My research is about the *understandings, behaviours and* attitudes staff who use technology for teaching – (for the purposes of this research the technology referred to is the institutional VLE Blackboard) through reflection on my own practice to create a Community of Inquiry for staff to engage with technology for teaching through an online course delivered as part of the university’s teacher education programme.

Research proposal - What do academics, who teach and support learning, consider to be the main influences on their *understandings, behaviours and* attitudes towards the use of virtual learning environments?

Research question ***: Investigating the adoption of a VLE within a UK university***

Research sub-questions:

* What influences the ways in which academics interpret and give meaning to virtual learning environments?
* In what ways do extra-institutional and intra-institutional factors influence academics’ attitudes and behaviours in respect of virtual learning environments?
* What other concerns influence academics’ behaviours and attitudes towards the use of virtual learning environments?

Structure for this chapter

* Introduction
* Research rationale, objective and questions
* Research context
* Theoretical and conceptual influences
* The researcher
* Thesis layout
* Conclusion

# Introduction

This thesis is an investigation into how best virtual learning environments (VLE) can enhance the student experience of higher education in England. The VLE investigated is Blackboard at the University of Lincoln, UK. The thesis examines my own practice as a Teaching and Learning Coordinator. I work alongside staff who teach and support learning as they explore the shift from traditional face to face formats towards the development of effective and pedagogically sound online learning experiences instead. In doing this research I have given a voice to staff who are subject experts in their fields, rather than technology specialists or digital scholars, but have been expected to manage the transfer of their practice to virtual environments and become digitally literate without the advantage of pre-existing technical knowledge and experience. Using a participatory action research methodology, aligned with the principles of online educational design, this thesis offers an account of the challenges of teaching and learning in a digital age from those academics and professional service staff who have been under-represented in the literature of digital education research.

Garrison (2011) calls for doing things differently and exploring the enabling factors of technology which make new forms of learning possible. Garrison suggests digital pedagogy moves away from transmission models of education towards the construction of communities of inquiry and the ability of elearning to foster higher order learning. The greatest mistake he suggests, is to integrate communication technology into existing models of education. Instead, we should revisit elearning to better understand how it can enhance a worthwhile educational experience. Rather than dystopian visions of digital diploma mills, the real challenge and benefit is to *‘…understand the nature and potential of elearning and its implications for a collaborative and constructive educational experience.*’p6.

First, this requires a theoretical framework within which to rethink pedagogy, one which is focused on shared practice of the student experience of their individual relationship with the technology. A community of inquiry is one where individual experience and ideas are recognised and discussed against the background of social knowledge, norms and values.

*‘An educational community of inquiry is a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding.’* P2

A community of inquiry can take advantage of the affordances of the internet to exist independently of time and location. Its educational roots lie in computer conferencing and collaborative constructivist approaches to learning but its construction and facilitation should be viewed as less an *‘industrialised form of distance education’* and ‘*first and foremost about providing a quality educational experience.*’ P2

Links can be made between inquiry based learning and Boyers models of scholarship; discovering knowledge, integrating knowledge, sharing knowledge and the scholarship of education. A community of inquiry contains the means for generating intellectual inquiry and research aimed at extending knowledge. The digital nature supports the making of connections across disciplines and global networks and enables working on common causes and shared interests rather than working in isolation. The scholarship of application; social responsibility and citizenship which in the paper Scholarship of Engagement ,Boyer describes as the common good aligns with current calls for a critical theory approach to digital education, one which engages with the public good and through attention to civic, social, moral and economic problems. Boyer calls the scholarship of application an attribute of reflective practitioners and references Schon. Critical reflective practice is a key element of higher education and there are clear parallels between Schon, Boyer and Garrison’s Community of Inquiry. A CoI fits the scholarship of teaching and learning; it involves a systematic study of teaching and learning processes and Boyer says this scholarship differs from in that it requires a format that will allow public sharing and the opportunity for application and evaluation by others; something the internet enables.

