Research for an ethical action-oriented curriculum

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Much teaching and learning in Britain (possibly globally) is premised on the 300-year-old idea that there is one ‘right’ way of thinking and acting, that this way can be taught and learnt, and that all will agree that this is how things should be (cf Berlin, 1998). Acting accordingly is then regarded as ethical conduct. This view is evident in all kinds of research, including (and perhaps most insidiously and dangerously) in Early Years curriculum research. However, it can also be argued that such conformity may be unethical, given that disagreement and ‘difference’ are factored out. I argue here that curriculum should be premised on critical assumptions that all, including young children, can and should do research, especially action research, where they actively engage with their learning, together with peers, parents and teachers who are doing the same. Curriculum research then becomes a pluralistic, ethically-informed practice committed to personal and professional accountability.

Biography

Jean McNiff was a teacher and deputy head teacher before focusing on her work as a researcher and writer and moving into higher education settings. She is currently Professor of Educational Research at York St John University, where she teaches and supervises the PhD studies of academic colleagues, and is a visiting professor internationally. She also supports practitioners in schools, universities and everyday workplace settings as they conduct their action enquiries to find ways of improving their work. Her books, scholarly articles and web-based writings are used worldwide as resources on academic and workplace professional education programmes. Her abiding aim is to produce workable ideas that say to practitioners, ‘You can do this too.’