

The 'qualities' of quality learning research:

An orientation and an introduction to some key discussion questions

June 2004



An orientation:

- Caravaggio



Judith Beheading Holofernes c 1599



An orientation:

- Artemisia Gentileschi



Judith Beheading Holofernes
Uffizi version 1618



Gentileschi's story reminds:

- Every discipline, community, historical period and educational practice contains norms and understandings that routinely position some people in less powerful positions than others. The consequences of this positioning are both personal and political; immediate and long term
- The existence and manifestations of these norms pose obvious challenges for people involved in any form of research.



Quality Learning:

- Is actively involved in responding to the challenge posed by historical and contemporary evidence of marginality within and beyond education
- Investigates the production, circulation, naturalisation, contestation and transgression of cultural norms associated with difference in a diverse range of texts and contexts
- Builds on previous work at Deakin (especially in the Deakin Centre for Education and Change)
- Articulates with stated University and State priorities



Quality Learning Projects:

- Regardless of the discipline area, educational setting, or historical context they relate to, Quality Learning projects work to identify those individuals or groups who are most 'at risk' within the site of analysis and uses the 'outcomes' achieved for these people as a key criteria for determining quality
- This often leads to attempts to 'intervene' or to challenge discriminatory traditions, norms and outcomes



This work isn't easy:

- Much is now made of the successes achieved by various 'emancipatory' movements
- Attention is commonly drawn to multiple ways of 'being' such things as woman, man, student, teacher, artist and so on



But:

- Patterns and experiences of alienation and discrimination (in overt and covert forms) have not been eradicated
- Drawing attention to continuing and new forms of 'otherness' is an increasingly difficult project



The difficult context:

- Anxieties of the nation-state

“minorities are the major site for displacing the anxieties of many states about their own minority or marginality (real or imagined) in a world of a few mega states, of unruly economic flows and compromised sovereignties” (Appadurai, 2001: 6)



The difficult context:

- The consumption of difference

“‘post-industrial’ societies have taken ‘differences’ into a spin, making them proliferate with an aim to ensure maximum profit. Advanced capitalism is a difference engine – a multiplier of de-territorialized differences, which are packaged and marketed under the labels of “multiple or multicultural identities”...this logic...triggers a consumeristic or vampiric consumption of ‘others’” (Braidotti, 2003: 2)



Of course change is possible:



But it's a both/and world...

the paths of transformation...engendered by the 'difference engine' of advanced capitalism are neither straight nor predictable. They rather compose a zig-zagging line of internally contradictory options. Thus, human bodies caught in the spinning machine of multiple difference at the end of postmodernity become simultaneously disposable commodities to be vampirized and also decisive agents for political and ethical transformation. How to tell the difference between the two modes of becoming other is the task of critical theory. (Braidotti, 2003: 2)



An example:



Queer Eye for the Straight Guy



An example:

Gay school for tots row

PARENTS watching Play School with their infants were shocked to find there was much more than a bear in there this week.

In a move that has angered family groups, the home of Big Ted delved into the issue of lesbian parenthood without any warning.

The Monday episode told the story of a girl called Brenna going to a fair with her two mummies.

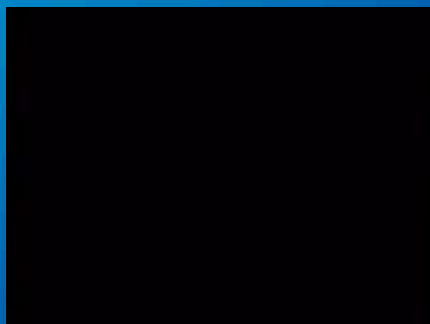
"I'm Brenna. That's me in the blue. My mums are taking me and my friend Meryn to an amusement park," the little girl says over images of her two mums smiling and waving while she and her friend played on a merry-go-round.

Angry family groups accused the ABC of using taxpayer money to indoctrinate toddlers in radical politics, effectively turning Play School into Gay School.

Liam Houlihan: The Courier Mail 3 Jun 2004



Sometimes the line is blurry:



Back to Quality Learning...

- In a space where images, ideas, identities, political positions and transgressive projects multiply and fracture with frequency and speed, there is on-going work to be done in distinguishing between various responses to difference or, in Braidotti's terms, between the vampiric and the ethical
- Quality Learning has been increasingly involved in aspects of this critical work for the last three years (and has sought to reclaim, in the process, the concept of quality itself)



Constructing QL projects involves:

- Identifying how particular texts/contexts produce/reproduce or denaturalise/contest dominant understandings of difference
- Focusing on the individuals or groups who can be defined as marginal, 'at risk' or 'other' within a particular space
- Explicating the forms that the risk or otherness takes, and highlighting the reasons why this matters
- Wanting it to be otherwise

From this basis, new pedagogies, new philosophies, new educational, technological and social relationships may emerge



The QL Agenda 2003-2005:

1. Develop an internationally recognised approach to conceptualising, designing and evaluating 'quality' learning experiences and environments.
2. Extend the Quality Learning Research Priority Area's research program
3. Communicate results of research and consultative work undertaken in the Quality Learning research priority area to local, national and international audiences
4. Foster the development of a sustainable research culture through high quality research training



The QL Agenda 2003-2005:

Develop an internationally recognised approach to conceptualising, designing and evaluating 'quality' learning experiences and environments.

Creating international networks

- International advisory board
- Distinguished visitors
- Educational Research Alliance: New identities/technologies/pedagogies



The QL Agenda 2003-2005:

Extend the Quality Learning Research Priority Area's research program

- Large Grants
- Seeding Grants
- Support for Faculty Research Groups
- Conference program



The QL Agenda 2003-2005:

Foster the development of a sustainable research culture through high quality research training

- Academic writing mentoring program
- Participation in HDR workshops
- Sponsorship of student exchange
- Workshop on researching teaching



The QL Agenda 2003-2005:

Communicate results of research and consultative work undertaken in the Quality Learning research priority area to local, national and international audiences

- Publications (see website)
- Conference Presentations/symposia
- Presentations to industry partners



The QL Agenda 2003-2005:

Other 'communication' activities:

- Website
- Brochure
- Electronic Journal



What, now, are the hallmarks of QL?

And how should this be signaled?

A commitment to:

- Critique
- Transformation
- Social Justice
- Equity?

A focus on:

- Disadvantage
- Marginality
- Difference
- Identity
- Ethics
- Risk?

Priority attention to:

Spaces where difference is most 'at risk'?
'New' spaces where risks are negotiated?
Spaces where members work most often?



Some signals are more confusing than others...



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An irish blessing:

May those who love us, love us

And for those who don't love us, may
god turn their hearts

And if god can't turn their hearts may
god turn their ankles so we shall know
them by their limping.