This chapter introduces the rationale for the research, its objective and the questions for investigation into how best an institutional VLE can enhance student learning. It outlines the wider context against which virtual learning environments have been introduced and embedded into UK higher education. This is followed with a description of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which have informed the research followed by a personal, reflexive account explaining my position as a researcher within my own institution.

# Research rationale

Since the Dearing Report into the Future of Higher Education in 1997, attention has been paid to embedding technologies for learning into university networks and systems through a number of sector wide rationales claiming Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) could increase institutional efficiency and benefit the student experience.

*Add here section on policy documents from government and HEFCE etc*

At the same time, existing research into the use of computers in education, in particular within the disciplines of computer sciences and languages, expanded incrementally to incorporate additional affordances of the internet for synchronous and asynchronous interaction, personal development planning, continuing professional practice, lifelong learning and flexible, blended and distance delivery. Additional research into the student experience, in particular with regard to their use of ICT before and during university, offering insights into the expectations and uses of technology by learners (refs). Early examination suggests there already exists a considerable body of research into virtual education or elearning as it became called. However a closer inspection reveals the research was being driven by those already expert in the field and focused more on the potential and theoretical rather than the practical aspects of elearning. What appeared to be missing from the literature were the views of the majority of staff teaching and supporting learning, for whom computers and the internet are incidental rather than integral to their daily lives. Academics who might not describe themselves as digitally literate, and feel less confident and competent with digital ways of working, are largely absent from digital debates and discussions into the future of higher education online, as well as being invisible in funded digital research bids and completed digital research dissemination opportunities. The absence of the teaching voice in the design and delivery of virtual learning experiences is the place where my research is located.

# Research Objective

The second decade of the 21st century remains a time of change for higher education. Amid all the uncertainty about its future in an increasingly neo-liberal economy, the core businesses of the university still include teaching and learning. The question of how to enhance the professional development of those staff who teach and support learning is of primary importance. Staff expertise is the most important asset in a university and ‘…without it literally nothing can be achieved’ (Blackmore and Blackwell 2003: 23). As this research will show, the shift from face to face to virtual teaching and learning environments represent significant changes in practice and behaviour which have privileged those already digitally competent while marginalising those without the necessary technical enthusiasm or expertise. As well as uncertainty about the future of the university, there are growing calls to view the rhetoric and promise of elearning as a failure (refs). This is leading to a rethinking of how best the university experience can be enhanced through digital education in the challenging economic times ahead. This research aims to contribute to these ongoing debates by asking how best staff can be supported to use the VLE to enhance their own practice.

As an educationalist at the University of Lincoln, I support staff to use technologies for learning, in particular the institutionally supported virtual learning environment Blackboard. My work focuses on the development of ways to enhance the quality of teaching and learning through shifting pedagogical design and delivery from predominantly face to face to online learning experiences. In order to work more closely alongside staff in the scholarly discovery of digital pedagogic practice, I developed a teacher education programme, Teaching and Learning in a Digital Age (TELEDA). This short postgraduate certificate is delivered and assessed entirely online through Blackboard. The course aims to relocate staff from a position of self-confessed digital shyness towards becoming digitally literate practitioners. Based on the principles of experiential learning, the objective was to reposition staff as students in a supportive collegial environment, one which created networks across subject disciplines and encouraged the sharing of those digital literacies, scholarship and pedagogies essential for 21st century education. Working alongside colleagues, and following the experiential learning cycle, the course was piloted, evaluated and redesigned in a process of ongoing collaborative endeavour. The objective was to investigate how academics working across subject disciplines perceive the role of virtual learning environments in their own practice and how their understandings, behaviours and attitudes towards digital education have been shaped. This data was previously absent from the research into virtual learning therefore had the potential to create new knowledge for informing decisions around how best to move digital education forward across the UK higher education sector.

# Research questions

The central research question:

What do academics, who teach and support learning, consider to be the main influences on their understandings, behaviours and attitudes towards the use of virtual learning environments?

To examine this issue the following sub-questions need to be explored:

* What influences the ways in which academics interpret and give meaning to virtual learning environments?
* In what ways do extra-institutional and intra-institutional factors influence academics’ attitudes and behaviours in respect of virtual learning environments?
* What other concerns influence academics’ behaviours and attitudes towards the use of virtual learning environments?

