

Speaking to the Ghost: An autoethnographic journey with Elwyn

Paul Heyward and Esther Fitzpatrick

Faculty of Education, University of Auckland

ABSTRACT

As educators we are haunted. This haunting takes place on several levels, through our personal histories, through key theoretical ideas we have encountered on our journeys, and by those significant educators who have gone before. This paper highlights how Elwyn S. Richardson continues to haunt education in New Zealand. Also how Elwyn, in turn, was haunted by 'Wal' and John Dewey. Rubbing up against neo-liberal reform, philosophers such as Elwyn, give us permission to develop our own personal educational philosophy. Through employing an arts-based autoethnography, we explore how our educational journeys have been haunted by Elwyn. And by drawing on Jacques Derrida's directive, 'speak to the ghost', we summon up Elwyn. To do this we write a series of fictional letters which enable us to reflect on one author's memories. Through analysis of these letters we demonstrate the importance of the Arts as a method to critically reflect upon, and rise above, the dominant neo-liberal ideology we work within. We speculate here that a strong personal philosophy has the potential to disrupt and engage educators critically with an institutional philosophy that continues to dominate much of mainstream education in New Zealand.

KEYWORDS

reflection, arts-based pedagogy, philosophy of teaching, Dewey, haunting, Elwyn Richardson

ARTICLE HISTORY

First published in
Educational Philosophy and Theory, 2016, Vol. 48, No. 7,
697–710

Introduction

In no *small* way has Elwyn Richardson haunted our lives. It's just that we didn't always know his name. As educators, involved in the practice of critical reflection, we are now able to identify more thoughtfully those philosophical ghosts who haunt us. In this discussion, we draw on Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology in order to examine how key theoretical ideas and significant educators, such as Elwyn Richardson, influence our own emerging educational philosophy.

Hauntology is a methodology of deconstruction that works to problematise particular narratives (Harper, 2009). A term originally coined by Derrida, hauntology restored speaking to ghosts as a respectable subject of enquiry (Davis, 2005; Derrida, 1994). As a method, it involves interrogating our relationships with our dead to 'examine the elusive identities of the living, and to explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought' (Davis, 2005, p. 379). Derrida argues that we should 'speak to the ghost' (Derrida, 1994, p. xviii), and in this article, we summon up Elwyn.

This article explores, through an arts-based autoethnography, how our educational journeys have been haunted by Elwyn. We begin by directing attention to two significant ghosts in Elwyn's own educational journey and describe how they each influenced his educational philosophy: their names are Wal and Dewey. Second, we describe the arts-based method of creative writing we employed to summon Elwyn. Then follows a series of fictional letters written by one of the authors

(Paul), accompanied by critical analysis to demonstrate the significant ways Elwyn has influenced education in New Zealand. We speculate here that a strong personal philosophy has the potential to disrupt and engage educators critically with the institutional philosophies that continue to dominate much of education.

Elwyn's ghosts

Elwyn's educational journey was significantly influenced by his early mentor Wal who, having completing a Master's degree in Zoology at Oxford, was expelled to the colonies. There he met a three-year-old Elwyn and gifted him his fascination with nature and the Scientific Method (MacDonald, 2010). Although Elwyn argued against being labelled by any particular educational term, especially the term 'progressive education', he did acknowledge that Dewey's writings had given him 'permissions'.

On the whole you will know now that I ignored or put aside educational philosophy, (but I admit to listening to John Dewey somewhat). I can't say now what, but I found 'permissions' in his writings. (Richardson cited in MacDonald, 2010, pp. 230–231)

Perhaps the permissions Elwyn were referring to were based on Dewey's belief that ...

... when science and art thus join hands the most commanding motive for human action will be reached; the most genuine springs of human conduct aroused and the best service that human nature is capable of guaranteed. (Dewey, 1897, p. 10)

Elwyn later describes how he knitted together Wal's Scientific Method and Dewey's belief in the importance of experience and the arts to develop his own philosophy. He states '... Then I put [Dewey] aside and got on with developing my own philosophy' (231) '... Creatively innovative artistic teacher ... with a scientific basis ... pity we can't say: scientartic' (Richardson cited in MacDonald, 2010, p. 285).

