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Terry Locke [a]; David Riley [b]
[a] Arts and Language Education Department, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand [b] Tangaroa College, Manukau City, New Zealand

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THEORETICAL RESOURCE

What happened to educational criticism? Engaging with a paradigm for observation

Terry Locke[a]* with David Riley[b]

[a]*Arts and Language Education Department, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand;* [b]*Tangaroa College, Manukau City, New Zealand*

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In *The Educational Imagination*, Elliot Eisner presents a theory of educational criticism and a form of qualitative research in education. Central to his theory is the notion of the connoisseur, a particular kind of observer who, on the basis of certain qualities, can be trusted to write an incisive and illuminating account of an educational setting. The theory is illustrated by a range of examples of educational criticism in practice. This paper reflects on the author's attempt to apply educational criticism in a self-reflexive way in the context of a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative project on teaching literature in the multicultural classroom. A number of questions are raised about observation as a data collection instrument, the ethics of observation and reporting, and ways in which a commitment to dialogue can impact on the textual products of criticism. If the observed teacher is an artist, what might they want to say to the connoisseur observer and how might this talking back affect the criticism itself?

Keywords: educational research; educational criticism; classroom observation; critical literacy; self-reflexivity; action research

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Introduction

I have always liked the title of Eisner's book *The Educational Imagination*. It suggests that the imagination is at the heart of the educational enterprise, or at least could be. One of the starting points for this paper is Chapter 10, 'The Forms and Functions of Educational Connoisseurship and Educational Criticism'. Another is a research project I directed on the teaching of literature in the multicultural classroom. Eisner gave me a lot to think about in my occasional role as classroom observer. Attempts to write educational criticism and my ongoing conversations with the project's teacher researchers gave me a lot to think about Eisner.

In this paper I begin with a summary of some of Eisner's ideas and why I found myself drawn to them in finding myself observing the classroom practice of research colleagues who happen to be teachers. I then say something about the research context for this paper. Following this contextualisation, I problematise a text presented as an exemplar of educational criticism by Eisner (Burchenal 2002). This brings me to suggest a strategy for addressing, at least in part, this problematic – a strategy that is in fact rooted in theories of literary narrative craft.

*Corresponding author. Email: t.locke@waikato.ac.nz

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The educational connoisseur and the art of observation

Eisner begins his chapter with reference to current interest in qualitative forms of educational research, making the claim that 'the paradigmatic use of qualitative inquiry is found in the arts', and not just in the work of artists but in art critics who have:

> the difficult task of rendering the essentially ineffable qualities constituting works of art into a language that will help others perceive the work more deeply. In this sense, the critic's task is to function as a midwife to perception, to so talk about the qualities constituting the work of art that others, lacking the critic's connoisseurship, will be able to perceive the work more comprehensively. (Eisner 2002, 213)

We can already see Eisner's emphasis on perception, the powers of which he argues are central to all worthwhile criticism.

> The act of knowledgeable perception is, in the arts, referred to as connoisseurship….The major distinction between connoisseurship and criticism is this: connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure (Eisner 2002, 215)

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Not anyone can be an educational connoisseur; a depth of experience is required to enable one to identify significances in a range of classroom practices. From Eisner's perspective, the traditional observation schedule may act to hinder rather than assist the kind of perceptivity he is referring to: 'Observation schedules are tools that can guide one's attention, but their mechanical use can blind one to what is significant' (2002, 216).

Rather than treating 'objectivity' as a problem, Eisner calls the concept into question and reframes the issue. Rather than viewing 'subjectivity' as a limitation, it is viewed as the inevitable consequence of the discursive constructedness of 'perceptional processes'. In a key passage, he writes:

> What we begin to recognize when we consider what connoisseurship entails is that the perceptual processes operate within an array of values and theoretical concepts that influence perception. Indeed, in both the social sciences and philosophy we use theories to organize our conception of the world. Individuals working with different theories … will attend to different phenomena within the 'same' setting and interpret their significance differently. (Eisner 2002, 218)

The connoisseur's sense that his or her experience is inevitably being filtered through a particular discursive lens or set of lenses is to be viewed as a strength. Indeed, without the lens there would ultimately be no significance, and multiple significances are okay. It is to be expected that the same complex experience (of an artwork or classroom) will mean different things for different people.

In response to the question 'What do critics do?', Eisner asserts that 'Criticism is the art of disclosing the qualities of events or objects that connoisseurship perceives. Criticism is the public side of connoisseurship' (2002, 219). Eisner's main concern in this part of his discussion is epistemological. The distinction he draws on between *discursive* and *non-discursive* knowledge is a way of recognising that human beings make sense of things in different ways and in a 'variety of expressive modalities' via which this sense can be 'disclosed'. Drawing on the work of Susanne Langer, he argues that 'knowledge can be conceived and experienced in nondiscursive as well as discursive forms'. The former involves representational resources capable of present-

ing to consciousness the 'feeling of the qualities' of life's particulars. Literary language is a key example of this and metaphor – characteristically seen as a lapse into imprecision in the literature of educational research – its key instrument (2002, 219–221).

