Travel impressions from

American Educational Research Association Meeting

San Francisco, April 18-22, 1995

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San Francisco is a beautiful site for a meeting, located on hills between the Pacific Ocean, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the Bay, with a view over to Berkeley and the further away the golden California hills. The famous fog cleared the air, even downtown there is little smog, and San Francisco is still a city for walking.

The sessions of the AERA meeting were distributed between the San Francisco Hilton, Parc Fifty Five and Hotel Nikko. Though located close by each other, rushing between the downtown hotels was not without hazards. One would easily stumble over the many homeless begging, not only for money, but for work. Some sold a newspaper, "Street sheet", with information about the situation of the homeless in San Francisco. As an alternative to panhandling the homeless vendors received the papers free, sold them for one dollar, and kept the proceeds to cover their basic needs (Coalition for Homelessness - San Francisco, Hyde Street, San Francisco, CA 94102). At one of the sessions a presenter arrived late and somewhat agitated, there had just been found a bomb close to her hotel, the police had sealed the streets off, so she had to make a long detour to get to the hotel with the session. One of the office buildings nearby had also been in the national headlines a year or two ago, when a frustrated man, I believe either a fired employee or a dissatisfied customer, had visited the office, shot and killed ten people.

This year's meeting gathered about 12 000 educational researchers, many of them from abroad. There was a considerable group from the Nordic countries; few from Denmark, some from Iceland and Finland, and many from Sweden and Norway. Beyond active participation in the sessions, the latter had also developed a connoiseurship for which the many hosted receptions served the best drinks. All travel reports are more or less selective, and with about 1000 sessions to choose among, then a strong selectivity is a precondition. Here follow some selections within the areas of the political context and future of educational research, evaluation, the place of skills and apprenticeship in education, and artbased qualitative research.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

I shall start with a rather representative panel, with the ten past and present presidents of the American Educational Research Association answering the question: *"What is your vision for the field of educational research and the AERA in the twenty-first century?"*. In contrast to most

meetings of presidents this was also representative with respect to gender, there were four women and six men among on the panel.

David Berliner regretted that the AERA had failed to be a strong force in promoting educational reforms. He argued for advocacy on educational issues where a consensus among researchers exist. Educational researchers have in some areas clear bodies of knowledge, such as the strengths of bilingual education, while they leave the public discussion to the advocates of English only education. He addressed the situation of homeless kids in the schools, and told about when he had been consulting teachers in the classroom on the use of some new sophisticated educational scaffolding programs. He noticed that several of the kids were not paying any attention to the new teaching forms. Looking closer he saw that some of the pupils were simply too preoccupied rubbing their aching teeth, and learned that many had never seen a dentist.

Berliner's picture of the educational situation in the US might appear exaggerated, but acccording to the statistics provided in an introduction to the 95 AERA meeting (*Educational Researcher*, June-July 94) his examples were representative of the social context of American education today. Thus at least 100 000 children are homeless in America every given night, nearly 13 million children live in poverty, every day 135 000 American pupils bring guns to school, homicide is the leading cause of death among 15- to 19 year old minority youth, suicide is now the second source of death among adolescents, and so forth. In his research and textbooks David Berliner represents a rather positivist and technological conception of educational research and practice (e.g. Gage/Berliner, *Educational Psychology*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992). At this panel he was the president most strongly taking issue with the political responsibilities of educational researchers, advocating an educational activism.

Lauren Resnick disagreed with Berliner, and stressed a fundamental difference of activism and research. As a consultant to the National Goals of Education Committee she had listened to the educational researchers called in by the committee contradicting each other, or monotonously repeating on the one hand and the other, we do not know yet. The politicians who had to decide and act, concluded there were no experts in the field. Her own conclusion was that as researchers we are committed to say on the one hand and on the other, which is opposite to the demands of action. As individuals we can be activists, but not as researchers.

Larry Cuban mentioned the noted failure of social scientists to predict significant social events, such as who would ten years ago have predicted the collapse of the regimes of Eastern Europe or Mandela becoming president of South Africa. Cuban further pointed to the noted absence of major conflicts and split ups in the AERA organisation. One reason may have been the opening up for many special interest groups - SIG's - to pursue their views and agendas within the organisation. The conflict between professional enhancement and political action was solved with an appearance of being political by locating the main office in Washington D.C. He concluded that while AERA has been an organisational success it has been a political failure.

