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Collaborative Inquiry by Teacher Educators: Mess and Messiness

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Abstract

Collaborative inquiry is a widespread and dominant approach to professional learning within education and is backed by a growing research base. However, one dimension of it seems to have been largely neglected by research methods texts and research accounts: the messiness of teacher collaboration. This seems a significant gap in the collaborative inquiry “story”. Drawing on Adamson and Walker’s notion of messiness as the choices, problems and unexpected challenges of a collaborative inquiry, this chapter foregrounds mess and messiness to answer four research questions: what is messiness in collaborative inquiry? How does messiness happen? Should we document mess and messiness? How can you document messiness? These questions are answered by drawing on existing literature and using illustrative examples from the author’s doctoral research. The chapter argues that when honestly documented, using “Second Text” and “confessional tales”, for instance, messiness can contribute to enhanced rigour within collaborative inquiry. It concludes by asserting that researchers need to acquire “Bildung” if they are to “surf the wave(s) of messiness” in their research.

Key words

collaborative inquiry; messiness; Second Text; confessional tales; “Bildung”

Introduction

Collaboration is an action noun, describing the act of working with one or more other people on a joint project. It can be conceptualised as ‘united labour’ and might result in something which has been created or enabled by the participants’ combined effort. (Lofthouse and Thomas, 2015, p.8)

This helpful definition was provided by Lofthouse and Thomas as a prompt for “a conversation” (p.8) with secondary school teachers about their experiences of working in partnership with other teachers to develop aspects of their practice and to establish to what extent they considered this to have been “collaboration”.

Their definition emphasises its active nature, that it is open ended in terms of who you might be collaborating with, and suggests possible benefits of collaborative inquiry. It might be described as a neat and tidy definition of collaboration. However, Eraut argues (2000, p.133) that “tidy maps of knowledge and learning are usually deceptive”. Lofthouse and Thomas’ definition was useful to their research participants but is silent on one of collaboration’s most important characteristics: its “messiness” (Adamson & Walker, 2011, p. 29). Messiness can mean the “complexity, unpredictability and difficulty in monitoring and management when teachers work and research together” (ibid). Messiness also includes ‘the dilemmas’ faced within collaborative inquiry (ibid). However, there appears to be a reluctance to openly discuss messiness within accounts of educational research (Cook, 1998). Whilst some authors do mention mess within the accounts of their collaborative inquiry, for instance, Lofthouse, Flannagan and Wigley (2016, p.529), drawing on Cook, describe action research as being “a messy area”, it is often brief and the authors quickly move on. It would seem that Strathern et al.’s (1987, p.251) “persuasive fictions” continue to dominate accounts of educational research; a culture in which researchers adopt particular writing approaches to tell their research stories and get published. This could be problematic if the researcher makes their account incomplete by not discussing instances of messiness in their study. Therefore, I am arguing that ethically mess and messiness in collaborative inquiry should be documented, that as story tellers and rigorous researchers we should be commit to telling the “whole story” and giving the reader an “honest” account of our research (McNiff, 2014). Therefore, this chapter seeks to foreground and unpack mess, messiness and “messy texts” (Segall, 2002, p.170) within collaborative teacher educator inquiry and the tensions that may occur when we attempt to capture this in our writing.

Murray (2012) asserts that as a discipline teacher education sits within Schön’s (1987, p.3) “swampy zone of professional practice”. It is worth re-visiting Schön’s work to consider how he describes the landscape surrounding this swamp as it has relevance for collaborative inquiry. Schön describes two types of terrain: the “high ground” and the “swamp” (ibid). The former is a space where “manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique” (ibid), the latter is where “messy, confusing problems defy technical solution” (ibid). Schön asserts that it is in the “swamp of important problems” (ibid) that “the problems of greatest human concern” (ibid), except for medical science, it could be argued, can be found and where collaborative inquiry is situated. I assert that by going into the “swamp of important problems” we are likely to encounter mess and messiness. Interestingly, Schön also suggests that a characteristic of this type of research is that it is “non-rigorous inquiry” (ibid). I would argue that omitting accounts of our encounters with “messy, confusing

problems” (ibid) and any associated messiness that arises during the research process contributes to Schön’s claim of this being “non-rigorous inquiry” (ibid), and I return to address this point more extensively later in Section 3.

This chapter draws on my inquiry on teacher educators’ use of modelling and existing literature to answer the following questions around messiness:

1. What is messiness in collaborative inquiry?
2. How does messiness happen within collaborative inquiry?
3. Should we document mess and messiness in collaborative inquiry?
4. How can you document messiness within collaborative inquiry?

I employ four conceptual frameworks to answer these questions:

1. Ecologies of practices and practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014a);
2. “Messiness” within teacher collaboration (Adamson & Walker, 2011, p.29);
3. Using confessional tales as part of a reflexive account of collaborative inquiry (Van Maanen, 2011)
4. “Second Text” as a way of documenting the “messy” text and “untidy” world of teacher education and collaborative inquiry (Segall, 2002, p.170).

The chapter’s research questions and conceptual frameworks are addressed in five sections. The first defines the study’s key concepts of collaborative inquiry, ecologies of practices and practice architectures, messiness in collaborative inquiry, “confessional tales”, and “Second Text”. The second explores how mess and messiness occurs within collaborative inquiry. The third sets out the case for documenting messiness in an inquiry and how this can enhance the rigour of our accounts (Sparkes, 1995). The fourth presents instances of messiness within my inquiry for consideration as examples of how to document it. Finally, I draw some conclusions and suggest the possible implications for researchers involved in collaborative inquiry.