> Through literature and through effective criticism we come to know what it feels like to be in prison, to be in ecstasy, to be in a particular classroom in a particular school. Through the arts we have the opportunity to participate vicariously in the lives of others, to acquire an empathetic understanding of situations, and therefore to know them in ways that only the arts can reveal. (Eisner 2002, 223)

In Eisner's words, the language of criticism is presentational, rather than representational.

There are three aspects of educational criticism, each with a different emphasis:

(1) *Description:* Eisner uses the term to refer to 'vivid rendering of the qualities perceived in the situation';
(2) *Interpretation:* This attempts 'to provide an understanding of what has been rendered by using, among other things, ideas, concepts, models, and theories from the social sciences and from history'; and
(3) *Evaluation:* This 'attempts to assess the educational import or significance of the events or objects described or interpreted'. (Eisner 2002, 234)

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Eisner is clear that the distinction between description and interpretation is not hard and fast. There is a suggestion that description embraces the perception of pattern and value indicators in what is observed. Interpretation involves a somewhat more conscious attempt to apply a particular discursive frame to the reading of a situation. In respect of evaluation, Eisner sees it as a given that different individuals and groups conceive the ends and means of education differently. And if perception is discursively coloured, an evaluative slant is inescapable. The aim of the educational critic is 'to provide grounds for the value choices made while recognizing that others might disagree with these choices' (Eisner 2002, 232). To the above three aspects, Eisner adds a fourth he calls *thematics.* By this he refers to the attempt to provide a succinct commentary on the implications of what has been described, read and evaluated in terms of provisional generalisations on what might be learned from the critical act.

Teaching literature in the multicultural classroom

On the face of it, there is a clear connection between educational criticism as described above and a teaching and learning research initiative (TLRI) project on the topic of teaching literature in the multicultural classroom. One might say that Eisner's enterprise has been to argue for the relevance for educational research of a particular kind of 'languaging' of experience – the same sort of 'languaging' that some would see as the defining characteristic of literary or aesthetic texts.

The project, which commenced in December 2006, involved seven teacher researchers from seven schools with culturally diverse populations: four secondary, two intermediate and one primary in South and West Auckland. The two-year project was coordinated by researchers (including the writer) from the Arts and Language

Education Department at the University of Waikato. The project was guided by the following research questions:

(1) What discourses currently shape teacher understandings of 'literature teaching' and 'cultural and linguistic inclusiveness'? How do these discourses relate to each other and to the larger context of the national policy environment?
(2) What features characterise the successful classroom practices/processes of a sample of teachers engaging students in activities aimed at fostering their ability to engage in the reading and composition of literary texts?
(3) In particular, what aspects of pedagogy have been successful in developing a culturally and linguistically inclusive classroom for the teaching and learning of literature? (These aspects may include programme design, resourcing, activity design and formative assessment.)
(4) In what ways can information and communication technologies be integrated productively in a culturally and linguistically inclusive classroom for the teaching and learning of literature?

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Like all Teaching and Learning Research Initiative projects, this project was non-hierarchical; that is, it had at its heart a collaborative and respectful relationship between university and school-based researchers, all of whom brought to the project complementary knowledges.

This relationship had a bearing on the research method and (as will be discussed) introduces a particular problematic into the concept of the educational connoisseur. In broad terms, the project might be described as having an action research framework. Action research is adaptive, tentative and evolutionary (Burns 1994). As Burns further states:

> Action-research is a total process in which a 'problem situation' is diagnosed, remedial action planned and implemented, and its effect monitored, if improvements are to get underway. It is both an approach to problem solving and a problem-solving process. (1994, 294)

Implicit in action research methodology is the notion of a cycle of problem definition, data collection, reflective analysis and planning, monitored action, reflection leading to a phase of redefinition that restarts the cycle. Such a cycle was admirably suited to the exploratory nature of this project and its essential open-endedness.

Another characteristic of action research, highlighted by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), is its participatory and collaborative aspect. These authors distinguish three types of changes in relation to the work of individual teachers and the culture of groups:

(1) Changes in discourse: ways in which teachers 'word' or 'story' their identities, knowledges and pedagogical practices;
(2) Changes in 'activities and practices': what teachers actually do in their work and continuing learning; and
(3) Changes in 'social relationships and organizations': the ways in which teachers relate with students, parents and the wider community, and with colleagues at a departmental, school and general professional level. (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988, 14–15)

This is not to take away from the individual focus of action research. The adoption of an action research framework was in keeping with a desire to enhance teacher professionalism by according participating teachers the role of reflective and collaborative generators of their own professional knowledge. According to Jean McNiff, 'Action research is an enquiry by the self into the self, undertaken in company with others acting as research participants and critical learning partners' (2002, 15). The project also had a self-study dimension. A key facet of the project's research process was an examination of the discursive assumptions that shape (support and/or constrain) one's practices as a teacher.

