CREATING DATA IN PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

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Abstract- This paper examines how writing produced within school-based practitioner research can function in framing and guiding both classroom practice and the research process itself. It outlines a model from Saussurian linguistics for analysing text, widely used by post-structuralist writers. In this model the meaning of the text depends on an evolving relationship between the words within it. An analogy is drawn with practitioner research, which is characterised as the generation and analysis of a sequence of pieces of writing, whose meaning can be derived through analysis of the relation between the successive pieces of writing produced. This model is employed as a framework for understanding, monitoring and influencing changes in practice. Examples are offered from a masters course for practising teachers.

1. Introduction

How can writing produced within school-based practitioner research function in framing and guiding both classroom practice and the research process itself? Advances within post-structuralism and hermeneutics have given a new prominence to the role of text and discourse analysis in building understandings of human action (e.g. Coward & Ellis, 1977; Henriques et al, 1984; Ricoeur, 1981). An important thrust of this work is that the categories implicit in the use of language itself reveal much about the community which generated it and the perspective of the individual user. In describing the world I say alot about myself and the way in which I see my actions gearing in to the world. Similarly, there are cultural conventions in describing the world, which reveal the culture's understanding of the world and hence something about the culture itself. This self-reflexive dimension of language has provided the starting point for much recent social research (e.g. Habermas, 1984, 1987, 1991). As Coward and Ellis (1977, p.1) put it "the study of language has opened up a route to an understanding of mankind, social history and the laws of how a society functions". The emphasis in recent studies concerned with language has been on how language is used, by individuals and by societies. That is, the performance of language has taken precedence over the study of the structure and system of language per se. The world is increasingly seen as being understood through the filter of socially derived words which individuals use to describe it. Conversely, in seeking to change their actions, both individuals and societies can, in the first instance, work on changing their use of language. As examples; individuals undergoing psychoanalytic therapy seek to change their actions through re-framing the way they see them; recent change in educational practices within the United Kingdom was brought about through introducing a curriculum which re-organised the way in which learning was spoken about. In Habermas' work, social evolution is seen as being brought about through such a process of attempting to reconcile social practices with descriptive practices. This

approach can also provide a framework for individual growth and, in particular, teachers working on developing their own professional practices.

Within the field of education, practitioner research often accommodates an understanding of how researchers are practically related to the situations they investigate, where their actions, as teacher/researchers, are seen as an essential part of situation being described (e.g. Adler, 1993; Brown, 1994 a; Elliot, 1993, pp. 193-207; Lomax, 1994; Schon, 1983). Also, such research paradigms are increasingly being employed in programmes of professional development within both initial training (e.g. Francis, 1995; Hatton and Smith, 1995; Hanley and Brown, in press) and masters level work (e.g.Cryns and Johnston, 1993; Brown, 1994 d). Associated with these moves is a burgeoning literature on teacher narratives, emphasising the teacher's perspective as represented through the accounts they give of their professional situations (e.g. Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Olson, 1995).

In this paper I work from the premise that the practitioner researching in his or her classroom brings about changes both through acting in the classroom itself and in producing writing commenting on this classroom practice. That is, descriptions of classroom practice, made by the practitioner, effect changes in the reality attended to by this practitioner. I suggest that actual professional practices and the ways in which these are described can function dialectically in influencing each other. The writing generated in this process can be seen as both responding to past action and guiding future action. In short, in describing my classroom, I affect the way I see it, thus the way I act in it and, hence, the way I subsequently describe it (since it has been changed by my actions). In engaging in this circular hermeneutic process, teacher/researchers pass through a sequence of perspectives, each capable of generating various types of writing and each susceptible to a variety of later interpretations. In this paper I will examine how such writing can be processed as data towards stimulating this dialectic. In particular, I seek to demonstrate how writing produced within such work, itself becomes scrutinised as an integral aspect of practice and instrumental in the process of self-reflexive practitioner-led change. In doing this I employ a method based on the linguistic model of Saussure, an approach which often underlies post-structuralist analysis. In this, absolute understandings of any individual piece of writing are not sought but rather each successive piece added modifies the flavour of the growing collection. I show how this emphasis on writing can be instrumental in promoting the development of professional practice (cf. Elliot, 1987, 1993, p. 197). Further, I offer an example of how the seeking of future pieces of writing can heighten awareness of significant moments of practice as they arise.

