. The first is “perspectival seeing”, which requires a conscious recognition of how one’s own research perspective orients. The second is the “construction-deconstruction tension”, which, though necessary, can leave us twisting in the wind, and the third is the promise of “complementarity”. To twist alone is less pleasant and, I will assert, less productive.

### **Perspectival seeing with an example**

Understanding how one’s own perspective orients allows us to view which phenomena come into site through different research perspectives, and which research questions can be asked through different methodological approaches. For students of research, I phrase the understanding a bit differently: the ability to choose a perspective that suits the problem one wants to address and the research question one wants to ask. This ability to self-consciously “know thyself”, advocated by ancient Greek philosophers, has bearing in postmodern times, when identity as well as reality is no longer located in a single physical, cultural or even literate space.

Best and Kellner (2008) attribute to Nietzsche, a construct for perspective that serves my purpose: Perspective is a way of seeing, a lens:

A perspectival way of seeing involves interpretation to grasp the uniqueness of concrete phenomena, allowing access to “a complex form of specificity” (Nietzsche 1968a: 340), which makes possible a more concrete and complete grasp of the particularities of phenomena. Seeing from conflicting perspectives also opens people to appreciation of otherness and difference, and to grasp the uncertain, provisional, hypothetical and “experimental” nature of all knowledge. (Best & Kellner, 2008, p. 5)

I applied Nietzsche’s and Best and Kellner’s construct when in 2003, the editorial board of the American Educational Research Association invited me to write a review of classroom research for the new edition of their research handbook. Two doctoral candidates and I took on the task, reading over 300 studies, chapters and articles from the prior 40 years (Rex, Steadman, & Graciano, 2006). We coded and analyzed the

texts as though they were data, following assumptions we abide by in our research: A review is an interpretation and a representation to which the reviewer must hold herself accountable through systematic principled actions. We coded and analyzed the texts as though they were data in a dialectical constant comparative process (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The result was a representation of the research as a means for viewing classroom interaction from their unique perspectives. In this case, we conceptualised perspective as the relational lens formed by each study's research question, methodology, and purpose. Through axial coding of the perspectives, seven categories emerged.

### **Construction-deconstruction tension**

In the review, my co-authors and I argued, and I think successfully illustrated, that the seven perspectival approaches were consequential in the research they produced for understanding classroom interaction. However, during this review we also realised it was incumbent upon us to not only represent research-based knowledge, but to also deconstruct that representation. We interpreted our job as giving intellectual tools to readers to construct and deconstruct knowledge in ways ethical and useful. Having been trained as a social scientist and a compositionist, I could, without much difficulty, write a presentation of knowledge. However, I had to work harder to determine how, rhetorically, I could also provide means for readers to deconstruct that knowledge. I was concerned that novice education researchers would believe they had read "Knowledge" with a capital K. My strategy was to write a conclusion to the review that positioned readers to rethink our rendering. We began that conclusion by declaring our own skepticism toward our work. We told readers what our framework left out and possible consequences. We explained another way we could have organised the review:

We take **a self-consciously skeptical position toward our preceding framework** in keeping with the stance taken by David Hamilton and Erica McWilliam in the 2001 Handbook of Research on Teaching. Before richly elucidating the last thirty years of "ex-centric" voices that frame research on teaching, Hamilton and McWilliam warned, "...[R]esearch on teaching became – and has remained – a diaspora. It is not a field of divergent models or paradigms that can be taxonomically juxtaposed to one another. Rather... research on teaching is a blurred genre, a kaleidoscope of unstable patterns, a palimpsest of multiple reinscriptions (p. 23).

Our framework has attempted to give definition to that blur by offering readers a historical story and field of knowledge they might usefully apply to their own research goals. **Yet, our framework leaves out much which, if included, would redefine what is of use, and so**



**prompt different applications.** For instance, after reading Hamilton and McWilliam's history, we became aware that **we could rewrite our history to foreground "context" rather than interaction** as the key organizing principle for presenting important research on teaching.