We argue that Elwyn's work has given us and many other educators similar permissions after his publication, 'In the Early World', became a key text book for pre-service teachers between 1960 and 1970 in New Zealand. Hence, as children in New Zealand classrooms, we were given permissions by Elwyn. But what exactly did Elwyn give us permission to do? It is through reading Elwyn's words we now realise how our own personal philosophies have been haunted, and how ideas from scholars, such as Elwyn, who have gone before, have become part of 'why we do what we do'.

Arts-based autoethnography

It is fitting, then, that our journey with Elwyn will be explored using arts-based autoethnography. Ellis, Adams and Bochner define autoethnography (2010) as 'an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)' (p. 1). Richardson (1999) has suggested creative analytical practices such as autoethnography 'invite Beauty and Truth' (p. 660). It is our hope that the use of creative writing, in the form of fictional letters to Elwyn, will help reveal our truth in coming to terms with the philosophy and practice of one of New Zealand's most inspirational educators.

Employing a method of creative writing provided us with a tool to reflect on one author's (Paul) memories of Elwyn Richardson in an episodic fashion, to support coherence (Smorti, 2011). The act of creative writing 'transformed and stretched' his memory, enabling a 'balance between the need to respond to the reality and the need for coherence of the self' (Smorti, 2011, p. 306). Fictionalising the letters enabled Paul to draw on 'partial happenings, fragmented memories, [and] echoes of conversations' (Sparkes, 2007), to illuminate the message and connect the reader to his experiences, in order to evoke an emotional intellectual response (Eisner, 1997; Fitzpatrick, 2014). Further, writing

fiction allowed him ‘the freedom to explore a familiar set of ideas in a new way, taking [him] to places within ... that had previously been silent and remote’ (Barnes, 2014, p. 244).

Richardson (1999) has discussed how the use of creative writing within autoethnography can situate the author within academic debates, departmental politics and personal history. In this article, the letters Paul writes to Elwyn will situate our narrative within academic debates regarding teacher reflection, the politics of preparing students for life in the classroom in a pre-service teacher education programme, and our philosophical development as a learner and a teacher. A key tension that emerges through our autoethnography is how we attempt to reconcile our philosophies of learning and teaching with the dominant neoliberal ideology we have worked within over the last 20 years. Elwyn’s work has proved to be the song that has consistently risen above the industrial drone of neoliberal policy and rhetoric.

Context: Paul’s story

In September 1999, I secured a two-year stint at the Auckland College of Education (ACE) as a Visiting Teaching Fellow. There were three things I knew about the position when I took it on. Firstly, I knew I needed a fresh challenge after six years’ teaching at the same school. Secondly, I knew in the role of Visiting Teaching Fellow, I would be encouraged to share my practical experience as a classroom teacher. Finally, the courses I would teach were grounded in the notion of the professional teacher being a critically reflective practitioner. I approached this new position with some confidence as I felt comfortable with my level of current successful teaching experience and thought I had a reasonable grasp of the model of critical reflection promoted due to my work as an associate teacher to ACE students.

Van Manen (1995) has argued models of teacher reflection fall into three main approaches. Firstly, there are *technicist* models of reflection where the primary concern is with technical application of educational knowledge in the classroom to maintain order and achieve pre-determined outcomes. Secondly, there are *practical* approaches to reflection where teachers are concerned with goals, connections between principles and practice, assumptions underlying practices, and the value of their goals. The final *critical* view of reflection requires teachers to be concerned with issues beyond the classroom, so that moral and social issues such as equity and emancipation can inform reflections on classroom practices. In the year 2000, the approach to reflection promoted within ACE teacher education programmes was theoretically informed by notions of *critical* reflection, but was often interpreted in practice as a *practical*, almost *technicist* exercise by students, lecturers and associate teachers.