2. A chain of stories

In engaging in educational research we are invariably engaged in a task of capturing the experience of the research process in some tangible and collectable form. Depending on the style of research in question this might include; extracts of people's speech, statistical analyses, lesson plans, example's of children's work, presentations or critiques of theoretical positions, interpretations of data, etc. In developing or reporting on a research enquiry there is a need to find ways of looking back on this tangible product in deciding

how best to select and combine components of it in creating further tangible product. I wish to propose a model for describing the research process based on the notion of it being seen as the production of a sequence of pieces of writing. This is based on the premise that the accountability of research activity, and the orienting and fixing of statements made in respect of this activity, is closely associated with the production of writing. The task of this paper then is to focus on the generation by the researcher of this sequence of pieces of writing.

In examining this model I wish to introduce a theoretical framework based on Saussure's model of linguistics. For Saussure (1974, p. 120), working at the turn of the century, a word in a text does not have meaning in itself but rather derives its meaning from its relation to the words around it. To understand the meaning of a text we need to understand how the individual words inter-relate. This idea has become a guiding principle within post-structuralist writing, such as in the work of Derrida and Lacan (see, for example, Coward & Ellis, 1977; Brown, 1994 b). Derrida's use of this notion is encapsulated in his use of the term *differance* - a play on the french words for deferral and difference. For him (e.g. Derrida, 1967; 1992, pp. 101-132), the meaning of a text is always *deferred* since the play of *differences* between the terms is never finally resolved. In this paper, I am drawing the analogy between the sequence of words in a text with a sequence of pieces of writing produced within a research enquiry. That is, the meaning of a research enquiry is a function of how the different pieces of writing are seen as interrelating. Thus seen, the process of building a research enquiry is inextricably linked with the process of generating new pieces of writing. This strategy promotes a multiple play of meaning derived through juxtaposing the various written accounts offered (Urmson & Ree, 1989, p. 311). Absolute meanings are not sought. Rather meaning evolves as new contributions are introduced. Clearly, this sort of post-structuralist approach is not about "picturing" reality in the way of Russell (e.g. 1914) or the early Wittgenstein (1961). For those engaged in practitioner research this textual analysis can offer an instrument for monitoring practice and an approach to uniting thinking with action through reflection (cf. Silcock, 1994, p. 278). Writing has a tangible product and offers an approach to accounting for the reality to which we attend.

The parameters of the space for professional action are negotiable as is what can be done within them. Both this space and how it is seen are governed by the language used in describing it and, I will argue here, this can be operated on through the medium of text. Writing can be used to tell a story about what is going on. There are, however, many ways of doing this and practitioners can seek to be creative in developing productive ways of seeing their practice through this medium. Nevertheless, although such an approach has a liberating feel to it, there is a sobering aspect to this account of post-structuralism that we need to guard against in examining the relationship between a text and that which it seems to describe. As indicated above, any accounts offered by individuals *speak* the society from which they come and have, built within the language itself, layers of assumptions endemic in that society's view of the world (cf. Foucault, 1972, Habermas, op. cit.). The social values we may wish to bring in to question can be embedded deeply within the fabric of the society's way of talking about things. There cannot be a clearly defined boundary between creating and inheriting ways of seeing things. The parameters individuals confront and the way they are understood are conditioned by social norms. These norms might, for example, embrace the tradition of

understanding teacher practice through positivistic models (Olson, 1995). Such norms can serve to constrain the individual's sense of what is possible, or realistic, in their own particular situation (cf. Buchmann, 1987).