As these opening paragraphs indicate, we set about providing the reader with ways to assume a self-consciously skeptical stance toward the coherence of our framework. However, that was not the conclusion that appeared in print. The one that was published asserts a seamless presentation of knowledge. It positions readers as experts if they accept the knowledge as written:

Each of the seven frameworks describes chronologically and topically related programs of research to demonstrate similarity in their perspectives about what constitutes classroom interaction and how we can understand and study it. Each perspective assumes a conceptual stance, or a cluster of conceptual relationships among the purpose of the study and its research questions, epistemological framework, and methodology. Each framework is not a recipe or a protocol, but rather a dynamically interrelated grouping of concepts and the logical ways of proceeding they imply.

This striking consequential difference was no nefarious plot by editors, no last minute failing of authorial nerve. The story is far more banal. The manuscript was too long and had to be cut by a third. I interpreted that to mean taking material from the introduction and the conclusion, so as to leave the "content" intact. That meant readjusting my expectations for what I could, and to what extent I should, deconstruct. Reviewers with critical inclinations were understandably perturbed and let me know in no uncertain terms.

### **Twisting in the wind**

I share this event with you to reflect the fraught and complicated nature of what I am suggesting we should ask of ourselves. I am sure you need no reminding that we work within existing institutional and professional structures that demand constant choices be made under often tight deadlines. Each choice, though it may appear necessary and small, is consequential. The texts through which we represent our knowledge are the arbitration sites of our choices, and they present the knowledge we produce devoid of the messy, conflicted choices we made.

Barthes (1986) saves us from too much self-flagellation. By citing the danger of over-emphasizing method, Barthes reminds us that at some point we need to write what needs to be written. In his terms, "at a certain moment, [we need] to turn against Method, or at least to regard it without any founding privilege, as one of the voices of plurality" (p. 319).



The danger of Method (of a fixation upon Method) comes from this: research work must satisfy two demands; the first is a demand for responsibility: the work must increase lucidity, expose the implications of a procedure, the alibis of language – in short, must constitute a critique (let us recall once again that to criticise means to call into crisis); here Method is inevitable, irreplaceable, not for its “results” but precisely – or on the contrary – because it realises the highest degree of a consciousness of a language which does not forget itself; but the second demand is of a very different order: it is the demand for writing, for a space of desire’s dispersion, where Law is dismissed; **hence it is necessary, at a certain moment, to turn against Method, or at least to regard it without any founding privilege, as one of the voices of plurality:** as a view, in short, a spectacle, mounted within the text – the text which is, after all, the only “true” result of any research. (Barthes, 1986, p. 319, emphasis added)

By allowing “space for desire’s dispersion” this view temporarily let me off the hook on the first review by giving me writer’s license to construct “the text”. Of course, I was relieved and reinvigorated by this apparent absolution. As a researcher and text-producer, I could avoid writer’s block. Nevertheless, not unexpectedly my comfort was short-lived, as textual construction is an endlessly fraught enterprise.

### **The value of complementary research**

In this section I explain how in performing another literature review I made more productive use of perspectival seeing and the challenging tensions between constructing and deconstructing research knowledge, by operationalizing the construct of complementarity. Other researchers before me have asserted that contributing to the solving of particular problems in schooling requires complementary research, which builds on and relates to the work of other researchers – school- and university-based. This complementarity can be viewed as compatible conceptual frameworks for bringing the phenomenon into focus; as interdependent units of analysis for interpreting, describing and representing the phenomena; and, as the production of reciprocally supportive results for application. A long tradition of literacy scholarship argues for this complementary view (e.g., Beach, Green, Kamil, & Shanahan, 1992). For example in 1988, Judith Green and Judith Harker illustrated the robustness of insight available when multiple perspectives analyzed the same classroom discourse. More recently, Greg Kelly (2006) has expanded the concept of complementarity among education research by arguing for epistemic plurality and proposing critical dialogues to contribute to public reasoning. A new book by Australian editors Claire Wyatt-Smith, John Elkins and Stephanie Gunn (2010), “Multiple Perspectives on Difficulties in Learning Literacy and Numeracy” provides sustenance for such conversations.

I added complementarity to my approach when I accepted an invitation to write the first review of discourse analytic research in literacy (Rex et al., 2010). I viewed my task as bringing into dialogue the considerable number of perspectives informing such research. My team of seven doctoral students and I noted that we could position the hundreds of studies we read to address the problem of equitable access to literacy education. By reading the corpus as a domain of knowledge, we were able to discern that a discourse analysis perspective made it possible for researchers to ask two questions key to equitable access: “Whose literacies count?” and “Which literacies count?” Research that attended to “Whose literacies count?” we represented as concerned with how educational structures and those in positions of authority are consequential for literacy learners. Research organised as “Which literacies count?” was represented as investigating issues of equity related to the authority of types of literacy definitions, literacy practices, and sites of literacy having to do with access. This, we determined, was a complementarity move.

