

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: York St John University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 25 (Education)</p>
<p>Title of case study: Contributing to the development of cultures of morally accountable practices for social transformation</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study outlines the impact of Professor McNiff's career-long research programme aimed at supporting practitioners' action enquiries for social transformation, and finding ways collaboratively to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the quality of practitioner research so as to influence new forms of thinking, practice and policy formation; • Demonstrate quality and validity through methodologically robust accounts of practice; • Articulate the significance of this research programme for dialogical cultures of educational enquiry. <p>The research has been undertaken internationally across multiple settings and sectors, and supported through the production of associated resources. The collective accounts constitute a global knowledge base that links impact and validity through critical self-enquiry.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Working collaboratively, inter-institutionally and internationally, over thirty years, Professor McNiff has encouraged and enabled practitioners, including herself, to offer descriptions and explanations for their practical work through personal theories of education.</p> <p>The research is underpinned by values that transform into conceptual, theoretical and methodological frameworks, as well as forming the criteria and standards by which its quality and validity may be judged. Those values are also articulated by key academic authorities as follows: individuals should claim their rightful place on earth (Arendt, 1958); humans are dialogical beings (Buber, 2002); constituted of agonistic relationships (Berlin, 1969); all individuals have the capacity for infinite acts of creativity (Chomsky, 1986); there is a need to make tacit knowledge explicit (Polanyi, 1958) for rigorous reports for public accountability; creating methodologies of social hope (Rorty, 2000, drawing on Dewey); developing capacity for critically informed representations of one's own and others' lives (Said, 1994); developing a community ethic for social transformation (Sacks, 2000); and developing communities of educational enquiry (Whitehead, 1999).</p> <p>The methodology takes the form of an action enquiry where practitioners engage with key questions about their own practice. Claims to improved practices and the exercise of educational influence are tested through a set of six stringent validity checks of whether or not: personal values have been realised in practice (ontological validity); the research has contributed to the development of critical engagement in knowledge production (epistemological validity); it has contributed to social and environmental wellbeing (social and environmental validity); it has generative transformational capacity for ecologically-constituted practices (ecological validity); it is methodologically rigorous (methodological validity); the research is communicated in a comprehensible, authentic and sincere manner, and demonstrates awareness of normative contextual understandings (communicative validity, Habermas, 1976).</p> <p>The creation of these six criteria represents an original and significant contribution to the literature, and is a development of McNiff's personal and collaborative work. Since the early 1990s, considerable work has been undertaken by the practitioner research community to establish criteria and standards for judging impact in practice-based research (e.g. Feldman, 2003; Bullough and Pinnegar, 2004). In 2005, Furlong and Oancea called for the practitioner research community</p>

to agree on new criteria for impact and standards for establishing the kind of epistemological and methodological pillars that would guide practices in work and research, and their assessments. McNiff's own contribution, beginning with her doctoral studies, has been to offer explanations for how values transform through their emergence in practice into dynamic epistemological and methodological criteria and standards of judgement. This view is embedded within a framework of immanence and emergence that demonstrates explanatory adequacy for informing and developing educational action enquiries, and has been used as the basis for higher education programmes of study in a range of institutions around the world, while at the same time contributing to wider impact through its influence on practitioner research within schools, and other public sector fields, and on national education programmes (see below Section 4).

3. References to the research

1. McNiff, J. (2013). *Action Research: Principles and Practice* (3rd edition). Abingdon: Routledge.
2. McNiff, J. (2012). Travels around identity: transforming cultures of learned colonisation. *Educational Action Research*, 20 (1): 129–146.
3. McNiff, J. (2011). Initiating debate: 'It takes a township'. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 25 (7): 1253–1273.
4. McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2011). *All You Need to Know about Action Research* (2nd edition). London and New York, Sage.
5. McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2010) *You and Your Action Research Project* (3rd edition). Abingdon, Routledge.
6. McNiff, J. (2011). New cultures of critical reflection in Qatar. *Educational Action Research*, 19(3): 279-296.

Texts 2, 3 and 6 are included in the REF2 submission and the other texts are available on request from the institution. Texts 1, 4, and 5 are only some of a significant output of textbooks relating to action research which have been produced by Professor McNiff. The most recent editions have been cited above but the original work dates back into last century. While metrics are no proof of quality, these texts have certainly had very significant reach: sales total over 33,000 since 2002 ; Text 1 has been cited more than 1500 times; Text 4 has 500 citations; and Text 5 more than 750.

4. Details of the impact

The impact of this case study is demonstrated through the development of local and global communities, who are reconceptualising the nature of educational research and theory through (1) engaging in their individual and collaborative action enquiries; (2) producing their dissertations and theses in the form of their personal theories of practice; (3) developing dialogical communities of educational enquiry for collaborative knowledge production. The aim is to improve education and serve the public good through developing a new epistemology for a new scholarship of learning and teaching. While much of the research has been conducted with higher education practitioners, in this case study the emphasis is on the impact of the research on those beyond academia – most notably teachers, but importantly also health professionals – who have come to use her work as a means of linking practical and theoretical knowledge for individual and social transformation.