Section 1: Key concepts

Collaborative inquiry

Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with other teachers (Admiraal, Akkerman, & Graaf, 2012) because “since 2000, collaborative inquiry has emerged as the dominant structure for the professional learning of educators in the UK, North America and other parts of the world” (Baumfield, 2016, p.103). Teachers are also encouraged to collaborate with their students (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014b) as it is seen as beneficial in terms of informing and improving teaching, learning and assessment (Lofthouse & Thomas, 2015). This leads to two questions:

1. What do we mean by collaborate?
2. What factors shape collaborative inquiry?

Collaboration is concerned with the researcher(s) and participant(s) – they may be other teachers, students, student teachers, managers, for instance – forming a partnership to explore an area of mutual concern; it involves them sharing ideas and knowledge, searching for joint solutions and in some instances “co-construction” (Lofthouse & Thomas, 2015, p.17). It is a defining feature of two types of research, self-study and action research, and is evident in the “sayings, doings and relatings” of its research participants (Kemmis et al., 2014a). More than that, it is a “democratic” process in which participants contribute to the design of the research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.199).

Coffield (2014a), drawing on Ball’s work, suggests that the *context* of teachers’ practice is more than just the setting for it; it is an “active force” on it. Coffield proposes that teachers and their teaching, and I would argue any collaborative inquiry linked to it, are always situated within the force-field of four contexts, three of which are internal and the other external. They are:

1. the site(s) of the collaboration and all the actors’ actions at the site (internal context), i.e. their “sayings, doings and relatings”;
2. the “professional cultures” (p.83) of the teachers and managers at the site(s) (internal context) and the associated “sayings, doings and relatings”. These teachers and managers are not necessarily “unidimensional, highly stable, and predictable characters”, according to Sparkes (1995, p.164). Professional lives can be often “messy” and this can feature in our collaborative inquiry (Cook, 1998);
3. the “resources” (ibid) of the site(s) such as the staff development budget (internal context);
4. and “externalities” (ibid) that shape the site(s) such as government policy and awarding body requirements (external context).

To this framework, I would suggest a fourth internal contextual influence that might be present within the field as an “active force” shaping teachers’ practice and collaborative inquiry: the “learning cultures” of their students and who they may be collaborating with (James, Biesta, Hodgkinson, Postlethwaite, & Gleeson, 2007). Therefore, I assert that there are up to five contexts actively shaping a piece of collaborative inquiry. This is presented visually in Figure 1.

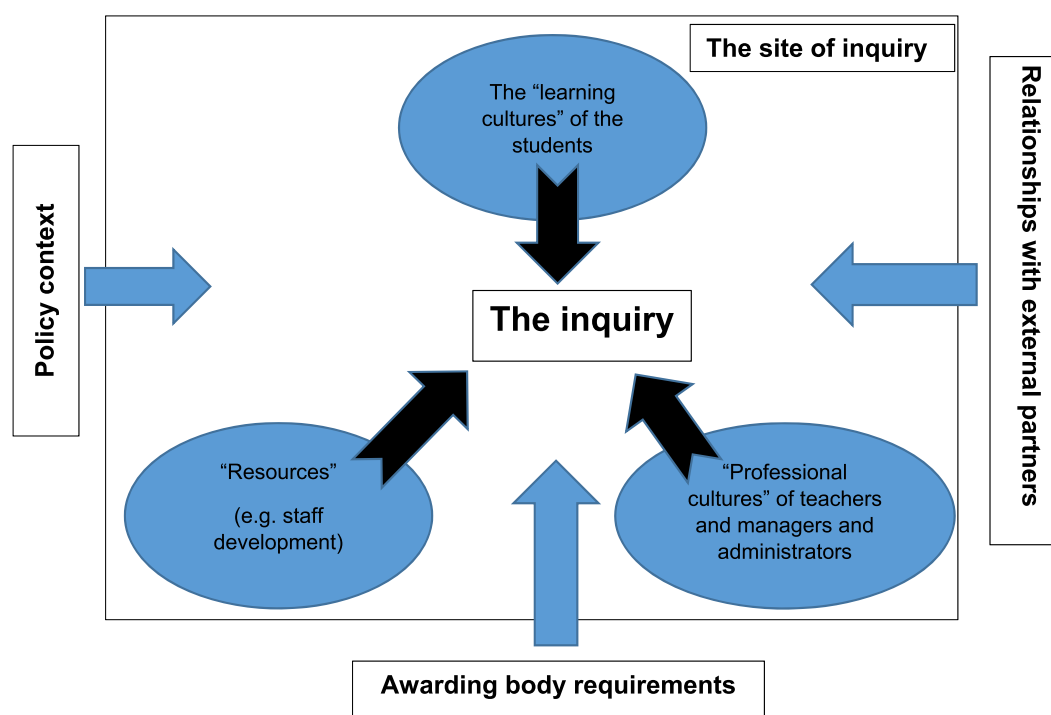


Figure 1. The forces actively shaping teacher collaborative inquiry

Ecologies of practice and practice architectures

Kemmis et al.'s (2014a) work on ecologies of practices and practice architectures, contemporary theories of practice for an educational institution, might add another layer to our understanding of collaborative inquiry and research at a site. The ecologies of practices are the five practices of an educational site (a school, college or university, for instance), namely their students and their learning; teachers and their teaching; leaders and administrators; managers of continuing professional development and/or teacher educators, and researchers. Each of these practices consists of "sayings, doings and relatings" (p.3) and these are enacted in the arrangements of three "intersubjective spaces" (p.4) at the site. For example, how research participants can communicate with each other within the "semantic space" (ibid) of language; how the "physical space-time" (ibid) arrangements of the site, such as timetables, allow participants to meet up within a busy teaching schedule and provide a meeting space for them when they do; how the "social space" (ibid) supports or stifles collaborative relationships between participants. This is visually presented in Figure 2.