# Research context

The use of CITs was promoted in the Dearing report into the future of higher education in 1997 and over the next decade, virtual learning environments were embedded into university networks and systems. From the beginning there was greater investment in their functionality than in the shift of pedagogical practice from traditional face to face to online teaching and learning practice (refs Salmon etc) resulting in Laurillard’s statement about higher education being on the brink of transformation but having been there for some time (ref). Since Dearing, attention has been paid to the theoretical possibilities of the technology with extensive research into the student experience of virtual learning, the latter being instrumental in shifting opinion from students as ‘natural’ digital scholars to young people needing specific support in developing those digital literacies necessary for higher education and graduate employment. However, lack of support for the digital competencies of those staff who teach and support learning has created a complex digital divide on campus between digitally competent teachers and those who had yet to make the shift from face to face to online practice. This divide is increasingly invisible as is the nature of all digital exclusions. In environments where ICT usage is maximised, many less competent ICT users are marginalised into ghettos of non-digital practice. The situation is exacerbated over time as research funding typically attracts the digitally literate who already demonstrate confidence and those innovators and early adopters as identified by Rogers in his diffusion of Innovations (ref). Decisions about the management, maintenance and future development of the VLE are typically made by technologists, ICT specialists, those academic staff who are competent users of technology and senior management who rarely have need to engage with teaching and learning online. The experiences of the less confident user, late adopter or resistor have little or no representation in the external or internal policy making process and research and as a consequence these staff risk becoming further marginalised and disempowered from virtual learning and digital education development.

This research acknowledges the wider influence of UK politics on higher education and the constraining policy frameworks within which university management teams have to work. It also acknowledges the existence of those negative views which see virtual learning as the mechanisation of academia through the imposition of managerialist control. However, the research is driven by pedagogic principles rather than political ones. It concentrates primarily on the literature of virtual learning design and delivery rather than the literature of political dissent and subversion. It adopts a fundamentally pragmatic stance, one which focuses on the affordances of the internet to widen opportunities for participation in genuinely authentic higher education experiences. The literature review is layered to include national, sector and institutional perspectives on the development of elearning in the UK, followed by an overview of the relevant research into digital teaching and learning practices. Setting out the context with reference to the scholarly literature and evidence base will reinforce the divide between existing published work of digitally literate technicians and scholars and the lesser known day to day experience of academics who teach and support learning.

It is this divide which has informed the decision to use a participatory research methodology to create actionable knowledge produced through collaborative partnership in the research process. The actions of collaborative working alongside colleagues and the sharing of critical reflection on practice, evaluation and revision of the course Teaching and Learning in a Digital Age, all constitute the data collection phase of the research. It is these previously untold stories which represent opportunities for staff to occupy the silent spaces in the literature of digital education which this research set out to fill.

# Theoretical and conceptual influences

Research is a social practice. It involves identity or the ‘presentation of the self’ as an ‘aesthetic and ethical’ project, which Foucault (Bernauer and Rasmussen, 1994) refers to as a ‘practice of the self’. This research has been guided and influenced by a postmodern view of social reality which draws attention to those voices which are unheard and unseen. A postmodern lens provides a useful method for conceptualising individual relationships with virtual learning environments and offers a unique insight into influences, attitudes and behaviours. Scheurich (1997) suggests research in the postmodern attempts to erase the distinction between research practices and the subjectivity of the researcher an approach. This fits well with a participatory action research design which draws attention to blurring the power balance between researcher and participant and stresses critical reflective practice as the process through which attention to self can be situated. A postmodern lens challenges the modernist view of identity as pre-existing in a humanistic/existential paradigm; instead it questions the subject as truth-teller and identity as pre-existing, suggesting instead identity is produced rather than revealed. Subject and subjectivity are constituted through historical-socio discourse/ideology but these processes are always open to change and resistance; hope lies within the human capacity to resist dominant structures of oppression and control. Postmodern approaches to research encourage critical reflection on subject position through narrative accounts – structured within a critical reflective framework – which contain within themselves opportunities to uncover the workings of discursive practices/influence – enabling the participant to review and reframe their subject position.