Hence, within a few weeks of beginning at ACE, I became aware of a tension that I found particularly difficult to resolve as a teacher educator. On the one hand, I felt I had a responsibility to prepare students for the realities of life at the ‘chalk face’ and, on the other, I was working within a model of critical reflection that required me to assist students to challenge assumptions about the nature of teachers’ work, the very work I was helping them prepare for. I felt conflicted in a role that required me to simultaneously prepare student teachers to deal with the compliance and accountability demands of schools while also advocating a transformational view of education that saw teachers as genuine change agents. Fitzsimons succinctly captures these neoliberal demands when he states:

In accord with broader policy directions, the Ministry of Education is intent upon accelerating academic achievement, promoting outputs that are measurable in terms of human capital, and disabling as far as acceptable any behaviour that disrupts the management of such a mission. Such a focus is quite technicist ... (Fitzsimons, 2013, p. 1278)

I had come into ACE from a senior teacher position and was keenly aware of these neoliberal demands. As a senior teacher, I was responsible for the induction of recently graduated provisionally registered teachers, was an associate teacher for students from a range of pre-service teacher

education providers, and was a mentor on the Teacher Retraining Project. My work with beginning teachers, student teachers and retraining teachers had made me keenly aware of the skill set needed for teachers to succeed in New Zealand primary classrooms at the turn of the twentieth century. This practical understanding of the realities of teachers' work in the wake of the neoliberal reforms of the education system of the 1990s guided my thinking as I began working as a pre-service teacher educator. I believed my role was to model good practice and prepare students to work successfully in classrooms. I soon realised my focus on helping students develop the skills required to survive in the real world of schools could land me with the unwanted label of being a 'technicist'.

The model of critical reflection that underpinned the ACE Bachelor of Education Teaching degree was John Smyth's model of reflective practice. Smyth (1993, February) had rigorously critiqued the reflective process that was often promoted in pre-service programmes. He proposed that the view of reflection employed in teacher education was usually narrow and technicist. He argued that reflection had become a form of common sense orthodoxy that was impossible to dispute. Good teachers were seen as those who reflected on their practice and made changes to meet the needs of their children. The rub for Smyth was that the needs of the children were often defined by a managerial agenda intent on controlling the work of teachers by moving knowledge about teaching away from practitioners into the realm of the 'so-called' expert. Thus to Smyth, reflection served to individualise educational issues to those of teacher competence. Smyth argued that within such an individualistic framework, reflection became a tool for self-blame and inhibited teachers from seeing the reality of the oppressive conditions of their practice and of children's learning. In offering an alternative model of reflection, Smyth (2001) suggested that reflection must be conceived as a collective activity that encourages teachers to confront the broader political, social and cultural structures that impose injustices upon learners through the control of teachers' work.

Smyth's model of critical reflection resonates with Fitzsimons idea of 'philosophy as dangerous' where, drawing on Maxine Greene and Friedrich Nietzsche, he suggests that what schools need is a strategy 'to probe the less visible ... influences that shape both the official curriculum and broader societal agenda for its educational institutions' (Fitzsimons, 2013, p. 1284). A 'philosophy as dangerous' strategy encourages students/teachers to engage critically with the institutional and larger macro influences of government policy and regulation. Fitzsimons concludes that ...

If schools are to go beyond their current functioning as government-directed networks of social and cultural subjectivity, then philosophy needs to exercise its critical faculties. (Fitzsimons, 2013, p. 1288)

After reading Smyth's work, I was aware that the model of reflection that I had become used to in the context of classrooms in the 1990s was indeed individualistic, narrow and technicist. His rallying cry against the increasing creep of managerialism into teaching resonated with me. I realised it was not enough to prepare teachers for the reality of work in the classroom. It was necessary to develop within students the capacity to transform this reality to best meet the needs of learners. Essentially I needed to balance teaching the skills necessary to survive in the classroom with a critique of how these very skills could be seen to be oppressing both teachers and learners. An elusive tightrope to balance on, let alone tread. One way of doing this was to help student teachers develop a philosophy of learning and teaching and begin to recognise themselves as 'agents of change'.