Ann Lieberman, who will be the Program chair for the meeting in New York next year, wanted to move some of the sessions of the AERA meeting out of the hotels to the arena of education - the schools. She further mentioned as a danger with the many special interest groups that we come to talk only to the people who say the same things as we do. Ann Brown saw a broadening of educational research in the future, studying learning in natural situations, in communities of practicce and in apprenticeships. Lee Schulman saw a danger in a possible counterreformation as a

reaction to the current postmodernist trends in education. There may come a renewed quest for rigour, an increase in quantified research, with larger polarization between different research groups.

Elliot Eisner addressed changes in education and in research. Educational change will involve moving out of the classrooms with one teacher to 30 pupils, redefinining what schooling means, redefining learning and teaching. There will be changing concepts of the research, since practitioners do not read research we will have to find other means to communicate research; in qualitative research with narratives, "storifying" research. With the participants of research wanting to have more to say, action research will become stronger. The advent of computers may lead to a productive diversity, it will become more problematic to compare people on a common scale, the commensurability of measurements will become difficult. The task of AERA as an organization will be to alert the public to problems in public education - education is a political undertaking, it is a normative endeavor.

EVALUATION

In the last few years there has been an increasing focus on educational evaluation, to some extent instigated by the American governments' plans of introducing a national curriculum and national exams in a country where schools have largely been the domain of the local states. This is in part a response to consistent findings of low US scores on basic school subjects in international comparisons. Whereas in many European countries national exams have been taken for granted, American educational researchers on the left have argued strongly against national exams, as introducing a stiffling centralised control over schooling (see *"The hidden consequences for a national curriculum*". Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association). With the new Republican majority in Congress, likewise battling Big Government, the impetus towards national exams have receded.

The range of innovations in evaluation range from Computer-based examinations for board certification of medical specialities to the movement for authentic evaluation. Rather than measuring student progress on the basis of inconsequential objective test results, *authentic assessment* measures student performance on a variety of complex tasks that are meaningful, significant, and useful in real life. Learning can no longer be demonstrated by merely manipulating symbols. The authentic revelation of what students know and don't know though exhibits, portfolios, and presentations focus the limelight squarely on the educators educating them. Authentic assessment is an evaluation not only of students as learners but of educators as teachers.

I participated in a session on "Evaluation, standards and curriculum" with a presentation of "Evaluation as knowledge construction". I discussed exams as tests of students vs. tests of knowledge, and argued that the procedures of examination contribute to the social construction of the valid knowledge of a discipline. The tensions of knowledge in a postmodern condition also apply to educational evaluation, in particular a tension of universal commensurability and the narratives of local cultures.

APPRENTICESHIP AND SKILLS

While apprenticeship learning was mentioned in several contexts, there were few specific presentations on apprenticeship. The noticeable exception was the anthropologist Jean Lave's lecture on "What's the situation of learning (after two decades of practice)?" upon her reception of the Sylvia Scribner award. She argued for developing a social theory of learning, maintaining that a psychology of individual learning ends up blaiming individuals for failure of learning. You take social existence so basic that you put it first, crafting identities are basic to the knowledge and skills subsumed under identities. Learning is to become a kind of person, to become a proficient practitioner with others, constructing identities in practice. Apprenticeship is a window for understanding learning and a challenge to school learning. Addressing the question - How could we improve schools? - she pointed out that the usual answer is to improve teaching, rather that to facilitate learning. The teacher may alternatively attempt to organize learning so that the children can learn from each other. A teacher may try to look at the pupils' identities-in-making and how knowledge relates to their crafting of identities, which she examplified with the struggle of minority children to establish identity in the schools.

After Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus had taught a research course on their skill model in Aarhus in 94 I had submitted a session to the AERA where Hubert Dreyfus would present his critique of the educational system, which follows from the skill model he and his brother had developed (see Steen Wackerhausen's "Mesterlære, eksperter og intuition - Interview med Hubert og Stuart Dreyfus", Nyhedsbrev nr. 16, 1994). Having heard nothing from the conference organizers for half a year I presumed it was not accepted, and wrote Dreyfus so. Arriving in San Francisco a week before the AERA meeting I discovered in the conference program that we were both featured in a session "Educational implications of the skill model" for one and a half hours. I called Dreyfus, who was going off to ski vacations the day of the session, I had no paper prepared. He managed to delay his ski departure, and with help of good friends I got some old files from my computer in Aarhus sent by email to Berkeley, took off to a lonely motel in the Nevada desert, and wrote a paper.