3. The meaning of a story

I wish to propose the hypothesis that the meaning of a story is dependent on its usage in another story. If, as a researcher, I produce a piece of writing, its meaning is dependent on how it relates to other pieces of writing in the enquiry and with the enquiry as a whole as it currently exists. This relationship, however, is not resolvable in an absolute way. The way in which any two pieces of writing relate with each other is dependent on my understanding of my current task. This will evolve through time as I pass through a variety of perspectives on what I am doing. In his discussion of Ricoeur's work on hermeneutics, Thompson (1981) suggests that the meaning of an action is related to how it is described. The sort of actions I wish to focus on are the productions of pieces of writing within practitioner research. Following Thompson I suggest the meanings of such productions are dependent on how they are understood and referred to in other pieces of writing. Each piece of writing produced functions in a particular way in relation to the others. None has an absolute meaning since another story can always be placed alongside. They support different new stories according to how they are used subsequently (cf. Sanger, 1994). A space is inserted between the event and the description of it. By creating sets of stories relating to practice, the author produces points of reference, which enable him or her to orient subsequent practice in relation to characterisations of past practice.

4. Framing in the voice of another: Creating and validating data

In discussing the issue of generating pieces of writing as data within practitioner research I wish to offer some examples resulting from my teaching third year students of a part-time masters degree at the Manchester Metropolitan University, designed for practising teachers (as discussed in Brown, 1994 d). My particular concern is with how pieces of writing reporting on practice become data within practitioner research enquiry. Teachers entering the third year of the course will have compiled a huge body of writings - a mixture of small and big pieces, transcripts, lesson plans, anecdotes, responses to reading, responses to sessions, etc. A principal task during this year is to consolidate and extend this work so that it becomes more clearly targeted on a specific theme for focused enquiry. The task of constructing such a theme is to serve as a guiding principle for third year work and, in particular, in the production of a dissertation at the end of the year. A strategy employed in the first few weeks of the third year, is specifically directed towards the clarification of this theme and with how pieces of writing function within it. Firstly, the teachers are requested to choose a small piece of work (maximum of one page), written in the past, which they see as having some resonance with their chosen theme, as they currently see it emerging. Secondly, having selected this they are asked to set up a situation in their teaching during the following week which will result in another piece of

writing which they see as being about working on this theme. At the following week's session they bring the two pieces, old and new, together with a one sentence statement of their title as they currently see it. The next session begins with these pieces of writing being circulated to all subgroup members. Each person is asked to write a paragraph about the three pieces which explains how the reader sees the two pieces of writing being concerned with working on the given title. Upon receiving these paragraphs the writer is asked to make a statement about their proposed theme, and how they see themselves working on it in a way, which makes explicit reference to the comments made by their subgroup colleagues (cf. Francis, 1995, pp. 235-236). This statement then forms the basis for the next cycle. It is through this process that the structures inherent in the writing become *realised* in *formatting* actual practice (Skovsmose, 1994, pp.42-58).

Below are pieces of writing produced by teachers working within this frame. I include the two pieces of writing old and new, the title guiding the selection and production of these, a tutor response, an example of a peer response and a revised statement with a comment on it..

Extract A (From the old piece)

Susan's mum and I chatted whilst Susan selected a felt pen and began to write her name on our Welcome Board. Susan's mum and I watched and after showing interest in her writing Susan's mum initiated further conversation with a comment about how well she felt Susan was doing with her writing, saying she could see a substantial improvement in the way she was forming her letters.

There is a traditional expectation.... that teachers are a little reserved and unapproachable, except on their terms, which is considered part of the institution of teaching and its professionalism... Even though I feel more traditional teachers would prefer me to remain shackled by this tradition within the profession I want to, and feel the need to, shake off part of it which keeps parents and teachers at a distance.