Within this action research framework, we effectively set up a series of case studies, allowing for an in-depth investigation into *specific* instances with a view to developing or illustrating *general* instances. In the case of this project, the specific instances were particular teachers working with particular classes. As Yin (1989) points out, case-study research can be exploratory (description and analysis leading to the development of hypotheses), descriptive (providing narrative accounts and rich vignettes of practice) and explanatory (offering causal explanations of the impact of various interventions). There was also potential for the case studies to have an ethnographic aspect. According to Donald Fetterman:

> … ethnographic study allows multiple interpretations of reality and alternative interpretations of data through the study. The ethnographer is interested in understanding and describing a social and cultural scene from the emic, or insider's, perspective. The ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist … (1998, 2)

Fetterman's reference to insiders was pertinent, in that this project methodology sought to collaborate with children and teachers in ways that collapse the insider/outsider distinction that characterises 'them/us' research. Indeed, the overall theme of this research lent itself to an ethnographer's approach.

Finally, critical discourse analysis was a research method available to both university-based researchers and teacher researchers involved in this project. Put simply, critical discourse analysis sets out to identify taken-for-granted stories about (or constructions of) reality that circulate in society and which invite us to 'take positions' on things (Locke 2004). Critical discourse analysis is a valuable tool in self-study. One of the aims of this project was to identify some taken-for-granted assumptions about what literature is and how it is best taught. Once these assumptions were identified, they were contested or accepted.

The first six months of the project (early 2007) were concerned with two phases of the project:

- *Phase 1:* Collaborative literature review and mapping of the territory.
- *Phase 2:* Initial baseline data collection, including student attitudes, some achievement data, and profiling current practices.

This paper is concerned with the last of these, the process of profiling current pedagogical practices. For us, 'practices' subsume belief-systems upon which practices are based, even when these require teasing out. (Critical discourse analysis is a method of doing this.) As a team we used a number of ways of doing this: focus group discussions, forums on the project wiki, reflective diaries, reflective profiles, formal and informal discussions both face to face and via email, and classroom observations. It is to the last of these – classroom observations – that I now turn.

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The observer in the classroom

Standard texts on educational methods invariably have chapters on observation (see, for example, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000, 305ff), where budding researchers are introduced to distinctions between structured observation and naturalistic observation, ethical considerations and other topics. It will be clear from the above discussion that 'naturalistic' observation is at the heart of educational connoisseurship. While the educational connoisseur would eschew the checklist, he or she would be attentive to the full range of concrete particulars (and underlying patterns) evident in the situation observed.

While Eisner is at pains to emphasise the singularity of the kinds of account generated by acts of educational criticism, I offer the extract below as an instructive example of the genre. It is taken from Mary Burchenal's (2002) contribution to Eisner's book and is entitled 'The Natural Laws of Teaching: A Study of One Classroom'. Because the account is based on a lesson taken by an English teacher (Bill Cresta) in a high-school classroom, it was distributed to secondary teacher researchers in the current project. The class is studying *Apocalypse now*:

> Although animated, Bill isn't loud and he's not a performer. (When I asked Tito, the student in front of me, if all his teachers were like Mr. Cresta, he said, 'Well, some are more outgoing and some are more quiet.') His energy seems to come from his passion for the subject matter and from his pressing sense of *how much there is* to read, to discuss, to know. It's almost as he were himself a knowledge race against time.
>
> Class moves, accordingly, at a startlingly quick pace. This is clearly a teacher who knows the direction of class before it begins.
>
> Class isn't snowed down by tangential discussion. In fact, Bill habitually directs the students' comments more than I, as a teacher, would find desirable. He has a habit of playing 'Match Game.' For the uninitiated, this game show of the 1970s was hosted by Gene Rayburn and highlighted a panel of dim Hollywood stars. Gene would read a sentence to the contestants with a 'blank' in it. The contestants would try to fill in the blank and match as many of the stars' answers as possible. Perhaps this comparison is unfair, but I found the students in Bill's class doing much the same thing. Bill rarely asked open-ended questions, and instead asked questions such as the following:
>
> 'He's a very – what? Yes a, a shrewd man.'
>
> 'Elizabethan staging is very different from ours because there's no – what? Good, no curtain.'
>
> 'If you have God's grace, you have – what? Right, his love.'
>
> 'When are we suspicious? When we feel we don't have – what?'
>
> 'What has the language of war done? Dove, or Hawk. There's no – what? Middle ground.'
>
> There are times when Bill will ask slightly more open-ended questions, but still I felt that the students' primary task was to 'match' the answer that Bill has in mind. (Burchenal 2002, 296)

I want to make a few comments about the content of this extract, then its literary style and then raise some issues in relation to it.