A paper I was asked to teach on upon my arrival at ACE was entitled 'The Professional Teacher: A Synthesis'. This was a compulsory paper for third-year students completing their degree. The course was underpinned by the notion of critical reflection. Students completing the course were required to reflect on the theories of learning they had been exposed to during the degree and classroom experiences from their practicums in schools, in order to develop a personal philosophy of learning and teaching. This philosophy statement was intended to become a fulcrum for reflection on practice and a guide for ongoing professional development. In developing a philosophy of learning and teaching, it was envisaged students would become more critical of

educational policy and practice. The philosophy would provide the essential pedagogical principles against which educational policies and practices could be best judged, and then either resisted or supported. The philosophy was to assist professional growth by promoting dialogue with colleagues about what is best for learners and to give clear direction for practice. The idea that a personal philosophy of learning and teaching only had meaning if it was used to guide professional action was closely aligned with Antonio Gramsci's concept of *praxis*. Praxis is a philosophical term referring to human action on the natural and social world (Gramsci, 1971). It emphasises the transformative nature of action and the priority of action over thought. It was in introducing the notion of praxis to student teachers I first consciously encountered Elwyn's work. It was also in introducing students to Elwyn's work that the tension between preparing anxious student teachers to work in reality of twenty-first century classrooms and the preparation of students to become critically reflective agents of change first came to a head.

A bad day at the chalk face

Dear Elwyn

I would prefer to be having a chat to you over a cold beer but here goes. Today I showed 'Song of the Bird' and I am not entirely sure why. I had not had access to the video until this morning so had no chance to preview the content before showing it to my students. I knew from my colleagues that the video was an excellent example of teaching 'praxis'.

After explaining the concept of praxis to the students via a few overhead transparencies I loaded the 'Song of the Bird' into the VHS player and sat back to watch. I must admit conditions were not great. The room the class of 25 were working in was small and poorly ventilated. Although I did my best to block the streaming sunlight from the 32 inch Panasonic TV screen the thin curtains of the room did little to reduce the glare. I am afraid the video quality was also poor with some scenes jumpy and the audio difficult to follow at times.

At the conclusion of the video I launched into a discussion of praxis. 'So how did we see Elwyn realise his philosophy through the committed action of his practice?' I asked modelling the open questioning that is supposedly a hallmark of good teaching. I looked around the room of blank faces hoping for a keen and insightful response. None was forthcoming. Again, trying to model effective teaching practice, I left the question hovering in the minds of students for eight seconds before attempting another approach. 'OK' I half pleaded, 'who can give us a philosophical belief about how children learn evident in the practice we have just seen?'. One, two, three, four (still a room of blank stares), five, six, seven ... silence broken. Jill, a former teacher aide and mature student, 'I don't get how some bloke doing pottery with children in the old days has any relevance to me in the year 2000. I can't do any of that kind of stuff now. I have a curriculum to teach, ERO to worry about, so sorry I just don't see the point of this self-indulgent rubbish'. Murmurs of agreement spread through the stuffy room. I made a feeble attempt to rescue this deteriorating session by explaining to the students I was not showing the video as a model of practice but rather an example of how one of New Zealand's most inspirational educators had achieved praxis at a particular historical time in a specific social context. My explanation was greeted with expressions of scepticism that grew into faces of frustration as I told the class the required reading before our next session was a chapter from your book 'In the Early World' where they would get a more detailed account of your innovative practice. Sadly I think that reading remained unopened.

So, Elwyn, I feel I have failed both you and the students today. A lack of preparation and understanding has meant your work was left unappreciated by a class of disgruntled third years, anxious about taking on a class of their own in little over three months' time. I take some solace in that I know you too had your days of failure and frustration but I guess praxis got you through.

Kind regards

Paul

I was disappointed as the Song of the Bird (McRae, 1950s) was unable to be heard by my students. While I was able to enjoy the unique melody of Elwyn's practice, my students could not. On reflection, it is clear a range of neoliberal drums were beating so loudly it was impossible for them to decipher the song of the bird. These students were faced with not only passing the final course of the degree so they could be qualified to teach, but also the reality of finding their first job so they could begin to pay off the debt they had accumulated over the previous three years. The drums provided an urgency, the melody a distraction.