Extract B (From the new piece)

Parent: *He keeps on wanting me to get him a kite.*

Teacher: *Have you thought of making one with him?*

Parent: *I did but I haven't got any stuff and anyway, I'm not sure how you do it.with him having no dad it's a bit awkward for things like that.*

Teacher: *Well there are lots of ways of making kites and you don't necessarily need lots of expensive materials. You could even make one out of an old newspaper, some sellotape, string and a plastic bag.*

Parent: *Do you hear that Nigel, Mr G is going to show us how to make a kite!*

(Thinking to myself what a big mouth I've got and I am really in a hurry tonight)

Teacher: *Well all you need is to roll up a newspaper in thin tight rolls like this and use sellotape to fix them. Then you cut out a kite shape such as a large diamond out of an opened out plastic bag and fasten them all together with sellotape.*

Parent: *You couldn't make one for us could you/ I'm not very good at practical things like that.. Nigel would really love that... Wouldn't you Nigel?*

Title:
United we stand, divided we fall: An exploration of dialogue between parents and teachers

Tutor response:
The first piece is written in fairly general terms which means we can only talk about what you might do next in similarly general terms. The second piece however, is much more specific and we can become much clearer about your use of wording and the sort of effect it has and how you might work on changing it. The second piece offers real substance that you can refer back to and helps me be clearer about your task which seems to be to do with developing ways of talking to parents so as to enable them to participate more fully in the schooling process for their child.

Peer responses (extracts):
The little chats are about you controlling the agenda - trying to get parents to think your way... The mother in the new story has turned the tables on you. She has you hooked rather than you being in control...You will need to rely on others perspectives much more than your own. Transcripts seem a good starting point in this area but how you can take the matter forward seems quite difficult...where are you coming from?

Revised statement:
Action research to illuminate and problematise the main areas involved in developing home-school communication with particular reference to dialogue between patents and teachers at the nursery stage.

Comment:
I feel my revised statement now gives more insight into the research being undertaken. I realise the difficulties (as identified) as the research involves accessing the perceptions of others and analysing these in a very clear and objective way.

In this process the author uses earlier pieces of writing, and responses to them by peers, as points of reference in creating new pieces, under the umbrella of the revised thematic title. By re-assessing past writing in the light of peer response he becomes clearer about the way in which he might generate, and work with, new pieces.

The act of writing is inevitably associated with an act of reading. In writing this student needs some understanding of how he will be read. In conversing with others, resonance is important. I show my understanding of your story by offering a related story. I substitute your example for another in an attempt to emphasise and extend your point, but also to see how it fits with my own experience. In doing this I bring meaning to your story for myself and perhaps, in revealing my perspective, shift the way in which you understand the significance of your own story (cf. Cryns and Johnston, 1993, pp. 149-152). Such a dialogue conditions the way in which subsequent action is planned and reported on. Another technique employed within the course described above, concerned with confronting this task, has some similarity with the game of Chinese Whispers. In framing my experience in a story it can be quite illuminating to examine how my ideas

sound through the voice of another person. Subgroup colleagues are frequently invited to make comments on someone's writing or verbal delivery so that the writer/speaker can hear him or her self being 'played-back' through the voice of another. It may also be that someone from another subgroup or a "spare" tutor might be "borrowed" to witness this summary and to write a one sentence statement which for them encapsulates the summary. The original speaker is then asked to make a statement saying how they see their original statement differing.

The function of these exercises within the research process is to integrate writing into the framing of the research enquiry. The writing produced in respect of the enquiry is not only about mapping the action on the ground. Writing is an integral part of the action being described. It provides a way of framing experience in a fixed form so as to pin down some aspects of this process with view to orienting this process. In doing this the writing itself becomes part of the substance of the research enquiry. Like the actions in the classroom it becomes part of the "thing" being reported on. The conceptions in the writing become *realised* as they frame actual practice. Further, it *formats* the reality attended to for future action (including future writing) (cf. Skovsmose, 1994). As a consequence classroom practice by the individual becomes increasingly conditioned by the linguistic framings being brought to it by them. For example, in having selected an old piece of writing with view to creating a new piece the teachers are structuring a piece of actual practice for the purposes of creating a new account. There is embedded within this an attempt at creating a resonance between actual practice and ways of describing it. Practice and description of it become mutually formative in an hermeneutic relation. This will be developed in the next section where I explore further how practitioner research might be oriented around change in this way.