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The first point to note is the dominance of a particular authorial voice. However, this does not preclude other voices. We hear the voice of one of Cresta's students and also Cresta himself through reported dialogue. (As in reading a novel, we are disposed to take the accuracy of the dialogue on trust.) The second thing is the way in which the activities of the writer match Eisner's prescription for the aspects of educational criticism. There is plenty of *description*; for instance, we get a sense of how Cresta moves and how he talks. We see certain patterns emerging from the description – for example, the pace of the lesson and a particular quality to Cresta's questioning. There is certainly *interpretation*. Burchenal interprets Cresta's questioning approach as a version of 'guess what's in my head' and therefore teacher-centred. There is also an implication that this questioning style is being dictated by or is related to the pace of the lesson. Finally, there is *evaluation*. It is very tentative (hence the use of modal modifiers, such as 'perhaps'), but nonetheless there is a calling into question of Cresta's questioning style.

On the basis of Eisner's account of educational criticism, it is arguable that educational criticism accounts can be deemed to be examples of the creative non-fiction genre. Wikipedia (2007) has this to say:

> Creative nonfiction is a type of writing which uses literary skills in the writing of nonfiction. A work of creative nonfiction, if well written, contains accurate and well-researched information and also holds the interest of the reader. Creative nonfiction is contrasted with 'research nonfiction' which may contain accurate information, but may not be particularly well written and may not hold the attention of the reader very well. (Para. 1)

My own view is that Burchenal's narrative is of sufficient quality for it to be considered creative non-fiction. (So, indeed, is a good deal of educational research!) Certainly, it uses a range of literacy devices. For a start, it is recognisably a prose narrative, using the present tense, and with an identifiable first-person point of view. The extract above utilises dialogue, but not in a conventional chronological way (more illustrative snippets). And there is the use of metaphor in the sentence: 'It's almost as if he were himself a knowledge race against time' (Burchenal 2002, 296).[2]

However, for all its virtues, I have an issue with the way the first-person narrative insistently privileges the voice of the observer – the connoisseur herself. Ivor Goodson (1999) encapsulates my concern with what he calls a 'representational crisis' related to a surge of interest in teacher narratives.[3] This arises 'from the central dilemma of trying to capture the lived experience of scholars and of teachers within a text. The experience of other lives is, therefore, rendered textual by an author' (Goodson 1999, 123). He goes on to quote Denzin (1993):

> If the text becomes the agency that records and re-presents the voices of the other, then the other becomes a person who is spoken for. They do not talk, the text talks for them. It is the agency that interprets their words, thoughts, intentions, and meanings. So a doubling of agency occurs, for behind the text as agent-for-the-other, is the author of the text doing the interpreting. (Cited in Goodson 1999, 123)

He further suggests that Denzin (1993) is making a case of 'academic colonization, or even cannibalization: "The other becomes an extension of the author's voice. The authority of their 'original' voice is now subsumed within the larger text and its double-agency"' (reference and citation in Goodson 1999, 123–124). Burchenal prefaces her narrative about Bill Cresta with the words: 'My apologies to Bill Cresta /

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who's been in the ring far longer than I' (2002, 293). I suspect that behind the apology is a sense of the problematic of representation, the intimation that an act of vocal usurpation has occurred. In terms of the genre, the issue becomes translated into an issue with point of view. While other voices *do* enter Burchenal's narrative, it remains a singularly, first-person privileging.

On 4 May 2007 I had an opportunity to observe David Riley teaching his Year 10 English class at Tangaroa College in Otara, South Auckland, a multiethnic school with mostly Polynesian students (43% Samoan, 19% Cook Island Maori, 11% Tongan, 3% Niuean and 10% New Zealand Maori, with the remainder made up of 13% other ethnicities and a mere 1% New Zealand European or Pakeha). Ethical approval had been negotiated with the school and students. In standard educational research terms, I was an 'observer-as-participant' (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000, 310). I was not the only observer. A video camera was set up to run in a fixed position for the duration of the lesson. In their own ways, David and his students were also observers with voices of their own.[4] David is head of the English department at Tangaroa and a teacher researcher in the project. In his reflective profile, he has this to say about himself:

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> I have grown up in South Auckland [Mangere] and most of my friends are Pacific Island or Maori. I have travelled to Pacific Islands such as Samoa, Fiji and Tuvalu. I have conversational knowledge of Samoan and bits and pieces of other Pacific languages. I have attended church in Otara since 1990 so have some understanding of Otara's special nature. I have worked as a youth leader and have some understanding of youth culture.

David's invitation to me to observe was part of the project team's collaborative baseline data collection exercise, all of which was aimed at helping refine the picture of where we were all at, discursively and in our practices – as teachers, as budding or practiced researchers, as subject specialists. The reflective profile from which the above quotation comes is a carefully written nine-page document that puts many aspects of his own practice under a spotlight. I was humbled by the openness of his invitation.