While my first physical meeting with Elwyn came through reading his seminal work 'In the Early World' and watching the video on his time at Oruaiti School, 'The Song of the Bird', I had in reality been influenced by the man from the moment I entered school as a five-year-old. Growing up in 1970s Auckland, I had the luck to enjoy a special experience of being taught at the state-run institution of Birkenhead Primary School. Although the passage of time has blended specific memories of my early experiences of formal education into more general emotions, these feelings are warm and golden orange in colour. As I imagine moving through the classroom spaces of my past, John Melser's description of Elwyn's classroom at Oruatiti comes to mind: 'To go into this room, even without children, is to be dazzled by a riot of colours, shapes and textures' (Melser cited in Richardson, 1964, p. ix). The classrooms of my childhood were indeed places of colour and vitality. Our work covered the walls and hung from the ceilings. Messiness was the norm as we glooped papier mâché glue and smeared printing ink. I look back at my learning during this time, a learning inextricably bound with creating. Poetry and expressive writing were the norm, abnormal adjectives were adored by teachers, as were absurd alliterations. One specific memory does jump to mind.

Connecting to the land and people

Dear Elwyn

I think you would have enjoyed today at my Standard Four Camp on Motatapu Island. It was our last full day and we had the chance to choose any activity we liked for our final afternoon. We had all completed bivouac building, fire making, the flying fox, orienteering, kayaking and rock hunting on our previous three days at camp so we had the chance to go back to the one we liked the most. I chose rock hunting and I was the only one. The flying fox was most popular but too much standing in line for me. I think you might have enjoyed the rock hunting too.

The teacher who took me rock hunting was Mr. Bell. He does more listening than talking and today he listened to what I thought about the rocks I found on the Northern shoreline of Motatapu Island. There were so many to choose from but Mr. Bell was really impressed with the ones I selected. The only rule in rock hunting was you could not move your rock. Once one was selected I would wave Mr. Bell over and we would both look at my discovery. He would ask me about why the form, colour and the habitat of the rock appealed to me. He asked me to explain the story of the rock and how it came to be on this shoreline at this particular time. As I talked, he listened and I became part of the Island.

From

Paul

My recollection of schooling in the 1970s is accompanied by the music of discovery. Like Wal with Elwyn on Waiheke, Mr. Bell opened my eyes to the scientific method of discovery on Motatapu Island. At Oruatiti school, Elwyn had worked on developing a scientific and arts-based method to provide the students with 'an emotional involvement' in the process (MacDonald, 2010). Through this process, he believed 'the methods of the scientist became those of the poet and artist' (Richardson cited in MacDonald, 2010, p. 236). The teachers I most fondly remember not only sang the song of the bird, but empowered students through the opportunity to internalise the spirit of the song and compose our own responses. The progressive ideals of Dewey, passed through the

hands of the influential Clarence Beeby (Director of Education at the time), were tangible in my schooling. For this I am grateful.

Motatapu Rock

A planet of tears

Red stain of breached surface

Cooking fire black

Another dramatic change

In the year 2001, I was seconded onto the Arts Implementation Project as a curriculum facilitator for a period of two years. During this time, I gained a deeper understanding of Elwyn's work and legacy and this knowledge would ultimately assist me to bring his work to student teachers in a far more satisfying way than the rather lame attempt described in the earlier letter. My work as a facilitator involved working in schools introducing teachers to the newly gazetted Arts Curriculum. I was part of a team of educators with expertise in the art disciplines of drama, dance, music and visual art. Although we all had been selected because of our teaching expertise in one of the particular disciplines, mine being drama, we often approached our work in schools with a multidisciplinary focus. This was a particularly rich and rewarding time in my teaching career as I got the opportunity to work with some wonderfully creative educators who shared a belief in the arts as a vehicle for learning and self-discovery.

An approach to introducing the curriculum to schools that proved particularly effective was an integrated planning approach. A team of four facilitators representing each art discipline would visit a school and evaluate the current state of arts teaching through discussions with staff. The team would find out about upcoming units of topic work in learning areas such as science, social studies and technology and then help teachers to plan an integrated arts unit that would include the four art disciplines and the key topic curriculum area. After the planning was complete, the curriculum facilitators would work alongside classroom teachers and their children using the arts to extend learning. One school that adopted the integrated planning model was my old school Birkenhead Primary. I could not pass up the chance to return to the school where I had such fond memories of the arts and the creative process.

A lesson from the wise

Dear Elwyn

I have spent the last month working at my old stomping ground Birkenhead Primary School. What has surprised and delighted me is that a number of teachers who taught me all those years ago, are still teaching at the school, and are still as committed to the arts as I remember them being.