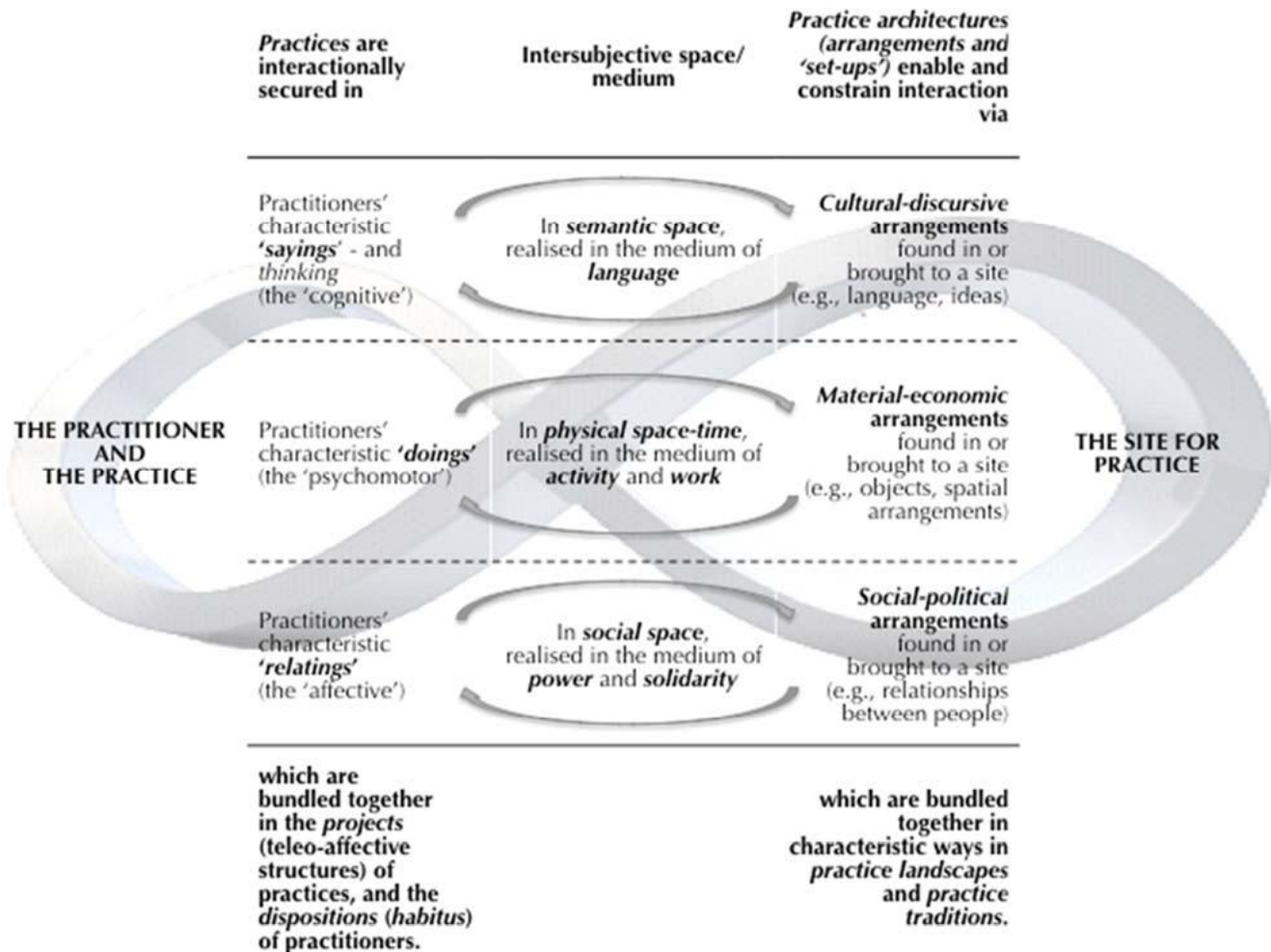


Figure 2. the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis, 2017, personal communication)

Kemmis et al. (2014b, p.150) argue the most courageous form of collaboration within education research is when partnerships are formed between participants from each of the five “ecologies of practices” in order to open a communicative space and develop a “conversation” on an issue of mutual concern. This is inclusive and powerful collaboration because it includes the voices of “groups who [can be inadvertently] excluded” (ibid) from these conversations such as students and “ancillary staff” (ibid). The value of this type of conversation is that it allows participants “to see the life and work of the classrooms and schools from very different perspectives” (ibid) and this can helpfully challenge any “competing self-interests” (p.151) that may exist. However, Lofthouse and Thomas (2015, p.19) posit that such an approach and the values which underpin it are somewhat counter cultural in today’s “highly performative cultures”, which are increasingly a worldwide phenomenon.