Hubert Dreyfus presented his and Stuart's model where skill development moves from knowledge of facts and explicit rules to more intuitive forms of involved pattern recognition as a novice moves through the stages of advanced beginner, competent and proficient to become a master. At the higher stages of mastery of a skill the position of analytical thinking is taken over by intuitive and emotionally involved forms of thinking. Hubert went on to criticise the way of thinking behind the examination system - exams are a kind of analytic testing in a situation which is bizarre and does not test higher level skills. Only on a novice level it can make sense to examine students in fragmented bits of knowledge and the rules for combining the bits. The skill model implies that the demands for explicit argumentation at exams may lead to regressions from an expert intuitive knowledge to the more explicit reasoning stages of beginners. For the higher levels of skill he argued for evaluation by performance of actual activities, here there is no substitute for the expert who makes the evaluative decisions, invoking Aristoteles: Only a man of practical wisdom can recognize a man of practical wisdom.

I contrasted the skill model to apprenticeship, where learning seldom starts with acquiring facts and rules, but rather through participating in a practice, observing and imitating more proficient peers and masters. As to educational implications I pursued Jean Lave's observation that while there is observable learning by apprenticeships, it may be difficult to observe any teaching taking place. This leads to an "iceberg model" of learning, where observable formal school teaching represents only the immediately visible 1/10 of the factors contributing to learning, the rest consisting of more

difficult observable factors such as learning from peers, and situational and material conditions of learning. Educational researchers, trained to focus strictly on observable and quantifiable behavior, will have difficulties observing the more complex situational non-teacher contributions to pupils' learning. Apprenticeship learning further involves a deprofessionalization of teaching, hardly compatible with the professional interests of teacher organizations.

The interest among the educational researchers in the session on the educational implications of Dreyfus skill model was rather small - less than 20 participants - or about a fifth of a public lecture on a similar topic in Aarhus last year. Perhaps the skill model is not recognized as relevant for education; perhaps it is too radical. Habermas' remark that the Dreyfus skill model puts a bomb under Western culture may also pertain to the educational domain.

THE ART OF RESEARCH

Several decades ago psychology was often evoked as the science to base educational research upon. The most frequent reference to psychology I heard at this year's meeting was to the Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, most often with a critique of its formalism stiffling creative writing. Over the last decades anthropology has been an important source of inspiration for educational research, and in the meetings the last year's art is increasingly being evoked as a challenge to educational research.

Ethical and aesthetical issues went through many of the sessions on qualitative research: educational research as neutral or engaged, and educational research as science or art. The presenters and issues crossed over between sessions; rather than review the separate sessions I will mostly present some impressions of throughgoing topics.

Yvonna Lincoln addressed the issue of standards for qualitative inquiry. After having outlined the more standard criteria for research, and going beyond the common criteria of critical subjectivity and reflexivity in qualitative research, she discussed the communal ethical dimension of research. Every mode of knowing involves its own moral trajectory. Knowledge should serve the communities researched, not only the researcher's community; the commitment to the researched subject should not recede behind the commitment to the published report. She emphasized reciprocity of researcher and the researched, involving sharing of privileges, for example sharing royalties with the subjects investigated. There is a dissolution of a dichotomy between the elite researcher and the researched subjects, valid knowledge is a matter of relationship between the knower and the known. Inspired by ecology she invoked sacredness, a recognition of the spiritual and sacred dimension of science and a respect for the equality and human dignity of the subjects researched.

The discussions on artbased research were often inspired by Elliot Eisner's ideas, in particular his presidential lecture at the AERA meeting in Atlanta 1993 (printed in the *Educational Researcher*, 1993, and also "*The enlightened eye*", NY: Macmillan, 1991). Art enters into both the process and the presentation of research. Art brings in new ways of seeing and it brings out the seeing experience to the public. When conducting research an artistic approach would encourage modes of discovery, sensitizing to a qualitative discernment of the phenomena, and opening to the sensous qualities of the topics studied. When presenting research an artistic approach will emphasize the aesthetic form, the unity of content and form, and experiment with multimedia presentations.

At least two points of departure for an artistic approach to the presentation of qualitative research went forth, an epistemological and a rhetoric. With an *epistemological* crisis in representation of knowledge, with a disbelief in an objective world to be copied and re-presented in an objective form, the question arises as to how the researcher can tell his or her story. Yvonna Lincoln asked: With a constructivist split of fact and fiction, with multiple realities, how are we to (re)present the results of our research? There is today a move from representation, or mirroring, of an assumed objective nature to edification - as stimulating and enriching a conversation, and as evocation - inspiring phantasy. The power aspect of constructing reality is involved here, inspired by Foucault a closer look at the power involved in the discursive construction of knowledge was advocated in several discussions. The *rhetoric* focus on reporting research often started with the complaint of social scientists that no one reads what we write. So we need to experiment with how we are to communicate our findings to different audiences and here art is seen as an important inspiration.