Impact on developing dialogically-oriented institutional epistemologies

Through working with groups of school, hospital, and university staff, the research has influenced the development of new institutional and organisational epistemologies of practice and cultures of enquiry. As far as impact beyond the level of universities is concerned, this can be evidenced in,

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for example:

- Norway: where McNiff is Visiting Professor at the University of Tromsø to support faculty in Health Sciences to develop a practice-based research culture for improving service delivery to ensure enhanced patient wellbeing. The ultimate focus is on improving the professional learning of student nurses and healthcare practitioners. Some initial evidence of impact is listed in the sources of corroboration (below).
- Qatar: where Professor McNiff headed a team to deliver an action research-based teacher professional education programme. This fulfilled the National Professional Standards for Teachers. This is offered as evidence of significant impact in that a national education system has adopted her research approach as a means of improving the quality of teaching, and, ultimately, of learning outcomes, in its schools. Sponsored by the national government, led by Professor McNiff, the input has ongoing impact in Qatari schools; the underpinning research (above) outlines part of what was involved and the sources of corroboration (below) include examples of outcomes directly related to her research involvement.
- United Arab Emirates: where Professor McNiff has worked with school staff to develop new inclusional and dialogically-oriented curricula and programmes. One venture in Dubai has been a whole-school approach to action research for improved practice and student outcomes. This is reported in a conference paper listed below as a source of corroboration.

Impact on new criteria and standards

Through working with workplace practitioners and university faculty, new criteria and standards have been developed for judging quality in practice-based research. For the purposes of this case study, the reference to universities is merely to show how it is through her work at HE level that the practitioners following McNiff's approach to action research have had their work validated. McNiff has sought successfully, therefore, to work with practitioners examining their own practice while at the same time to work with HEIs to have the study of that practice accepted at postgraduate research level. This is evidenced in doctoral programmes and journal publications, as follows:

- South Africa: where PhD theses and journal articles are produced drawing on her work to explain how values transform into living criteria and standards of judgement: from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (e.g. <http://aru.nmmu.ac.za/Home>, <http://aru.nmmu.ac.za/Projects/Action-Research-for-School-Leaders>); University of the Free State (e.g. <http://academic.sun.ac.za/chaebitzer/ACTA%20%20Academica.2007.%20Submitted%20Action%20Research%20Article.pdf>); Stellenbosch University; NorthWest University). Ten practitioners in the township of Khayelitsha have been awarded their Masters degrees through action research: see <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/kayelitsha.asp>.
- Ireland: where seven PhD action research theses were validated by the University of Limerick (see <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/theses.asp>)
- UK: where nine students studying with YSJ are being awarded their PhDs for offering their theses as explanations for their work (the first PhD awarded in 2013).

Impact on collaborative networks and dialogical communities

Through working with institutional communities around the world to develop collaborative networks and dialogical communities:

- USA: where the new Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) acknowledges the impact of her work on its philosophy (see <https://sites.google.com/site/arnaconnect/planning-messages/jeanmcniffdeliverarnainauguralkeynoteaddress> for information about her keynote address for the inaugural meeting)
- Iceland: where she gave the keynote presentation at a new action research association,

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- again based on her work (see Gudjonsson, in McNiff (ed.) 2013b)
- South Africa: where she collaborated in developing an action research unit at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (see above)
 - New Zealand: where she visited with ten HE institutions, working to embed action research in practice-based settings (e.g. see <http://tlcommunityunitec.ning.com/profiles/blogs/a-morning-with-jean-mcniff> and <http://tlcommunityunitec.ning.com/main/sharing/share?id=3664184%253ABlogPost%253A2645>)

UK: where she co-convenes the Value and Virtue in Practice-Based Research International conference: see <http://www.yorks.ac.uk/education--theology/faculty-of-education-theo/faculty-events/value-and-virtue.aspx>

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Teacher Enquiry Bulletin *Action Research for Teachers in Qatar* (http://www.jeanmcniff.com/userfiles/file/qatar/Qatar_Action_Research_booklet_email.pdf) which reports on various projects which have been undertaken in schools, based on the research model developed by McNiff and endorsed by the Supreme Education Council of Qatar. This is also reported in item 6 in the references to the research (Section 3 above).
2. Influence on thinking and practices in South Africa: see <http://aru.nmmu.ac.za/Home>; (2011) article (see Section 3 above); invitational keynote presentations at the Universities of the Free State; Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University; North West; Cape Town.
3. Work with the National Centre for Guidance in Education, Ireland, since 2005; influencing forms of professional learning and practices: see Darbey, L., McNiff, J. and Fields, P. (2013) *Evidence Based Handbook: Guidance Case Studies*. Dublin, NCGE.
4. Norway: presentation at the American Educational Research Association (2013), San Francisco; see also chapter by colleagues Norbye, Thoresen and Edvardsen in McNiff (2013) *Value and Virtue in Practice-Based Research*.
5. United Arab Emirates. A paper at the 2013 Value and Virtue Conference reports on the impact of McNiff's research on school practice in Dubai: Hammond, D. (2013). *Professional development through action research in Dubai English Speaking Schools*.

Individual contacts for corroboration:

Chief Executive, La Salle Education can attest to Professor McNiff's impact on professional development in Qatar and Bahrain.

Chair, Department of Education, Moravian College, USA can attest to the impact of Professor McNiff's work on Moravian's public school teachers.