The aim of David's lesson was, in the words of his lesson plan, 'to critically examine the way women are portrayed in Hip Hop videos'. The plan had a number of sequenced activities, a barrier game to introduce critical literacy theory to the students, a teacher-led discussion about critical literacy and the close reading of a series of Hip Hop videos guided by the questions:

- How are women portrayed in this video?
- How are men portrayed?
- Who has the power?

Through his own professional reading and through involvement in the project, David had become interested in critical literacy approaches to the study of texts. In an email to me before my visit, he asked me look for (in his words):

(1) Do students understand the concept of critical literacy?
(2) Are they able to apply it?
(3) Do they understand why it is important?
(4) What more effective ways could I tackle it?

Accordingly, I had prepared an observation schedule based around non-chronological event sampling (see Appendix 1). In my notes about the observation schedule to David, I suggested that the schedule would be limited in terms of the evidence provided, and that we would be supplementing it with other data from the video, from documents produced in class to record discussion responses and findings, and from David's own reflections on the lesson (perhaps using the video to stimulate recall).

My intention all along was to take notes on what I observed in David's classroom in a 'naturalistic' way. (At this point, the idea of educational criticism was lurking in an inner recess somewhere.) So, for almost an hour, I ticked boxes and took notes. The observation schedule was completed and, in its own limited way, did its job. I could report to David that:

- In terms of record sheet 1, there were two contributions suggesting that 'Texts are *powerful* things that have effects in society and on people' and two suggesting that 'People who make texts have certain *designs on* their audience'. However, there were none suggesting that 'Texts incorporate *versions of reality*', 'Texts position readers to see things in particular ways', 'Texts *use language* to do their positioning work', and 'Texts *privilege* the viewpoints of some people, but *marginalize* the viewpoints of other people'.
- In terms of record sheet 2, there were 24 events showing students 'Identifying particular representations in a text' and seven showing them 'Identifying people or groups privileged/marginalized by these representations'. However, there were none showing students 'Providing evidence (language features of various kinds) to support their identifications of representations (or discourses)', 'Questioning or contesting these representations in some way', or 'Indicating an appreciation of why critical literacy is of value'.

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I could suggest that his activity design and mode of questioning helped students to engage in an interrogation of texts in keeping with critical literacy approaches. And, I could also suggest that the design and questioning could be revisited to see whether they might be modified so as to conduce to the student events and contributions that did not show up on the schedule. However, as I am sure has happened with countless classroom observers, I felt that the formal schedule was providing a partial and impoverished picture. It was this feeling that spurred me to write an account in the spirit of educational criticism.

From univocal account to multivocal narrative

I describe this initial account, written soon after viewing David's class as *univocal.* It also embodies an 'act of knowledgeable perception' (Eisner 2002, 215) or connoisseurship. In this respect, it is similar to Burchenal's narrative discussed above. David's willingness to have me observe is, you could say, a tribute to the expertise he saw in me. Here is an extract a few minutes after the start of the lesson:

> Around 2.17, students begin coming in quietly. They are all non-European. They sit down, take out their hard-covered exercise books and wait for proceedings to start. One comes over to me and introduces herself, politely and curiously and perhaps in response to a 'dare'.

David wears blue jeans, worn at the cuffs, white sneakers and a faded black, Bruce Lee T-shirt. I am aware that such dress would be considered 'unprofessional' in certain schools. I have to say that the atmosphere is down-beat, relaxed. No one seems hurried. David asks them to write down the 'aim of the day'. Suddenly things are quieter. One of the students writes names of absentees on the whiteboard. David's voice is quiet and gentle. Indeed, for the duration of the period, he will not raise it once. I notice a subtly intense exchange between him and one of the female students in a group near the front of the room, after which two of them fetch workbooks from the storage cupboard behind the teacher's desk. Some late-arriving boys wander in.

The text describes (David's clothing, for example), it identifies patterns (David's use of a quiet voice) and routines, and it interprets ('perhaps in response to a "dare"') and evaluates (the comment about David's dress, which effectively endorses the unconventionality). I am going to call it creative non-fiction, although others may demur. I know the crafting that went into it.[5]

However, like Burchenal's account, it is a first-person narrative that privileges the university-based researcher – the connoisseur's detached and informed eye. As Goodson (1999) has suggested, there is a danger of colonisation here. But there are other problems as well, which tend to characterise any narrative that adopts the first-person point of view. While such a strategy offers a particular kind of immediacy – a being thereness – it is limited to what the narrator can know. The above passage, to use conventional educational research terms, is more *etic* than *emic* – more anchored in the conceptual framework of the observer than 'captured through the eyes of the observed' (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000, 313). In literary terms, it is restricted to what the first-person narrator can know, and hence resorts to the speculative ('perhaps in response to a "dare"' with its tell-tale, modal 'perhaps'). It is also inevitably coloured by the first-person's discursive frame.[6] I was, David suggested to me later, the only person in the room that day that would have written 'They are all non-European'. I suspect most of the occasion's participants would have written 'There is a white fulla at the back of the room that Sir told as about the other day'.