The opening towards artistic forms of expression led to multiple experimental attempts with different textual practices to communicate educational research. To the place of argument in qualitative research are added narrative and performance. (One art-research presentation from last year's AERA meeting in New Orleans may be read in *Qualitative Inquiry, 1*, no 1: "Researcher as artist/artist as researcher" by Susan Finley and Gary Knowles).

Norman Denzin discussed ways of presenting as performance, outlining different modes such as poems, natural texts, science texts, dramatization and stage reading. Texts may be handed out to be performed by the audience; when the texts are not merely read but performed, this may lead to more interpretations. Publications may be in the form of performance scripts, as gifts to the readers. In what is called a reader's theatre the audience receives scripts to perform, for example an interview transcripts. The performers stage the performance, choosing where to sit or stand, where to face, tone of the voice and the like, the specific choices of the staging entailing interpretations of the script.

There were several multivoiced presentations, which worked well with presenting interviews as live dialogues. Rather than the presenter monotonously reading long quotes, two persons would read and act the text, one playing the interviewer, the other the subject, bringing an element of drama to the interview interaction. Multimedia presentations could involve simultanously presenting an interview interaction on video, accompanied by slides with quotes and interpretations, the presenter writing on the blackboard and commenting.

Joyce and Faulkner were mentioned as authors constructing novels of multiple voices, a technique today facilitated by the use of hypertexts. Patti Lather demonstrated the use of "split texts" when reporting her study of women with AIDS. A first text would render the women's stories almost unmediated, in a second text the researchers would tell their own stories of the research, and in a third mode she would invoke angel intertexts in a third person voice. Entering the artistic domain does not involve leaving all the epistemological issues of research, as pointed out by Bob Donmeyer, when using theater as a form of presentation there are still choices such as between a representational realistic theatre or a presentational symbolic theatre.

There were also experiments with non-linguistic forms of knowing with - in Eisner's words - an emphasis on the immediate before mediate, the present before the re-presented, the sensous before the symbolic. Qualitative research and jazz was one topic, one session utilizing video was a visual

anthropology of the language of motion, invoking emotions as anger and delight. Sculpturing was also drawn in, I felt somewhat lost when the presenter handed us a piece of moldable plastic, asking everyone to make a shape that reflects your AERA experience. Then I found my hands forming a school building.

Some participants saw artistic presentations as a liberated communication where "anything goes". Others with experience in artistic work emphasised the necessity of training and background, of technical and artistic mastery of the media used, be that of the artistic use of language or the techniques of the visual arts. One consequence of art based research is that we as social researchers will have to start learning from writers how to give our stories an artistic form. One audience member complained that many of the short stories he had heard read at this meeting were boring, they did simply not convey anything. If you want to present your findings in a literary form, it has to be good. Listening to a traditional scientific report which does not get through is simply boring, listening to a dull personal literary story is not only boring but also embarrasing.

Some worried voices asked about the evaluation of art based research, what will be the implications for promotion and tenure? Someone remarked that the art inspired researchers were looking for love in the wrong places, why continue to send the artistic reports to the mainstream journals, why not make and use new journals open to experimenting approaches. From an activist feminist position Patti Lather objected to this kind of esoterism and marginalization of critical and constructive research. These are issues of power and strategies of resistance. What matters is to conquer the institutions and media of power. This involves taking possession of the main journals and changing them. Rather than discard "bad" positivist words such as "data" and "validity" we need to reappropriate and reinterpret these central terms of the social sciences (one such attempt is found in "The validity of angels: Interpretive and textual strategies in researching the lives of women with HIV/AIDS" *Qualitative Inquiry, 1*, no 1, 1995).

Critical voices to the whole art based research raised questions such as: Why call this research, why not just call it art? Why retain the word "research", why not just drop the word and call it educational art? As heretical as the blending of art and research may seem today, there are historical precedents, such as Plato's dialogues, with entertaining stories of drinking parties, rhetorical speeches and humorous narratives, blended with rigorous philosophical discourses.

Next year's meeting takes place in New Your the week after Easter.