By choosing equitable access as a common frame for the dialogue, we had taken a normative stance. By choosing studies from researchers in a variety of career stages, institutional venues, countries and disciplines we aimed to engage a rich field for complementary perspectival seeing. To promote a construction-deconstruction dynamic for the reader, we organised the review into two sections. The first presents research according to Whose literacies count? and Which literacies count? The second section presents studies that address five questions, also revealed through our coding:

1. What are literate identities, how are they constructed, and by whom?
2. How are disciplinary knowledges, discourses, and identities constructed?
3. How can schools provide students with access to school-based literacies?
4. What are the shifting roles of literacy teachers and learners within and outside of school?
5. How does discourse analysis research address movement within and across literacy sites and practices in a contemporary, globalised, and increasingly digitally-influenced world?

I hoped I had avoided my earlier misstep. By generating two readings in dialogue with each other, we discouraged an essentializing, ahistorical view. As Barthes might say, we acted upon our desire to produce a text that fit our purposes. The review has been published. Inevitably some readers will charge that we spun the literature to our own purposes; that we left out important research or that we misused the authority given to us. High profile reviews of research literature are not for the faint of heart or for those not willing to work in ambiguous complex spaces.

Nevertheless, we cannot take any of this too personally. Once represented, complementarity, if it is to be useful, is best held as fragile, temporary co-relationships that serve the agreed upon framing of the purpose of the times. In this case we interpreted complementarity for those of us interested in equity and access, which is itself a constantly moving historical, social and political target. Research knowledge to describe and promote productive educational change functions not only as complementary and self-critical. It also performs in a state of flux. We researchers can be more productive in response to educational issues, if we assume the position of strategic agents operating within flux. Recognition that we are operating in quick sand, albeit quicksand represented as concrete, necessitates immediate attention to assuming the best stance to stay viable. Such recognition alerts us to remain focused on what counts at a given time as informative and viable knowledge.

### **A Summary That Points to Purpose**

I will pause to summarise where I have taken us so far. Using my own work to illustrate, I have been inhabiting constructs of normative stance, perspectival seeing, and complementarity to persuade you of their utility and value as ways of understanding the work that we do. I have posited that our work is to construct, deconstruct and disseminate knowledge. I have suggested that these understandings have to do with the ways education researchers agentively go about choosing, designing, conducting and writing about their projects. I have also been asserting that these constructs could be useful to productively address the current state of public education. Another way of framing these ideas is to articulate them more directly in relation to current public education situations, contexts and demands. If we reframe these constructs in terms of “purpose”, we can shift the focus from the realm of interesting and debatable ideas to performative criteria for action. If we are purposeful as researchers, we concern ourselves with

- creating theoretical frameworks and methodologies that construct and deconstruct knowledge targeting problems of public schooling that are actionable; with
- contributing to the solving of particular problems in public schooling by building programs of complementary research that build, relate to and extend the work of other researchers – school- and university-based; and with
- disseminating research so as to reach those who might benefit, in ways that are accessible and will do the most good.

## **Innovative Global Dissemination**

### **What counts as purposeful dissemination?**

These concerns bring me, finally, to the issue of innovative global dissemination. Commensurate with the issues involved in producing purposeful, complementary knowledge, innovative dissemination is a fraught space. What counts as innovative knowledge? Who is to be served by it and for what purposes? It is one thing to say that we should reach those who should benefit in ways that will do the most good. It is another to determine the semantics of that statement. What does “benefit” mean and for whom? Traditionally, the matter of dissemination is not the focal issue for researchers. We are trained to publish our research knowledge mostly to a small constituency – our own field of scholarship. Except for evaluative studies, usually meant for the commissioner, our fellow researchers are our research audience. Another exception might be action research approaches, where participants are also research partners. But for the vast majority of research, the connection between our work and those we study is usually tenuous. Whatever we learn from a study is rarely written so as to speak to participants or to public stakeholders. We tend to assume a trickle-down dynamic. If we build education knowledge through valid description, theory-building, and methodological innovation the fruits of our labors will eventually reach down to the students, teachers, parents, administrators we are studying. I have read many arguments for why this approach is necessary for the sake of validity and practicality. Two of the most frequently invoked are the sampling argument – that we cannot study every person in every educative situation, and the efficiency argument – nor do we have time to write for practitioners or the public, to be all things to all people.