By identifying limitations in such a narrative, I am not rejecting it out of hand. Let us look at one more excerpt from this univocal account:

The third Group 1 video is Wyclef Jean and Ying Yang Twins, 'Dangerous'. At this point, the modeling and joint negotiation of textual response with a focus on action and dress have worked well. David says, 'Just write it down.' David asks for a contribution from someone who hasn't contributed yet, a 'different voice'. What we're seeing on the screen right now is a music video which is cutting between two black men in a car and a lone woman in an alleyway who is moving in a sinuous manner and pushing her short blouse from her shoulder to her upper arm. A female student introduces the word 'seductive' into the discussion. This becomes a theme, and a number of students suggest that by being seductive this woman is exercising power. A male student, Michael, however, disagrees. He thinks that the men in the car are the ones exercising power. They have the money. David indicates that he is inclined to agree with Michael, though they are clearly in a minority.[7]

It is an interesting 'teaching moment' that is not developed at this point, but could clearly be returned to as a theme in future lessons. What is seduction? What sex is generally described as 'seductive'? What is the nature of power relations in situations where one person is 'constructed' as seducing the other? What sorts of texts have 'seduction' as a theme or idea?

A 'critical event' like this one, even described from the single point of view, of the connoisseur is useful fodder for conversation. It is not as if the glass is so refracted

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that nothing is coming through from the experience being presented. Looking at this text, I am aware that I could not have written the second paragraph without quite a deal of experience. It is my voice on offer here, but, in a collaborative project like this, that is part of the deal.

Still, let us return to the issue of univocality – the singularity of the first-person point of view narrative. In terms of the project, David and I have plenty to talk about. There is my univocal educationally critical narrative; but there is also David's own reflection, the notes students took during their group discussions about the videos and also students' retrospective reflections on the class. We are not *short* of data. So what is driving me at this point to address the issue of singular voice is partly literary (how might such problems as singular voice be solved?) and partly research focused (how might the record of an hour-long class as complex, dramatic event be improved?). I am sure I am not the only reader who enjoyed Burchenal's example of educational criticism. Are there other ways in which such criticism can be textually embodied?

I am going to use the last extract quoted from my first account as a basis for a transformation into a narrative style I am calling *multivocal narrative.* What the transformation required was a process whereby this account was interrogated by David's own reflection on the lesson, student accounts and, in particular, David's questioning of my version in an email exchange, of which the following is an extract:

> I wouldn't return to the topic of seduction in a future lesson, mainly because of the sexual aspect of that theme … maybe with a Year 13 group but still probably not just because I am not comfortable myself with exploring texts which deal with sexual themes with students and in my opinion it respects the background of many of our students. I wouldn't choose the pivotal moment in the lesson that you did – and that's all good!! For me, it would have been when one student labeled some of the texts as 'good' and the others as 'bad'. It may seem a small thing, but that stood out to me because I didn't want to give the students those labels. I wanted them to come up with their own judgements. (Riley 2007)

In transforming the univocal account, I was attempting to address two main issues:

- the limitations of a single point of view; and
- the tyranny of chronological time.

Let me share the transformed narrative, and then I shall discuss what I was trying to do:

> The third group 1 video is Wyclef Jean and Ying Yang Twins, 'Dangerous':
>
> I see the fire in her eyes
> Fire in her eyes
> The way she moves
> She got the fire in her eyes
> Fire on her waist
> Fire in her thighs
>
> At this point, as Terry sees it, the modeling and joint negotiation of textual response with a focus on action and dress have worked well. For his part, David is aware that he has been doing a lot of modeling already and that it is a teacher role he endorses. So he says, 'Just write it down.' Because he wants students to think of the classroom as 'our class', he asks for a contribution from someone who hasn't contributed yet, a 'different voice'.

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What everyone is seeing on the screen right now is a music video which is cutting between two men in a car and a lone woman in an alleyway who is gyrating in a sinuous manner and easing her short blouse from her shoulder to her upper arm. In response to her teacher's invitation, Krissie introduces the word 'seductive' into the discussion. Like other students, she sees herself as benefiting from having been introduced to the word 'portrayed' and will use it in the reflection she will write for Sir the next day. As Krissie sees it, thinking about who's actually in charge in these videos has been a useful exercise. From her perspective, the woman in this video is doing just that, taking charge:

Watch out boy she'll chew you up
She's dangerous (dangerous)
Dangerous (dangerous)

This becomes a theme, and a number of other students agree that by being seductive this woman is exercising power. None of this washes with fellow student Michael, however. He thinks that the men in the car are the ones exercising power. It's obvious they have the money:

She's fine She's fine
She heals She mine
Black barbie

At this point, David recalls his dilemma in selecting texts for this lesson. In his reflective profile, he has described his practice of selecting texts which respect students' religious backgrounds, without overt sexual content and with minimal expletives. However, the topic they are looking at in this lesson does contain sexual themes. David has been careful to select texts which are not too explicit but which still enable him to approach the issue of how gender is portrayed in hip hop music videos. This has meant choosing not to use many excellent examples of texts he had collected, which illustrate the topic, but which he considers inappropriate for use with this class. He will wonder how well he did in this regard:

She do what she do
And she gon' get what she gon' get
She hit the strip club
And she gon' make her money quick

Meanwhile, at the back of the room, Terry (later described by one of the students as 'that doctor hanging around') is reflecting on what he thinks of as a critical event. As he sees it, the half-developed discussion around the concept of 'seduction' is a pivotal 'teaching moment' than might be returned to as a theme in future lessons. What is seduction? What sex is generally described as 'seductive'? What is the nature of power relations in situations where one person is 'constructed' as seducing the other? What sorts of texts have 'seduction' as a theme or idea? Suddenly, he's a long way from the here and now and inhabiting a future secondary classroom – his own – that he is most unlikely to find himself in.

A major reorientation of narrative point of view has occurred in this revision. The first-person narrator has been replaced by a third-person roving narrator[8]. The roving narrator can be thought of as analogous to a camera that shifts from the perspective of one participant in the action to another. While located with a particular participant, it is limited to that participant's thoughts and perceptions. However, it provides the potential for great 'coverage'. The challenge to an author (yes, I am *still* the author of the above narrative) is to clearly signal to a reader when a shift of perspective occurs. There are a number of examples of such *person indicators* in the above narrator, mostly the use of names ('as Terry sees it'). The shift itself can be indicated by

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adverbials such as 'Meanwhile'. Cohesion is important. When a pronoun is being used, the writer needs to ensure that a reader knows to whom 'he' or 'she' refers. There is no rule about how quickly these perspectival shifts can occur, as long as the signposting is adequate. The advantage overall is access to a greater number of voices. The text has become *multivocal.*

Classroom narratives tend to be written in the present tense. (Burchenal's (2002) text and my own univocal narrative are examples.) You could say, however, that the use of present tense is a trick, aimed at giving the illusion of immediacy. In fact, these accounts are written retrospectively, but attempt to suppress this. Such an emphasis privileges chronological time – the minute-by-minute flow of events which the narrator or narrators in a narrative are subject to. However, psychological time is no respecter of chronology. It harks back and projects forward in time. In doing so, it encompasses a greater range of events. Metaphorically speaking, it works with a larger canvass. The multivocal text above does two things with time: it retains the moment-by-moment flow of classroom events as the default present, but it gives itself permission to range forwards and backwards in time. The reader is cued to these temporal shifts by changes in tense ('*has been doing* a lot of modeling', 'he will remind') and time-related adverbials ('already', 'later').

I still want to call this creative non-fiction. What I have been discussing here are technical issues that any self-reflective writer of narrative thinks about. These ones pertain to decisions in relation to the construction of point of view and its impact on a reader. But it can be seen that such decisions have an impact on sentence structure also. As for diction – well, the literary side of me acted on a number of dissatisfactions with the first account and changed words such as 'moving' and 'pushing' to 'gyrating' and 'easing', words I considered to be more concrete and sensuous. Well and good. But what does all this mean for educational research?

What happened to educational criticism and should we care?

Back in 2002, Eisner expressed high hopes for educational criticism:

> I believe that the creation of educational criticism, a form of criticism not unlike that found in the arts but directed to educational matters, could provide a kind of utility that scientific studies and quantitatively treated phenomena neglect. Indeed, I hope that one day we will have journals of educational criticism and critical theory that will seek to refine the quality of educational criticism and the methods and assumptions with which those doing such criticism work. (2002, 215)

However, a quick database search I undertook to check out examples of educational criticism unearthed only one clear example of a writer adopting this method for research purposes (Moroye 2005). In an email, I asked Eisner himself what his view was on this seemingly bleak harvest. His response was reasonably upbeat:

> The relative absence of educational connoisseurship and education criticism from the pages of educational journals has to do with the fact that the concepts I invented have been transformed into an interest on [sic] the use of narrative as a way of telling education's stories. Narrative is not identical with educational criticism but it shares a strong family resemblance. (Eisner 2007)

I have no grounds for not deferring to Eisner's explanation. However, because engagement with educational criticism impelled me into some important self-reflexive

conversations with myself and with fellow researchers like David, I do not want to let the matter drop. I do not want educational criticism to drop off the radar screen.