5. Understanding, monitoring and influencing change

Another important function of such exercises within the masters course is to enable the researcher to become aware of how their research is developing. Of particular concern to someone in the middle of action-oriented research is where to go next. It entails going through a sequence of different perspectives, where each perspective is informed and flavoured by those which have preceded it. The next step cannot be preplanned since, often, I will not understand the circumstances until I am confronted by immediate possibilities. In practitioner research, which downplays any notion of a detailed over-arching plan, I need to be rigorous in making the next step. Mason (e.g.1992, 1994) has for example, completed work directed at the task of being *inside* a problem. He has addressed a variety of types of problems, both within mathematics and within practitioner research and professional development. In particular he has worked on the task of "deciding what to do next". A key aspect of his work is learning to recognise in current problem situations characteristics one has experienced before. This might be seen as being a task in assessing the environment in problem situations so that features of current situations might be associated with past ways of reaching a resolution. In this paper, pieces of writing are being offered as a way of marking the environment of the teaching problem and thus providing an orienting framework. Elsewhere (Brown, 1994 d) I have shown how this is akin to the work of Dockar-Drysdale (1991, pp. 98-111) with

emotionally deprived adolescents. For these children, who experienced difficulties in orienting themselves in their everyday lives, the teacher employed a technique of helping them create and remember stories to which they could return, so as to provide points of reference for new stories. Employed within practitioner research this technique provides textual constructions against which the meaning of new stories can be constructed - the meaning of the new stories being relational to those already in place. Such a framework can become instrumental in understanding how practice is changing.

To pursue a developmental path within practitioner research there is a need to build an understanding of change. I suggest the task of practitioner research enquiry is, firstly, to understand this change, secondly, to monitor it and thirdly, to influence it. I propose to address this here by positing a notion of change as evidenced through markers separated by time. Such a marker in this instance will be a piece of writing within the research process. For the classroom practitioner there are many strands evident in change. Further, the researcher's perspective of this change is susceptible to change, as is his or her way of describing it. In the classroom the children change because they get older, because of the change of teaching style, because ways of monitoring their progress change. The teacher changes because they get better (or worse!) with practice, because they bring new structures to their ways of describing their lessons, because the children change etc. For the teacher researcher, change is something of which you are part, something you observe and something you report on. There is a need to experience yourself as part of it before you can report on it. Making sense is done retroactively. Pieces of writing can function as markers in time, capturing how things are seen at a particular moment. By comparing pieces of writing produced at different junctures the writer can understand how certain things have evolved. As an example I offer three extracts appearing together in the final dissertation of a teacher on the masters' course.

Extract A
I want the children to do well at school. I want them to achieve the goals of reading writing and arithmetic. I want them to gain social skills too and be able to cooperate and express themselves. ..Children who are still struggling to form letters or read simple words cause me concern. I feel as if I cannot be doing my job properly at times, not reaching them.

Extract B
We operate in different discourses depending on need. On my part, the need to be seen as a teacher with good control, or, and often at the same time the teacher who fosters discovery through active learning and rationality. As a result I categorise children according to that need. My guilt comes from the fact that I recognise when I am not operating as the passive, facilitating teacher and feel that the way I am behaving is therefore wrong. It is wrong because I am operating more within the shadow side of child-centredness, that of the old pedagogy of chalk and talk and authoritarianism. I see this behaviour of mine as a danger sign which threatens. It threatens because it goes against the morality of child-centredness - the fair equal way, where the teacher does not have the right to oppress the children.

Comparison of the two pieces

The most obvious change I see in these two pieces of writing is a move from looking purely at what I do or do not do towards an attempt within a theoretical framework to explain my actions and feelings. The first piece of writing places me immediately within the feelings I had about my classroom and teaching at that time. It feels anxious and angst ridden, the latter piece reads far more objectively, the self condemnation replaced by a more analytical attempt to understand.