## **An Example of Purposeful and Accessible Research Dissemination**

Nevertheless, another view of purposeful dissemination survives. There exists research designed to be relevant for both scholarship and application. I have already cited work at the tip of the research iceberg being done here in Australia. Such research also exists in the U.S. I spoke with John Rogers at the University of California in Los Angeles last month about the research projects he is involved with there. His Institute for Democracy, Education and Access is engaged in a number of research and dissemination projects. One is the collection, analysis and interpretation of education data that have a bearing on opportunity outcomes, especially those that highlight issues of equity and raise unacknowledged concerns. For example, one research report, “Sharing the Burden: The Impact of Proposed Teacher Layoffs Across LAUSD” (the Los Angeles Unified School District) (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA), 2009), correlates the 8,500 teachers who have received lay off

notices with the neighborhood racial composition and median income of the communities they serve. The results indicate a much higher proportion of layoffs in those areas most in need of stable teaching staffs.

These brief, concise reports are written for public stakeholders with whom the institute sustains working relationships. For example, civic and community organizations and parent groups make use of these reports when they meet with governmental officials to push back against negative policies and advocate for ones more equitable. Available to anyone through the world wide web (<http://www.idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/index.html>), the reports provide these groups with the material they need in the form of arguments and data:

Many schools serving low-income communities of color have worked hard to recruit and develop new teachers with the skills and commitment to be successful in these communities. The dismissal of large numbers of teachers in these schools will disrupt ongoing reform efforts and instructional programs, and might have a long-term impact on the schools' ability to attract (and retain) new teachers into the profession. Teacher layoffs also will undermine the sense of professional community within schools and erode the relationships between schools and the communities they serve . . . Districts may realise short-term cost savings by creating larger classes and reducing the teaching force, but increasing class size in Los Angeles schools means adding more students to classrooms that are already among the most overcrowded in the nation. (UCLA IDEA, 2009)

I admire the position taken by John Rogers, by UCLA and by Jeannie Oakes at the Ford Foundation who is funding a great deal of this work. Theirs is the conviction that university-based education researchers should be engaged in such efforts. They do so without asking fees for their products or services. What could result if significantly more researchers held themselves to the principle that in designing projects the goal is to produce knowledge that could contribute not only to our field but to the education publics that could make use of that knowledge?

**Yes . . . But . . .**

In this recession era of deep budget cuts that are being felt at the university level, this is a brave and some would argue, untenable stance. UCLA is undergoing major cuts in program and staff due to massive cuts in their state funding. The last time I checked, California's budget deficit was \$26.3 billion. This year the UC Board of regents adopted a \$813 million budget cut. UCLA outline nearly \$100 million in cuts from its budget, more than 10 percent of UCLA's general fund, according to vice chancellor for finance, Steven Olsen. Arizona State lost 18%. Even institutions previously embarrassingly flush with endowment capital such as Stanford and Harvard have taken a hit. Stanford is

cutting its general funds budget by 10-12% and Harvard's endowment dropped 30% resulting in layoffs and major cuts to academic programs.

Blood is in the water. In this period of shrinking resources and programmatic contraction, many universities are encouraging faculty to take advantage of federal stimulus money to fund their research as well as other funding sources. The implicit argument is that to not do so would seem disloyal and somehow unpatriotic. In the U.S. \$4 billion in "Race to the Top" funds is not to be sneezed at. We could all think of important, useful things to do with some of that money. However, I think we should also think carefully about these choices as well. The lure of funding has always been an issue for researchers. Grant procurement is a criteria for hiring faculty and for promotion. We teach our doctoral students how to find and obtain grants. The shaping of a research agenda to suit an RFP is traditional research apprenticeship curriculum. Yet, as with all RFP calls, (though, perhaps not here in Australia) some funders' criteria are more in tune with what researchers and practitioners count as purposeful research uses than others. As academics we live with this tension of getting funded versus doing other work we think should be done. That tension, part of the struggle, is heightened amidst the current feeding frenzy. Committing to research that can be distributed at no cost to publics and practitioners who can make good use of it calls for two facilities: Strategic rhetorical argument to funders, and candid self-examination. We should be asking ourselves: What do we have to be wary of when thinking about who consumes our research and for what purposes?

Some possible answers come to mind: commodification, marketization and empire building. Research knowledge as a commodity is such a nonradical idea as to be invisible in the academy. Fundamental to our jobs as academics is the packaging of knowledge for consumption. Though we prefer not to think in terms of styrofoam and shrink wrap, each report, paper, article and book for dissemination commodifies the outcomes of our work, buying us forms of professional capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). We survive and thrive in our various professional venues to the extent we effectively market our knowledge commodities. Marketization has grown increasingly fashionable as a construct for explaining why some research fairs better than others. Research that gains attention and garners resources does so, according to this model, because it suits the needs of the marketplace. While this economic model is becoming exceedingly popular, the meritocratic meta-narrative remains entrenched as a justification for the status our work achieves, even amidst awareness of the role played by influential social professional networks. We work in a relatively small, highly competitive marketplace and Social Darwinism is a convenient frame for explaining professional ascendancy and marginalization. To acquire a complementary normative stance calls upon us to think differently from emphasizing one perspective/model over others, especially our own.

### My Efforts at Creating Global Networks

I point to these issues in order to describe some of the complicated dimensions of the choices we researchers make and how tied they are to discursive formations that may be taken for granted. It is much easier to point out the discursive formations appropriated by others, than it is to acknowledge one's own. I am sure there are many I have not addressed, but I have pointed to the ones I have because it is these discourses I have consciously confronted in my own research.

I have grappled with how, through open access, to design and disseminate research as widely as possible to those who could find it useful. I continue to experiment with forms of dissemination. Most recently, I have gone digital, turning to the web to broadcast the results of a research project I designed with open access dissemination in mind. I tracked down university digital resources freely available on my campus (i.e., Sitemaker) to establish an open access web site. The site makes use of video, audio and artifact data from my recent action research project in an alternative high school on the edge of deeply troubled urban area in the U.S. (<http://sitemaker.umich.edu/argument>).

The site's purpose is to introduce, for educators of students who are achieving at the lowest levels of academically measured performance in the least well served public schools, a way of teaching a literacy critical to civic and academic participation: the writing of persuasive arguments. The site is meant for teachers who have been struggling with this challenge. Teachers actively participated in its design and assessment. In constructing the site, we had in mind visitors who turn to the web in their search for resources. When they log on, we want to provide them with recognizable teaching challenges and curricula needs similar to their own. Along with teaching videos and curriculum, we provide an example of student essay writing before the project: the garbled response to a proposed new law requiring a "C" grade average before teenagers could acquire a driving license.

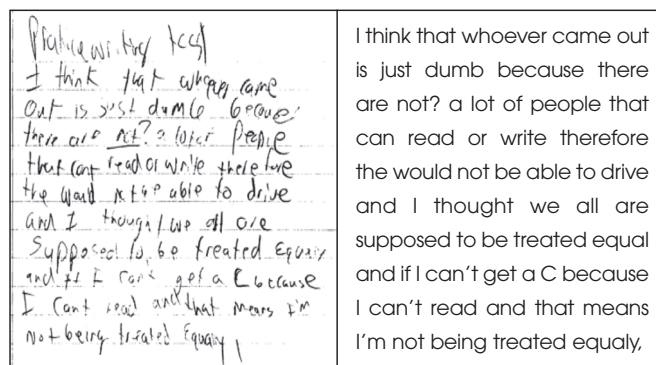


Figure 1: Example of student essay writing



We also provide the draft the student produced after our intervention during which he was called on to articulate his reasoning and write it down. He wrote this argument in response to “Stomp the Yard”, a dance film popular among the students in this class.

DJ was a selfish guy and his brother died because of it, but now he's a team player. If it wasn't for him DJ's brother would still be alive. I say that DJ at the beginning of the movie is dancing selfishly and not for the team and that is what got his brother killed. He realizes that being on a step team or a dance team is not just for him, others are on the team too win also. Dancing is a team thing and he realizes that.