Messiness in Collaborative Inquiry

Encountering messiness within research for the first time can be disorientating and disheartening, though if we could understand more about why and how it happens then that may help us work with it and navigate our way through it. Adamson and Walker (2011) identify that messiness occurs within teacher collaboration and tell us what it is, though they do not explain how it happens. Law (2003, p.3) states that “contemporary social science methods are hopelessly bad at knowing...mess” and suggests that the “dominant approaches”, who are committed to neat and tidy accounts of research, seek to “repress the very possibility of mess” and messiness. This is unacceptable in Law’s view. The “world is largely messy” (ibid) and therefore Law asserts we should be “interested in the process of knowing mess...[and the] methodologies for knowing mess” (Law, 2003, p.3). In Section 2 I will return to mess and messiness and explore four possible explanations for how messiness may occur in collaborative inquiry. I now want to turn to the interlinked ideas of “confessional tales” and “second text” and how they may be helpful when writing about messiness.

Confessional tales

The concept of “confessional tales” originated in the research of ethnographers who were attempting to reflexively de-privatise their fieldwork; it was a direct response to the criticism from scientifically orientated research community (Van Maanen, 2011). It requires the researcher to make explicit the data collection process of “fieldwork” and so make visible the humanity of the researcher and their relationships with those they are researching (ibid). It is a “modest, unassuming style of [some]one struggling to piece together something reasonably coherent...[amongst the] disorder, doubt and difficulty” of their research setting (Van Maanen, 2011, p.75). One of the weakness of such an approach is that it may become too “self-absorbed” (Sparkes, 1995, p.171) or in attempt to involve others’ voices it might inadvertently “consume” individuals’ stories (p.167). On the other hand, confessing to what has happened in our inquiry “exposes more of [ourselves] to the reader at a personal level and an author, as well as giving some interesting insights into the process of” (p.172) conducting collaborative inquiry. This is not an easy process. Foley (1992) agonised over how to “write truly accessible...[texts] that are reflexive and thus fulfil the criteria of good post-positivist critical interpretation...and was left feeling that there was no way to serve two masters, the people and the professoriate...” (Foley, 1992, p44). When it does appear, Van Maanen (2011) notes that “confessional tales” are often buried in the appendices of the research, or the methodology and methods section of ethnographic research, where it is usually presented as “a separate chapter” (p.81). I would argue this could decouple any instances of messiness from the

research and its processes. Van Maanen adds that in fact most “confessional tales” are never published and any that are written are by established researchers with a publication record based on their “realist tales”. Van Maanen (2011, p.81) makes a telling point:

The confessional is apparently interesting only insofar as there is something of note to confess as well as something of note to situate the confession. It is apparently more difficult to achieve the latter than the former. Authors of unknown studies, while they surely have much to confess, will rarely find an audience who cares to read their confessions.

Alongside our “confessional tales” in our research accounts can sit a “second text”.

Second Text

Writing up an account of collaborative inquiry is itself complex because it requires us to narrate an “untidy world” (Lather in Segall, 2002, p.170) and the convention and expectation and indeed requirement of a journal is to tidy up the text into neat conclusions for the reader (Lather, 1996; Segall, 2002). However, collaborative inquiry is not always neat and tidy and the findings may be debatable. Van Maanen (2011, p.95) asserts that “fieldwork data are constructed from talk and action” and as such might be interpreted in more than one way because of the setting; the identities of the participants, and the knowledge of the researcher and their participants. Instances of “messy” research like this need a way of writing up the messiness of the inquiry; it requires us to try and capture the “messy” text (Denzin in Segall, 2002, p.170) that exists within collaborative inquiry. There is an ethical dimension to illuminating messiness in research, I assert. Segall’s (2002, p.150) “Second Text” is one way of doing this.

Second text is a “method of inquiry” (Segall, *ibid*), informed by Lather’s work, which addresses “the complexity of narrating an untidy world” (p.170); it seeks to capture the “polyphonic” (*ibid*) voices of those within the inquiry and invites them to commentate on the text as it is being constructed and once it is finished. It is a methodological and philosophical approach that is congruent with collaborative inquiry because it acknowledges that the researcher’s/author’s account is “personal” and “positioned” (p.150) and as such readers need to hear the participants’ voices and “words” (p.151) too. These should be “presented unedited and in full wherever participants chose to place them” (*ibid*) in the text. It is not member checking though, asserts Segall, it is more open and democratic than that. Second Text is a collaborative way of conducting research that gives participants “an opportunity to comment on the process and produce of that

investigation, a space to voice their rejections and evaluate” your work with them and your “words about them” (Segall, 2002, p.152). It opens the researcher’s “text to interrogation” (ibid) and makes this “interrogation visible to” (ibid) those who read it. The way Segall (2002, p.16) made visible “Second Text” within his work was to italicise it. To conclude, Second Text offers every participant a voice and words to contribute to an account of a collaborative inquiry, illumining any messiness within it and this potentially gives the research greater verisimilitude.

Section 2: How mess and messiness can occur in collaborative inquiry

A starting point for beginning to know mess would seem to be the “active force” (Coffield, 2014a, p.83) of government policy towards education. Murray, Swennen and Shagrir (2009, p.30), drawing on Cochrane-Smith (2005), assert that “teacher education is positioned as a public policy problem”, both within the United Kingdom and internationally. As such, it has moved towards the forefront of national politicians’ and the European Union’s education policy agenda (European Commission, 2015). Whilst Murray (2012, p.19) acknowledges that examples from England might be described as “The English exception” and be a result of “English-specific factors”, she argues that performativity has become “a global phenomenon” and as such is familiar and relevant to international colleagues. Therefore, I assert that readers can consider my English examples by asking the two key questions: What is this policy? Does it apply to my own country and context?