In the first, the teacher grapples with her perceived difficulty in managing a child-centred environment. In the second, the philosophy of teaching governing the first description is examined. In the third, the two pieces earlier pieces are compared and contrasted as pieces of writing. A new meaning is brought to them by a teacher now able to say more about the limitations of her earlier perspective. Taken together the three pieces evidence changes in writing style, changes in her perception of her teaching, changes in her perception of how her writing functions. There is an on-going attempt to switch between adopting an insider stance on how things are experienced and giving a retroactive account of how earlier first person accounts arose. The teacher is concerned with understanding a more sophisticated version of self - namely, a self understood as evolving through time. Linguistic instability is a necessary consequence since the evolving subject cannot see herself from a fixed point.

In my final example I will offer some writing from a teacher examining how the analytical frame he has built up can assist him in modifying his practice in specific situations. Steve works in a centre for children with special needs. However, alot of his work involves visiting students in their own schools in response to requests from these schools. His early writing on the masters course centred around the mismatch between his understanding of his role and the expectations of his colleagues and the teachers in the schools he visited. He sought to focus on the difficulties he experienced in resolving the disputes which ensued. This writing helped him, with the aid of fellow course members, to identify the way in which his own actions exacerbated some of the disputes. The extract focuses on a dispute, involving Steve, concerned with the process through which a school had referred a pupil to the centre. Steve uses his writing about this dispute to assist him in clarifying the process through which he is examining and seeking to develop his practice.

Having worked through a process of development based in meeting the course criteria I had reached an auspicious moment within my chosen research methodology, I had:
-Analysed my professional beliefs and practice.
-Gone through a data collection process.
-Validated what I had done through a validating group.
-Focused on changes over the period of time of the process.
-Begun to identify an area of concern with implications for future practice.
The new objective was the planning of and implementation of changes to my practice in my professional context. How was I to move forwards? I decided to collect some more dialogue as data, not a random piece but created with the specific intention of collecting to complete a picture of my dissertation. My focus became clearer, '<u>my ways of presentation, how they communicate my intentions in my range of professional interactions</u>.' . I wanted some data generated to do with my focus and I began looking for

situations which could provide opportunities to generate such data. Within two days such an opportunity developed. I decided to act on the basis of collecting specific data within a plan of trying to re-frame the discourse whilst remaining in Transactional Analysis "adult" (Berne, 1964). I then reflected on the data as I recorded it, but first the 'Allocation Transaction'.

<u>18/5/95 Allocation Transaction</u>
The Centre staff meet weekly to discuss allocation of training, new cases and change of provision for schools and pupils. A referral came up for a school I am the link teacher for. This is what I wrote and reflected on:

"I asked; 'Where has this come from?'
A brief public argument followed between me and colleague 1 about whether the school was using a back door method to gain extra provision
Colleague 2: I don't think it is useful to go into this now, we have other things to discuss."

The meeting continued and I decided to follow up the discussion later. It was an unproductive argument and afterwards I checked that interpretation with colleagues which confirmed it. There had been a misunderstanding and I had responded negatively to what I perceived as aggression. I decided to follow up according to my planned shift by an intervention where I changed my approach by clarifying and re-framing what I had been saying whilst trying to see what had been the perceptions of others. As I said at the time:

"Here was a chance to re-frame my approach and have a different outcome which meant applying a planned and controlled change. Which was...try to re-structure the Transaction by pausing and trying to explicitly clarify what sort of problem it was and to try to redefine it."

I wanted to collect some more dialogue as data, not a random piece but created with the specific intention of collecting to complete a picture of my dissertation to do with my focus of my way of talking and how it communicates my thinking and meaning. At this point I asked "how am I going to act from here?". Shortly afterwards I met Colleague 1, bearing in mind my planned shift.

Me: 'I want to check what was going on at the allocation meeting. It seemed you thought I was being critical of you, why was that?'
Colleague 1:   'You were saying I had not used the proper system.'
Me: 'No, that's not what I was trying to say. What I was meaning I think was annoyance at what I thought was another example of the school trying to avoid doing things properly I think you do a good job of ensuring the link teachers are not ignored. I was expressing my annoyance with the school and apologise if you saw it differently as that was not the intention.'
Colleague 1;   'That's OK..'

We then discussed other things and I needed time to reflect on the outcome and significance of the fairly brief attempt at the planned intervention. My plan had been an attempt to halt the transaction and re-frame my presentation. I had noticed my anger rising in the original Allocation Meeting as a response to what I felt as aggression, not an intellectual response but an emotional one.....
In recording and reflecting on the dialogue, two ideas primarily began to seem important in terms of the task I had set myself. Firstly, the idea that the initial aggressive interaction could have its origins elsewhere, i.e in the school not following systems and wanting back door access to the service. Secondly that there could be a chain of causes and effects within these actions. I could begin to see where to collect my next piece of dialogue. I was going to plan an intervention with the senior teacher I liaised with at the school.

Steve then plans for an encounter with this senior teacher, records his conversation when it takes place and uses this data as a focus for further analysis. Increasingly, the writing he produces is directly a consequence of his professional actions and also part of a guiding framework for subsequent practice (cf. Brown,1994 d). The research process becomes an integral part of his actual professional development. In meeting the senior teacher at the school the teacher/researcher is targeting a particular encounter, about to happen, with view to understanding it, and indeed acting within it, in line with his current research agenda. The outcome is that he builds not only a sense of "how things might be seen" but also of "what might be done". In doing this the practitioner synthesises "description led experience" and "experience led description" (Hanley and Brown, in press). He acts on the basis of meanings he has given to earlier accounts of his professional dealings. But each new professional encounter helps the practitioner to modify his sense of what needs to be done. The above piece appeared in Steve's final dissertation as an illustration of the process he went through. Looking at the entire piece retroactively he brought new meaning to it, through reconciling his post-experience understanding of the process, with the words contained in the piece, which had sought to capture how he understood his actions at the time. The older writing, now separated from the person who wrote it (since that person has moved on), is scrutinised for its implicit qualities as evidence of past perspectives (cf. Sanger, 1995, pp. 90-91)

6. Conclusion

I have sought to emphasise two key aspects of the role of writing in practitioner research:
 i) writing as an integral aspect of the classroom action being described,
 ii) writing as an important marker of time in monitoring change.
In producing writing as part of the practitioner research process I am creating part of the reality to which I attend. Further, I construct an understanding of time through selecting and composing sequences of pieces of writing. Consequently, the process of research becomes a task of, firstly, positing a way of doing things in writing and, secondly, assessing this writing in relation to how things are actually done. Neither of these can be understood independently of time. In order to capture time, moments in time are characterised through pieces of writing which serve as position statements for those

moments. These pieces of writing, however, become anchorages for the constructed reality simultaneously capturing the past and positing the new, according to their particular usage in newly generated stories, constructed by the researcher, as they move between being a writer and being a reader in response to, and in creating, their evolving research interest.

This leads to a final concern; namely that of dissemination. While researching into my own classroom I am both writer and reader of my research. In capturing, in words, a certain view of my work I can use this to orient future action. But what of the reader uninvolved in the research project, how might the research report help him or her? The modes of dissemination normally associated with traditional research seem not to apply. The product of practitioner research does not result in statements of practical implications common to all. Rather, it gives an account of a practitioner examining specific issues within their practice and how these were addressed as problems within the research process. The practitioner, with his or her perspective and his or her way of working, is an essential part of the situation being described. In post-structuralist accounts, the self, and the situation he or she is in, are non-dualistic but rather, are mutually formative, as part of each other. Further, the self/situation has an essential time dimension understood by the individual through engagement in their situation. To understand the situation involves an appreciation of how the self/situation, and the decisions faced, evolve. An account of this cannot be given except by an individual addressing specific professional concerns. For the practitioner reading the research report the loss of supposed 'objectivity' is replaced by an account of what might be seen and how best to see it - a traveller's guide rather than a map or an encyclopaedia entry. It remains for the reader to assert his or her right to tell stories about how it connects with their own practice.

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