DJ says that if it wasn't for him his brother would still be here. Early in the movie, DJ and Duran were at this dance battle out of there home town. Both teams had put up money and the winner gets that sum of money. DJ and Duran's team had won, but then DJ was like double or nothing. Nobody on the team wanted to go on but they did because the team didn't want DJ going out there by himself. DJ's team demolished the other team and won again. The opposite got mad because they'd lost and followed DJ's team out. They started to fight and in the process of fighting DJ's brother Duran got shot and died. If DJ and his team went of went home after the first dance, Duran would still be alive.

DJ starts to go to college because that's what his family wants him to do and his brother. DJ soon joins a fraternity and starts to step. Later of the steeping he's doing it for his brother and for his teammates. At the beginning of the steeping he's doing it for him self. But now he's learning how not to be selfish. He's building a family with his new dancing partners and during the process hes he shows them some different type of dance moves and he is contributing to the team in non-selfish way and he is making them a better team.

The step team is practicing in the pool and DJ knows there going to lose with these dancing moves. So he shows them something hot and new. The new steppers like it but the old ones didn't. So the leader was like let's settle this tonight at the dance floor. DJ and the leader dance and DJ lost because he didn't follow the steps, he did his own thing. Then his teammates told him it is not just about you and that makes everything click for him. DJ was like I want to be part of the team now.

The step team makes it to the National Championship but not DJ because of something that happens but he does come and dances his butt off. During the process DJ says that man come on its for you and you always wanted it, but the step leader says no its team thing and were going to do this. DJ goes out and does his brothers finishing move and everybody is excited and DJ and now not selfish no more he is a team player. Dj won because of his brother's move. At first causing his brother to die, to contributing dance moves to his step team and using his brothers moves hes not a selfish guy no more, and his life will be much easier.

**Figure 2: Student's essay response after receiving instruction in warranting a claim with evidence**

Our aim is to persuade teachers that students already understand argument, that many students are quite proficient at arguing in familiar social situations, and that they can show students how to apply that facility to writing for other purposes. We regard this web site as an experimental “proof of concept” and “proof of value”. It is the first step toward developing an open access resource for public school teachers that respects what students can and want to do in school with their out of school literacy knowledge. I want it to be the first stage of a more extensive network of teaching

resources. If it grows legs, the site could be developed to link not only my own archived digital research assets but those of other literacy researcher educators around the U.S. and the globe, including, I hope, Australia.

## Conclusion

As I proceed, I do not assume the general climate is supportive of the purpose for research I am forwarding. Though wary of seeming apocalyptic, I feel obliged to conclude by contemplating possible future developments. I am aware of concerns in your country that research funding is being cut at the same time that criteria for research are being rewritten (Gough, 2008). You are undoubtedly aware that similar patterns have been in place in the U.S. In principle, the Obama administration is more amenable to supporting educational improvement, distinct from the former federal emphasis on teacher accountability. However, it is too soon to tell whether government funds for research will encourage the bolstering of teacher education, professional development and open access. I remain hopeful, but guarded as to whether “The Race to the Top” in the U.S. will become another way of declaring the failure of schools and of teacher education.

Nevertheless, university-based researchers remain the education knowledge producers of record, and how that knowledge is produced and disseminated continues to be ours to determine. But for how long? The Internet is unstoppable, as the music, video and journalism industries have had to realise. Even medicine is now contending with patients who self-diagnose and self-prescribe from the knowledge available on Internet medical sites. The web has exploded traditional knowledge gate-keeping functions of managed peer review. Is now the time to let go of the assumption that as researchers and scholars we “own” the knowledge we generate, or that we can control where it goes and for whom? That premise has yet to be empirically verified and is already seriously challenged by off-site virtual universities as well as by on-line blogs and publications. Research may continue to be corralled by the valuation processes of our governing professional institutions, but can we ignore that popular meta-discourses, rhetorical skill, social networking, and the luck of timing have as much to do with which research is picked up as evidence, with how it is read, and with how it is utilised by education stakeholders?

Historically, the mandate of social science research has been to assume an ethical responsibility for improving conditions that currently exist. As social scientists, education researchers wear this mantle of purpose. We are concerned with producing and disseminating research that counts for public education stakeholders. Perhaps a way to consider opportunity in the current moment is to see advantage in the flux. If we researchers can get past the notion that we are building education knowledge as an implicated future edifice, we can sort out new conceptions of knowledge dissemination and integration that can expand understanding while being of use in the here and now.

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