In the United Kingdom in 1976, the then Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, began “The Great Debate” about the state of education in England. This was the first time the British government had explicitly expressed an interest in education and a presage for “more than 30 years of policy hyperactivity” (Coffield, 2015, p.13) devised by ever-changing Secretaries of State from successive governments (Orr, 2016). For instance, Coffield (2008), drawing on research undertaken by Gemma Moss, stated that 459 documents were sent by “government agencies to all primary schools in England on the topic of literacy during the years 1996 and 2004...which amounts to 51 per year or almost one a week for nine years” (p.8). This lack of political stability (Orr, 2016) has meant teachers in England have experienced “a permanent revolution” (Coffield, 2008, p.9) that has intensified itself into an ever accelerating “pace of change” (ibid). These reforms have been underpinned by the advent of an unholy trinity of “*policy technologies*” that characterise neo-liberalism: marketization, “managerialism and performativity” (Ball, 2003, p.215). In terms of the external “context”, I assert that, within England, these *policy technologies* contribute significantly to the architecture of any mess

and messiness within collaborative inquiry. They may also be present, though perhaps to a lesser extent, within research undertaken within Europe and other parts of the world.

On a more personal level, Cook observes (1998) that messiness occurs in action research (and self-study, therefore) because the professional lives of the researcher and participants are rarely neat and tidy. This is the mess and messiness of the self within collaborative inquiry. There are two dimensions to this: our “confessional tales” (Van Maanen, 2011) and our “helping” work as teacher educators (Wilcox, Watson and Paterson, 2004, p.278).

Sparkes (1997, p.173) asserts that well told “confessional tales” lift “the veil of secrecy” of what actually happened when we seek “access to the field”, collect our data and analyse it; they remove the methodological silence surrounding messy data collection. These narratives, according to Bruner, provide “believable... accounts” of the research and “human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course” (Bruner, 1986, p.13). It is in the human actions, “vicissitudes and consequences” that “mess and messiness happens”.

Wilcox, Watson and Paterson (2004, p.278), writing about self-study, posit that “those in the helping professions have the distinct and messy business of making sense of their experience rather than assessing results against a standard measure (Schön, 1983).” Thus, we may add our role and those of our participants as contributors to mess and messiness in collaborative inquiry.

Alongside the policy context and the self sits the focus of our collaborative inquiry: teaching, learning and assessment. Coffield (2014b, p.113) posits that the “leitmotiv” for those studying teaching, learning and assessment is that it is inherently “messy, elusive... unpredictable”, complex and ambiguous and as such might be viewed as a “confusing” mess (Schön, 1983, p.42); it may be slippery to describe (Rushton, 2015). Therefore, I am arguing that teaching, learning and assessment brings its own messiness into the research. All collaborative inquiries are surrounded by a force-field of at least four factors that can create mess and messiness. These factors interact with the inquiry and the inquiry can interact with them. This is visually presented in Figure 3.

There are two final points. First, when using the terms mess and messiness, I am not suggesting that any research where it occurs is necessarily “disordered or undisciplined” (Thomas in Cook, 2009, p.278), though Sparkes (1995, p.173) suggests we should accept that “shocks, surprises, blunders, and social gaffes” can occur. I prefer to adopt the view that telling stories of messiness within our accounts unveils our humanity as researchers, and might reassure other researchers that “mess happens”. Second, I am foregrounding Adamson and Walker’s (2011, p.29) view of messiness as “complexity, unpredictability...



Figure 3. How mess and messiness can occur within collaborative inquiry

dilemmas” and difficulties that happen in research and that to navigate our way through it is a “very highly skilled process” (Cook, 1998, p.103) which requires “professional knowledge, judgement, tacit knowledge, intuition, and professional maturity” (Cook, 1998, p.107). Therefore, reporting on any messiness in our research and explaining how we dealt with it might enhance its rigour and reassure other researchers, particularly early career researchers who are undertaking an apprenticeship in becoming and being a researcher.

Section 3: Should we document mess and messiness in research?

I began building this argument earlier in the chapter, though I want to develop it into a forceful argument for collaborative inquirers to include accounts of mess and messiness within their papers and texts. Within this section I consider why documenting it is an ethical and methodological issue for collaborative inquiry and how these two “compass points” might guide its researchers to write more rigorous and relevant accounts of their research (Levin, 2012). Simultaneously they should seek to find what may be an elusive balance between these two and in the process enhance the inquiry’s “academic integrity” (Levin, 2012, p.141), giving it credibility within the wider research community, and removing the label of “non-rigorous inquiry” attributed to it by Schön (1983, p.3).

Fraser (1997, p.161) posits that action research is “an ethical enquiry” concerned with “address[ing] the professional dilemmas” of teachers. Dilemmas,

according to Altrichter, Feldman, Posch and Somekh (2008, p.189), are “situation[s] in which someone must choose one or two or more alternatives...” They add that using a tool like Winter’s dilemma analysis might allow us to see into how a teacher makes decisions when dealing with the messiness of teaching, learning and assessment (Coffield, 2014b) and this could sit alongside the messiness – the “dilemmas” (Adamson & Walker, 2011, p.29), for instance - of collaborative inquiry. Both of which could be written up as part of an “ethical enquiry”. Fraser’s (1997) argument that the ethical dimensions of research are not considered and discussed sufficiently within education research still holds, it seems to me. 15 years later Levin argued that there was still too little discussion of the ethical issues, and I would add messiness, within action research texts. My argument is that this may still hold today as researchers seek to “fit” the “whole story” and the findings within the prescribed editorial requirements of a journal or book chapter, and build their reputation as they do it.

The credibility of collaborative inquiry is dependent on its ability to hold in balance the competing demands of your commitment to your participants, your joint work and telling its story and at the same time meeting the expectations of the academy and professoriate who require rigorous research. This tension creates Janus-faced collaborative inquirers (Levin, 2012) and as a result its own type of messiness. One way forward is to employ rhetorical devices (Sparkes, 1995) like “Second Text” to create “alternative explanations” (Levin, 2012, p.145) for inquiring about the complexities of teachers’ practices and teaching, learning and assessment.

Levin (2012, p.143) sets out five “factors” that together contribute to the credibility and rigour of action research: research partnering, researcher’s bias; standardized methods; alternative explanations, and trustworthiness. Levin (2012, p.140) proposes that another way forward to support “academic integrity in action research” lies within the concept of “Bildung”, a process of becoming and being which originated in the German universities in the late nineteenth century. It is a contested notion, however, according to Levin. Nevertheless, he argues that “Bildung” enables the collaborative inquirer to master its process including “knowing how to...reflect on ethical and moral challenges in the research process...[it] must prepare the practitioners for writing up [action research] AR in such a way that it contributes to the social science discourse” (Levin, 2012, p.135). It seems to me that implicit within these five factors and “Bildung” is knowing how to deal with mess and messiness when it arises, learning from it, and how to document this within your research without compromising its rigour. As Cook (2009, p.277) argues, mess and rigour are unlikely “bedfellows”, though they can be through “Bildung”. Levin (2012) goes on to suggest that one-way action researchers might acquire “Bildung” is through “training”. However, how this might happen within the “institutionalized form of in-service education”

(Kinsler, 2010, p.172) that exists in UK and American universities, where most teachers are inducted into action research, is unclear.

My penultimate point is concerned with the validation of action. Heikkinen, Huttunen, Syrjälä and Pesonen (2012, p.8) identify five “principles” for validating action research: how the story of the action is told; being reflexive; the presence of dialectics in the writing; its “workability and ethics”; its “evocativeness”. They add that these principles are closely aligned with Kemmis et al.’s concept of ecologies of practices, in terms of their sayings, doings and relatings, and the practice architectures of the site and how these “hang together” within a site’s intersubjective spaces. It seems that this text is also silent on the potential for Adamson and Walker’s messiness to be present where these principles, practices and spaces intersect and interplay. I would suggest that part of any validation process should be the inquirers and validators discussing any instances of mess and messiness and considering how it might be documented before the research is written up and presented to its intended audience.

My starting point in this section was should we document messiness and I conclude the chapter by asking how much messiness do we report on, what is considered rigorous accounting for messiness, and what might be “over telling the story”. It is clear that there is a balance to be found between the story and presenting a piece of rigorous research. Published researchers with an established publication record can afford to be experimental when documenting messiness (Sparkes, 1995); however, early career researchers will want guidance on where the balance lies and one way they may learn how to find it is by reading others’ work. However, it is not always easy to find examples and indeed I would not want to prescribe how much messiness is documented, though some useful criteria might be: sufficient detail for a reader to trust and believe the honesty of the account and not so much that the story dominates the rigorous reporting of the research. This will require researchers to take risks as they search for the balance between the two. Tierney (1993, p.314) suggests that “some [of these] will fail, but others will succeed and [be published], in doing so, they will enable us to see the world in dramatically different new ways”, illuminating and guiding the way for others to follow.

Section 4: Examples of messiness from a messy collaborative inquiry

As a university-based teacher educator and apprentice researcher (Murray, 2012), I have been involved in a “messy” collaborative inquiry over a period of four years with a team of teacher educators based in a further education college and their in-service student teachers. This inquiry was a piece of second-person practice action research (Chandler & Torbert, 2003, p.142) with six teacher educators and

three of their student teacher groups. The focus of this inquiry was the teacher educators' use of 'modelling' within an initial teacher education programme and what impact this had on the student teachers' learning.

Externalities make things messy

The setting for this inquiry is the English further education sector. Internationally, further education colleges are similar to technical and vocational further education institutions in Australia, community colleges in the USA, and Fachoberschules in Germany. Orr and Simmons (2010, p.78) note that in England "virtually all aspects of further education are now highly mediated by the State". The sector has traditionally been responsible for post-compulsory education in England and has a reputation for giving students, 16-18 year olds and adults, a "second chance" (Orr, 2016, p.20). It provides education and training for about four million students (National Audit Office, 2015, para. 1.1, p.12) and has a budget in the region of £7 billion (p.5). Its further education colleges are diverse organisations with a large number of 16 to 18 year olds undertaking apprenticeships and many adults also studying (Association of Colleges, 2016). During the period of inquiry (2011 to 2016) two neo-liberal policies have fashioned the further education landscape, teacher education and this collaborative inquiry. First, between 2010 and 2016 the budget for the sector was reduced by over 30 per cent per annum (Keep, 2014) and this resulted in fewer new teachers being recruited and fewer undertaking initial teacher education (Education and Training Foundation, 2016). Second, the statutory qualification requirements for teachers in the further education sector were removed in 2013 (Orr, 2016).

The combined "externalities" of austerity and de-regulation contributed to the messiness of this inquiry as fewer student teachers were recruited at my partner college and this meant the size of the team of teacher educators I was collaborating with reduced from 13 in July 2012 to five in July 2016. A consequence of this was that none of the teacher educators I worked with in the first cycle of the inquiry were teaching on the programme when the second cycle of the inquiry started, so could not be filmed teaching, which was one of the ways I was collecting data on their use of modelling. Whilst none of my participants lost their jobs, some of their teaching hours were reduced and one of them left. All of these changes made the research more difficult to conduct.