It is ironic that these 'old timers', often dismissed as 'out of touch behaviourists' by young student teachers, are still the teachers committed to a child centred arts based pedagogy. As your pal Dewey reminds us an essential condition for learning is having an open mind. It is a shame that the age of a teacher should close minds of those who have the most to learn.

Anyway while working at the school I got talking to one of my old teachers about the integrated approach to learning and teaching we were modelling and asked her opinion. 'Well Paul with the greatest of respect I have been teaching through the arts my entire career. When I trained at to be a teacher in the late 1960s we were introduced to the work of Elwyn Richardson. He worked up North and in West Auckland for many years. He truly taught about and through the arts and his work has been a major influence on my teaching career'.

Following this conversation I quizzed other colleagues I knew of a similar vintage to my former primary school teacher to see if they remembered coming across your work in their teacher education. Elwyn, it would seem you were quite the pedagogical rock star of the sixties and seventies. I now realise that you have indeed played a formative role in both my personal education as a child and the education of the profession I belong to.

Cheers for that

Paul

A haunting classic

I have frequently found the songs I like the most are often the covers of songs from my past. Often I do not realise they are covers until hearing the original again. Hearing Elwyn's song for the first time in 2000 was much like hearing a cover of a classic. The groove has been haunting the listener for many years waiting to be rediscovered.

After returning to ACE from my arts secondment, I was again faced with the prospect of helping students to develop a philosophy of learning and teaching and grasping the notion of praxis. Still troubled by the sceptical and confused faces from my last experience of sharing Elwyn's work with students, I decided to change tack. The last time I had asked students to begin writing a philosophy of learning and teaching in class, all I found was resistance. To begin the philosophy-writing process, students were asked to respond to the following questions: 'How do you believe children best learn?' and 'How will you work in the classroom to enhance learning?' Initially, these questions were posed as sentence starters with 15 min given to respond in writing. Surprisingly, many of these third-year students struggled to commit ideas to paper. I tried another approach and asked students to share their response to the same questions in paired conversation. Instead of the sound of intense discussion about the nature of learning, all I could hear was the uncomfortable shuffling of feet and nervous laughter. It seemed my students were unwilling or unable to share their views on how people best learn. Common requests from students when confronted with these exercises in philosophy generation were 'What should go in my philosophy?' and 'Help! I have no idea where to start?' I decided to go to Elwyn for assistance.

Returning to the arts

Learning has to be made meaningful, personal and real according to Elwyn. How was I to make the process of writing a philosophy of learning and teaching to third-year student teachers meaningful, personal and real when they were more concerned with behaviour management techniques than pedagogical principles? After some reflection, I decided to return to the arts and draw on the 'mantle of the expert' approach to teaching pioneered by Heathcote and Bolton (1995). In this approach, students are cast into the role of experienced project workers assigned to complete some form of commissioned work for a client, usually played by the teacher in role. 'It is an enterprise model of learning, with emphasis on tasks that need to be done, energy directed towards the service that needs to be completed ...' (Sayers, 2011, p. 21).

I informed my students that I was a spokesperson for the Ministry of Education and they were architects who had been invited by the Ministry to tender a concept design of the ideal classroom for the twenty-first Century. They were in a unique position to fulfil this project as they had all completed a three-year degree and three years' classroom teaching before being headhunted by the Ministry to go to Architecture School. The Ministry had wanted future classroom architects to consider pedagogy more fully at the design stage than had been the case in the past. In groups of four, students were asked to design a plan view of their ideal concept classroom on a large piece of newsprint to present to a group of Ministry officials. Each member of the group would have the

opportunity to pitch the design to the officials through explaining how the design reflected their pedagogical understanding of how children best learn and how teachers should work in classrooms. When students had completed their designs, they were told that one member would remain in role as the architect explaining the design and the philosophy of teaching and learning behind the design. The rest of the group moved to another group and took on the role of the Ministry of Education officials deciding on the concept design they would take through to the next stage of development. At the conclusion of the activity, I asked the students to give a written response to the two questions: 'How do you believe children best learn?' and 'how will you work in the classroom to enhance learning?' The intensity and concentration that had been missing in my earlier attempts to get students to write a philosophy was now clearly evident. The act of creating a class-room design, pitching the design to others, had provided the students permission to write their beliefs about how children best learn when previously they were reluctant to. It was as if the collaboration of the design process and the responsibility of taking on the dramatic role of being a school architect or Ministry official had allowed a space for ideas to be discussed. Much like Mr .Bell asking me about my discoveries on the rock hunt all those years earlier, my student's felt their ideas were valued and they realised that in their expression, they were somehow more human.