Across the sector there have been calls for a more critical approach to the development of digital education. Selwyn (2007) identifies the emergence of a consistent theme; namely how the use of computer technology does not reflect the creative, productive and empowering usages envisioned and promoted by learning technologists. The rhetoric attached to elearning in the late 20th century has subsided smid recognition the promise and reality have not converged.  Laurillard says higher education is on the brink of transformation, but has been there for some time. Feenburg (2011) says ‘*the promise of virtual learning in the 1990s has come to nothing and elearning within the university has failed’.*

Building on the social construction of technology model put forward by Bjiker, Feenberg (2010) describes technologies as being social, determined by the meanings we give them, with development and use being influenced by existing cultural and ideological structures and frameworks. This research adopts Feenberg’s call for a critical approach which emphasis the dynamics of technological design and development as social and political processes (Feenberg 2005) and uncovers these through attention to what Mats Alvesson and Kaj Skoldberg (2000, pp.194-5) call a central element informing ‘pragmatic postmodern methodological principles’ namely that research work and texts should capture a plurality ‘of different identities or voices associated with different groups, individuals, positions or special interests’. Alvesson and Skoldberg remind postmodern researchers how single participants may convey multiple representations, how phenomena can be presented using a variety of modes and media, including ‘the use of different sorts of descriptive languages’ and the role of the researcher is to be reflexive which leads to the possibility of flexibility or ‘openness and different sorts of readings to surface in the research’.

It is not possible within the confines of this thesis to cover the full range of approaches to the use and non-use of virtual learning environments and a distinction has been made between social and political critical theory and the critical reflective pedagogic practice. With regard to educational technology research, the approach of Reeves et al has been adopted. Suggesting too much attention has been paid to evaluations and case study approaches, leading to a weakening of reliable and robust research into education design, *‘…it is extremely difficult to trace the impact of educational research to anything that really matters.’* (p57).

Reeves, T. C., McKenny, S. and Herrington, J. (2010) Publishing and perishing: The critical importance of educational design research.  Australasian Journal of Educational Technology 2011, 27(1), 55-65 call for greater attention to the construction of effective pedagogy for virtual learning through Educational Design Research (EDR). This offers a direct link between research and practice so has the potential for more meaningful impact. Reeves et al. suggest six possible research approaches to EDR; one of which being the postmodern theory which has been adopted for this thesis.

*‘Although educational design has a twenty year history going back to 1992, most educational researchers confound research goals and methods… Researchers with postmodern goals are focused on examining the assumptions underlying contemporary educational programmes and practices with the ultimate goal of revealing hidden agendas and empowering disenfranchised minorities. Although increasingly evident among researchers with multicultural, gender or political interested, research in the postmodern tradition is rare within the field of educational technology.’* (Reeves et al 2010:60)

Reeves suggestion of research in the postmodern tradition being rare within the field of educational technology may be partially due the relative newness of internet enabled educational research compared with already existing and influential critiques of postmodernism including Sokal and Bricmont 1988, Chomsky 1995, Postrel and Feser 2000 and Chomsky 2013. However, within educational research a postmodern lens has been considered useful by Giroux (quote) and researchers like Shostack, who call for radical approaches to addressing diversity and difference and find value in a postmodern lens.

Lea, M. R. and Jones, S. (2011) Digital literacies in higher education: exploring textual and technological practice. Studies in Higher Education, 36 (4). Pp 377-393 shows how the boundaries of digital text students and staff engage with are fluid and unstable

A postmodern lens values diversity and difference in education, it raises awareness of social inequality and provides new impetus for inclusion work, it supports the value of the individual not as a consumer but as contributor, creator and constructor of their own world view. Shostack in Radical Research says research which addresses diversity, difference and multiple voices is postmodern in its principles.

Stronach (1997) and Best and Kellnor1998 have also demonstrated the value of postmodern approaches within contemporary social and cultural studies. The subject of postmodernism has been examined by Bauman (2000) who has argued the current form of modernity is not postmodernity, but what he calls ‘liquid modernity’. This is characterized by ‘…social forms based on transience, uncertainty, anxieties and insecurity and resulting in new freedoms that come at the price of individual responsibility and without the traditional support of social institutions.’ (Delanty 2006). While Modernist research assumes that there is a reality ‘out there’ waiting to be investigated, described, and catalogued, research in the postmodern demands practices of ‘reflexivity’ and understanding of the possibility that ‘reality’ is socially constructed. Theories of the social construction of reality do not deny an external world which can be investigated. The intentions is to focus on how meanings are ascribed to a ‘reality’, thereby producing or constituting reality through social conventions, discourse, conversations and negotiations within communities of practice or inquiry.

A postmodern society is characterised by the features of post-modernism - globalisation, mass information, the sign, the simulation and virtual representation of reality, mass surveillance, the internet and cyber-culture. A virtual learning environment represents a postmodern challenge to traditional face to face lecture and seminar formats. A VLE contains multiple characteristics of postmodern culture – it is a virtual simulation of the university experience, accessed by anyone anywhere it is global, it deals with information, contains surveillance functionality, we log on or plug ourselves into the internet to use it – becoming cyborgs (see Haraway)

Higher Education itself has become a bricolage of opportunities – degrees in vocational, creative, work based learning, professional and social subjects as well as STEM, Arts and Humanities, all delivered through f/t, p/t, wbl, blended, distance, flexible courses, on and off campus by f/t, p/t, hourly paid lecturers, consultants, subject experts, GTAs - with anytime anyplace access enabled through the VLE in all its forms

Supporters of postmodern concepts - Ian Stronach and Maggie MacLure (1997, p.16) say ‘It is easy to demonstrate that postmodernism exists in practice, whether or not it ought to in theory’. However, postmodernism has come to seen as the theorizing of the condition of ‘postmodernity’, the post-modern post-industrial age, most commonly signified by the shift from industrialisation to information. The word postmodernism is now an all encompassing term for a complex array of differing approaches to the understanding of social reality.

Postmodernism is understood in multiple ways. (The Postmodern Condition, Liquid Modernity, The Postmodern Turn, etc),

Postmodernism contains with itself other schools of theory which have been applied to research; deconstruction and poststructuralism are both theoretical frameworks of postmodern inquiry

Theorists have presented multiple intellectual interpretations of postmodernism resulting in many theoretical postmodernist positions appearing as opposing exercises in abstraction. The mess of postmodern literature (refs) makes it difficult to present any concise summary

Postmodern theory itself offers a difficult landscape to be located in. It claims modern society and contemporary culture are in the midst of a profound paradigm shift on which the means by which knowledge is legitimated and promoted as legitimate has been questioned. Ussher, R., & Edwards, R. (1994). Postmodernism and education. New York: Routledge.

Traditional education is deeply connected to ideas of modernity and enlightenment. The postmodernism challenge of the idea of a self-knowing subject capable of autonomy and agency is a radical critique which directly attacks the epistemological and methodological basis of both positivist and interpretivist [quantitative](http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/Quantitative/quanthme.htm) and [qualitative education research](http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/Qualitative%20methods%202/qualrshm.htm). Tierney and Lincoln have concluded educational research needs to recognise multiple forms of representation for multiple audiences because "multiple texts, directed toward research, policy, social change efforts, or public intellectual needs...may better represent both the complexity of the lives we study, and the lives we lead as academics and private persons" (1997, p. xi) Tierney, W. G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.). (1997). Representation and the text. Albany: SUNY Press. Donna Haraway (1991, 1997) claimed future sites of education will be situated at the interface between the human and the machine interface producing a cyborg identity not so far removed from present day engagement with the VLE which requires a virtual connection to the internet and disembodied communication and collaboration.