The messy process of securing participants

Murray (2012) points out that performativity is shaping teacher educators' work lives throughout the world, though the extent of this varies between countries.

In my study I found that it was also present. Three factors combined to affect my recruitment of more participants at a meeting in July 2012: my own naivety, my choice of data collection methods, and the performative climate of the college where the study was taking place. How did this mess happen? First, my letter asking for institutional approval to carry out the study naively offered to the Principal, the Head of the college, a copy of my thesis once it was completed. Some researchers make this offer; however, within the performative climate that existed, which I should have been aware of, this was ill advised. The institutional approval was granted but as I sought to recruit more participants “my promise” became a sticking point in the inquiry and I had to work hard to persuade some of them they could trust me.

Second, seeking to emulate Swennen et al.’s (2008) use of stimulated recall interviews (SRI) in their study on modelling, I planned to film the teacher educators teaching and conduct an SRI afterwards. However, some of the potential participants did not want to be filmed. I should not have assumed, as I had done, that people would be happy to be filmed and talk about their teaching to me. Teacher Educator A, a work colleague from my University, had allowed me to film them teach and participated in a SRI as part of my piloting of the data collection instruments, saying: “I’m quite happy now talking to you about all of this, but I don’t want to watch myself teach...” (SRI, June, 2012). Whilst Lunenberg et al. (2007) argue that teacher educators need to make themselves vulnerable if they are to model teaching behaviours to their student teachers, Teacher Educator A’s “sayings” and the reactions of some of the potential participants to being filmed gave me my first insight into the contribution identity has to messiness within collaborative inquiry. Segall (2002, p.170) help us understand how they might have been feeling: “...regardless of how committed teacher educators are, not everyone would relish the idea of having their practice open to external, critical scrutiny”. Further reflection led me to consider the impact of accountability and the performative work place on these teacher educators’ identities (Powell, 2016).

Then I told them of my offer to provide the Principal with a copy of my thesis. The atmosphere in the meeting dramatically changed as concerns were expressed by two of the potential participants about “my promise”; they seemed fearful. This critical incident forced me to think again about the planned inquiry and the potential impact of my behaviour (the self); the teacher educators’ identities; the management of the college, in terms of Kemmis et al.’s ecologies of practices; and the external forces of a performative environment on it. However, it is useful to see it from one of the participant’s perspectives as well. Teacher Educator F reflected at a “Teacher Talk” (Hardy, 2010) meeting in September 2013:

Do you remember you said you were going to pass the information back to the Vice Principal and I think there was a real problem of trust and that was really questioned at that point by some of us in our minds because that felt as if the surveillance was going to have repercussions?

Two points seem important. Firstly, the sayings, doings and relatings” of “the reconnaissance stage” (Kemmis et al., 2014b, p.92) create the climate for the inquiry. Secondly, at the start of the inquiry there appeared to be what Ball (2003, p.226) calls a “regress of mistrust”; a “mistrust” between myself and some of the participants because of “my promise” and how I had said I wanted to conduct the inquiry, and “mistrust” between some of the teacher educators and the leadership of the college. These “relatings” were shaping the “sayings and doings” of this inquiry. In November 2014, I gained a further insight into some of the “active forces” present at that meeting in July 2012. Below are two extracts from a “Teacher Talk” meeting held in November 2014 when we were reflecting on the inquiry.

Extract 1

Speaker	Dialogue
Teacher Educator B	I think what people were worried about – if I may be so bold to say – is that there was a host of competing and contradictory practices within so many people ...I think [the start of] this research came at a moment where people were vulnerable in that respect.
Teacher Educator F	We were quite vulnerable.
Teacher Educator G	We brought our baggage with us.

Extract 2

Teacher Educator B reflected:

...there are so many things that were involved in the inquiry that were unpredicted and unpredictable and so I would say the policy context and all the changes that we’ve had as a team...the audit culture within which we work was too powerful for some in terms of some of the initial stages back in 2012 where people didn’t feel comfortable in participating and that was something I don’t think you predicted in your research...

To conclude, I made an apprentice researcher’s mistake when offering to share a copy of the inquiry with the senior managers of the college without discussing this with my participants; however, there were other “active forces” present

in the room during my meeting with the participants in July 2012 that shaped “the sayings, doings and relatings” that afternoon, contributing to the messiness within this inquiry. They only became visible later because of the level of trust that had been established with the participants.

Messy relationships

This instance of messiness led to a “a disorientating dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000, p.22) for myself and Teacher Educator C after I had held the focus group with their student teachers, who were first years. I had asked for verbal consent before the focus group started on the understanding that I would send them a consent form to sign. At the end I thanked them for their time and contribution and left, unaware that something had happened in the focus group. I was therefore shocked when I got the following email from Teacher Educator C:

The group were very reluctant to be involved after your visit and one learner was very unhappy with regard to “wait time” used with them when you asked a question about how I used modelling. They thought I had used it and then you waited a long time for their answer to explain how and they didn’t respond. They said that a long wait time for 1-2-1 questioning is fine, but in a whole class context they felt very unhappy with the experience. They also did not understand what you were researching despite your PowerPoint presentation and explanation but were pleased that the consent form explained the reasons for the research... (personal communication, April 2013)

I was puzzled by what had happened as I had used exactly the same approach for the focus groups with the two year 2 groups of student teachers without a problem and all the consent forms had been signed. Further reflection suggested that perhaps I had not spent enough time getting to know this group of student teachers and establishing a strong student-teacher relationship (Hattie, 2009) for them to trust me. They did not know me and I did not know them well enough to use Rowe’s (1974) “wait time” with them. A second theory which might shed light on what happened in the focus group with this first year group is the research into learning cultures in FE in England (James et al., 2007).