Following the school architect activity, I introduced the idea of praxis. I explained to the students that having a philosophy of learning and teaching was meaningless without a commitment to action. I reminded them of Haberman's (1995) research into 'star teachers' where he identified that a common attribute of 'stars' was their ability to both explain a personal philosophical belief and then give an example of how this might play out in the classroom (general to specific), and also justify a particular teaching action in relation to their broader philosophical beliefs (specific to general). In short, these teachers had achieved '*praxis*'. I then pressed the students to identify some beliefs about learning I might hold as a teacher that were inherent in their school architect activity. Following this discussion, it was time to introduce the ideas of Elwyn.

I informed the students they were about to see a DVD called 'Song of the Bird' about the pedagogy of one of New Zealand's most inspirational educators, Elwyn Richardson. The students were made aware that after the screening, they would be able to go and view some of the actual pottery and artwork completed by the students of Oruaiti as it was on display in the administration block on campus. As they watched the DVD, I asked the students to concentrate on the following questions:

- What were some of major influences on how Richardson went about his work in the education system?
- What were two key philosophical beliefs Richardson held about how children best learn?
- Give an example of how Richardson realised his philosophy in practice? (Praxis)

Following the DVD, the class enthusiastically discussed some of the key beliefs of learning they had seen in 'The song of the Bird'. The importance of authenticity in learning tasks, engagement with emotions, responsibility to the community, children as both teachers and learners, tumbled out into a conversation that was concluded only by the demands of the timetable. As students left the room, one checked where exactly the pottery and art completed by the children of Oruaiti was displayed, while another asked if a copy of 'In the Early World' was on desk loan, as the chapter in our book of readings had whetted her appetite for more.

A day of exhilaration

Dear Elwyn

You may remember a few years ago I wrote to you regarding a failure I had in introducing third year student teachers to the concept of 'praxis' through your work at Oruaiti School. In fact one student had

accused me of being self-indulgent in sharing the practice of a teacher whose conditions of work were so foreign to the ones she would be faced with. Well today I had another go, and I am happy to say, with some success.

One particular student approached me at the end of the session with tears in her eyes and told me viewing the 'Song of the Bird' was more inspiring than any of the other of the lectures she had experienced in the previous three years of her degree. Her increasing doubts about whether teaching was for her were extinguished upon seeing your work at Oruaiti and the passion with which you spoke about the children you taught.

In the 'Song of the Bird' you talk of days of exhilaration, days where you and your learners came together as a community of learners intent on discovering what it meant to be human. I found a sense of this exhilaration today as my student teachers thought deeply about what it is to be a learner, a teacher, a human.

Thanks for your help

Paul

A conclusion of sorts

Working on this paper has summoned up our ghosts. Memories of our childhood have been brought to the surface and we remember them differently. We see now how those small touchstone stories were part of a bigger 'something' that was happening in New Zealand at the time. We understand ourselves as fortunate. Fortunate, that educators like Elwyn were not satisfied by the status quo, but rather worked to develop their own educational philosophy. We like Elwyn's term 'scientartic'. There is a permission given here to experiment, to struggle, critique and develop our own philosophy. Mindful of the significant ideas and layers of haunting in our worlds, we continue to write our own song. We write and encourage others to write; writing songs to disrupt the dominant tune of neoliberalism that pervades the nooks and crannies of our workplace. Perhaps Fitzsimons' 'philosophy as dangerous' is what we should be working toward. Duffy (1999) describes the importance of teachers developing their own philosophy to effectively respond to the tensions between what teachers believe and the expectations from institutional philosophy. Duffy describes teachers who, like Elwyn, are 'empowered ... to adapt various philosophies, methods, and programmes to their own vision for students' and in so doing attain a 'strength and dignity [through] pursuing one's own sense of what is right' (Duffy, 1999, p. 780).