[Mats Alvesson](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=rdr_ext_aut?_encoding=UTF8&index=books&field-author=Mats%20Alvesson), [Kaj Skoldberg](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=rdr_ext_aut?_encoding=UTF8&index=books&field-author=Kaj%20Skoldberg) end edition 2009 [Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas in Qualitative Research – suggest postmodern method is not that different from interpretative and critical theory research – they are all about interpreting method and data in different ways rather than relying on one single clear cut pattern p212. The](http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1848601123/ref=rdr_ext_tmb) differences between freer forms of interpretative method and deconstructive technique are not that different from postmodernist research - the originality in pm research lies less in ideas about managing data and more in more in these three points 1) avoiding the adoption of any definitive viewpoint at theoretical or interpretative level (or overarching theory/grand narrative?), 2) an insistence on research being ‘alert to the notorious ambiguities, differences and divergences of things’ 3) an emphasis on the problem of authority, ‘that all research is about the researcher ascribing to a particular phenomenon a certaindefinite thereby legitimized meaning, which in turn upholds the authority of the researcher in relation to other voices.’ P213

John and Jill Schostak in 2008 call for a radical research inquiry – one which challenges the status quo and makes a difference – much within this book parallels postmodern inquiry methods – and they refer to the ‘…battles between those who locate scholarship within the enlightenment project of reason and modernity and those who desconstruct or challenge.’ P 107 quoting the often used example of the hoax paper by Sokal and Bricmont printed in Social Text in 1996 – intended to expose postmodernism as nonsense but ending in Sokal defending the truth as he mean it to be thereby condoning the postmodern process whereby truth in continually challenged and counter challenged rather than being fixed and reliable p 108. In calling for radical research which pays attention to alternative views and exclusion

‘Each question introduces a questioner with a different viewpoint.’ p271 ‘The only safeguard for individuals is their insistence on the radicality of viewpoint, a viewpoint that engages with otherness as its equal in the formation of communities. Dialogue is the field of the radical because it is the only place where wrongs, and hence justice and equality of treatment, can be recognised.’ P 272

Pedagogic theory into how people learn favours an interpretative, qualitative social reality – one which focuses on the construction of learning out of individual reflexive practice and participation in social communities of inquiry. Within this paradigm a number of alternative approaches have emerged including critical theory – which has been used to great advantage in highlighting educational inequality and oppressive pedagogical curriculums an structure (Friere, Giroux, hooks etc)

At the heart of what Stronach and MacClure refer to as the postmodern embrace is the problem of representation both of the self and knowledge. I have adopted their application of postmodern discourse – sometimes complex and seemingly abstract – to the tangible, solid realities of educational research and pedagogic practice. Stronach, I. and MacLure, M. (1997) Educational Research Undone: The Postmodern Embrace. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Scheurich calls for a radical reformulation of the qualitative research agenda through the application of postmodernist critique using a practical rather than theoretical framework. *I think it might be an attempt to be pragmatic in a social reality which has been theoretically constructed.* Scheurich’s work is based on a reconstruction of Foucault’s work on archaeology. Scheurich, J.J. (1997) Research Method in the Postmodern. London: Falmer Press. Slattery says one of the most important contributions of postmodern discourses within education is the move to expand research methodologies to accommodate alternative interpretations of data collection and analysis.

It is not possible within this thesis to address the full range of postmodern theory and this is not its purpose. I have tried to highlight those theoretical and conceptual aspects of postmodern discourse which have most influenced my research question and methodology. I have limited my literature review to those areas where postmodern approaches have been applied to educational research and pedagogy, keeping in mind their potential relevance to virtual learning environments, a subject which at the time of writing appears to be under-represented. I have focused on the application of postmodern discourse to educational research method, in particular to participatory action research with its focus on actionable knowledge through uncovering marginalised and unheard voices and how virtual learning environments, through their potential for teaching and learning, can be reconceived as tools of widening participation rather than digital diploma mills.

The fundamental objective of a postmodern approach is subtext, desconstruction, layers, alternative interpretations, qualitative over quantitative, qualitative which can be imaginative and playful, looking at what data does not mean rather than what it implies, reversing, turning around, looking at the space between binary opposites rather than the opposing characteristics, PM research seeks to uncover hidden voices.