Learning cultures “should be understood as the (social) practice through which – students and tutors – learn” (Hodkinson, Biesta & James, 2007a, p.420). They are shaped by the relationship between the student and their teacher(s) and any change, a new or different teacher, for instance, can impact on it (Gallacher et al., 2007). “Differences in power are always an issue [in learning cultures]”, according to Hodkinson et al., 2007a, p.419), and the student teachers may have seen me

as being from the awarding body and been intimidated by this. They may have wondered whether I was assessing them. “A learning culture will permit, promote, inhibit or rule out certain kinds of learning.” (Hodkinson, Biesta & James, 2007b, p.28) and it would seem that these student teachers, who were first years, may not have been confident enough and ready to discuss how they were learning to teach with someone they did not know and not yet trust.

Clearly I could not use the data from the focus group but I still had the dilemma of what to do about the data from the filmed class, as they had not objected to that, and it was agreed that I should not quote any of the student teachers when writing up the inquiry. Second, I decided that I would invest more time in getting to know the student teachers involved in Cycle 2 of the inquiry before any filming commenced. Thirdly, and as a result of a discussion in a “Teacher Talk” meeting in September 2013, I agreed with the teacher educators that we would invite one of the student teachers to film the classes in Cycle 2 and then the teacher educator would facilitate the focus groups with their own student teachers.

Narrating messiness in an “untidy” world

There are two challenges for us as we document messiness in our studies: the rhetorical device we use to do this, and presenting the account to a wider audience (Sparkes, 1995). Berry (2007) suggests that writing up accounts of research on teaching about teaching is a difficult task. Interpreting what is written, said or seen with qualitative research can be problematic (Denzin, 1995). The person who is listening, reading or watching can only understand these observable “sayings, doings and relatings” if they are part of the dialogue. Anyone who is outside the dialogue is a “superaddressee”, according to Denzin (1995, p.10), “a hypothetical third party who is presumed to understand what is being spoken” but often does not always appreciate the “sayings, doings and relatings” they are interpreting. Examples of this from my collaboration were when I was seeking to transcribe and interpret a section of a filmed class with Teacher Educator C and their student teachers. In the first example I was seeking to provide as thick a description (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) as possible for the reader and so indicated in my transcription that Teacher Educator C had waited two seconds after asking a question. I passed my transcription and initial analysis to them to review and comment on. Here I was seeking to move beyond simply member checking the accuracy of my transcription and invite my participant to challenge my account of what I had filmed; I was inviting Teacher Educator C to provide an alternative, “Second Text” (Segall, 2002, p.150) to my text. To be clear, this was a participant using their “voice” and “words” to provide another version of the film. I italicised

their comments in the transcription, as suggested by Segall (2002, p.16), and told my readers that this is what the italicisation signified. Their response was:

...I would argue that with this particular class and in that moment I was maintaining the pace of the class by not waiting too long... This shows that actually wait time also relies on your knowledge of a class and particular trainees and their interactions and confidence levels (personal communication, October 2014).

Their response made me think further about how we can know and what we can know about others' teaching behaviours when we are filming them.

To conclude, it would seem that using "Secondary Text" can be a method for researchers "to reflect the impossibility of mapping an "untidy" world into a "tidy" text (Lather, 1996, p.529) and the problematics inherent in the interpretation of (someone else's) lived experience" (Segall, 2002, pp.150-151). It also captures the complexity and dilemmas, both characteristics of messiness, when transcribing and interpreting data.

Conclusion

This chapter has not attempted to "tidy away" the messiness of collaboration (Cook, 1998); it foregrounds it, it unpacks it and it provides examples of it. This paper set out to consider messiness within collaborative inquiry; its forms and how it happens. More than that, it has sought to build a case for messiness to be present in accounts of collaborative inquiry where it is evident in the research process. It suggests adopting "Second Text" and "confessional tale" as ways of doing this and acknowledges that when doing so a balance needs to be found between ensuring the relevance and the rigour of the account, something which will require researchers to be more experimental in their writing. Doing this, for me, is part of telling an inquiry's story honestly (McNiff, 2014, p.101) and telling the "whole story" of the collaboration. Otherwise there is a danger that researchers concerned with researching classroom practice could unintentionally, I would argue, collude with a government's view that TLA is "uncomplicated... [and] controllable" (Coffield, 2014b, p.133) and formulaic if they omit mess and messiness from their research accounts or reduce it to a single sentence. Cook (1998, p.107) calls for researchers to "get this mess out into the open and as such, allow it to be critically scrutinised for its intrinsic worth and what it has to offer." There appears to be very limited literature and research on messiness within collaborative inquiry and I want to address this by inviting other researchers, especially colleagues from Europe and further afield, to join

me and be experimental in their writing when and where opportunities to write about messiness occur. I have learned from “surfing the waves of messiness” in my collaborative inquiry” and our ability to “surf” them reflects our professional knowledge, skills and abilities, or “Bildung”, as researchers. In the spirit of Pete Boyd’s encouragement to surf the waves of neo-liberalism, I have “surfed the waves of mess and messiness” in my inquiry. They made me think harder and better about my “sayings, doings and relatings” and those of my participants and helped me develop a deeper, more critically reflexive understanding of my collaboration with a team of FE-based teacher educators and their student teachers. It made me a more mindful action researcher in Cycle 2 of my inquiry. I am looking forward to my next ‘big wave(s) of messiness’.

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