Like hearing a song through a badly tuned radio, the students Paul first introduced Elwyn to seem more annoyed by his tune than inspired. His more recent attempts to introduce Elwyn have been more successful as he has attempted to make learning more meaningful, more personal and more real through the inclusion of the arts in his teaching. Our belief in the power of art to shape human meaning owes much to our own education, an education shaped in no small way by one Elwyn S. Richardson.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Paul Heyward is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Learning Development and Professional Practice at the University of Auckland, Faculty of Education. Paul's teaching and research interests include drama in education, critical reflection and the ethics of teaching and learning. Email: p.heyward@auckland.ac.nz

Esther Fitzpatrick (PhD candidate) is a Lecturer in teacher education at the University of Auckland. Her Master's thesis, completed in 2011, used an innovative narrative methodology to gather the 'small stories' of children through a drama experience. She has published on issues of racial-ethnic identity in postcolonial communities, drama as a method of inquiry, ethical issues of arts-based methodologies, and poetry as improvisation in research relationships. Her current research uses a postcritical ethnography where as a bricoleur Esther draws on a range of art based methods to explore her topic of inquiry. Email: e.fitzpatrick@auckland.ac.nz

References

- Barnes, L. G. (2014). Writing from the margins of myself. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 13, 237–2554.
- Davis, C. (2005). Hauntology, spectres and phantoms. *French Studies*, 59, 373–379.
- Derrida, J. (1994). *Spectres of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new international*. (P. Kamuf, Trans.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dewey, J. (1897). My pedagogic creed. *School Journal*, 54, 77–80.
- Duffy, G. G. (1999). Teaching and balancing of round stones. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79, 777–780.
- Eisner, E. W. (1997). The promise and perils of alternative forms of data representation. *Educational Researcher*, 26, 4–10.
- Fitzpatrick, E. (2014). A conversation with Steinbeck: finding my way to postcritical ethnography. In C. Mutch, & J. Rath (Eds.), *Emerging critical scholarship in education: Navigating the doctoral journey* (pp. 14–29). Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Press.
- Fitzsimons, P. (2013). School and the limits of philosophy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 46, 1276–1289. doi:10.1080/00131857.2013.771449
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. (Q. Hoare, & G. Nowell-Smith, Trans.). New York, NY: International Publishers.
- Haberman, M. (1995). Selecting 'star' teachers for children and youth in urban poverty. *The Phi delta Kappan*, 76, 777–781.
- Harper, A. (2009). Hauntology: The past inside the present. In *Rouge's foam excessive aesthetics*. Retrieved from <http://rougesfoam.blogspot.co.nz/2009/10/hauntology-past-inside-present.html>
- Heathcote, D., & Bolton, G. M. (1995). *Drama for learning: Dorothy Heathcote's mantle of the expert approach to education*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- MacDonald, M. (2010). *Elwyn Richardson and the early world of art education in New Zealand* (Doctor of philosophy unpublished doctoral thesis). The University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.
- McRae, J. (1950s). The Song of the bird. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYMdmvinFIM>
- Richardson, E. S. (1964). *In the early world*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Richardson, L. (1999). Feathers in our cap. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28, 660–668. doi:10.1177/089124199129023767
- Sayers, R. (2011). The implications of introducing Heathcote's Mantle of the expert approach as a community of practice and cross curricular learning tool in a primary school. *English in Education*, 45, 20–35.
- Smorti, A. (2011). Autobiographical memory and autobiographical narrative: What is the relationship? *Narrative Inquiry*, 21, 303–310. doi:10.1075/ni.21.2.08smo
- Smyth, J. (1993, February). *Reflective practice in teacher education and other professions*. Paper presented at the meeting of Fifth National Practicum Conference, Sydney, Australia.
- Smyth, J. (2001). *Critical politics of teachers' work: An Australian perspective*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Sparkes, A. C. (2007). Embodiment, academics, and the audit culture: a story seeking consideration. *Qualitative Research*, 7, 521–550. doi:10.1177/1468794107082306
- Van Manen, M. (1995). On the epistemology of reflective practice. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 1, 35–50.