It does this through an Action research methodology

Action research in the UK is traditionally linked to education whereas in the US it is more about ‘the systematic collection of information that is designed to bring about social change’ Bogdan, R. and Biklen, S.K. (1992: p223) Qualitative Research for Education, Boston: Allyn and Bacon

Using the Carr and Kemmis definition of action research – as education research orientated to the enhancement of direct practice – and self reflection

‘Actin research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by the participants in social siutations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practice, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.’ Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. 1986: 162 – Becoming Critical. Education, knowledge and action research. Lewes: Falmer.

PAPER - Insider Action Research Doctorates by David Coghlan in Higher Education (2007) 54:293-306 The dynamic of reflection on reflection – learning about learning – meta-learning *(is this the same as deeper approaches to learning?) i*s what gives such insider action research its quality. ‘The knowledge that emerges has the capacity to be actionable, that is, at the service of both the academic and practitioner communities. The integration of first, second and third person inquiry and practice is what gives insider action research doctorates their integrity.’ P 301

Reason and Bradbury identify these three pathways – first person – the ability of the researcher to inquire and reflect on improving own practice, second person – ability to create dialogue or community space for inquiry, learning and reflection, Third person - wider dissemination outside the community eg publication and reporting. Referred to in Wicks, P, G (check this double barrel) and Reason, P. (2009) Initiating action research, Challenges and paradoxes of opening communicative space in Action Research Volume 7(3): 243–262 <http://peterreason.eu/Papers/Communicative%20Space.pdf>

PAPER - Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Chad Perry, (2002) "Action research within organisations and university thesis writing", Learning Organization, The, Vol. 9 Iss: 4, pp.171 – 179

Abstract: This paper argues that action research is more appropriate than traditional research for improving practice, and professional and organisational learning. Our particular aim is to help postgraduates in the social and human sciences to understand and clarify the difference between core action research and thesis action research; that is, between collaborative, participatory action research in the field (aimed at practical improvement in a learning organisation) and independent action research in preparing the thesis (aimed at making an original contribution to knowledge). We present a model to illustrate the distinction and relationship between thesis research, core research and thesis writing.

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Paper looks at integrating action research into social science research programmes – saying there is little literature (in 2002) on the complexity of presenting AR in the format appropriate for a Phd. TELEDA is my Core Action Research Project and my PHd is the Thesis Action Research project. The core project is about the ‘situation and processes’ of staff use of VLE as a practice – the thesis project is a research problem which addresses ‘intellectual propositional knowledge’ about how people adopt change in practice p176 Authors recommend a PhD core AR cycle should go through two or three cycles to make a distinctive contribution to knowledge p176

Writing about insider research in educational institutions, Mercer compared data collected as insider and outsider and found little difference in content and form of the data although felt this might change if the research were conducted by academic managers rather than between teachers of similar status. Mercer, J. (2007) The challenges of insider research in educational institutions: wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas in Oxford Review on Education, vol 33, no 1, February 2007, pp 1-17

Hammersley, M 1993 p 219 On the teacher as researcher, in M. Hammersley (ed) Educational research vol 1 London: Paul Chapman/Open university

‘There are no overwhelming advantages to being an insider or an outsider. Each position has advantages and disadvantages thought these will take on slightly different weights depending on the particular circumstances and purposes of the research.’

Trowler, P. (2011) Researching your own institution, British Educational Research Association online resource, says being an insider is never a fixed value but depends on the individual’s identity position. The issue is best thought of as a continuum than a binary opposite. For action research (such as this) being an insider might be considered an advantage where the research question addresses implications for policy and practice. The disadvantages are more likely to derive from normalisation, as the insider researcher may have difficulty in producing a culturally neutral account which needs to ‘make the normal strange’. There might also be interview bias if participants know in advance any expectations you might have from the research. Endogeneous research conducted by ‘those on the inside’ may be efficacious precisely because the researcher has an understanding of existing social and cultural codes. Trowler suggests taking steps to ensure judgements about robustness of data analysis and conclusions drawn from it and offers 12 questions for consideration.

*May be worth listing and addressing these*

*To be continued…..*