My first reason is my self-confessed literary penchant and the fact that this research was about literary texts. If those of us who are passionate about literature believe it has a place in the lives of our students, and further believe (as Eisner does) that it provides a way into certain truths about situations, then is there not a place for encouraging teachers and students to consider ways of using literary genres as a means of articulating responses to their own educational experiences? What I have called multivocal narrative is, I think, a form of storying with the potential for offering multi-perspectival accounts of complex situations such as classrooms.[9]

My second reason has to do with the relationship between narrative (or storying) and educational research. I would argue that all research is underpinned by narrative and that all research reports are telling stories one way or another. I would further argue that some types of research report suppress their narrative dimension as a way of avoiding self-reflexivity. The inescapable fact about narrative is that it puts an immediate spotlight on the point of view being adopted and the consequences thereof in terms of voice, access, privileging, representation, balance, and so on.

The project I was involved in was avowedly collaborative and non-hierarchical. If all narrative poses issues of voice and representation, as this paper argues, then all texts that emanate from it must address these issues. This paper has focused on a commonplace of educational research – the not-so-humble classroom observation. The multivocal narrative illustrated in the previous section of this paper actually provided a template for a particular kind of discussion between David and myself. While I might be termed 'first' author, all parts of the text required his input. (He asked me to drop the word 'black' before 'men' in the description of the video's *mise-en-scène*.) More specifically, where the narrative shifted to his point of view, it was important that it incorporated his words and not mine. The emergent multivocal narrative was a particular product of our ongoing conversation about his practice, and our collegial endeavour aimed at making his students' learning around literary texts more enjoyable and productive.

Eighteen months later – as a contribution to the project's final report, whose composition was my responsibility – David wrote a report of his own, reflecting on the contribution his various interventions had played in the literary learning of his students. At this stage, building on his own connoisseurship, he was developing his own voice as a researcher. In composing the final report – a sustained and weighty, third-person research narrative – I incorporated David's voice alongside the voices of other teacher researchers. In the report itself, I described the process and product as follows:

> It is a stitching together (or bricollage) and refining of a large number of text extracts written by all members of the project team, sometimes sitting together in front of computer screens, sometimes via the passing to and fro of email attachments that went through countless versions before settling as 'final' individual teacher accounts, or as self-contained texts for inclusion in this report. In a true sense, this report is multi-authorial. (Locke et al. 2008, 193)

The production of a multivocal narratives itself might be seen as a metaphor for a commitment to diversity. As we move forward from this project, researchers and reflective practitioners both, we take our diversity with us and celebrate it. Really, this is the only basis for our conversation.

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Notes

1. See http://www.tlri.org.nz/
2. Eisner would see metaphor as having a central role in the descriptive/interpretative aspect of educational connoisseurship: 'To reveal these particulars, to capture these "essences", one must not only perceive their existence but also be able to create a form that intimates, discloses, reveals, imports, suggests, implies their existence. In this process of transformation, metaphor is, of course, a centrally important device' (2002, 222).
3. A major concern of Goodson's is with the potential for teacher narratives to be divorced from political and micropolitical perspectives, from theory, and from broader cognitive maps of influence and power' (1999, 122). I share this concern, but it is only tangentially related to this paper.
4. There were also the voices of a number of American Hip Hop groups: Mims, Fat Joe, T.I., Wyclef Jean and Ying Yang Twins, Pussycat Dolls. Unbeknownst to these artists, David's students were learning to talk back to them.
5. As 'author' of this account, I can report on my liking for the pared-back writing of Ernest Hemingway (1986) who, in general, eschewed metaphor, preferring what I would term emblematic events, such as the random death of Aymo in *A farewell to arms*, of whose corpse Hemingway's narrator, Fred Henry, comments: 'He was very dead'.
6. A solution to this problem is to write narrative using multiple, first-person viewpoints. An example of this is William Faulkner's well-known novel, *As I lay dying.* See Faulkner (1963).
7. Students' names have been changed to protect their identities.
8. Sometimes called the 'concealed narrator'. See Gordon and Tate (1960, 442–443).
9. A literary example is Stephen Crane's classic short story 'The open boat'. See Crane (1993) .

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Appendix 1

Observation record sheet 1

Number of student contributions that suggest that:	Activity
Texts incorporate **versions of reality**	Do Now: Video discussion:
Texts **position** readers to see things in particular ways	Do Now: Video discussion:
Texts **use language** to do their positioning work	Do Now: Video discussion:
Texts **privilege** the viewpoints of some people, but **marginalize** the viewpoints of other people	Do Now: Video discussion:
Texts are **powerful** things that have effects in society and on people	Do Now: Video discussion:
People who make texts have certain **designs on** their audience.	Do Now: Video discussion:

Special observations/comments:

Observation record sheet 2

The presence of events/exchanges that show students:	Activity
Identifying particular representations in a text	Video discussion:
Providing evidence (language features of various kinds) to support their identifications of representations (or discourses)	Video discussion:
Identifying people or groups privileged/marginalized by these representations	Video discussion:
Questioning or contesting these representations in some way	Video discussion:
Indicating an appreciation of why critical literacy is of value	Video discussion:

Special observations/comments: